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Convergence of Commons: Process Geographies of People's Global Action

Neoliberalism and its Discontents

A spectre is haunting the world. It is the spectre of neoliberalism. While neoliberal ideology is neither monolithic nor omnipresent, taking hybrid or composite forms around the world (Larner 2000), it nevertheless articulates an overarching commitment to 'free market' principles of free trade, flexible labour, and active individualism. It privileges lean government, privatisation, and deregulation, while undermining or foreclosing alternative development models based upon social redistribution, economic rights, or public investment (Peck and Tickell 2002). It threatens to colonize and capitalize those remaining areas of social, economic, and cultural life that constitute the commons: the land, water, forest resources etc., that remain under some form of communal control.

Peck and Tickell (2002) argue that neoliberalism has seen a shift from 'roll-back neoliberalism' during the 1980's - which entailed a pattern of deregulation and dismantlement (e.g. of state-financed welfare, education, and health services and environmental protection) to an emergent phase of 'roll-out neoliberalism'. This emergent phase is witnessing an aggressive intervention by governments around issues such as crime, policing, welfare reform, and urban surveillance with the purpose of disciplining and containing those marginalized or dispossessed by the neoliberalization of the 1980's.

In both phases neoliberalism has had profound impacts upon the commons. It entails the centralisation of control of the world economy in the hands of transnational corporations and their allies in key government agencies (particularly those of the United States and other members of the G-8), large international banks, and international institutions such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the World Bank, and the World Trade Organization (WTO). These institutions enforce the doctrine of neoliberalism enabling unrestricted access of transnational corporations (TNCs) to a wide range of markets (including public services), while potentially more progressive institutions and agreements (such as the International Labour Organization and the Kyoto Protocols) are allowed to wither (Peck and Tickell 2002).

Neoliberal policies have resulted in the privatization, deregulation, appropriation, and exploitation of communities' common resources of livelihood (land, water, forests, seeds, culture, and people's identity). This has resulted in the pauperization, displacement and marginalisation of indigenous peoples, women, peasant farmers, and industrial workers, and a reduction in labor, social, and environmental conditions on a global basis - what Brecher and Costello (1994) term 'the race to the bottom' or 'global pillage'.

In response to this, new forms of translocal political solidarity and consciousness have begun to emerge, associated with the partial globalization of networks of resistance, involved, at

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least in part, in the defence of remaining commons resources. The attempts by marginalised groups and social movements at the local level to forge wider alliances in protest at their growing exclusion from global neoliberal economic decision-making can be conceived of as 'grassroots globalisation'ⁱ While establishing global networks of action and support they attempt to retain local autonomy over strategies and tactics (Appadurai 2000).

Grassroots Globalisation as Counter-Empire?

Hardt and Negri (2000) term the emerging global economic system 'Empire' and characterize it as "a decentered, deterritorializing apparatus of imperial control" (xii). Characterized by an absence of boundaries, they argue that there is no *place* of power – constituted by networks, it is both everywhere and nowhere, a *non-place*. However, geopolitical and geoeconomic power does get territorialized in certain places. For example, the United States - as the world's only superpower with military bases in at least fifty-nine countries - wields an immense influence on international relations and, through its control of the IMF and World Bank, the global economy (Blum 2000, Mertes 2002).

Hardt and Negri (2000) and Hardt (2002) also argue that resistance to 'Empire' constitutes a counter-Empire, not limited to local autonomy, but one that thinks and acts globally, effecting a politics of association, rather than a series of discrete local actions. In short, resistance must create a 'non-place' –everywhere and nowhere - from where alternatives to Empire are posed (Hardt and Negri 2000: 205-218). The problem with this formulation is that it underplays and the geographical contexts and contingencies of political action. It seems to pose resistance as practising a reactive politics that mirrors 'Empire', rather than articulating a different kind of spatial politics. Below, I will argue that, rather than constituting a 'non-place' of resistance, grassroots globalisation networks forge an associational politics that constitute a diverse, contested coalition of place-specific social movements, which prosecute conflict on a variety of multi-scalar terrains that include both material places and virtual spaces. I will consider one network, that of PGA, in order to elucidate how grassroots globalization is attempting to forge a convergence of struggles over the commons. First, I will consider two important aspects of contemporary grassroots networks, heterogeneity and the politics of scale.

The heterogeneity of grassroots globalisation networks

Grassroots globalisation involves the creation of networks: of communication, solidarity, information sharing, and mutual support. The core function of networks is the production, exchange and strategic use of information – for example, concerning oppositional narratives and analysis of particular events. Such information can enhance the resources available to geographically and or socially distant actors in their particular struggles and also lead to action (Keck and Sikkink 1998). Information-age activism is creating what Cleaver (1999:3) terms a 'global electronic fabric of struggle' whereby local and national movements are consciously seeking ways to make their efforts complement those of other organized struggles around similar issues.

In particular, grassroots globalisation is resulting in the forging of new alliances - as different social movements representing different terrains of struggle experience the negative consequences of neoliberalism (Wallgren 1998). By identifying structures of power within the

global political field, social movements have established common targets of protest, exemplified by the anti-WTO mobilisations in Seattle, 1999, and the anti-World Bank and IMF protests in Prague, 2000.

