

## **Transnational Agrarian Movements: Origins and Politics, Campaigns and Impact**

SATURNINO M. BORRAS JR, MARC EDELMAN  
AND CRISTÓBAL KAY

*This essay introduces a special issue of the Journal of Agrarian Change on transnational agrarian movements (TAMs). The contributors' methods and subjects vary widely in geographical, temporal and political scope. The contributors to this collection share an understanding of TAMs' complexity that grows out of an appreciation of the complicated historical origins and the delicate political balancing acts that necessarily characterize any effort to construct cross-border alliances linking highly heterogeneous organizations, social classes, ethnicities, political viewpoints and regions. This introductory essay outlines the TAMs' deep historical roots and also explains why and how the authors in this collection see this complexity as an essential element in understanding TAMs. This complexity can be understood by looking at seven common themes: (i) representation and agendas, (ii) political strategies and forms of actions, (iii) impact, (iv) TAMs as arenas of action between different (sub)national movements, (v) class origins, (vi) ideological and political differences and (vii) the dynamics of alliance-building. By acknowledging TAMs' contradictions, ambiguities and internal tensions, the authors also seek, from the standpoint of engaged intellectuals, to advance a transformative political project by better comprehending its origins, past successes and failures, and current and future challenges.*

**Keywords:** transnational agrarian movements, peasant movements, global civil society, rural politics, class alliances, global governance, La Vía Campesina

Saturnino M. Borras Jr, Canada Research Chair in International Development Studies, Saint Mary's University, 923 Robie St, Halifax, NS, Canada B3H 3C3. e-mail: sborras@smu.ca. Marc Edelman, Professor of Anthropology, Department of Anthropology, Hunter College and the Graduate Center, City University of New York, New York, NY 10065-5024, USA. e-mail: medelman@hunter.cuny.edu. Cristóbal Kay, Professor of Development Studies and Rural Development at the Institute of Social Studies (ISS), P.O. Box 29776, 2502 LT The Hague, The Netherlands. e-mail: kay@iss.nl

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## THE RISE OF TRANSNATIONAL AGRARIAN MOVEMENTS

How have recent changes in the global political-economy affected the autonomy and capacity of the 'rural poor'<sup>1</sup> to understand their condition, assess political opportunities and threats, frame their worldviews, forge collective identities and solidarity, build movements and launch interlinked collective actions? What are the emerging forms of local, national and international resistance and how do these impact processes of agrarian change? How and to what extent has the scholarly literature in social movements and agrarian studies been able to catch up with this rapidly changing terrain of ideology, politics and organizations of (trans)national agrarian movements? These are the broad questions addressed in this collection.

Neoliberalism has significantly altered the dynamics of agrarian production and exchange relations within and between countries across the north–south divide. The simultaneous processes of globalization 'from above', partial decentralization 'from below' and privatization 'from the side' of the central state that used to play a key role in the maintenance or development of agrarian systems have shaken rural society to its core (see, for example, Edelman 1999; Gwynne and Kay 2004). These broader societal processes coincided with the most recent wave of agrarian restructuring, providing even greater power to transnational and domestic capital to dictate the terms of agricultural production and exchange (Byres 2003; Friedmann 2004; Bernstein 2006; McMichael 2006; Akram Lodhi and Kay 2008). While there are winners and losers in this global–local restructuring, working people and their livelihoods increasingly face ever more precarious conditions. Diversification of (rural and rural–urban; on-farm, off-farm or non-farm) livelihoods, forced or otherwise, has been widespread (Bryceson et al. 2000; Ellis 2000; Rigg 2006; World Bank 2007). Access to and control over land resources are being redefined and landed property rights restructured to favour private capital (De Soto 2000; World Bank 2003; but see Rosset et al. 2006; Lahiff et al. 2007; Akram Lodhi et al. 2007).

These global–local complex processes have affected 'agrarian movements' in a variety of ways, many of which used to (and continue to) operate solely within local communities and national borders. Today, many agrarian movements have 'localized' their struggles in response to partial decentralization, others have focused on 'privatized' activities in a manner akin to 'state-substitution' on development issues such as social service delivery, while others have 'internationalized' their struggles in response to global agrarian restructuring.

In recent years, Transnational Agrarian Movements – or TAMs, for short – (taken here in a loose definition to mean 'movements', 'organizations', 'coalitions', 'networks' and 'solidarity linkages' of the 'rural poor') and some of the national peasants' and farmers' groups directly linked to these transnational

<sup>1</sup> The 'rural poor' is obviously a highly heterogeneous category; here, it includes small owner-cultivators, sharecroppers, tenant farmers, rural labourers, migrant labourers, subsistence fisherfolk and fish workers, forest dwellers, indigenous peoples, peasant women and pastoralists. The differentiation among the rural poor has class, gender, race, ethnic and caste dimensions, among others.

movements have gained considerable power and political influence (and in some quarters, perhaps notoriety).<sup>2</sup> La Vía Campesina is the most well known of all the contemporary TAMs, networks or coalitions (Borras 2004; Desmarais 2007). There are, however, numerous other transnational movements, networks and coalitions that are based among rural sectors or advocate for rural people; some are engaged in left-wing politics, while others are less radical (Edelman 2003).

Perhaps the largest agrarian-based and agrarian-oriented transnational network today is the International Planning Committee (IPC) for Food Sovereignty, with more than 500 rural social movements and NGOs, radical and conservative, as members (<http://www.foodsovereignty.org>). The fisheries sector also has relatively vibrant transnational networks, including the World Forum of Fish Harvesters and Fishworkers (WFF), World Forum of Fisher Peoples (WFFP) and the International Collective in Support of Fish Workers (ICSFW). The agricultural workers' sector is relatively less visible, but the International Union of Food, Agricultural, Hotel, Restaurant, Catering, Tobacco and Allied Workers' Associations (IUF) remains an active and significant global actor. Some agrarian-based networks are relatively new, but others have been around for decades, such as the International Federation of Adult Catholic Farmers' Movements (FIMARC), founded in the 1950s. There are even more numerous agrarian-oriented transnational civil society networks, such as the FoodFirst Information and Action Network (FIAN), the Land Research and Action Network (LRAN), the Erosion, Technology and Concentration Group (ETC Group), the Genetic Resources Action International (GRAIN) and Friends of the Earth (Edelman 2003).<sup>3</sup>

Some of these global movements and networks have ideological and political orientations that are fundamentally different, as is the case with Vía Campesina and the International Federation of Agricultural Producers (IFAP), or Vía Campesina and the Asian Peasant Coalition (APC). Others have closer fraternal relationships, such as Vía Campesina and the International Movement of Catholic Agricultural and Rural Youth (MIJARC). Meanwhile, many others are regional in focus, such as the *Coordinadora Latinoamericana de Organizaciones del Campo* (CLOC, Latin American Coordination of Peasant Organizations) and the *Réseau des Organisations Paysannes et de Producteurs de l'Afrique de l'Ouest* (Network of Peasants' and Producers' Organizations of West Africa, ROPPA). Moreover, many of the agrarian movements are differentiated in terms of the class origin of their main mass base. In IFAP, for example, medium and large farmers are dominant, while in Vía Campesina the member organizations consist mainly of poor peasants and small farmers. Nonetheless, the large transnational movements tend to be highly heterogeneous in terms of class as well: IFAP also has members that come from the ranks of poor peasants and small farmers, while

<sup>2</sup> For more nuanced academic discussions about the differences and similarities of these categories in the context of cross-border or transnational 'movement' literature, see Fox (2000, 9–12, 45) and Khagram et al. (2002, 9).

<sup>3</sup> The full names of organizations are provided when they are first mentioned. After that most are referred to by their abbreviations.

Vía Campesina has members that come from the ranks of middle and rich farmers. Finally, many transnational movements, networks and coalitions have overlapping memberships, even those that are rivals, such as Vía Campesina and IFAP.

Many of these groups, and especially Vía Campesina, perhaps the most politically coherent of all contemporary TAMs or networks, have significantly undermined major conferences of important intergovernmental institutions, most notably the World Trade Organization (WTO), International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank. In Seattle, Washington DC, Cancún, Hong Kong, and elsewhere, theatrical protests with significant peasant and farmer participation contributed to raising public and media awareness of these movements. Following the violence outside the 2001 G-8 summit in Genoa, for example, *Newsweek* singled out the Vía Campesina as one of eight 'kinder, gentler globalist' groups behind the anti-G-8 protests (*Newsweek* 2001, 17). In 2008, the London *Guardian* included Vía Campesina coordinator and Indonesian peasant leader Henry Saragih in its list of 'ultimate green heroes', the '50 people who could save the planet' (*Guardian* 2008).

Many of the national movements that are leading members of transnational networks have engaged in dramatic anti-corporate actions, such as bulldozing a McDonald's fast-food shop in France, burning a Kentucky Fried Chicken outlet in Bangalore, and uprooting a GM soya farm and a eucalyptus nursery in Brazil, among others. The protest suicide of Lee Kyang Hae, a South Korean farmer, during the Cancún WTO negotiations was another form of dramatic action.

