

Review of *Global Justice Networks: Geographies of Transnational Solidarity*

CEMAL BURAK TANSEL
University of Nottingham, United Kingdom

Global Justice Networks: Geographies of Transnational Solidarity.
By Paul Routledge and Andrew Cumbers (2009), Manchester: Manchester University Press, 224 pp.

A decade ago, resistance to neoliberal globalization was understood as a concrete global phenomenon, marked by the emergence of a loosely affiliated alternative globalization movement and registered through multifarious acts of opposition across the world. Fast forwarding to the present day, resistance has substantially lost its projected image as an unprecedented “global” political entity; yet its multiplex currents are still maintained by a plethora of movements, groups and individuals at different social and spatial levels. Following a decade of declining visibility and the erosion of the claim for global representation of grassroots dissent, what once was termed “the second superpower” needs to be reconceptualized and recontextualized.

Global Justice Networks: Geographies of Transnational Solidarity engages with the above necessity and attempts to provide a conceptualization of resistance that is grounded in the material realities of opposing subjects, attuned to the questions of place and space and conscious of the existing forms of dissension, collaboration and power relations within the movements of resistance. As the authors underline in the first pages, the book portrays resistance to neoliberal globalization not in the form of a homogeneous, monolithic movement, but as the interconnection of various networks that emerge from “place-specific forms of political agency that coalesce across space at particular times, in specific places and in a variety of ways” (p. 2). The authors label these networking bodies “global justice networks” (GJNs) and position them as “convergence spaces” wherein movements can communicate with each other, design joint actions and campaigns, build

Correspondence Address: Cemal Burak Tansel, School of Politics and International Relations, University of Nottingham, B111 Law and Social Sciences, University Park, Nottingham, NG7 2RD, United Kingdom. Tel.: +44 (0)115 951 4862, Email: ldxcbt@nottingham.ac.uk

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interpersonal linkages and forge mutual solidarity. Within this framework, particular emphasis is given to the role of the local scale and place from which tangible resistances originate, without neglecting the wider structures of socioeconomic interconnectivity. Accordingly, place-based struggles form the nucleus of wider networking patterns. Through the recognition of commonalities and “common frames of reference” (Eschle, 2005) between these hitherto separate struggles, movements rescale their fronts of resistance by instrumentalizing what the authors term “imagineers” and “networking vectors” and construct “collective visions” based on a global justice agenda (p. 197).

In line with their theoretical proposition, Routledge and Cumbers critically engage with two prevalent theoretical resources that have been widely utilized in the study of resistance to neoliberal globalization: network theory and global civil society discourse. It is maintained that the former “insufficiently theorizes the social context from which networks emerge” (p. 63), while the latter overlooks “the entangled operational logics, differential power relations and dilemmas surrounding the grassrootsing of network imaginaries” (p. 214). In lieu of a widely accepted hyperglobalist conceptualization which locates international agency at an extremely abstract global level, the authors highlight the significance of local subjectivities that emerge concomitant with their rootedness in their respective places. This does not, however, restrict agency to the particular place in which resisting subjects exist. On the contrary, resisting subjects/movements coordinate and cooperate with similar struggles through the construction of networks. On this point, Routledge and Cumbers tread very carefully to distinguish their position from the network argument they initially criticize. They manage to do so by pointing out the relational aspects of networking and revealing the contentious processes which constitute the forms of relationships within networks.

The strongest aspect of the book is the cohesion between its theoretical structure and the thoroughly conducted empirical studies. Routledge and Cumbers present three different case studies (People’s Global Action Asia, International Federation of Chemical, Energy, Mining and General Workers, the Social Forum process) to outline their hypotheses. While the extent to which these networks and processes resist neoliberal globalization varies significantly, the authors delineate several common characteristics. The uneven social and spatial relations between the constituent parts of the networks are visible in all three cases. Contrary to the acclaimed representation of global resistance in the form of a decentralized, horizontally assembled opposition, Routledge and Cumbers repeatedly underscore the emergence of particular actors that claim implicit or explicit leadership statuses and the persistence of verticalist organizational elements. Furthermore, convergence spaces are problematized with respect to their inclusiveness and heterogeneity. As many interviewees testify, networks themselves are not inherently progressive spheres and they constantly need to be reconstructed to accommodate the needs and demands of grassroots members. The authors conclude the book with a similar statement, claiming that transnational solidarity is not

an end point, but a process; hence, global resistance is best understood in a processual manner in which resisting subjects and collective visions are constantly reworked in accordance with material conditions and particular localities.

Routledge and Cumbers successfully provide a balanced perspective on resistance without resorting to “spatial fetishism” (Massey, 2001) and turning a blind eye to the uneven relationships and contested power relations within the movements of resistance. The synthesis of theory and practice in the book creates a critical approach with which the contours of movements of resistance can be drawn accurately by paying specific attention to social and spatial relations that produce them.

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