Such protests have been celebrated for bringing together formerly disparate and often conflicting groups, such as trade unionists, environmentalists, indigenous peoples movements, and non-government organisations. 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. However, because the globalisation of protest involves the inter-penetration and multiplicity of forces at local, regional, national, and global scales, such a multiplicity raises the possibility of alliances that contain various contradictions (Chin and Mittelman (1997). For example, place-based gender relations within particular social movements may be at odds with those of other movements, in other places, with whom they participate in struggle. This raises questions about how social movements act effectively in coalitions across diverse geographical scales.

The scale politics of grassroots globalisation networks

The consolidation of a global system of financial regulationⁱⁱ - as one of the means of neoliberal global control - has prompted the 'upscaling' of previously local struggles between citizens, governments, and transnational institutions and corporations to the international level. Many of these movements, although engaged in grassroots globalisation networks, nevertheless remain local or national based, since this is where individual movement identities are formed and nurtured.

When local-based struggles develop, or become part of, geographically flexible networks, they become embedded in different places at a variety of spatial scales. These different geographic scales (global, regional, national, local) are mutually constitutive parts, becoming links of various lengths in the network. Networks of agents act across various distances and through diverse intermediaries. However, some networks are relatively more localized, while others are more global in scope and the relationship of networks to territories is mutually constitutive: networks are embedded in territories and at the same time, territories are embedded in networks (Dicken et al 2001). Of course, movements that are local or national in character derive their principal strength from acting at these scales rather than at the global level (Sklair 1995). For example, transnational corporations such as Nestle, McDonalds, and Nike have usually been disrupted primarily due to the efficacy of local campaigns (Klein 2000). Even where international campaigns are organised, local and national scales of action can be as important as international ones (Herod 2001). For example, the Liverpool Dockers international campaign was grassroots-instigated and coordinated (by Liverpool Dockers) and operationalised by Dockers beyond the UK working within established union frameworks (Castree 2000).

Space is bound into local to global networks, which act to configure particular places. As a result 'each place is the focus of a distinct *mixture* of wider and more local social relations' (Massey 1994: 156), and hence places can be imagined as 'articulated moments in networks of social relations' (*ibid* p. 154). Moreover, while networks can create cultural and spatial configurations that connect places with each other (Escobar 2001), so can particular places be important within the workings of networks. For example, in his research on the *Madres de Plaza de Mayo* in Argentina, Fernando Bosco (2001) shows how collective political rituals enacted in

different commons places across space (e.g. the public meetings of *Madres* in plazas across Argentina) enabled the sustainability of different movement communities and movement identities. By reinforcing moral commitments and group solidarity, activist's identities were maintained both within particular groups and between movements and activists in wider solidarity networks.

Bosco argues that the identification with particular places can be of strategic importance for the mobilisation strategies of particular resistance movements. These can contribute to the construction of strategic network ties with other movements in the same locality or in other localities. Activists may deploy symbolic images of places to match the interests and collective identities of other groups and thereby mobilise others along common cause or grounds. Hence the ties to particular places can be mobile, appealing to, and mobilising, different groups in different localities (Bosco 2001).

However, because places are important loci of collective memory, then social identity and the capacity to mobilize that identity into configurations of political solidarity are highly dependent upon the processes of place construction and sustenance (Harvey 1996). Such particularities of place may come into conflict with those of other places, for example due to different place-specific understandings of gender relations. As a result, these may vitiate against multi-scalar mobilizations and pose important problems for the development of grassroots globalisation networks. To discuss this issue requires a consideration of the work of David Harvey.

Militant particularism/global ambition

Borrowing a term from Raymond Williams, Harvey argues that place-based resistances frequently articulate a 'militant particularism' (1996, 2000). This is where the ideals forged out of the affirmative experience of solidarities in one place have the potential to get generalised and universalised as a working model for a new form of society that will benefit all humanity - what Harvey terms 'global ambition'. However, Harvey notes that militant particularisms are often profoundly conservative, resting upon the perpetuation of patterns of social relations and community solidarities. He wonders whether there is a scale at which militant particularisms become impossible to ground let alone sustain. Indeed, he argues that

'Anti-capitalist movements... are generally better at organizing in and dominating "their" places than at commanding space. "[R]egional resistances"...can indeed flourish in a multitude of particular places. But while such movements form a potential basis for that "militant particularism" that can acquire global ambition, left to themselves they are easily dominated by the power of capital to coordinate accumulation across universal but fragmented space. The potentiality for militant particularism, embedded in place runs the risk of sliding back into a parochialist politics (1996: 324).

Successful international alliances have to negotiate between action that is deeply embedded in place, i.e. local experiences, social relations and power conditions (e.g. see Routledge 1993), and action that facilitates more transnational coalitions. Social movements, according to Harvey, can either remain place-based and ignore the potential contradictions inherent in transnational coalitions (e.g. concerning different gender relations within participant movements) or treat the contradictions as a nexus to create a more transcendent and universal politics, combining social and environmental justice, that transcends the narrow solidarities and particular affinities shaped in particular places. In short, movements need to develop a politics of solidarity capable of reaching across space, without abandoning their militant particularist base(s)

(1996: 400). This is especially pertinent for those militant particularisms that arise to protest those disguised particularisms - such as masculinism and heterosexism - that masquerade as universal (Fraser 1997).