Yet, the same agrarian movements also sit in the consultative bodies of some United Nations (UN) agencies, such as the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) and the United Nations Commission on Human Rights (UNCHR). They negotiate and bargain with international bureaucrats for a variety of agendas that range from policy reforms to funding support. They negotiate and agree to some compromises with select nongovernmental donor and cooperation agencies about the terms of funding for their activities. Official venues of international representation have witnessed profound changes in recent years when TAMs asserted their own distinct, direct representation in these 'spaces' – challenging the traditional 'occupants' of such representation spaces, particularly intermediary NGOs. In some cases, more radical agrarian movements have been able to gain seats in these official venues, partially undermining the hegemony previously enjoyed by more conservative movements. These challenges to the traditional clout of NGOs and conservative movements such as IFAP can be seen, for example, in Vía Campesina's ability to eventually gain direct representation in the official global interface mechanism (Farmers' Forum) with farmers' groups at the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), in the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), and at the International Conference on Agrarian Reform and Rural Development (ICARRD).

The TAMs' growing international presence, visibility, voice and political influence has inspired a broad range of progressive and radical non-agrarian networks, from environmentalists to human rights groups, resulting at times in

new kinds of powerful synergies. The rise of the (new) peasant movements in general and TAMs in particular has also generated a new wave of academic scholarship, from Marxist to postmodern interpretations of such phenomena (see, for example, Harvey 1998; Edelman 1999; Brass 2000). It has provided a much needed concrete justification for some nongovernmental funding agencies' programmes. Indeed, TAMs have achieved a level of reach and influence that can no longer be ignored even by mainstream development and financial institutions, which have intensified their attempts to capture and co-opt, collaborate with or undermine at least some of these transnational movements.

Most observers focus their attention on only the most visible and 'noisy' global movements, such as *Vía Campesina*. But current TAMs and networks are plural and diverse, as indicated earlier. Some observers tend to assume, as many agrarian activists frequently claim, that contemporary TAMs constitute a *new* phenomenon. But TAMs and networks are not always entirely new. Many comparable groups had existed before. Many of the actually existing movements or networks have been here for decades, as is the case, for example, of *Campesino a Campesino* (Peasant to Peasant) in Central America–Mexico, which started in the 1970s (Holt-Giménez 2006). Moreover, actually existing transnational movements or networks often build directly on older cross-border linkages from well before the neoliberal onslaught that commenced in the early 1980s (see, for example, Edelman 2003, 196–7). Many cross-border and cross-continental links were forged, for example, during the 1970s and 1980s as part of the vast political solidarity networks in Europe and North America that backed national liberation and anti-dictatorship movements in many developing countries, such as Chile, Nicaragua, South Africa and the Philippines. However, the roots of contemporary transnational alliance-building date back much earlier than the most immediate predecessors described above. Understanding the diversity and dynamics of contemporary TAMs partly requires an understanding of past TAMs and networks. It is to this topic that the next section is devoted.

## HISTORICAL ANTECEDENTS

Transnational alliance-building among peasant and small farmer organizations accelerated after the late 1980s, but its roots lie as far back as the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. This indicates that cross-border organizing is not merely a result of new communications technologies, the growing reach of supra-national governance institutions or a weakening of the contemporary state system under globalization. Early transnational farmers' organizations manifested sometimes eclectic amalgams of agrarian populism, Communism, elite-led reformism and noblesse oblige, pacifism and feminism.

### *The Green International and the Red Peasant International*

In the ten years after World War I, two rival international movements vied for peasant support in central and eastern Europe: the agrarian Green International,

eventually headquartered in Prague, and the Moscow-based Peasant International or *Krestintern* (Jackson 1966, 51).<sup>4</sup> Following the War, agrarian or peasant-led political parties came to power in Bulgaria and Yugoslavia and had major influence in Czechoslovakia, Poland, Romania, Hungary, Austria and the Netherlands. The agrarian parties differed in ideology and practice, and each was typically composed of bitterly competing factions, but most sought to shift the terms-of-trade in favour of rural areas, to implement land reforms and to break the power of the traditional landed groups. The latter two goals were, of course, shared by the Communists, with whom the Agrarians had intimate and complex, occasionally collaborative and more usually antagonistic, relations in country after country.

The most formidable agrarian government was in Bulgaria, where in 1919, following a period of violence and instability, Alexander Stamboliski's Agrarian Union won the first postwar elections (Jackson 1966, 161; Bell 1977, 142–3).<sup>5</sup> Stamboliski carried out wide-ranging social reforms, most notably modifying the tax system to favour the rural poor and distributing the few large estates to the peasantry. Over the next four years, the Agrarians won growing electoral support (as did the Communists, the second largest party). Stamboliski – famously hostile to cities and urbanites, whom he repeatedly termed ‘parasites’ – hoped to turn Bulgaria into a ‘model agricultural state’ within 20 years (Jackson 1966, 42; Pundeff 1992, 82–3).

Novelist Ernest Hemingway, who met Stamboliski in 1922, wrote in the *Toronto Star* that he was ‘chunky, red-brown-faced, has a black mustache that turns up like a sergeant major’s, understands not a word of any language except Bulgarian, once made a speech of fifteen hours’ duration in that guttural tongue, and is the strongest premier in Europe – bar none’ (Hemingway 1987, 149).<sup>6</sup> At home, Stamboliski formed the Agrarian Orange Guard, peasant militias armed with clubs, which were periodically mobilized to meet threats to the government, especially from the Communists and right-wing Macedonian nationalists (Pundeff 1992, 82). In foreign policy, he attempted to secure support from agrarian parties in Poland, Czechoslovakia and elsewhere for an international agricultural league that would serve as protection against both the reactionary ‘White International’ of the royalists and landlords and the ‘Red International’ of the Bolsheviks (Colby 1922, 108–9; Gianaris 1996, 113).

The Green International first took shape in 1920, when agrarian parties from Bulgaria, Yugoslavia, Austria, Hungary, Romania, the Netherlands and Switzerland began to exchange delegations and set up a loosely organized ‘league’ under the direction of a monarchist Bavarian physician and peasant leader, Dr Georg Heim (Durantt 1920).<sup>7</sup> The following year, the alliance formally

<sup>4</sup> ‘*Krestintern*’ was a conjunction of the Russian ‘*Krest’yianskii Internatsional*’ or Peasant International.

<sup>5</sup> The full name of Stamboliski’s party was the Bulgarian Agrarian National Union (BANU).

<sup>6</sup> The 15-hour speech was to an Agrarian Party meeting. According to Hemingway (1987, 150), ‘that speech broke the hearts of the Communists. It is no good opposing a man of few words who can talk for fifteen hours’.

<sup>7</sup> Heim’s political views are briefly mentioned in Brown (1923).



constituted itself as the International Agrarian Bureau and set up a headquarters in Prague (Bell 1977, 143).<sup>8</sup> This effort, due significantly to Stamboliski's initiative, made little headway over the next three years, as the Bulgarian leader was occupied with diverse diplomatic problems and a wide range of domestic opponents, including the Communists, disenchanted urban elites, nationalist and royalist army officers, Russian and Ukrainian 'White' refugees from the civil war in the Soviet Union, and right-wing Macedonian extremists.

In 1923, Stamboliski's enemies toppled him in a bloody right-wing coup that ushered in more than two decades of military and royalist dictatorship.<sup>9</sup> Stamboliski's captors severed his right hand and, after prolonged torture, decapitated him (Bell 1977, 237–8). Sporadic peasant resistance was quickly overcome and dozens of BANU supporters were assassinated in the succeeding weeks. Several months after the coup, a brief, fragile alliance between exiled Bulgarian Agrarians and Communists produced a Communist-led uprising, but this too was rapidly quelled, with an estimated 5,000 rebel fatalities (Pundeff 1992, 85–7; Carr 1964, 209).

The Bulgarian disaster helped pave the way for the 1923 decision of the Communist International (Comintern) to establish a Red Peasant International (Krestintern) and to seek deeper ties with the agrarian parties. Several factors in the Soviet Union and the international Communist movement also contributed to this move. The 1921 introduction of the New Economic Policy (NEP) in the USSR, characterized by greater tolerance of agricultural markets and smallholding property, ushered in a uniquely pro-peasant period in Soviet history that lasted until 1929 when the consolidation of Stalin's rule brought the initial steps toward collectivizing agriculture and 'liquidating the kulaks as a class'. Disappointed by the failure of the 1919 Communist uprisings in Germany and Hungary and by the 1920 defeat of the Soviet invasion of Poland, Moscow increasingly looked to the east as the most likely zone for successful new revolutionary movements, but these societies had only tiny industrial proletariats and massive peasantries. At the Krestintern's founding congress in 1923, the group issued an appeal to 'the peasant toilers of the colonial countries' (Carr 1964, 615). The first issue of its journal contained articles by Nguyen Ai-quoc (a pseudonym for Ho Chi Minh) and Sen Katayama, the Japanese Comintern operative whose activities ranged across Asia and as far as Mexico and Central America (Edelman 1987, 12).

The Krestintern only succeeded in attracting non-Communist agrarian movements on a few occasions. In 1924 it briefly recruited as a member Stjepan Radić's Croat Peasant Party, heretofore very much in the agrarian rather than the Communist tradition and, like Moscow, radically opposed to the idea of a Yugoslav federation that might serve as 'a mask for Great Serbian imperialism' (Biondich 2000, 198). Radić, however, who hoped to use the Krestintern

<sup>8</sup> In this period, the Green International had a strong Pan-Slav orientation. Its membership in 1921–25 was limited to the Czech, Serbian, Polish and Bulgarian agrarian parties (Bell 1977, 143).

