

**Claims to Globalization: Thailand's Assembly of the Poor and
the Multilevel Resistance to Capitalist Development
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For centuries, groups and individuals have continually resisted unjust social processes and structures by asserting their political agency through sustained collective actions. While these actions have varied depending on particular circumstances and locations, they have always been greatly determined by the historical context in which they have occurred. Thus, as the world was organized through the construction of modern nation states in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, localized actions against immediate authorities diminished and modern forms of social movements emerged within a national context (Tilly 1984). In turn, transformations that have occurred on a global scale in the latter half of the twentieth century have begun to alter the ways in which collective action is carried out. In the context of an integrated and increasingly pervasive global economy, many social movements have recognized the extent to which overarching global economic processes can exert influence over social, political, economic, and ecological circumstances in local and national realms. In contrast to past movements that operated solely within the nation state and international state system, several movements have responded strategically to the transnational practices of global capitalism by fostering connections with an expanding web of transnational networks that allow for interactions with

globally dispersed allies and opponents. As such, their political activities have expanded beyond the state to include actions at transnational and global scales.

In this paper I seek to examine forms of multilevel resistance to capitalist development in Thailand that have been carried out by the social movement network, the Assembly of the Poor (AOP). Following a brief discussion of Thailand's development agenda as occurring within the context of neoliberal globalization, I will focus on the ways in which the AOP has advanced its efforts to oppose the adverse social and ecological ramifications of capitalist development through actions at local, national, and global scales. In analyzing such actions I hope to argue that the AOP's transnational extension has allowed its members to confront multiple areas of power and authority that exist within the global economy while including them in broader arenas and networks of resistance that are spreading throughout the world. Lastly, I hope to raise questions about the potential that emergent forms of grassroots globalization and global politics may have in challenging the hitherto dominant system of neoliberal globalization.

Globalization and Capitalist Development in Thailand

Understood in its most general sense, globalization refers to "the widening, deepening, and speeding up of global interconnectedness" (Held et al. 67). While this interconnectedness manifests itself in various social, cultural, political, and ecological forms, in practice, the economic processes of neoliberal globalization have significantly defined the concept. In this form, globalization is "arguably the politics of instituting a corporate market on a global scale" (McMichael 596). Demonstrating such politics, the global capitalist economy was constituted throughout the late twentieth century by national policies of deregulation, privatization, and liberalization of trade and investment that were implemented worldwide with varying pressure from supranational institutions such as the World Bank and International Monetary Fund (IMF). Defined as "...an economy whose core components have the institutional, organizational, and technological capacity to work as a unit in real time, or in chosen time, on a planetary scale," the global economy serves to connect capital, savings, and investment from national economies throughout the world (Castells 311). Accompanying the development of this economy has been the emergence of new global actors – particularly transnational corporations and global economic institutions – who have gained considerable influence over policies and overall development agendas of individual nations. The emergence of such actors

has resulted in the transfer of vast amounts of decision-making authority from individual states to the governors of the global economy and helped to transform capitalism from its previously international system into a globalizing one in which “there are hardly any places now left outside of market influences” (Harvey 67).

A key component of such a transformation has been “the restructuring of states to facilitate global circuits of money and commodities” (McMichael 596). Thailand’s development agenda, beginning in the 1950s and accelerating in the late 20th century, is one example of many across Asia, Africa, and Latin America that reflects such restructuring. Largely backed by a World Bank plan of rapid industrialization, this agenda was initially characterized by substantial economic investment in urban infrastructure, a strong market orientation, and a leading role for the private sector and foreign investment (Bello et al. 6). The military dictatorship of Sarit Thanarat (1958-1963) set the course by promoting capitalist development as “both an economic goal to be pursued and an ideology on which the legitimacy of the government was based” (Keyes 76). Showing a comprehensive departure from Thailand’s pre-1960 agricultural-based economy and society, succeeding governments maintained this goal and ideology by seeking urban-based industrial growth through a liberal, market-oriented approach (Falkus 15). Subsequently, the National Economic and Social Development Board in the Prime Minister’s Office began to focus on export-oriented manufacturing policies that were accompanied throughout the 1980s by “the tremendous infusion of foreign capital” (Bello et al. 6). By the 1990s foreign capital had contributed so much to Thailand’s growth that the World Bank, IMF and many mainstream economists regarded it and other countries of Southeast Asia as “exemplars for the rest of the developing world” (Rigg 3). However, perpetually overshadowed by the immensity of this economic development was its unevenness across the country. Largely left out of the success stories of Thailand’s development during this time was the subordinated position of the country’s rural regions to the capital city of Bangkok. Put simply, the government strategy of the late twentieth century was “consistently a lopsided, shortsighted one of milking and permanently subordinating agriculture to urban commercial-industrial interests” (Bello et al. 137). Exploitation and transfer of wealth from the country to the city persisted throughout the 1960s and 1970s as agricultural exports provided the manufacturing sector with capital to acquire imported machinery (Suphachalasai 67). By the 1990s the agricultural sector had declined heavily in relation to manufacturing,