However, even if social movements are capable of reaching across space, differential power relations exist within the functioning of the networks that are created. Particular actors are often dominant within networks, due to their control of key political, economic, technological resources (Dicken et al 2001). Moreover, different groups and individuals are placed in distinct (more or less powerful) ways in relation to the flows and interconnections involved in the functioning of resistance networks. Thus, while the working of networks involves the intermingling of geographic scales, contradictions and tensions remain – either tied to the militant particularisms of particular movements or in the placing of specific actors within the network. Drawing upon these theoretical debates concerning heterogeneity and scale politics in the practices of grassroots globalisation networks, I now consider a specific network, People's Global Action (PGA).ⁱⁱⁱ

People's Global Action

The PGA network owes its genesis to an international encounter between activists and intellectuals that was organised by the Zapatistas in Chiapas in 1996. At the encounter, the Zapatistas' Subcommandante Marcos declared that those present would construct an intercontinental network of resistance against neoliberalism.

This intercontinental network of resistance, recognizing differences and acknowledging similarities, will search to find itself with other resistances around the world. This intercontinental network of resistance is not an organizing structure; it doesn't have a central head or decision maker; it has no central command or hierarchies. We are the network, all of us who resist. (Marcos 2001: 13).

In Spain the following year, the idea of a network between different resistance formations was launched by ten social movements including *Movimento Sem Terra* (Landless peasants movement) of Brazil, and the Karnataka State Farmers Union of India. The official 'birth' of the PGA was February 1998, whose purpose was to facilitate the sharing of information between grassroots social movements. The PGA organized an alternative conference (at the 1998 Ministerial Conference of the WTO in Geneva) between social movements from Asia, Africa, and Latin America that called for resistance to neoliberal globalisation.^{iv} As De Marcellus (2003) notes, in the PGA network, indigenous movements for whom the commons are the cornerstone of organization, culture and identity, have been important actors, such as the Kuna of Panama, Maori of 'New Zealand', the Quechua and Aymara communities organized by the cocaleros, and the CONAIE and CONFUNASSC of Ecuador.

The broad objectives of the network – enshrined in a series of hallmarks (see below) - 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 (see PGA website). 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.

PGA uses the Internet as a prime means of communication and coordination - through its web-site and various activist mailing lists. Through these technologies, the PGA network, amongst others, put out the calls for the recent global days of action against capitalism, such as the protests in Prague on September 26 2000. The PGA network is facilitated by a Convenors' Committee, which comprises social movements within the network. The current Committee comprises movements concerned with ethnic, women's, labour and indigenous issues. The Committee organise the PGA conferences (see below), decide about the use of resources, advise local organisers about technical and organisational questions, and decide about the content of PGA's information tools.

In practice there have been problems with the workings of the Convenors' Committee. First, the convenors have not been able to take the time to fully assume their responsibilities, owing to the exigencies of movement work in their respective localities. Second, the convenors have had great difficulty in functioning at a distance, having problems of access to necessary information, as well as language and cultural problems. The process has tended to remain haphazard, abstract, and dependent on email access

Hence much of the organisational work of the PGA network has been conducted by Support Groups of activists who have helped organise conferences, mobilised resources (e.g. funds), and facilitated communication between Convenors, and information flows between the participants of PGA. The Support Group activists are mostly based in Europe, but some are located within the other PGA 'regions'. According to participant activists, PGA represents a space of convergence between different grassroots movements, wherein the interactions between movements, and their politics of association are facilitated (Interviews, Bangalore, India 1999 and Cochabamba, Bolivia 2001). To discuss these in detail, I will now consider the specific 'process geographies' (Appadurai 2000: 7) that is the multi-scalar, dynamic, processes of interaction and relationship that characterize of PGA.

The Process Geographies of PGA.

The collective visions of PGA

In networks comprising diverse social movements, it is crucial that there are certain unifying values - what I would term collective visions - to provide common ground from which to coordinate collective struggles. In PGA the militant particularisms of movements find their global ambition in the hallmarks and organisational principles of the convergence. The hallmarks of the PGA, cited in the PGA website, 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](http://www.agp.org)).

The organisational principles deal with how the network functions – concerning its conferences, convenors, projects etc.

The PGA hallmarks articulate certain unifying values that create common ground but allow for the diversity of (local) alternatives, projects, tactics etc. since no single agenda could contain such different militant particularisms. Indeed, such unifying values tend to be interpreted by participant movements in the context of their differing local realities (Alger 1997). However, the unanimity of the hallmarks masks various contested social relations within the network that I will discuss below. In terms of practical politics, this has meant that PGA has adopted, through its third international conference in Bolivia, a series of Global Sustainable Campaigns, which movements can collectively participate in, while responding to the particularities of their local/national circumstances. The four campaigns focus on militarism, paramilitarism and state terrorism; territory and sovereignty (e.g. issues of land and water resources and indigenous rights); privatisation; and construction of grassroots alternatives to the capitalist system and the strengthening of local initiatives and struggles. All of these campaigns relate in particular ways to people's defence of their communities and commons. Each PGA regional network is in the process of discussing the processes by which they intend to participate in these campaigns. In certain ways, the hallmarks and campaigns – as collective visions - represent the kind of universal politics that Harvey (1996) discusses as crucial to the formation of transnational solidarities.

Processes of facilitation and interaction in PGA

PGA 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).

PGA is organised primarily through the Internet via its website (www.agp.org) and various e-mailing lists. In addition, PGA organises international and regional meetings, conferences, and caravans. Rather than what Cleaver (1999) would term an 'electronic fabric', the Internet acts as a communicative and coordinating thread in the PGA network, which weaves different place-based struggles together so that they may converge in virtual space.