<sup>9</sup> During the coup the Communists declared neutrality in what they saw as a simple quarrel between the urban and rural bourgeoisies (Bell 1977, 231).

affiliation to pressure Belgrade for greater Croatian autonomy, had pacifist leanings and encountered difficulty in collaborating with Yugoslav Communists. He never actually participated in any Krestintern activities and his withdrawal from the Krestintern weakened the broader legitimacy of an already weak organization (Carr 1964, 227–9, 953; Jackson 1966, 139).

China's nationalist Kuomintang (KMT) also flirted with the Krestintern during the mid-1920s as part of its alliance with the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). Several KMT leaders visited Moscow and Krestintern and Comintern operatives, including Ho Chi Minh and a significant group of Vietnamese militants, studied at the CCP's Peasant Movement Training Institute (PMTI), where Mao Tse-tung was an instructor (Quinn-Judge 2003, 82–9). In 1925 the slogan 'Join Krestintern' reportedly appeared on posters in Chinese villages (Carr 1964, 723). But this connection was also severed, in 1927, when the KMT massacred its Communist allies in Shanghai, something which caught Soviet leaders completely by surprise. On the eve of the coup, the Comintern had instructed the CCP to bury its arms (Cohen 1975, 261).

The Krestintern never attained the influence or reach of most of the other 'auxiliary organizations' of the Comintern, such as the Red International of Trade Unions (*Profintern*) or the International Organization for Aid to Revolutionaries (also known as Red Aid or MOPR, its Russian acronym). In early 1925, the Krestintern journal published an apology for the difficulties that had prevented it from holding a second congress. Later that year, Nikolai Bukharin, in an exhaustive report to the Fifth Comintern Congress on efforts around the world to bring the peasantry into revolutionary organizations, failed to even mention the Krestintern. Following the Comintern congress, the Krestintern held a plenum, with 78 delegates from 39 countries. It recommended that its militants participate in existing peasant organizations and try to align them with Communist positions (Carr 1964, 952–7). But this was precisely the approach that two years later led to the Shanghai fiasco and apart from some minor and ephemeral organizing successes, the Krestintern was basically moribund by the end of the 1920s. Pro-peasant figures in the Soviet Party, in particular Bukharin, increasingly found that they had to conform to Stalin's vision of the rural world and most were ultimately eliminated in the purges of the mid to late 1930s (Cohen 1975). The Krestintern's only durable achievement was the founding of International Agrarian Institute in Moscow, which was explicitly intended to serve as a counterweight to the Rome-based International Institute of Agriculture (IIA) (Carr 1964, 956).<sup>10</sup>

From the outside, however, the Red Peasant International did not appear so weak. In 1926–7, in response to the perceived threat of the Krestintern, there were rival efforts to form an international coordinating body for peasant

<sup>10</sup> The IIA, founded in 1905 by an American, David Lubin, with Rockefeller Foundation support, hoped to unify different governments around common approaches to agricultural statistics and research (Jackson 1966, 140–1). The IIA was a remote ancestor of the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), also based in Rome since its founding in 1945.



organizations. The first originated with Dr Ernst Laur, general secretary of the Swiss Peasant Union, who sought to unite the Paris-based International Commission of Agriculture (ICA) and the IIA in Rome, which was closely associated with the League of Nations.<sup>11</sup> Laur's plan was to create closer links between national peasant and farmer organizations and the two policy bodies, but it foundered when the ICA and IIA each established competing international coordinating groups of farmer organizations and when the eastern European agrarian parties kept their distance, suspicious of Laur's opposition to state expropriations of large estates and intervention in the agricultural sector (Jackson 1966, 140–50).

By 1926, the Prague International Agrarian Bureau or Green International jet-tisoned its Pan-Slav orientation and began to reach out more widely to farmer organizations in France, Romania, Finland and elsewhere in Europe. Under the leadership of Karel Mečír, who had served as Czech Ambassador to Greece, the Green International defined itself as a centre for the exchange of experiences, moral reinforcement and solidarity for peasants and agrarian parties, and as an international adversary to national governments that threatened peasant interests. Its main activities, however, were the publication of a multilingual quarterly bulletin and the holding of annual conventions. At its height in 1929, it included 17 member parties, stretching, in Mečír's words, 'from the Atlantic Ocean to the Black Sea, from the Arctic Ocean to the Aegean' (Jackson 1966, 149).

The world economic crisis of 1929, the failures of various national agrarian parties, and the rise of fascism all contributed to the demise of the Green International. The Communists, despite occasional flirtations with the agrarian parties, heartily condemned both the Green International and Laur's attempt to unite the Paris ICA and the Rome IIA. In an increasingly polarized central and eastern Europe, with rapidly shrinking political space, the project of a peasant or farmers international did not re-emerge until after World War II, with the founding of the International Federation of Agricultural Producers (IFAP, see below).

### *Associated Country Women of the World*

Further west, a very different sort of transnational farmer organization began to take shape in the late 1920s, the Associated Country Women of the World (ACWW), which is still in existence.<sup>12</sup> Today ACWW, 'the largest international organisation for rural women', claims a membership of nine million in 365 participating societies in over 70 countries (ACWW 2002). Its proximate origins lie in encounters between leaders of the International Council of Women (ICW) – founded in Washington in 1888 – and the Women's Institute (WI) movement, which began in Canada in the 1890s and spread to the United States, England and many British colonies (Davies n.d.).

<sup>11</sup> The ICA was formed in 1889 by French Agriculture Minister Jules Melin. It sought to hold periodic international congresses on technical problems of world agriculture (Jackson 1966, 140–1).

<sup>12</sup> Parts of the sections on ACWW and IFAP are based on Edelman (2003, 185–8).

The ICW was founded by US activists (and delegates from eight other countries) who had participated in the abolitionist, women's suffrage and temperance movements (Rupp 1997, 15). The Women's Institutes were initiated by leaders of ICW's Canadian affiliate as auxiliaries to the Farmers' Institutes, a provincial extension programme which also existed in the United States (Moss and Lass 1988; McNabb and Neabel 2001). In 1913 Canadian WI activist Madge Watt moved to Britain where she helped found several hundred local Women's Institutes and interested long-time ICW President Ishbel Gordon Aberdeen in starting an international federation. Watt and Lady Aberdeen, an aristocratic feminist whose husband had served as British Governor General of Canada, called a meeting in London in 1929 with women from 23 countries who established an ICW committee on rural women (Drage 1961, 125).<sup>13</sup> The committee published a yearbook (*What the Countrywomen of the World Are Doing*), a journal (*The Countrywoman*) and a newsletter (*Links of Friendship*); it also circulated leaflets in three languages to recruit new national associations (Meier 1958, 5). In 1933, in Stockholm, it became Associated Country Women of the World.

In ACWW's early years, women from the English, Belgian, Romanian, German and Swedish nobility played key roles (Meier 1958, 4–5; Drage 1961, 131–3; *London Times* 1938). By 1936 its first Triennial Conference outside Europe, in Washington, DC, attracted some 7,000 farm women, most of them Americans (Meier 1958, 7). The Association set up speakers' schools for organizers and researched issues such as midwifery services and nutrition. In the pre-war period it worked with the League of Nations. During the War, it moved its headquarters from London to Cornell University in upstate New York. Following World War II, it attained consultative status with several United Nations agencies (Meier 1958). More recently, ACWW has supported development and income-generating programmes and advocated in international fora for women's rights. Despite growing participation by women from less-developed countries and an increasingly sophisticated approach to gender issues, ACWW never transcended its elite British origins. Its conventions are still held in English, without translation services, a practice which limits participation from outside the English-speaking world primarily to educated middle- and upper-class women, most of whom are NGO personnel rather than rural producers (Storey 2002).

#### *International Federation of Agricultural Producers*

The International Federation of Agricultural Producers (IFAP) was founded amidst post-World War II optimism about global cooperation and fears of impending food shortages and a recurrence of an agricultural depression like that of the

<sup>13</sup> At ACWW's founding meeting Lady Aberdeen reportedly 'went fast asleep, enveloped in a large shawl. She woke up however, just at the right moment, and closed the meeting'. 'She was', according to ACWW secretary Dorothy Drage (1961, 134), 'wonderfully talented'.

1930s.<sup>14</sup> In 1946 the British National Farmers' Union convoked a meeting in London of agriculturalists' representatives from 30 countries, with the objective of supporting the newly formed UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) and overcoming differences between commodity-based interest groups – grain farmers and feed-lot livestock producers, for example – within the agricultural sector (*London Times* 1946a, 1946b).

The northern European groups that dominated IFAP already had a decades-long history of international congresses, many involving cooperative societies and Christian farmers' organizations created in the early twentieth century (ICA and IFAP 1967; IFAP 1957, 5). Despite a certain ambivalence about market liberalism, these forces often backed centre-right political parties. They worked with the Rome-based IIA (see above), which engaged in agronomic research, campaigned for uniform systems of statistical reporting and cooperated with the League of Nations in the inter-war period. The FAO, founded in 1945, was explicitly modelled on this earlier experience and IFAP was intended as the FAO's private-sector counterpart or ally.

The post-war food crisis led IFAP to emphasize raising production, even though some delegations, such as the Canadians, called for international marketing mechanisms that 'would distribute abundance efficiently and in such a way that surpluses would not spell disaster to the producers' (*London Times* 1946b). IFAP leaders served in government delegations to FAO conferences, sometimes exercising substantial influence on FAO policies (IFAP 1952). More recently IFAP joined ACWW in publicizing World Rural Women's Day, celebrated each year since the 1995 Beijing Women's Conference on 15 October.