bringing the most poverty and despair to small-scale farmers and peasants (Bello et al. 135). In the context of economic growth predicated by participation in external markets, such populations have been rendered insignificant and thus vulnerable to exploitation by and exclusion from the rapid changes occurring within Thailand.

Associated with such subordination has been the environmental degradation, and associated human consequences, caused by several aspects of Thailand's development agenda. For example, the country's earlier integration into the world economy as a resource and agricultural exporter entailed heavy deforestation that has continued throughout the decades, resulting in Thailand's northeast region to lose nearly 30% of its forests between 1961 and 1997 (Bello et al 183). Such deforestation has caused multiple and lasting problems for those living in the countryside, foremost of which include droughts and destructive floods induced by watersheds that are destabilized by industry logging (Bello et al. 176). Contributing greatly to hastened deforestation, while presenting a set of ecological problems of its own, has been the construction of dams that have been "developed fundamentally to provide electricity for the country's rapid industrial growth, centered disproportionately around Bangkok" (Glassman 519). In addition to contributing to the disappearance of an estimated 2,000 square kilometers of forest, hydroelectric dams have displaced thousands of rural families (McCully 83-85) and significantly reduced water and fish availability for those living in various river basins (McCully 53). Furthermore, the proliferation of shrimp farms in southern Thailand, implemented to increase supplies for global food markets, is having damaging effects on the coastal environment as well as the communities whose livelihoods have been dependent on the area's deteriorating mangroves (Barbier and Sathirathai 2004).

Considering these damaging consequences, ecological degradation and its concomitant human suffering have proven to be inherent features of Thailand's economic development agenda. Moreover, as this agenda continues to be greatly influenced, if not determined, by an increasingly powerful and invasive global economy, those who traditionally subsist outside of it face serious threats to their fundamental means of survival and ways of living. Thus, it is easy to see why rural resistance movements have developed alongside these projects. During periods of parliamentary democracy in the 1970s, groups such as the Communist Party of Thailand (CPT) and the Peasant's Federation of Thailand (PFT) built strong memberships for their respective resistance movements, only to be

systematically repressed in the lead up to and after the 1976 military coup (Missingham 22-24). With such repression, rural protest was temporarily contained until the parliament replacement of the military dictatorship provided the context for a reemergence of protest activity beginning in the mid-1980s (Baker 13). While protests were initially localized during this time, in the late 1980s political organization of villagers began to redevelop in ways that would lead to the creation of a new political space within which rural agency could be asserted into the national discourse on development and progress. As will be discussed, this discourse has been greatly influenced by members of the AOP who have proclaimed crucial concerns of Thailand's marginalized rural populations in national and, more recently, global political arenas.

Contested Development in the Global Economy: The Case of the Assembly of the Poor

Amid the vast social and environmental transformations that were occurring within the context of Thailand's economic development, community leaders and NGO activists saw an increasingly urgent need for a broad umbrella organization able to fight for community rights at the national level (Missingham 38). Thus, on December 10th, 1995 a conference entitled, "Assembly of the Poor: The Consequences of Large-scale Development Projects" was held at Thammasat University in Bangkok and attended by representatives of such village organizations as the Northern Farmers' Network, the Network of People Affected by Dams, and a network of urban slum dwellers (Missingham 38). During the conference, villagers, NGO activists, academics, and university students participated in panels and gave speeches about the negative social and ecological impacts of industrial development. After days of discussion, participants drafted the "Mun River Declaration," which served as a manifesto announcing the formation of the AOP and attacking "state policies that promote industrial development at the expense of the environment, the small-scale agricultural sector, and urban laborers" (Missingham 39). Most importantly, the Mun River Declaration signified the refusal of the most excluded and ignored sectors of Thai society to remain passive subjects of the rapid changes taking place within the country. Days after it was prepared, hundreds of AOP members introduced themselves to the state and public by marching through Bangkok and submitting the declaration and list of demands to the Thai government.