The PGA web-site is translated into seven languages and provides information about the history of the network; PGA international and regional conferences; various actions and initiatives that the convergence has organised; upcoming events, and reports on struggles from around the world. There are several email lists that provide spaces for discussion, communication, information sharing, and coordination. Many activists participate in these discussions in PGA Europe, although PGA Asia and PGA Latin America tend to witness less activist participation. Although mass movements participate in these regional networks those with e-mail contact who tend to participate in PGA discussions are usually only individuals (often members of the Convenor's Committee) who can communicate in English and who have access to the Internet.

The reliance on the Internet to organise grassroots globalisation networks raises other problems. First, is that of the circulation of excessive amounts of information, or 'information blizzard' (Critical Art Ensemble 1994: 132), which in certain crisis situations can become amplified when activists resort to all means available: letters, faxes, telephone calls, e-mail, and personal visits (Ribeiro 1998). Second, the abstract, disembodied character of Internet discussions (and protest post-mortems) can accentuate what become quite vitriolic debates (e.g. concerning particular tactical approaches to protest events) that might otherwise reach compromise if conducted in a face-to-face manner, with the attendant visual and verbal clues and nuances. As Ribeiro notes:

Trust, friendship, reputation, predictability, hierarchical position within a social network, and even charisma are elements of political activity that certainly cannot be reduced to technologies of communication. There are features of face-to-face interaction (gestures, tone, pitch, indexicality) and even of telephone conversation that are highly informative; these features are concealed in computer-based interactions (1998: 341).

For, it is unlikely that trust between individuals who have not met, can be fully developed over the Internet. The depth of trust required to plan, and conduct, political action together is place and face-based (e.g. see the discussion of 'homeplace' in hooks 1991). In other words, it is dependent, in part, upon movement's militant particularism.^v

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). 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.^{vi} Such conferences 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. At the international conferences meetings are held primarily in English or Spanish (with the one being translated into the other). Translation clusters are also formed where the conference proceedings are simultaneously translated into the languages of the other people who are participating.

PGA also organises activist caravans. These are buses of activists from various struggles around the world, which visit social movement struggles in countries other than their own. These caravans have a certain historical precedent in the solidarity convoys that took North American activists to Nicaragua, El Salvador, and Guatemala during the 1980's. These convoys brought humanitarian aid to communities in those countries, and articulated opposition to U.S. government policies in the region – particularly the U.S. government support for the military juntas in El Salvador and Guatemala, and for the contra war attempting to destabilise the Sandinista revolution in Nicaragua.

Rather than being forms of political tourism, the PGA caravans are organised in order for activists from different struggles and countries to communicate with one another, exchange information, share experiences and tactics, participate in various solidarity demonstrations, rallies, and direct actions, and attempt to draw 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. The caravans have

included an Intercontinental caravan in 1999, which brought five hundred Asian farmers to tour Europe; a United States caravan that culminated in the WTO protests in Seattle in 1999; and caravans before and after the PGA conferences in Bangalore, India (1999), and Cochabamba, Bolivia (2001).^{vii} In addition, there have been speaking tours (e.g. that which brought Colombian activists from the Process of Black Communities to Europe in 2001), and workshops and seminars, concerning neoliberalism and its alternatives, on several continents.

Despite these initiatives, there are concerns within the network that certain individuals and groups sometimes block information flows, marking out certain channels of communication and coordination as their own, thereby marginalising others while asserting their discursive dominance within the network.^{viii} At the PGA conference in Cochabamba, it was noted that the PGA Support Groups had a great, if not disproportionate, amount of discursive and material power within the network. This was due to them doing much of the work unable to be completed by the Convenor's Committee, their extensive activist contacts, and their ability to raise funds for political actions and conferences.

The discursive dominance that individuals have in relation to these flows and inter-connections, is because different groups and individuals are placed in more or less powerful ways in relation to such flows. This is augmented by differences in the material power enjoyed by certain activists concerning mobility. Some activists are more mobile than others in at least two ways. First there is differential access to contemporary communications technologies such as the Internet. Huge inequalities of resource access exist between activists in 'Northern' and 'Southern' states, and between activists within states - for example, in 'Southern' movements, between movement leaders and the movement masses (Slater 2003). Even many of those movement leaders in the South who have access to the Internet, frequently have to use (relatively) expensive Internet cafes in order to communicate within the PGA network.

Second, there is differential financial resource availability between activists and between social movements, concerning the ability to travel across continents to particular actions, meetings and conferences. For example, while certain European support group activists have been able to visit movement struggles in Latin America and Asia, few of the activists involved in these movements have the financial resources to travel outside of their countries. At both the PGA conferences in India and Bolivia, PGA has attempted to address the contradiction of wealth disparities within the network by having the air fares of 'Southern' activists subsidized by relatively wealthier 'Northern' movements within the network.

Nevertheless, such disparities can lead to the emergence of an elite group of mobile 'global' activists who enjoy the privileges of email, mobility, and certain financial and discursive power (see Harding, 2001 regarding funding of the 'anti-globalisation movement'). Certainly, activists are able to use skills that they have learned during political organising in their local struggles during their participation in global networks. For example, consensus methods of group decision-making have been translated from European-based struggles to international conferences (see below). Moreover, existing local, regional and national friendship and activist networks are re-deployed at the international scale for the purposes of global networking (Smith et al 1997). Processes of interaction get stretched out across greater distances for such activists, potentially making 'global' arenas of political organising more like a new 'local' arena of action for them.