## SILENCES IN THE LITERATURE

Studies of social movements and, to some extent, those of agrarian change, have followed the flows of the neoliberal and movement dynamics: some focus on local civil society actions, others emphasize state-substitution initiatives by civil society organizations, while others concentrate on transnational social movements. These studies have stretched the traditional boundaries in our understanding of contemporary agrarian movements and agrarian change. However, at least three broadly distinct but interrelated gaps remain in the current literature.

First, the rapid expansion of studies on social movements and civil society, especially at the international level, has shed new light on the intermediary organizations, especially NGOs, that usually 'broker' between the rural poor and various institutions of governance, and on issues around human rights, environment and trade negotiations. However, few of these studies provide a full understanding of the internal dynamics of the agrarian movements themselves. Often these receive relatively little systematic examination, despite the TAMs' impressive

<sup>14</sup> A sense of the critical food situation is provided by the same *Times* article that announced the founding meeting of IFAP. It noted the imminent arrival in London and various other cities of '215,181 boxes of apples from Australia' and 'the first consignment of tomatoes from the Channel Islands', which was to be sent to the north of England and Scotland (*London Times* 1946b).

entry onto the global political scene during the past decade and a half. A glance at the fast-growing transnational social movements literature shows that recent studies focus mainly on networks concerned with human rights, women's and indigenous rights, labour, environment, migrants and international financial institutions (see, for example, Keck and Sikkink 1998; Cohen and Rai 2000; Florini 2000; O'Brien et al. 2000; Seoane and Taddei 2001; Waterman 2001; Smith and Johnston 2002; Pianta and Silva 2003; Taylor 2004; Mayo 2005; Tarrow 2005). Surprisingly, given the dynamism and high profile of transnational agrarian movements, scholars have given them relatively less scrutiny, with a few exceptions that include Edelman (1998, 2003, 2005), Mazoyer and Roudart (2002), Borrás (2004), Holt-Giménez (2006) and Desmarais (2007). How movements around each theme (environment, human rights, trade, migrants, agrarian, and so on) ally with or compete against each other, and with what implications, is another question that is generally under-explored. This collection of essays makes an initial effort to fill in this gap in the transnational social movements literature.

Second, there is a dearth of analysis of the dynamics of interconnectivity, or absence of it, between the international, national and local levels of contemporary agrarian movements. One example of this is the way in which representation and accountability at these different levels tends to be sweepingly assumed rather than systematically problematized and empirically examined. The actually existing local–national–global linkages demand better and fuller understanding. One issue worth deeper examination is the question of 'partial representation': it is very common to hear a global movement claiming to be 'representative' of the 'voice of the rural poor' from a given country, even when that particular organization is far from being representative of the diverse rural poor from its country. Similarly, it is common to hear claims from movements about their 'global' representation; it only takes one to ask whether these movements have representatives from China or the former Soviet Union, or the Central Asian region or the Middle East to discover that their 'global' coverage is quite limited. This collection attempts to initially engage this issue more systematically.

Jonathan Fox (2005) raises a related issue when he distinguishes between 'transnational and translocal memberships' made in the context of cross-border migrant studies or Deborah Yashar's (2005) concept of 'transcommunity' in the context of indigenous peoples' communities. This distinction is also analytically useful for studies of transnational social movements, not just because it calls attention to differences between translocal migrant associations or transcommunity indigenous peoples' linkages, but also it reminds us not to take as unproblematic what is claimed by agrarian movement leaders (for example, 'transnational links'), on the one hand, and what may actually exist in reality (for example, 'translocal'), on the other.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>15</sup> Fox's and Yashar's analyses are indications of an infrequently remarked semantic problem. 'Transnational' and 'transnationalism' are used in two separate, albeit related, senses in contemporary social science. One, employed in this essay and in most of the other contributions to this collection, emphasizes *political* linkages across national borders. The second usage refers mainly to *migration* and *diaspora*-related phenomena. For examples of the latter approach, see Mahler (1999) and Glick Schiller (2004). For an analysis that bridges both usages, see Fox and Bada's essay in this collection.

Furthermore, there is also a question of 'dynamic versus static' views on representation and interconnectivity. Social movements are highly dynamic, undergoing surging and ebbing all the time (see, for example, Edelman 1999 for a Central American case). Movements may come and go, rise and fall, or strengthen but later weaken. However, the official claims of transnational movements about themselves, their constituent organizations and their respective levels of representativeness tend to be static. Failed attempts at sustaining TAMs and other social movements remain significantly under-theorized in the literature, as Edelman notes (this collection).<sup>16</sup>

Third, there tend to be only weak analytical connections between the phenomenal rise of studies in social movements and civil society on the one hand and studies on agrarian change dynamics on the other hand. We are thus generally confronted by two parallel, at times unrelated, sets of studies. Frequently social movement studies describe the political context in which agrarian movements function but lack any analysis of the agrarian structure within which the movements are embedded. Conversely, in many recent studies on global agricultural trade rules, TAMs are completely absent, despite such movements' frequently significant influence on global trade negotiations.

In short, despite increasing scholarly attention to transnational social movements, the agrarian dimension of these has remained significantly under-studied. Meanwhile, the broader field of agrarian studies has been slow to catch up with the phenomenal rise of TAMs. This collection is an initial contribution towards filling in these gaps and towards suggesting some new research agendas. It will, of course, only be able to partially cover the gaps discussed above. But we hope that it will inspire or provoke further studies of the many remaining, under-explored issues.

## COMMON ISSUES

The contributions to this collection are diverse in terms of themes, analytic approaches and disciplines, as well as the specific units and levels of inquiry and the contexts, settings and conditions of the agrarian movements examined. However, the contributions share a concern with agrarian structures and institutions and they ask some important common questions. These include: (i) What are the characteristics of the agrarian structures from which these movements have emerged (or did not emerge)? (ii) What is the social base of the agrarian movements being examined? What social classes, groups and sectors do they represent (or claim to represent or not represent at all)? (iii) What are the issues and demands put forward by the global, national and local organizations on particular development and policy questions? What are the sources of these demands and the social and political forces that back them? (iv) What are the issues that unite – and divide – agrarian movements, and why? And (v) to what

<sup>16</sup> See, however, the essays in Anheier (1999).

extent have the (discourse and) campaigns and collective actions over time by these movements altered (or not) the very agrarian structures that they sought to change in their favour?

These questions raise issues significant for any rigorous study of TAMs that aims to bring together the social movements and agrarian studies literatures: (i) representation and agendas, (ii) political strategies and forms of actions, (iii) disaggregating and understanding impacts, (iv) TAMs as arenas of action between different (sub)national movements, (v) diverse class origins, (vi) ideological and political differences and (vii) the dynamics of alliance building.

## REPRESENTATION CLAIMS AND AGENDAS

The contributions in this collection consider the *diverse* interests of the social classes and groups in whose names TAMs and other global citizens' networks establish policy positions and make demands. The impact of neoliberalism on pre-existing rural production and exchange relations has had varying impacts on different social classes, regions and sectors, and within and between countries in the global north and south. The rural poor have usually suffered adverse effects. Looking upward from below, we see that some have formed organizations and joined social movements, although most of these have remained localized. Some local organizations have forged ties with each other, resulting in the formation of national associations and movements. A few of these national groups were able to link up with movements from other countries, or have been able to forge a certain degree of 'vertical' integration of their movements or networks (Edwards and Gaventa 2001; Fox 2001), and have created transnational networks or movements. Looking downward from above, it is clear that while a few globalized movements have made impressive strides, far more groups and ordinary rural poor people have been left behind or decided, for various reasons, to remain within the boundaries of local and national venues – unlinked to any global agrarian movements. It is in light of this reality that the question of representation within TAMs needs to be discussed more carefully.

Effective representation of the social base's interests within their movements should not be assumed to be automatic or permanent and unproblematic. 'Effective representation' is dynamically (re)negotiated within and between leadership and membership sections of movements over time. It is important to critically examine the question of representation in studying TAMs for at least two inter-linked reasons: (i) it is from movements' or networks' claims to represent a group or groups of people that they justify their issue-framing and demand-making initiatives; (ii) movements argue for the importance, urgency, necessity or justness of their cause and make demands based on their claims to represent particular groups of people. Indeed, this is their public *raison d'être*. In the case of TAMs, it is usually the 'oppressed', 'peoples of the land' or 'the peasants' that are the subjects of these representation claims.

Despite the importance of the issue of representation, there are not many critical efforts to scrutinize this question. It is often the case that the issue of



representation is assumed rather than empirically demonstrated. Similarly, the extent of representation is commonly conflated with the degree of visibility and 'loudness' of TAMs; that is, the more visible and the louder the TAMs, the more representative they are assumed to be. For example, a much smaller global network of NGOs may be able to be present in most international conferences and official venues of consultations, while a community-based transnational agrarian movement may be far larger, but may not be able to be present in such global conferences and institutional processes. Uncritical observers, especially among international development agencies, might very well consider the former as the representative network (even when this is not the case in reality). Understanding representation in the context of TAMs requires analysis that goes beyond what is easily observable, i.e. 'visibility and loudness', and into issues that are usually not included in the movements' discourses. This can be accomplished in a number of ways.