In the years following the Mun River Declaration, the AOP greatly expanded its membership through the development of an extensive and

diverse network of the country's poor populations. By 1997 six villagers' networks representing over 36,000 families from all regions were incorporated into the AOP and broken down into "problem groups" that included Forest and Land, Dams, State Development Projects, Slum Community, Work-Related and Environmental Illness, Alternative Agriculture, and Small Fishers (Missingham 45-46). The inclusion of urban slum dwellers and laborers into the network is significant because these groups consist largely of farmers and other rural inhabitants who moved to Bangkok to address worsening conditions at home through the demand for service and manufacturing labor in the city. Thus, the diffuse nature of poor populations throughout both rural and urban sectors has provided an extensive grassroots base for the AOP's emergence and progression as a broad-based national movement of the "poor" who are "victims of development" (Missingham 44). In addition, the AOP's network consists of multiple alliances with the urban middle class, academics, media, and NGOs who have added much logistical support to this grassroots base (Banpasirichote 237).

Through its networked organizational structure, the AOP has been able to develop a movement that is continually progressed by democratic cooperation among community groups and their allies. In contrast to a hierarchical structure that concentrates authority at the top and dictates an agenda to a rank and file, the decentralized AOP network allows representatives from several villagers' organizations, NGOs, and academics to share information and agree upon the best courses of action for the movement (Missingham 53). As such, the movement is motivated by a diverse collection of immediate grievances that are specific to particular communities, and taken together, these grievances comprise a united opposition to common processes and practices of development. In addition, they assert a historically marginalized discourse about rethinking and resisting the capitalist development paradigm that the Thai government has adhered to. How this growing discourse has translated into political practice within and between local, national, and increasingly global scales is a topic of further examination.

Political Actions in the National Arena

Though problems stemming from Thailand's capitalist development program inevitably emerge as local manifestations, most of the AOP's political actions have occurred in the national arena in which several of the

movement's local groups have converged to collectively assert their respective claims. As one NGO adviser explains, "After many years of protest by different villagers' groups at local sites of conflict...villagers have repeatedly encountered the plea that the officials in those [local authority] positions do not have the authority to act on their demands" (Missingham 139). Thus, in March of 1996, after dissatisfaction with government inaction towards their original petition, the AOP staged their first mass protest in front of the Government House – the center of state power and authority. The rally of 12,000 people lasted for five weeks and gained public recognition as well as a promise by Prime Minister Banharn to take action on all grievances listed in the petition (Missingham 129). Though, after months of government negligence, the late-1996 collapse of Banharn's Chart Thai Party, and the reluctance of the new Prime Minister, Chavalit Yongchaiyudh, to implement his predecessor's promises, the AOP began planning their next action. It was their following protest that would fully assert them into the national political arena as a diverse yet unified social movement seeking immediate changes in the ways in which the state carried out its development projects.

On January 25th, 1997 thousands of villagers from all regions traveled to Bangkok by bus, train, and shared vehicles to converge on the capital in a show of force outside of the Government House. The villagers, along with hundreds of urban slum dwellers who joined the rally, amounted to over 25,000 protesters who refused to move until the government responded to their petition (Missingham 121). Immediately upon entering the city, a "Village of the Poor" was constructed directly outside of the Government House within which villagers shared their experiences with each other and the urban public through speeches and performances. River community representatives spoke of the damage that dams have caused to their fishing practices, forest communities expressed concerns over harmful forest management projects, and other villagers from several areas throughout rural Thailand similarly asserted grievances and claims specific to their local circumstances. In addition, talks about the government's neglect of these populations were given by NGO activists and academics at various venues across the city, including parks and college campuses, serving important purposes of public education on the lives and experiences of perpetually ignored segments of Thai society. As a whole, the globalized capitalist development paradigm was admonished while public support for community-based sustainable development was sought.