The multi-scalar politics of PGA

The sustainability of a sense of collective identity when in a spatially extensive network such as PGA is based upon gatherings in particular places (e.g. the regional and international conferences, see below). In addition, the routes of the PGA caravans focus around those places where there are social movement struggles occurring. Caravans attempt to create a multi-scalar politics of solidarity through communication and support actions within particular countries between activists from those and other countries involved in different struggles.^{ix} For example, the Latin American caravan in 2001 comprised activists from struggles in Europe, South Asia, Southeast Asia, North America, Australia and New Zealand. They left from the PGA conference in Bolivia and visited peasant and indigenous movements in Peru, Ecuador, and Colombia. Such an initiative required massive coordination by the various local based groups who were organising the specific elements (e.g. meetings and rallies) of the caravans' activities. In the aftermath, regional strategy meetings of those groups who were involved have been organised to plan for future protests and initiatives.

Places have been used strategically to sustain networks such as PGA. For example, specific symbolic sites have been chosen for the location of the PGA international conferences. The PGA conferences in Bangalore and Cochabamba were chosen partly because they had been the sites of successful resistance by popular mass movements against transnational corporations pursuing a neoliberal agenda and an assault upon communities' commons. In the case of Bangalore, Monsanto and Cargill had both faced successful opposition to their attempts to introduce GM cotton-seeds and field trials in the Indian state of Karnataka, by the Karnataka State Farmer's Union – the host of the PGA conference. In Cochabamba, Bechtel Corporation faced successful opposition to their attempts to privatise the city's water supply by a popular coalition of students, business people, labour unions, and peasant movements. This included the Six Federations of the Tropics (coca farmers) who jointly hosted the PGA conference with the National Federation of Domestic Workers.

These conferences have differential impacts upon the struggles that occur in those places where they are organised. When movements act as hosts for PGA international or regional conferences, their struggles are given a certain amount of national and international projection (e.g. through the media) as a result. Moreover, the grassroots members of a movement can receive a boost in morale when activists from around the world visit, and articulate support for, their struggles. For example, at the PGA conference in Cochabamba, conference delegates visited the coca-growing region of Chapare to show solidarity to peasant farmers. These farmers are resisting the Bolivian government's participation in a United States government initiative called *Plan Dignidad* (Plan Dignity) which calls for the eradication of Bolivia's coca-crop, and hence coca-growing peasant livelihoods (Interviews, Cochabamba 2001). However, such projection of struggles may not always have positive effects. For example, following the solidarity rallies in Chapare, there was increased state repression of coca-farmers once the conference had ended and the international delegates departed.^x

In addition to organising conferences and caravans, PGA has also participated in broader networks of struggle, exemplified by transnational collective rituals, wherein geographic scales of protest become mutually constitutive. Transnational collective rituals make take the form of *globalised local actions* that are political initiatives that take place in different locations across the globe in support of particular localised struggles, or against particular targets. These can occur simultaneously or at different times. For example, the PGA 'speaking tour' of Colombian activists entailed a series of workshops and seminars in various European countries (e.g. Scotland,

England, Spain, Germany), in cooperation with many non-PGA political groups, in support of the activists' social movement, the Process of Black Communities, and its struggle for self-determination in Colombia.

Alternatively, transnational collective rituals may take the form of *localised global actions* that are political initiatives whereby different social movements and resistance groups coordinate around a particular issue or event in a particular place. For example, PGA has been partly responsible for putting out the calls for, organising, and participating in, the recent global days of action that have occurred in response to the meetings being held by the G8, WTO, IMF and World Bank.

During the global days of action, the particular places of protest – Seattle (against the WTO in 1999), Prague (against the World Bank and IMF in 2000), and Genoa (against the G8 in 2001) - became the primary sites of resistance for many different movements for certain moments in time. As such these places become (different) articulated moments in the activity of grassroots globalisation networks where opposition to neoliberalism as well as alternative visions are articulated. The global days of action in Seattle, Prague, etc. were the most visible face of grassroots globalisation, symbolically representing the struggles of millions of people around the world who were also resisting neoliberal globalization and the commodification of their commons/lifeworlds. The symbolic force that the protests in such places have generated has contributed to further mobilisations and the creation of common ground amongst activists. Each global day of action protest serves to inspire the mobilisation of dissent at the next, wherever it is sited.

Despite the success of such convergences – not least in the rejoining of the concerns of the politics of identity and redistribution - significant differences remain in the type of specific alternatives to neoliberal capitalism articulated by global Northern and global Southern movements. Northern activists articulate alternatives that are conditioned by their embeddedness within – and alienation from – an already industrialised capitalist society. The fundamental concerns of Southern activists are with the defence of livelihoods and of communal access to resources threatened by commodification, state take-overs, and private appropriation (e.g. by national or transnational corporations). Their alternatives are rooted, in part, in some of the local practices being undermined by neoliberal globalisation (Glassman 2002).

Because of this, the PGA hallmarks make a specific call for the articulation of diverse, locally specific alternatives to global capitalism. Within the context of the universalisms of global ambition, the intention is to mobilise the militant particularisms of participant movements in solidarity and coordination with others, for example via the Global Sustainable Campaigns. This is because, in part, representatives of social movement struggles within PGA have acknowledged that resistance networks had been far more effective at organizing at regional and national scales than they had been at the international scale.