First, in most cases, by representation, TAMs are in fact talking about 'partial representation'. Partial representation can be viewed from at least two perspectives: globally and nationally. A quick scan worldwide would reveal that most of the high-profile TAMs today do not have any (significant) presence in large areas of the world, notably Russia, Central Asia, the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region, and most especially China. Together, these regions host the majority of the world's rural poor. In this collection, Kathy Le Mons Walker examines contemporary rural China, and Kevin Malseed the particular case of the Karen people in Burma, to demonstrate that poor people's demands in these regions may be distinct from, but also often similar to, rural poor people's demands elsewhere. Despite the TAMs' global aspirations and discourse, the cases that Le Mons Walker and Malseed examine are completely beyond the TAMs' radar, notwithstanding the importance, intensity and scale of these and similar struggles.

Nationally, partial representation can be seen by the fact that, no matter what is claimed, no single organization, movement or group of movements can fully represent the vast and diverse groups and interests in an entire country. We can see this by looking at two extreme settings: one where a national member of a TAM is very weak and the other where a national member is very strong. Both South Africa and Brazil have member organizations in *Vía Campesina*. As Brenda Baletti, Tamara Johnson and Wendy Wolford explain in this collection, the Landless People's Movement (LPM) of South Africa, a 'late mobilizer', started very weak politically and organizationally, and after just a few years, imploded. It is still the only organization that represents the South African rural poor in *Vía Campesina* despite its extremely limited, currently nearly insignificant, degree of representation. Meanwhile, the Movement of the Landless Rural Workers of Brazil (MST, *Movimento dos Trabalhadores Rurais Sem Terra*) is said to be, and perhaps is, the largest and most politically coherent national movement within *Vía Campesina*. It certainly represents a great number of poor people in Brazil. However, even in the context of Brazil, MST's representational capacity is, at best, partial. The recent candid admission by its leader, João Pedro

Stédile, about its still limited current ability to organize Brazil's landless poor is instructive (Stédile 2007, 195). Moreover, even sympathetic critics of the MST have noted its limited representation among the Afro-Brazilian population and among rural women, some of whom have abandoned the MST to form their own organizations (Stephen 1997, 217–33; Rubin 2002, 45–6). Arguably, all other national movements in *Vía Campesina* fall somewhere in between these two extreme poles in terms of representation, i.e. varying degrees of *partial* representation.

As will be discussed below, and in the studies in this collection, partial representation has profound implications for the very nature and orientation of issue-framing and demand-making processes and outcomes within TAMs. But one implication of the reality of partial representation is that perhaps it is better seen not from an 'either/or' perspective, i.e. either representative or not. Rather, representation is inherently a matter of degree.

Second, framing representation as a matter of degree suggests that it is not static. Representation is constantly renegotiated within organizations or movements. This means the degree of representation of a particular movement may increase or decrease over time, and in some cases may completely disappear. Marc Edelman's historical analysis of the Central American peasant alliance, ASOCODE, is illustrative of the contested and dynamic character of representation (Edelman, this collection; Edelman 1998).<sup>17</sup> ASOCODE was one of the earlier versions of progressive transnational agrarian movements based among small farmers and landless peasants. Its rapid and phenomenal rise to fame in the early 1990s was an inspiration to many other movements outside of Central America. It was quite vibrant and indeed had solid claims about representation. For various internal and external reasons, ASOCODE later imploded. By the turn of the century, it could no longer claim and could no longer be considered as having a high degree of representation in the region. This is similar to the story told by Saturnino M. Borrás Jr (this collection; Borrás 2004) in the case of the Democratic Peasant Movement of the Philippines (DKMP, *Demokratikong Kilusang Magbubukid ng Pilipinas*), another member of *Vía Campesina* that had a significant social base in the 1990s, but rapidly and significantly contracted before the end of that decade. Solidarnosc-Rural in Poland, which was a founding member of *Vía Campesina* and sat in its International Coordinating Committee during the latter's formative years, is yet another, similar case. Solidarnosc-Rural went from having a sizable base to being unable to actually demonstrate any significant degree of representation (among small farmers in Poland). It was asked to leave *Vía Campesina* a few years after *Vía Campesina*'s second world assembly. Agrarian movements go through the natural dynamics of ebb and flow over time. Their capacity to represent the particular groups that they claim to represent is directly affected by such cycles and dynamics, which in turn have

<sup>17</sup> ASOCODE was the *Asociación Centroamericana de Organizaciones Campesinas para la Cooperación y el Desarrollo* (Central American Association of Peasant Organizations for Cooperation and Development).

some influence on the nature and orientation of the movements' issue-framing and demand-making processes.

Third, a problem is the failure to significantly represent groups of rural people, partly due to restrictive definitions of 'peasant' or 'farmer'.<sup>18</sup> Conventional framing of agrarian movements tend to be 'agriculture-centred', with 'people of the land' as a defining character of the common actors. But the rural sector has long been diverse and plural, as are the livelihoods of the rural poor (see, for example, Bryceson et al. 2000; Ellis 2000; Rigg 2006). To limit organizing effort as well as issue-framing and demand-making to agriculture-oriented themes effectively excludes a significant portion of the world's rural poor. The case of cross-border migrant workers is particularly important because they constitute a large section of the world's rural population (in their areas of origin, but many times also in the receiving countries). Jonathan Fox and Xochitl Bada (this collection) examine how cross-border migrants (Mexico-to-USA) have had a profound impact in the sending areas. Out-migration affects local labour markets in diverse ways and sending communities are, furthermore, increasingly transformed by the huge volume of migrants' remittances. There is a persistent and troubling divide, politically and academically, between the rapidly growing scale of transnational labour migration and the failure of the major TAMs to accord the issue of cross-border migrant workers a central place in their analyses and strategies.<sup>19</sup> Migrant organizations and studies of cross-border migration only rarely embed their political or academic work in agrarian change dynamics (as Fox and Bada observe on the issue of the persistent 'disconnect between migration and development'). The Mexico-US cross-border migration that has direct links to the situation of the Mexican rural sector is not the only significant migratory flow out of a threatened countryside. Others include Nicaragua-to-Costa Rica, Zimbabwe-to-South Africa, Morocco-to-Spain, Poland-to-Britain and the Philippines-to-Malaysia.

Fourth, and finally, as the discussion above suggests, the question of representation is complicated and often contentious. Diverse realities and multiple

<sup>18</sup> Structural factors are also, of course, significant in explaining why it has often been difficult to organize and represent rural as compared to urban people. Geographical dispersion, remoteness, poor communications and transport infrastructure, and the greater differentiation of rural people and variety in social relations in the countryside have historically complicated rural organizing, at least as compared to the efforts to organize the urban industrial working class. The deindustrialization and rise of the informal sector that often accompanies neoliberalism have, however, over the last two decades, contributed to greater difficulties in many parts of the world in organizing the urban poor and working class.

<sup>19</sup> In a number of cases, however, what we might call 'minor TAMs' with a bi-national focus have advocated effectively on behalf of migrant workers. Among notable examples that work in both the United States and Mexico are the Rural Coalition (Rural Coalition 1994) and the Farm Labor Organizing Committee (FLOC), which is affiliated with the US AFL-CIO (American Federation of Labor-Congress of Industrial Organizations). FLOC, which has worked in Mexico to clean up corruption in the recruiting system for farm workers going to the United States, has been a target of violence and in 2007 lost one of its key leaders, Santiago Rafael Cruz, to an assassination (Velásquez 2007). Some of these and other minor TAMs have formal and informal relations with major TAMs, such as *Vía Campesina*.

channels of representation and accountability are often too complex for movement leaders and activists to understand and deal with. For example, the concept of 'class' is frequently invoked in terms that are too abstract and vague, and too divisive. Unstructured, unorganized and covert forms of actions are too fluid and invisible for movement activists and leaders to acknowledge or comprehend. And so, in many ways, movement leaders act like states, inasmuch as they engage in a 'simplification process' to make complex realities legible to and manageable for them, to use the powerful analytic lens offered by James Scott in his book *Seeing Like a State* (1998). But in doing so, a great many important details tend to be taken for granted or missed in the analysis and discourse that the TAMs produce.

The question of representation is inherently linked to the issue of the agrarian movements' agenda-setting processes and outcomes. A global network of middle to rich farmers that stands to benefit from certain types of free trade will not oppose initiatives for barrier-free trade between countries. A transnational network that does not have a mass base in China or the countries of the former USSR may float the notion of a socialist alternative in an unproblematic manner. It is difficult, if not impossible, to fully understand representation and agendas as separate issues. This points to the importance of not automatically and uncritically accepting as unproblematic claims by transnational movements about their agendas, bases of support and political successes. One way of taking a more nuanced look at this is to identify possible discrepancies between claims about agendas and other matters between national member groups, on the one hand, and the TAMs, on the other. The responses of (trans)national peasant movements and ordinary, local peasants and farmers around the issue of genetically modified (GM) crops illustrates this disconnect. As Peter Newell (this collection) points out in the case of Latin America, and Ian Scoones (this collection) in the cases of India, South Africa and Brazil, GM crops have become a major focus of contention, pitting peasant and small farmer organizations and many environmentalists against agribusiness and large farmer groups. The controversy about GM crops in reality involves a range of interlinked debates: on food safety, contamination of crop land races and threats to genetic diversity, the health of humans and other species, farmers' budgets, intellectual property, farmers' right to produce and save seeds, the economic and ecological vulnerability implied by genetic monocultures, and the concentration of power in the hands of a few giant corporations. Yet as Newell and Scoones suggest, the stakes in this discussion and small farmers' on-the-ground practices are not always as clear cut and straightforward as the contending parties claim or would wish (see also Müller 2006; Herring 2007).