Central to the demonstration's contestation of the Thai government and its policies were efforts to generate necessary support from the urban public. As such, protesters framed their demands within the popular discourse of "Nation, Religion, and King." Reference to such ideologies helped to "undermine the ideology of difference and otherness that is attached to poor protesters" while "underscoring shared identity and suggesting common citizenship rights with other sections of Thai society" (Missingham 158). Such framing indicates a concerted effort by villagers to introduce themselves as a constitutive yet neglected part of Thai society. Furthermore, because the protest included several urban laborers and slum dwellers, the ever-present rural/urban divide was challenged with pleas for recognition of the diffuse poverty that had been increasing as a result of development projects in all regions of the country. The protest was presented as a series of claims towards the Thai government to be included within the unfolding of the development process rather than as a threatening resistance to mainstream Thai society.

Throughout the 99 days of the demonstration, increased support from the Thai public helped to put pressure on the government to consider the demands of the AOP. Negotiation meetings were held between AOP members and government representatives, including Prime Minister Chavalat (Missingham 131). With the help of a mostly sympathetic media, these negotiations were presented to a national audience in such a way that garnered further support from most of the country's middle-class and NGO sector. This backing was decisive in prompting the government to accelerate its efforts to address the villagers' demands. Eventually, the government agreed to all 122 grievances put forth by the AOP, which included the establishment of a 1.2 billion baht fund to compensate communities harmed by dams and other development projects (Missingham 131). In addition, one dam project was cancelled while five others were put under review, and resolutions that allowed for long-settled groups to remain in forest zones were passed (Baker 23). Though the protest was an immediate success, the ensuing economic crisis that hit Thailand and Southeast Asia later that year would have a devastating impact on these concessions as they collapsed along with the Chavalit government.

Nonetheless, the demonstration did make a valuable impression on Thai society that would not have been achieved if their actions had remained local and dispersed. Most importantly, the construction and maintenance of a makeshift village within Bangkok proved effective in presenting to the public the continued hardships of those populations largely

neglected in the popular discourses on economic growth and development. Throughout the three-month-long protest, the site functioned like an actual village with daily routines of domesticity, sustenance, and survival. As anthropologist Bruce Missingham observed first-hand, "...domestic activities became symbolic, signifying the protesters' persistence and resistance to the destructive effects of development and their intention to endure here in the rally site until the state responded" (Missingham 142). Such a display of the lives of villagers from across the country served as a distinct contrast to the signs of wealth and prosperity that had been growing rapidly in the country's urban center and proved effective in dispelling inaccurate depictions of the Thai hinterland as "a place where nothing significant happens" (Askew 102-103). In contrast, the protest represented a nationally dispersed "community in crisis" that was "threatened by the very development and economic growth the city both symbolized and depended upon economically" (Missingham 141). Thus, it served to educate the urban public and Thai government about the lesser-known impacts that capitalist development projects were having on rural populations. As the immediate results indicate, public response to the demonstration was favorable enough to force the government to recognize these communities.

Significantly, such a protest at the national level was necessary for perpetually neglected issues of development and environmental justice to be heard by national political leaders. Though environmental concerns have been growing in Thailand since the later decades of the twentieth century, issues linking environmental changes to social justice concerns have been marginalized by the mainstream "consensus-dominated civil society discourse" that has tended to stay clear of controversial issues related to poverty (Banpasirichote 234). In addition, as Thailand's historically precarious democracy has been characterized by varying levels of corruption, mainstream environmental campaigns have been susceptible to interference by vested business and bureaucratic interests (Banpasirichote 237). Thus, issues of great importance to AOP members, including those related to dams, community forest management, depleted fisheries, the suppression of local knowledge systems, and so on, are most often trumped by powerful interests. Such political marginalization is a main reason why street protest – long designated as the "political resource of the powerless" (Della Porta and Diani 170) – was utilized in the 1997 Bangkok protest as well as others that followed. As is the case in several countries, a severe lack of democratic participation in Thailand's policy process has led grassroots environmental movements such as those of the AOP to become

increasingly contentious (Banpasirichote 237). Thus, the use of protest at the state level proved to be a necessary political act of resistance for those suffering from local manifestations of national policies.