Geographical dilemmas arise in the attempt to prosecute multi-scalar politics because activists tend to be more closely linked to the local, national or regional movements in which their struggles are embedded than to international networks. This is compounded by restrictions on finances, Internet resources, and the ability to travel internationally etc. Moreover, much of the energy of movements is taken up with local struggles for survival. For example, in Bangladesh, the struggles of the Bangladesh Krishok Federation are focused upon the rights of landless people and their main struggle is not against neoliberal globalisation as such but for basic land rights. Hence the militant particularisms of participant movements may vitiate against full ongoing engagement with the global ambitions of a grassroots globalisation network. Having said this,

movements may still be able to conduct occasional solidarity actions in their localities (e.g. globalised local actions) on behalf of broader international networks.

The contested social relations within PGA

The PGA network comprises a diversity of movement participants, and subsequently a diversity of organisational philosophies, ideologies, goals, and cultural beliefs. As I have argued above, the unifying values that hold this network together are its collective visions - the PGA hallmarks and organisational principles. However, the cohesion of the network depends on the quality and durability of facilitation and interaction between its constituent participants, as well as their ability to devote time and energy towards the network while also being involved in their own local/national struggles.

Concerning the processes of interaction, while their web-site is translated into seven languages, PGA uses the languages of English and Spanish in the majority of its Internet communications. For example, e-mail communications within PGA Asia that form part of its networking strategies are in English - a language that is neither spoken nor understood by the majority of peasant farmers who comprise the mass base of movements who participate in the network. Moreover, the proceedings of PGA international conferences are also conducted in Spanish and English. Those who could not readily communicate in the dominant languages form small translation clusters in their own languages. This is a practical requirement given the many different languages spoken in the PGA convergence. However, those activists who are bilingual (in Spanish and English) have certain advantages at the meetings and workshops of the conference, concerning following and responding to the nuances of debates, and the intricate ebb and flow of discussions.^{xi} In addition, translation into certain common languages raises the possibility of homogenizing different movements' experiences, and the effacement of important culturally-specific differences. Resistance networks can provide alternative channels of communication, whereby particular voices that are suppressed in their own society may find articulation in international networks that can project and amplify their concerns. However, within PGA these remain selective - some voices are still heard at the expense of others.

There is a terrain of unequal power relations at work within PGA, both between participants in the network, and within the movements that constitute the networks. The place-specific hopes and dreams of marginalised folk are not necessarily realized in the collective visions of a network. For, while the PGA hallmarks reject all forms of domination, some continue within the convergence. For example, unequal gender relations persist within several of the peasant movements that participate in PGA. The leadership of such movements continues to be dominated by men, and patriarchal attitudes and actions - particularisms that masquerade as universal - persist within the functioning and organization of the movements. In addition, unequal gender relations often characterize the communities from which social movements draw their membership (Interviews, Bangalore, India, 1999 and Cochabamba, Bolivia, 2001).

Moreover, global media such as the Internet, create gatekeepers, and codes of access and interpretation, that may easily restrict the articulation and circulation of minority voices - e.g. of women and indigenous peoples - through this technology. For example, gender and gender 'place-based' experiences are difficult to represent in the cyber-bound discourse against neoliberalism (Belausteguioitia 1998).

Such powers to dominate are thus entangled with those of resistance within these movements. As a result, networks such as PGA are spaces of resistance/domination (Sharp et al

2000). In recognition of this continuing problem, gender workshops are organised in all of the PGA regional and international conferences. Such workshops provide spaces in which gender inequalities within participant movements and within the network can be discussed and worked upon.

There are also other questions of power within the dynamics of the networks, some associated with cultural differences between PGA participants. In part, these have resulted from a clash between attempts to establish what Harvey (1996) would term a universal politics within the decision-making processes of the network and the militant particularisms of some of its participants. For example, in the PGA conference in Cochabamba, many Latin American delegates felt that meetings were controlled from a 'European' perspective, which was obsessed with particular forms of 'process' and 'consensus'. Some delegates felt that such 'universal' procedures were used to discriminate or silence debate, and control the discussion space. Quechua delegates commented that in indigenous meetings participants would often repeat issues constantly, while in international meetings, where there was much participation by 'Northern' activists, repetitions by speakers were frequently silenced.

As noted earlier concerning processes of interaction, a discursive power is at work as certain processes of political interaction and communication that are used in European autonomist and direct action communities – such as consensus – have been grafted onto PGA's international conferences in an attempt to establish perceived egalitarian discussion procedures applicable to all. However, such particularisms that are deployed as universalisms have vitiated against the smooth workings of the network precisely because they have transcended important place-specific affinities. Indeed, such attempts at universalism can create a homogenous activist environment that elides important issues of diversity (Subbuswamy and Patel 2001).

The different ideologies, agendas, and strategic and tactical practices articulated within grassroots globalisation networks may also cause contestation, for example, concerning the use of violent and nonviolent methods of struggle in different contexts (see Benjamin 2000). Indeed, these differences and their attendant problems are similar to those that exist within particular participant movements, since all forms and scales of political organising involve contestation and negotiation. However, grassroots globalisation networks maintain less everyday interactions between participants, and greater diversity of contesting views and issues, than specific social movements. In response to this, PGA has argued for a diversity of tactics, and has kept the wording of its hallmarks deliberately general so that different movements may interpret terms like direct action in their own ways according to the place- and political-specificity of their struggles.