## POLITICAL STRATEGIES AND FORMS OF ACTIONS

TAMs generally agree on certain types of common political strategies and forms of action. It is indeed remarkable how highly diverse (sub)national and (sub)regional peasant groups such as the National Farmers' Union (NFU) of

Canada, Brazil's MST, the European Peasant Coordination (CPE), KRRS of Karnataka, India or Mozambique's UNAC would be able to agree on common political strategies and forms of action (see Edelman 2003; Desmarais 2007).<sup>20</sup> But while it is critical – politically and academically – to understand such strategic alliances, it is equally important to acknowledge potential and actual differences within and between TAMs. For one, understanding diversity and differences will lead us to appreciate better the accomplishments of TAMs' unity-building efforts. It will also help us grasp other related issues, such as representation and 'inclusion–exclusion' processes within TAMs. In short, it will help us understand TAMs better in all their complexity. We briefly examine this issue along three dimensions.

First, similarities and differences between TAMs and other groups that do not have clear and legible strategies and effective forms of actions. Most transnational agrarian movements look for 'counterpart' organizations in other agrarian societies. When they do not find rural poor peoples' associations that are in their 'image and likeness', they tend to conclude that 'nothing is happening' or that 'there are no social movements' in those societies. This process of TAMs searching for counterparts in practice usually involves looking at the ideological make-up of a potential ally as well as its political strategies, methods and forms of collective action. It is for this reason that TAMs typically characterize organizations in regions and countries such as the former USSR, the Middle East and North Africa (MENA), China and Southeast Asia, and to a significant extent, Sub-Saharan Africa, as having 'no clear political strategies' or being 'politically and organizationally weak'. They may also point to such regions and argue that there is an 'absence of movements' or an 'absence of mobilizations and protests'.

But important works around the 'everyday forms of peasant resistance' (e.g. Scott 1985, 1990; Scott and Kerkvliet 1986; Kerkvliet 2005) and subsequent studies inspired or provoked by this approach (e.g. O'Brien 1996; O'Brien and Li 2006) alert us that such assumptions are problematical. In many settings, peasants engage in everyday forms of resistance that are 'unorganized', 'unstructured' and 'covert' to defend or advance their interests. Le Mons Walker explains that in the case of contemporary China everyday peasant resistance has taken a more overt form, but remains 'unstructured' and 'unorganized' (in the conventional senses of these terms). Malseed describes how, in the case of the Karen people in Burma, everyday forms of resistance have a lot in common with conventional organized, structured and overt agrarian movements. Le Mons Walker and Malseed each argue (in this collection) that contrary to the dominant assumptions, there may be great potential for transnational linkages between these various peasant initiatives, but that this would require revising many of the established TAMs' conventional assumptions. To a significant extent, the problem of conventional TAMs excluding particular groups because their political strategies and forms of

<sup>20</sup> KRRS stands for *Karnataka Rajya Ryota Sangha* (Karnataka State Farmers' Association). The European Peasant Coordination is usually abbreviated CPE for *Coordination Paysanne Européenne*, its name in French. UNAC stands for *União Nacional de Camponeses* (National Union of Peasants).

actions are not in their 'image and likeness' is also applicable in the case of cross-border migrant associations, as explained by Fox and Bada (this collection) in the context of Mexican migrant groups. Unless these critical gaps are quickly and seriously addressed by TAMs, their issue-framing, demand-making and overall power on the global scene will be, at best, well below its potential. Critical scholarship on TAMs requires a truly global lens in looking at movements or networks that frame issues and make demands in the name of the *world's* rural poor but that have no presence in key geographic zones.

Second, similarities and differences between TAMs. There are significant differences between various TAMs on political strategies and forms of action. Some favour a combination of confrontation and critical collaboration with (inter) governmental institutions, while others favour uncritical collaboration and formal alliances. More generally, the first type of strategy has guided Vía Campesina's political work, while the latter has characterized the IFAP. Vía Campesina has declared that it does not, and will not, legitimize key international institutions that are among the promoters of neoliberal globalization, such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the World Trade Organization (WTO) and the World Bank. It has refused to participate in their institutional processes and attempts to discredit these agencies at every opportunity (Vía Campesina 2000).<sup>21</sup> But Vía Campesina has nonetheless decided to collaborate with particular groups of sympathetic reformers within the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) and the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), a specialized UN agency. This is in contrast to the longstanding harmonious relationship of IFAP with all these agencies. Larger transnational coalitions that include (inter)national members from the more radical and the more conservative groups tend to move back and forth between these two poles, as in the case of IPC for Food Sovereignty.

Some TAMs have identified radical, direct actions as the most appropriate and effective ways of putting their issues onto the official agendas and effecting actual reforms in their favour. These actions include land occupations, physical attacks on GM experimental infrastructures and field testing sites, bulldozing or torching of symbolic icons of transnational corporate greed, occupations of government and corporate offices, and street marches to disrupt important multilateral conferences (see discussions by Scoones, Newell, Edelman, Borrás, and Baletti, Johnson and Wolford in this collection). Other TAMs, especially those associated with middle and rich farmers such as IFAP, as well as those dominated by large NGOs such as the ILC, do not engage in dramatic, confrontational forms of collective action. They prefer to send their top executives for official meetings with important international institutions.

Assessing which strategies and forms of actions are more effective depends largely on the goals and targets of a particular campaign. If the goal is to delegitimize specific institutions, then public shaming through confrontational actions may

<sup>21</sup> But see Edelman (2003, 207) on Vía Campesina's brief 1999 attempt to engage in dialogue with the World Bank about agrarian reform.



indeed be an appropriate approach. In campaigns where the goal is to secure concessions, as for example, expanding 'invited spaces' (see Gaventa 2002) for civil society participation, then a more critical collaborative interaction would likely be more effective. Overall and in the long run, however, it may not be favourable to a particular TAM to be pigeonholed as having a specific, predictable strategy or action repertoire, such as 'only confrontational actions' or 'only conformist interaction through official channels'. The *Vía Campesina's* capacity for combining multiple tactics and strategies, as well as a wide range of forms of actions, almost certainly contributes to its effectiveness.

Third, similarities and differences within TAMs. Within large TAMs, different political strategies and forms of actions – sometimes competing and contradictory – can occur simultaneously. Take for instance the strategy of Brazil's MST, which is generally confrontational direct action, as well as 'independence' from the state (Baletti, Johnson and Wolford, as well as Newell, this collection) – and contrast this to the Senegalese group, CNCR (*Conseil National de Concertation et de Coopération des Ruraux*), which works much more closely with government and opts for less confrontational forms of action (McKeon et al. 2004). It is possible to come up with a long list of similar cases that demonstrate the contradictions between TAMs' supposed political strategies and the forms of actions with their (sub)national and (sub)regional members. This diversity and the resulting contradictions are most pronounced and widespread in the larger TAMs, such as the IPC for Food Sovereignty.<sup>22</sup>

Can or should activists in the TAMs and in their national member organizations reach consensus around standards for politically effective strategies or actions? In cases where this appears to have occurred, it usually reflects what the dominant actors within and between TAMs define as standards. This process is illustrative not only of the TAMs' simplification or standardization efforts, but also that TAMs are indeed sites of power. Keck and Sikkink remind us that 'Transnational advocacy networks must also be understood as political spaces, in which differently situated actors negotiate – formally or informally – the social, cultural, and political meanings of their joint enterprise' (1998, 3). They continue, 'Power is exercised within networks, and power often follows from resources . . . Stronger actors in the network do often drown out the weaker ones' (see also Della Porta et al. 2006, 20). It is usually the powerful actors within TAMs that define standards for their movement and, to the extent that they can, for others outside their movement as well.

## DISAGGREGATING AND UNDERSTANDING IMPACTS

Disaggregating TAMs' impacts is important in order to assess whether, how and to what extent their actions bring them closer to their goals. This is especially so because, as Tarrow explains, 'advocates of transnational activist networks

<sup>22</sup> See Jordan and van Tuijl (2000) for a relevant discussion on this issue.

have highlighted many successful instances of successful intervention on behalf of actors too weak to advance their own claims. In an internationalized world, we are likely to see more of such intervention, so it is important to look at it without illusions. Transnational intervention fails more often than it succeeds' (2005, 200). Keck and Sikkink (1998, 201) propose that transnational networks attempt to realize their objectives through five interlinked processes, namely, (i) by framing debates and getting issues on the agenda, (ii) by encouraging discursive commitments from state and other policy actors, (iii) by causing procedural change at the international and domestic level, (iv) by affecting policy and (v) by influencing behaviour changes in target actors.