By seizing the urban space surrounding the Government House and asserting their claims to the Thai government and society, the AOP established itself as a national social movement in direct contention with the Thai state rather than a loose collection of dispersed local struggles. Importantly, such action at the national level transformed the political consciousness of many villagers into one characterized by “lack of fear, confidence, determination, and collective solidarity” (Missingham 158). As villagers were able to meet and share stories with other members of the network, the collective solidarity of the movement was fostered. In addition, these interactions as well as the unprecedented interactions with government officials created a learning experience for villagers who were educated on different aspects of national politics (Missingham 160). Most importantly, the immediate results of the protest added to the confidence of rural communities and individuals as they came to realize that they were not completely vulnerable to seemingly uncontrollable systemic changes. However, because the contested development projects were carried out to bolster Bangkok’s, and thus the entire country’s position within the global economy, the protest can be seen as a reaction to development in a globalizing context. As such, the site of protest existed not only on the national level, but also within the global economic space of Bangkok. Though the bulk of the AOP’s political activity has continued to exist at the national level, the transnational and global dimensions of their actions have proven to be increasingly important, especially after the Asian economic crisis that began in Thailand in mid-1997.

Transnational Activities of The Assembly of the Poor

When the collapse of the Southeast Asian economy began in Thailand on July 2nd, 1997, causing the Thai baht to lose a fifth of its value, almost everyone was surprised (Rigg 25). Two key features of the Thai development model – heavy dependence on a fragile export sector and even more dependence on foreign capital – proved also to be the main causes of the collapse (Bello et al. 36). Immediately, Bangkok suffered as the many construction projects throughout the city came to a halt and thousands of workers lost their jobs. In addition to increased unemployment and poverty within the city, “much of the pain of the crisis was displaced to rural areas, in spite of the origins of the crisis in the urban-industrial economy,” further

intensifying the “sense of the injustice of the system which had not served rural areas that well during the boom yet made them pay heavily during the bust” (Glassman 522). Moreover, the collapse made frighteningly clear the degree to which the lives of many Thai citizens were vulnerable to unpredictable changes of the global economy. The economic crisis also gave way to political crisis as the Chavalit government collapsed along with several others in the region.

Though the 1997 collapse generated much anger and resentment towards the IMF and the World Bank for their hand in orchestrating the failed development model (Tadem 379), the crisis actually caused the Thai state to become much more dependent upon the institutions of the global economy. Within weeks IMF rescue packages amounting to \$17 billion were granted to the state (Rigg 25), though much of this fund was used to pay off foreign creditors rather than saving the local economy (Bello 2006). In addition, as the new Chuan Leekpai government began implementing crisis-management policies they quickly reversed all of the major concessions the AOP gained in their 99-day protest as part of an “aggressive determination to suppress the rising demands of organized rural groups” (Missingham 201). In the context of the economic crisis and a hostile Chuan government, during 1998 and 1999 the AOP resorted to a “scattered-star” approach consisting of setting up protest villages in various locations, such as near the continually contested Pak Mun dam, to resist development projects at the local level (Chalermripinyorat 546). Yet, as these projects were increasingly recognized as occurring within a global economic and political context, the AOP began to adapt their national struggle to the global context in which Thailand was undeniably entrenched, opting to expand its network across national borders and shift the scale of its politics to include activities at transnational and global levels.

The concept of “scale shift” has been defined in social movement literature as “the spread of contention beyond its typically localized origins” (Tarrow and McAdam 125). In many cases this shift has occurred back and forth from the local and national levels to transnational and global realms. One significant way in which the AOP has carried out such a shift has been their involvement in transnational protests. The first example of such activity was their participation in a demonstration in Bangkok during the tenth meeting of the United Nations Commission on Trade and Development (UNCTAD X) in February 2000. Though this protest was held in Thailand’s capital, the AOP’s actions may be seen as constituting a scale shift in that, for the first time, the main targets of contention were

global institutions and not the Thai government. During this conference, leaders representing the World Trade Organization, the World Bank, and the IMF were planning to make up for the meetings that failed to occur as a result of mass protests that took place against the WTO in Seattle two months earlier (Glassman 517). Arguably influenced by Seattle's unprecedented display of heterogeneous disapproval towards neoliberal globalization, AOP members joined the group of national and transnational protesters at the UNCTAD meeting and delivered a statement that "excoriated the type of development pursued in Thailand and its effects on people such as these villagers" (Glassman 518). Since this event, AOP members have been key participants in protests during meetings of other regional and global economic institutions that include the Asian Development Bank in Chiang Mai in 2000, and the 2005 Hong Kong meeting of the WTO. Though a lack of resources has limited the AOP's mobility to the Asia Pacific region, in the past decade they have demonstrated a clear effort to expand the targets and reach of their protest activities to include opponents beyond the Thai state. Importantly, involvement in protests against supranational targets can be looked at as signifying the assertion of the AOP's social movement discourse within global political arenas while simultaneously adding to an expanding worldwide critique of neoliberal globalization.