From the analysis of the process geographies of PGA – as one example of a grassroots globalisation network - I want to propose that, rather than constituting a 'non-place' of resistance to neoliberal capitalism as Hardt and Negri (2000) argue, such networks can be conceived of as 'convergence spaces' that facilitate the forging of an associational politics that constitutes a diverse, contested coalition of place-specific social movements. These coalitions prosecute conflict on a variety of multi-scalar terrains that include both material places and virtual spaces. I propose the notion of convergence space as a conceptual tool by which to understand and critique grassroots globalisation networks.

Convergence space

A convergence space comprises a heterogeneous affinity –“a world made of many worlds” (Marcos 2001: 10) - between various social formations, such as social movements. By

participating in spaces of convergence, activists from participant movements embody their particular places of political, cultural, economic and ecological experience with common and 'commons' concerns, which lead to expanded spatiotemporal horizons of action (Reid and Taylor 2000). Such coalitions of different interests are necessarily contingent and context dependent (Mertes 2002).

The notion of a convergence space has implications for political agency. It serves to critique Harvey's (1996) call for a global ambition of universal values that can transcend specific movement's militant particularisms. Also, by being deployed to understand specific grassroots globalisation networks, the notion of convergence space enables theoretical approaches to networks (e.g. Dicken et al 2001) to be grounded in the materiality of practical politics. Using the empirical analysis of PGA as a guide, convergence spaces can be conceived as having the following characteristics:

1. *Convergence spaces comprise diverse social movements that articulate collective visions, to generate sufficient common ground to generate a politics of solidarity i.e. multi-scalar collective action.* These collective visions are representative of a 'prefigurative politics' (Graeber 2002), prefiguring not a future ideal society, but a participatory way of practising effective politics, articulating the (albeit imperfect) ability of heterogeneous movements to be able to work together without any single organisation or ideology being in a position of domination. Collective visions approximate the universal values that Harvey (1996) discusses. Contrasting, but not necessarily disabling, tensions exist between the articulation of a universalist politics and the militant particularisms of movements within the functioning of convergence spaces. First, certain universalisms can vitiate against the smooth functioning of grassroots globalisation networks – as seen in the use of consensus political procedures in PGA conferences.

Such universalisms may in fact be particularisms that are deployed as universal which create homogenous activist environments that elide important issues of diversity. Second, the immediacy of place-based concerns – such as movements' everyday struggles for survival under conditions of limited resources – can mean that the global ambitions articulated by grassroots globalisation networks remain unrealised.

2. *Convergence spaces facilitate uneven processes of facilitation and interaction.* The diverse groups and movements that converge in such spaces enact a practical politics consisting of at least five processes: communication, information sharing, solidarity, coordination, and resource mobilization. These processes form moving, overlapping circuits – enacted materially and virtually - that constitute convergence spaces. Interactions within virtual space act as a communicative and coordinating thread that weaves different place-based struggles together. These connections are grounded in place- and face-to-face based moments of articulation such as conferences and global protests. However, owing to differential access to (financial, temporal) resources and network flows, differential material and discursive power relations exist within and between participant movements. As a result, processes of facilitation and interaction tend to be uneven.

3. *Convergence spaces facilitate multi-scalar political action by participant movements.* Social movements engaged in grounded material struggles, and articulating place-specific concerns, also actively participate in forging a globalising network of such struggles. Indeed, particular local-based social movements may develop transnational networks of support as an operational strategy for the defence of their place(s) (Escobar 2001). Certain places may be of symbolic

importance in the collective rituals of the network, for example as sites for international conferences, or global days of action (Bosco 2001).

Rather than 'grassrooting the space of flows' (Castells 1999), convergence spaces facilitate an intermingling of scales of political action, where such scales become mutually constitutive (Dicken et al 2001). For example, grassroots globalisation networks prosecute *globalised local actions* (political initiatives which take place in different locations across the globe, in support of a particular localized struggles) and *localised global actions* (political initiatives coordinated around a particular issue or event in a particular place). These transnational collective political rituals, exemplified by global days of action, can enable the sustainability of activist and movement identities, and practically and symbolically articulate the common ground shared by different place-based social movements. Moreover, in these actions places become 'articulated moments' (Massey 1994) in the enactment of global networks. As a result of these types of action, there are differential impacts on particular place-based struggles, due in part to the extent to which a particular struggle is projected onto the global arena by virtue of its involvement in a globalising network. However, certain scales of political action may provide more appropriate means for movements within convergence spaces to measure their strength and take stock of their opponents, than others. For example, many movements in the global south see defence of local spaces, and opposition to national governments (pursuing neoliberal policies) as their most appropriate scales of political action (Mertes 2002). As a result, geographical dilemmas arise in the attempt to prosecute multi-scalar politics compounded by the uneven character of processes of interaction and facilitation.

4. *Convergence spaces are comprised of contested social relations*, because of the very different militant particularisms that are articulated by participant movements. For example different groups articulate a variety of potentially conflicting goals (concerning the forms of social change), ideologies (e.g. concerning gender, class, and ethnicity), and strategies (e.g. institutional [legal] and extra-institutional [illegal] forms of protest). While these contradictions may act as a nexus for a more universal politics – as Harvey argues – problematic issues will continue to arise within convergence spaces concerning unequal discursive and material power relations that result from the differential control of resources (Dicken et al 2001) and placing of actors within network flows (Massey 1994). These in turn may give rise to problems of representation, mobility, and cultural difference, both between the social movements that participate and between activists within particular movements. The alliances forged necessarily involve entangled power relations, where relations of domination and resistance are entwined, that create spaces of resistance/domination (Sharp et al 2000).