Most of the contributions to this collection agree and demonstrate that TAMs' greatest and most palpable impacts have been in (re)framing debates and getting issues on the agenda. This is argued perhaps most forcefully by Phil McMichael, who explains how TAMs, especially *Vía Campesina*, are reframing debates not only on specific issues, but *the terms of the debates* around the very notion of 'development' and the agency of peasants in this process. McMichael, Scoones, Newell, and Friedmann and McNair (all in this collection) show how transnational linkages have contributed to reframing debates around the political economy of food – from the question of organic food certification to anti-GM crops mobilizations. The notion of 'food sovereignty' as an alternative to the current corporate-controlled and industrial food complex was developed by *Vía Campesina* and has since then spread to the agendas of many other TAMs, environmental movements, and even governmental and intergovernmental institutions.<sup>23</sup> Meanwhile, Fox and Bada (this collection) demonstrate why out-migration of rural Mexicans to the USA does not always constitute a choice of 'exit' over 'voice', something which is frequently assumed to weaken civil society in the areas of origin of the migrants. They show that in some cases 'exit' can be followed by 'voice', where migrants have reframed the terms of the discussion around local development and their roles in it. Borras (this collection) explains that the Global Campaign for Agrarian Reform (GCAR) led by *Vía Campesina* has its most significant impact in terms of reframing the debate about land reform and land policy in reaction to the currently dominant market-led model.<sup>24</sup> Peluso, Afiff and Fauzi (this collection) explain that the convergence of environmental and agrarian movements in Indonesia with links to global networks can produce mutually reinforcing impacts for these movements and lead to a significant reframing of environmental and land issues.<sup>25</sup>

<sup>23</sup> *Vía Campesina* and its allies also see 'food sovereignty' as an alternative to the mainly quantitative notion of 'food security' propounded by some intergovernmental and nongovernmental agencies. The regional government of Tuscany (Italy) is one of several sub-national jurisdictions in Europe that has pioneered food sovereignty policies within its boundaries and has lent political support to food sovereignty campaigns in Europe. For a background discussion, see Patel (2006) and Rosset et al. (2006).

<sup>24</sup> For a background on the current debates on land reform, see Borras (2007).

<sup>25</sup> Anna Tsing (2005) has studied a similar Indonesian case, and has offered rich and nuanced analysis of the mutually transforming processes in these global connections through what she calls 'friction'.

Quite importantly, however, Edelman (this collection) demonstrates that part of the waning of the regional transnational network in Central America was the movements' failure to adapt their agendas sufficiently to the rapidly changing agrarian structures in this region and the massive exodus of migrants from the countryside. He points out, for example, that agrarian movements in the region continue to repackage calls for land reform. But, he argues, without critical and more systematic understanding about how past state-directed land reforms improved or failed to improve the livelihoods of poor peasants, current issue-framing and demand-making around land reform may not be very effective in countering elite and World Bank efforts to implement market-led agrarian reform.

In the other four dimensions that Keck and Sikkink point to as important for evaluating transnational networks' impact, TAMs, as shown in most of the studies in this collection, have so far made little headway. It is possible that one of the most valuable aspects of TAMs is their reframing the terms of relevant policy and political debates internationally, which can in turn help create a favourable context for (sub)national movements to actually make palpable gains.

#### TAMs AS ARENAS OF INTERACTION BETWEEN (SUB-)NATIONAL MOVEMENTS

Agrarian movement activists tend to represent TAMs as 'single actors', as networks or movements with collective agency. Such representations in turn tend to be uncritically accepted by external observers, including other TAMs, other global civil society networks, and some scholars and development policy experts. These actors then generalize about particular TAMs based on what they perceive as general patterns of behaviour exhibited by particular TAMs over time (e.g. some TAMs are more radical than others, some TAMs are more reformist than others, and so on). The fact that a particular TAM has its own specific characteristics distinct from others, and that it is a group with collective agency, is important for agrarian movement activists in terms of movement-building processes, and is less problematic for academic observers. However, the notion of TAMs as single, unitary actors cannot be detached, empirically and analytically, from another, concomitant feature of TAMs, notably that these are also arenas of interaction between (sub-)national movements. This tends to confirm what Keck and Sikkink have already pointed out – i.e. that transnational networks should be seen as 'network-as-actor' and 'network-as-structure' (1998, 7).<sup>26</sup> These two spheres of TAMs (re)shape each other in a dynamic process similar to Anna Tsing's (2005) notion of 'friction', resulting in the constant transformation of a TAM, its members and the way interactions between members are structured.

Inherent to political spaces where various actors come to interact with one another is the question of power. Different groups enter this space with dissimilar

<sup>26</sup> See related discussions in Guidry et al. (2000, 3) and Batliwala and Brown (2006).

degrees of political power. Therefore, member movements have varying degrees of influence in the process of shaping the character of a TAM, a single actor, as well as the processes that structure the interaction between member movements. Baletti, Johnson and Wolford (this collection), for example, describe the asymmetry in political power between Brazil's MST and South African's LPM, both members of *Vía Campesina* but with distinct levels of influence within it. These authors even suggest that MST's assistance to LPM in movement building and mobilization, the very type of collaboration that many view as an advantage of TAMs, might have harmed, not helped, the LPM. This highlights the question of 'uneven development of (sub)national movements' as an important issue in studying TAMs. Baletti, Johnson and Wolford employ a categorization of 'early mobilizers' (Brazil's MST) and 'late mobilizers' (South Africa's LPM) and indicate that this dimension of organizational timing shapes the degree of power of component groups within a TAM.

This categorization of 'early' and 'late mobilizers' is indeed useful in the case of MST and LPM. However there are cases for which this analytical approach may not be as useful. Take, for example, the case of the Indonesian Federation of Peasant Unions (FSPI, *Federasi Serikat Petani Indonesia*) examined by Peluso, Afiff and Fauzi (this collection) and compare it with, say, Mexico's UNORCA.<sup>27</sup> The latter was formed in the 1980s, was one of the key founding members of *Vía Campesina* in 1993 and remains an important movement, especially for the North American regional coordination of *Vía Campesina*. Meanwhile, FSPI was formed only in late 1996 and gained organizational and mobilization momentum only during the post-authoritarian regime transition in 1998. It is one of the very late mobilizers in *Vía Campesina* and even within Southeast Asia. However, for various reasons, including some external opportunities (e.g. *Vía Campesina* wanted to transfer its operational secretariat to Asia), FSPI rapidly increased its global political influence. In 2004, it became the host of the global operational secretariat of *Vía Campesina*, and its leader, Henry Saragih, becoming *Vía Campesina*'s general coordinator.

In addition to the mode of categorizing movements based on the timeline of organization-building and mobilization as one of the explanatory factors in the differential power positions within a TAM, it may be useful as well to examine the timeline of the act of linking as well as the 'quality of the link' between a movement and the TAM. For this purpose, we can use the categories 'early linkers', 'late linkers', 'strong linkers', 'weak linkers', which may also define an organization's position of influence and power within a TAM. For example, KRRS of Karnataka in India is an 'early linker' that contributed to building *Vía Campesina*. It also has a 'strong link' due to its particular history and capacity to launch dramatic actions against transnational and GM seed companies, something that is central to the global discourse of *Vía Campesina*. Meanwhile, numerous movements of landless labourers and Dalit workers in India were, in

<sup>27</sup> UNORCA is the *Unión Nacional de Organizaciones Regionales Campesinas Autónomas* (National Union of Autonomous Regional Peasant Organizations).

the context of *Vía Campesina*, ‘late linkers’. Many of them attempted to link-up with *Vía Campesina* only in 1996, but by then the middle and rich farmer-based KRRS was already well-entrenched within the global movement – actively preventing the entry of other movements from India or effectively discouraging many other movements from India from seeking membership in *Vía Campesina*.<sup>28</sup> Many of these ‘late linkers’ also have ‘weak links’ to the global actors for a variety of reasons, which include the relatively low priority to workers’ issues within *Vía Campesina*, whose advocacy caters primarily to surplus producing strata of the peasantry who are engaged with issues of trade and biotechnology. There have been no systematic worker-centred campaigns within *Vía Campesina* (around wages, for example) except, of course, land reform, which KRRS initially opposed as a focus for a global campaign (see, for example, the discussions by Borras and by Scoones in this collection). Many ‘late linkers’ are unable to insert themselves effectively into the TAM, especially where rival national movements have already become well-entrenched within the TAM. This is, for example, the case of UNORKA in the Philippines, whose application for membership in *Vía Campesina* is opposed by KMP (see Borras, this collection).<sup>29</sup> This type of tension is widespread in most of the TAMs.

## DIVERSE CLASS ORIGINS

Without a class analysis it is impossible to disaggregate (and fully understand) the processes and outcomes of development. Scholars who have recently argued for bringing class back in to the study of rural development do not claim that a class analytic lens is sufficient for explaining all important dynamics of agrarian change. Other social relations and identities, particularly gender, ethnicity and religion, also play distinct roles.<sup>30</sup> But scholars who point to the explanatory power of non-class identities in recent rural social movements also frequently argue that while ethnicity and other non-class identities are important, class too must be considered in any analysis of movement-building and agrarian change

<sup>28</sup> Despite KRRS’s social base among a relatively prosperous sector of the peasantry, the organization’s discourse and actions were frequently radical and dramatic, particularly during the period until 2004, when its longtime leader Professor M.D. Nanjundaswamy passed away. KRRS was famous for ransacking the Bangalore offices of Cargill and campaigning against the presence of US fast food chains in India (Gupta 1998). During the 2004 Mumbai World Social Forum (WSF), Nanjundaswamy and KRRS, alleging that the event was conceived and dominated by non-Indian NGOs with little popular backing, boycotted the WSF and organized a parallel ‘resistance’ forum outside the main event.