Participation in such arenas has been greatly aided by the AOP's involvement with transnational networks and organizations that operate on a global scale. For example, the AOP now serves as the Southeast Asia convener for People's Global Action (PGA) Asia, a network that facilitates communication and political coordination between a variety of social movements in various locations. In addition, the AOP is a member of La Via Campesina, a movement that has brought together millions of landless peasants, small farmers, agricultural workers, rural women, and indigenous communities in their global campaigns for biodiversity and food sovereignty (McMichael 604). Moreover, the AOP's continual fight against large dams has been greatly aided by its relationship with the International Rivers Network (IRN), an organization that collaborates with a global network of local communities, social movements, and NGOs to "protect rivers and defend the rights of communities that depend on them" by opposing "destructive dams and the development model they advance" (IRN 2008). Such transnational coordination has greatly enhanced the AOP's ability to shift the scale of its movement activities beyond local and national levels while demonstrating clear manifestations of this shift.

The AOP's connection to groups who operate at transnational and global levels has allowed for the use of tools and resources that are provided for the purposes of protesting global targets and building mutual solidarity with other movements affected by similar processes of globalization and development. For instance, PGA has fostered an extensive network "to offer an instrument for coordination and mutual support at the global level for those resisting corporate rule and the neoliberal capitalist development paradigm..." (Routledge et al. 2578). In particular, the AOP has benefited much from PGA's ability to mobilize resources and people for transnational protests. In addition, PGA and other groups such as La Via Campesina have acted as valuable support systems during these protests. For example, when 79 representatives from the Assembly were detained during the 6th WTO Ministerial Meeting in Hong Kong in 2005, La Via Campesina publicized the incident and widely circulated a solidarity statement urging the release of all detainees (La Via Campesina 2005). Moreover, through participation in transnational protests as well as conferences facilitated by such groups, members of the AOP have taken part in "solidarity-building efforts" that are based on notions of shared fate with communities in other countries (Smith 2002). For example, in recent years there has been continued exchange of information between Thailand's dam-affected communities and India's anti-dam activists who have been involved in their own struggle over the Narmada Valley dams for decades (Glassman 526). Thus, by forging connections with transnational movements and networks, the AOP has been able to confront more political targets while greatly expanding its diverse social movement network through solidarity with communities who are also making claims to their respective national governments and common global powers.

Importantly, increased coordinated action and mutual solidarity has translated to strengthened issue-based transnational campaigns in which the AOP has increasingly taken part. For example, AOP members have recently linked with La Via Campesina's campaigns for food sovereignty and shared their experiences of poverty resulting from WTO, IMF, and World Bank promoted programs of export-oriented rice production and monopoly control by transnational corporations (La Via Campesina 2006). Such participation has added to a growing discourse that exposes the devastating effects of the corporate-driven global food system and offers suggestions for the implementation of food sovereignty worldwide. In addition, through ties with the IRN, communities who have long fought against the Nam Choan, Pak Mun, and other dams in Thailand have been able to contribute to

global campaigns against World Bank-funded dams. Such campaigns have been influential in forcing the World Bank to adopt new policies on resettlement, environmental assessment, indigenous people, and information disclosure (McCully 308). Thus, by drawing from strengthened connections with transnational allies, the AOP has simultaneously transposed its own movement agenda to global arenas while contributing to broader social movement campaigns in resistance to particular aspects of neoliberal globalization.

In addition, members of the AOP have been able to utilize groups who enjoy greater access to, and recognition by, national and global institutions to further their immediately local goals. For instance, the World Commission on Dams (WCD), an independent body of scientists, academics, politicians, anti-dam activists and dam-industry professionals commissioned by the World Bank to assess the environmental and social impacts of large dams (McCully xix), has proven to be a valuable resource. In particular, the 2000 WCD report, *Dams and Development: A New Framework for Decision-Making* “vindicates many of their [dam opponents] arguments and proposes a progressive decision-making framework for future water and energy planning which echoes many of the demands of anti-dam campaigns” (McCully xxv). As such, the communities struggling against the Pak Mun dam used the report to assert the validity of their local knowledge of ecology that had long been ignored by the Thai state and global economic institutions. Bolstered by the report, in June of 2001 these communities and their allies were able to put enough pressure on the Thai government to open the dam’s floodgates for a year to study its social and ecological impacts (Drinkwater 2004). Within the year over a hundred local fish and numerous plant species returned to the Mun River and local communities were able to “return to fishing, farming and other longstanding practices central to their culture” (Drinkwater 2004). Eventually a compromise to leave the dam gates open for four months of the year was agreed upon. This example demonstrates both the unfortunate lack of credence given to the knowledge claims of local communities and the potential of these communities to validate their knowledge and strengthen their negotiating power by utilizing information from more institutionally respected sources.