Convergence of Commons

Convergence spaces function within a penumbra of differences, conflicts, and compromises. As negotiated spaces of multiplicity and difference, they can be conceived as dynamic systems, constructed out of a complexity of interrelations and interactions across all spatial scales (after Massey, 1994). Multiple differences (and their attendant resonances and tensions) can be empowering to those conducting resistance, if the common ground shared by activists is a global ambition capable of challenging international institutions while also empowering local/national struggles.

Harvey (1996) is correct that for movements to work successfully together, they need to develop a universalist politics capable of reaching across space, without abandoning their militant particularist base(s). Certainly, in articulating the collective visions of its hallmarks and Global Sustainable Campaigns, PGA has attempted to create a common ground for transnational solidarity. Moreover, by stressing the importance of diversity and difference (e.g. regarding movement tactics and local approaches to the Global Sustainable Campaigns), PGA has also sought to retain the militant particularisms of its participant movements.

However, convergence spaces are also spaces of contested social relations – not least because of the persistence of place-specific parochialisms (e.g. in the form of unequal relations of power and gender) within participant movements. As a result, certain universal values may serve to reinscribe or mask inequalities between actors within a network. However, this does not necessarily mean that networks are unable to function. Rather, as movement-specific hopes, visions, problems, and inequalities converge, so networks become entangled spaces of resistance/domination, still able to articulate opposition and alternatives to neoliberalism.

Grassroots globalisation networks are at present, primarily defensive in character, as yet unable to articulate a hegemonic strategy (Sader 2002). The 'war on terror' that followed the September 11th 2001 attacks on the World Trade Towers and the Pentagon, served to initially undermine some of the initial successes of grassroots globalisation mobilizations, because it captured public attention, and grassroots globalisation networks were ill equipped to respond to it. However, following corporate corruption scandals such as Enron, the economic crisis in Argentina brought about by neoliberalism, and the over-extension of US militarism, grassroots networks are beginning to regroup and reorganise (Bello 2002).

To be effective in their global ambitions, attention needs to be paid to the internal structures of the movements and groups that participate in convergence spaces, and to their placing within local realities. Attention must also be paid to the effectiveness and character of participant movement links to national organisations, as well to the dynamic, changing character of their global connections, interactions and relationships with other movements within the network. Universal values are always embedded in, and emergent from, the local and concrete (Reid and Taylor 2000). For collective visions to be able to incorporate diverse militant particularisms, they need to embrace a politics of recognition that identifies and defends only those differences that can be coherently combined with social and environmental justice (Fraser 1997). Only then will the concerns of the commons articulated by the participants of convergence spaces enable a more transcendent and universal politics to be fashioned, that seeks to defend the integrity of the communal resources of people's livelihood across all spatial scales.

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Endnotes

ⁱ Grassroots globalisation is a more accurate term than 'anti-globalisation' for what such alliances represent. They struggle for inclusive, democratic forms of globalisation, using the communicative tools of the global system. What they are expressly against is the neoliberal form of globalisation (see Graeber 2002).

ⁱⁱ For example, through the discursive and material role played by institutions such as the IMF and World Bank in global economic policymaking.

ⁱⁱⁱ On a methodological note, I do not write on behalf of PGA. Rather, I present my interpretation of PGA from my limited involvement in the network, and discussions and interviews with some of its activists during that involvement. I attended the PGA international conferences in Bangalore, India, in 1999, and Cochabamba, Bolivia in 2001. I have also participated in the organization of a tour of Colombian activists through Europe in 2001 to highlight the impacts of Plan Colombia upon the country's people. Since 2001 I have acted as a support group member for PGA Asia, conducting a preliminary networking tour through South and Southeast Asia in 2002.

^{iv} This was convened by such groups as Movimento Sem Terra (Brazil), Karnataka State Farmer's Association (India), Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People (Nigeria), the Peasant Movement (Philippines), the Central Sandinista de Trabajadores (Nicaragua) and the Indigenous Women's Network (North America and the Pacific).

^v However, there are trust-based relationships within PGA that are not place-dependent. These have been built upon people having got to know one another at conferences, and worked together on particular protests, but who live in different places.

^{vi} There have been three international conferences, held in Geneva, Switzerland (1998), Bangalore, India (1999) and Cochabamba, Bolivia (2001), and regional PGA conferences have been held in Europe (Milan, Barcelona, Leiden), Nicaragua, Panama, Brazil, Bangla Desh, New Zealand (Aotearoa) and the United States.

^{vii} The India caravan visited struggles of tribal peoples, fisherfolk, and rubber workers in southern India. It included activists from various countries who had attended the PGA international conference in Bangalore.

^{viii} Personal communications: Bangalore 1999.

^{ix} There is some excellent work by Geographers concerning the use of space by different groups in the construction of their political strategies (Swyngedouw 1997, Allen et al 1999, Herod 2001), and how these may collide with shifting institutional and regulatory spaces at local, regional, national and supra-national levels (Brenner 1998).

^x Internal PGA communication. November 2001.

^{xi} As an English-speaker who also speaks some Spanish, I have been able to participate in most discussions.