Sociologists Doug McAdam and Sidney Tarrow state, “What we normally see in transnational contention is the transposition of frames, networks, and forms of collective action to the international level without a corresponding liquidation of the conflicts and claims that gave rise to them

in their arenas of origin” (McAdam and Tarrow 123). Thus, it is important to recognize that the various ways in which the AOP has shifted the scale of its political activities has been for the purpose of enhancing its members’ original struggles. They have not replaced local and national protest with actions on a global level, but have utilized a variety of strategies involving numerous alliances in maintaining a multilevel approach to political action. Such an approach seems necessary considering the diffuse character of political and economic power in a globalized world. As David Schlosberg argues in his study of environmental justice movements, “Citizen action is necessary on the regional and local level, because it is where much of the control remains lodged; it is necessary on the global level because the institutions of global governance there are so limited (and undemocratic). And it is necessary to network across each of these levels, as political power flows through them simultaneously” (Schlosberg 136). As the above analysis has shown, the AOP recognizes the necessity of such multilevel strategies and has exhibited them through several acts of resistance at local, national, and global scales. Moreover, such resistance has allowed for the inclusion of the AOP in a constantly growing and connected collection of diverse oppositions to the dominant processes of neoliberal globalization.

Conclusion

The development paradigm that has been adhered to by the Thai state “... offers the world a single vision that flattens its diversity and sponsors an increasingly unsustainable monocultural industrial system” (McMichael 589). Since the mid-nineties the members of the Assembly of the Poor have challenged this vision by building a network of Thai communities and allies in resistance to local injustices, constituting a national social movement to resist ecologically and socially damaging development projects at the state level. However, such projects have never been insular national events. Initial industrialization agendas were formulated and encouraged by the World Bank, and liberalization of the national economy was continually predicated upon the country’s emergent position within the global economy. Furthermore, the financial crisis of 1997 made it clear that the various global forces impinging on the state called for a multilevel approach to political action. In response, the AOP has taken actions similar to other grassroots movements who are, as Arjun Appadurai writes, “finding new ways to combine local activism with horizontal, global networking” (Appadurai 25).

Though the transnational expansion of its originally national network has been helpful in challenging state policies, the extent to which such developments will further the goals of Thailand's poor amid powerful state and global forces is yet to be determined. Nevertheless, the AOP's cross-border connections reveal emergent possibilities for political action and resistance in the contemporary era of globalization. By involving themselves in transnational campaigns and presenting their concerns within such frameworks as environmentalism, food sovereignty, and biodiversity, the AOP has been able to connect to broader frames of reference and larger spheres of action. This suggests that movements that may otherwise be dismissed as insular groups of stubborn peasants unable to adjust to globalization and development can present themselves as being involved with broad issues of global concern. Moreover, their participation in a growing array of transnational social movement networks demonstrates the ways in which grassroots movements might gain access into global political arenas and potentially influence global politics. In addition to making claims to the state, these movements are increasingly asserting claims to global institutions and other powers that attempt to dictate and define the ways in which globalization transpires. Thus, by presenting their local problems on a global stage and offering alternatives to harmful capitalist development projects, movements such as the AOP are contributing to an expanding global resistance to dominant practices and processes of neoliberal globalization.

Lastly, the proliferation, increased interconnection, and collaboration between a diversity of movements throughout the world points to new possibilities for the realization of alternative forms of globalization that are developing through bottom-up processes of collaboration and understanding. When activists from different areas of the globe share information, develop common goals, cooperate in political action, and offer alternatives, our understanding of globalization as consisting of much more than integrated markets is enhanced. Thus, transnational social movement processes are adding to a constantly growing vision of globalization from below – a vision that counters the homogenizing logic of neoliberalism with its diversity and global pervasiveness. How alternatives to neoliberal globalization manifest themselves is continually unfolding, and the extent to which such processes may challenge dominant capitalist ideologies is yet to be seen.

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