<sup>29</sup> UNORKA is *Pambansang Ugnayan ng mga Nagsasariling Lokal na Organisasyon sa Kanayunan* (National Coordination of Autonomous Local Rural People’s Organizations). KMP is *Kilusang Magbubukid ng Pilipinas* (Peasant Movement of the Philippines).

<sup>30</sup> See, for example, Bernstein’s (2007) explanation in the context of a review of current scholarly discourses on rural livelihoods, as well as Herring and Agarwala’s (2006) argument for ‘restoring agency to class’ in the context of, among others, the class basis of the differential positions of various groups ‘organized’ and ‘unorganized’ rural-based and rural-oriented groups in India concerned with the issue of GM crops.

dynamics.<sup>31</sup> It is this nuanced approach to the relevance of class that we hope to bring to the discussion about TAMs.

In studying today's TAMs there are two main, critical dimensions related to the issue of class: (i) the *extent of domination* of a specific class or classes and (ii) the *quality of insertion* of a particular class or classes, within a TAM. The extent of presence and domination of a particular class or classes within a large transnational movement matters. It influences the general pattern of political behaviour of the movement or network. Take IFAP, for instance, which is dominated by middle and rich farmers in the north, resulting in less radical and generally conservative advocacy positions. However, the quality of insertion into a transnational network by a particular class also matters. Even when a particular class constitutes a minority, under certain conditions it can become a key actor within a movement. This happens when its representatives' positions are adopted by a wider movement that recognizes their political validity and value for organizing and strengthening the TAM. Such is the case of the middle and rich farmer organization of KRRS and its anti-TNC and anti-GM crops agitation and mobilization (see discussions by Scoones and by Borrás, this collection).

A class analytic lens is also useful for examining the nature and orientation of various movements. As Peluso, Afiff and Fauzi show (in this collection), environmentalist and land-oriented agrarian movements in Indonesia have links to, and receive influences from, transnational networks. The class composition of these movements is a major factor in how these relations play out. The earlier wave of agrarian movements in the 1950s and 1960s had a strong base among the poor peasantry demanding land. It was violently crushed by the military. What would later emerge was a class-blind environmental movement. While this movement was also constrained by the Suharto regime, even from its beginnings in the early to mid 1980s it was the main presence in rural-oriented civil society in Indonesia and related organizations with international links. Although this movement did not address the political economy of landed property, from its early years it had a strong but necessarily subdued environmental justice orientation. In the early to mid 1990s, environmental justice-oriented activists made alliances with both underground agrarian activists and indigenous peoples' movement groups. The class-oriented issues of land redistribution were later taken up by resurgent agrarian movements during the 1998 national regime transition from centralized authoritarian rule. Discussions about class among activists in Indonesia remain generally implicit, but the demands – land to the landless poor peasants and rural labourers, recuperating lands from large corporations, and so on – are clearly class-informed and class-oriented. The conservation movement, meanwhile, has split in part along class lines over land redistribution in national parks and other conservation areas. However, the ambiguous and shifting alliances between different components of these movements make it difficult to define the differences as clearly or solely class-based.

<sup>31</sup> See, for example, Brysk (2000) and Yashar (2007) in the case of indigenous peoples' movements in Latin America.



While movement leaders and their allies hardly consider class divisions and struggles among their favourite issues and indeed rarely speak openly about them, actually existing realities within transnational agrarian movements and within their national member organizations point to the significance of class as a critical issue. A few leaders of these transnational networks may, however, occasionally acknowledge the class character of transnational movements. João Pedro Stédile, for example, recently asserted that ‘the [Brazilian] MST and Vía Campesina, especially, work with the theory of waves or cycles of class struggle’ (Stédile 2007, 194). While this might be a controversial or delicate claim for some Vía Campesina member organizations in other countries (see below), Stédile’s main point was that peasants, not only in Brazil and in contrast to organized working classes there and elsewhere, have been in the forefront of anti-neoliberal and anti-imperialist struggles (see relevant discussion by Petras and Veltmeyer 2003). The class issue is also implicit in some Vía Campesina leaders’ vision of alliance-building. Paul Nicholson, for example, a farmer from the Basque Country (Spain) and one of Vía Campesina’s most important leaders, argues that the most fundamental alliance in the world’s countryside today is that between small farmers and rural workers (Vía Campesina 2000).

## IDEOLOGICAL AND POLITICAL DIFFERENCES

From time to time some transnational agrarian movement activists admit that ideological and political differences exist and are important issues in movement or network building. But again, as with class, this issue is typically avoided as much as possible and usually addressed only internally. The strategic implications of ideological and political differences within and between TAMs – in movement-, alliance- and coalition-building, representation and accountability, issue framing and demand making – cannot be taken for granted. They do matter. They play important roles in the rise or fall, strengthening or weakening of transnational movements, networks and coalitions. These dynamics can be seen from three perspectives.

(i) *Class-based.* Some ideological and political differences are clearly informed by class. Groups dominated by particular classes have particular sets of interests and issues different from other groups with different social class compositions. For example, KRRS of India does not support, and even opposes, land reform. It is a movement dominated by middle and rich farmers who own varying sizes of landholdings. Several movements of landless rural labourers in India have political differences and conflicts with KRRS primarily because of their different class bases. Such a conflict has been internalized in TAMs. Recall our earlier discussion on the contrasting political strategies adopted by Brazil’s MST and Senegal’s CNCR (see McKeon et al. 2004). On a larger, global scale, we can point to the ideological and political differences that separate IFAP and Vía Campesina, with class as an important, though not the sole underlying reason for such differences.

(ii) *Differences in political strategies and calculation.* There are also peasant groups that have mass bases in the same social classes in the countryside, for example, poor peasants and rural labourers, but which bitterly oppose each other because of ideological and political differences. The discussion by Borras (this collection) about the conflicts between the three peasant movements in the Philippines – KMP, DKMP and UNORKA – is illustrative of this phenomenon. On a global scale, there is an important difference for example in the political calculation of the International Land Coalition (ILC) and the IPC for Food Sovereignty. The NGOs and IFAP that are within ILC decided that the best strategy to advance pro-poor land policies would be to forge formal and official alliances with international financial institutions (e.g. the World Bank) and intergovernmental institutions (e.g. World Food Programme of the UN). ILC also works to replicate similar approaches within national-level organizations. This is, of course, a strategy rejected by the IPC for Food Sovereignty, which opted to maintain its civil society character and its autonomy from international financial and development institutions. IPC for Food Sovereignty instead tries to build its rural social movement base and NGO alliances in order to push for a more mutually reinforcing interaction with sympathetic international institutions.

(iii) *Institutional turf battles and personality differences.* Perhaps the most common differences within and between TAMs result from institutional turf battles and personality differences. The great competition for funding from northern development agencies has always been a major source of tension within and between TAMs, though one which is rarely acknowledged. Moreover, personality differences have also played a role in fanning the flames of ever-present political tensions. On many occasions, competition for funding, fights for public recognition and fame, and personality clashes have contributed to deepening fault-lines between and within TAMs.

## DYNAMICS OF ALLIANCE-BUILDING

TAMs devote considerable resources and efforts to alliance-building activities in order to extend the reach of their collective actions beyond their own ranks. And because this involves at least two different groups trying to find some common ground, there are inherent tensions and fault-lines in alliance building. In the past the most common types of alliances that involved peasant movements were those with political parties and workers' organizations (see, for example, Kay and Silva 1992 on the case of Chile; Salamini 1971 on the case of 1930s Mexico; Herring 1983 for some South Asian cases; Heller 2000 on the case of India). Most of these alliances coincided with the rise to power of left-wing, communist or socialist parties, generally during the first three-quarters of the past century. However, the waning of many of these left-wing political parties in the 1970s–1980s, the neoliberal resurgence since the early 1980s, and the weakening of most workers' movements have increasingly led rural-based movements to eschew

these two types of alliance. This strategic shift coincided with the emergence of identity politics among rural social movements, some of which, though certainly not all, rejected class politics altogether (see, for example, the discussions in Alvarez and Escobar (1992) in the context of Latin America). Most of the peasant movements that joined the major TAMs emerged during this period after the decline or disappearance of political party and worker–peasant alliances. This does not mean that these movements do not interact with political parties or trade unions. They usually do, but not in the politically subordinate, ‘transmission belt’ kind of relationship that marked the previous era. This is, for example, the context in which Brazil’s MST emerged in the early 1980s, formally launched in 1985, and now deals with the governing Workers’ Party (PT, *Partido dos Trabalhadores*). This is also the historical context of many other movements that would come to play significant roles in contemporary TAMs (the southern European and Mexican movements within *Vía Campesina*, for example).

In lieu of the political party and the worker–peasant class alliances, contemporary TAMs are confronted by the challenge of at least three broad types of coalitions: the NGO–peasant movement relationship, sectoral alliances, and thematic advocacy alliances.

(i) *NGO–peasant movement relations*. Perhaps one of the most controversial and contentious alliances in the contemporary terrain of peasant movements is that between the movements and NGOs. In the most general, caricaturized presentation of this issue, some peasant activists have assumed that NGOs do not and cannot represent the rural poor and are undemocratic, but have privileged seats in official international (non)governmental consultation venues, and they have the funds. The same activists see peasant movements as representing the rural poor and as democratic organizations, but lament that they are rarely invited to official international consultative venues and that they do not have funds. It is, in effect, a ‘love–hate’ relationship between peasant movements and NGOs. Even those peasant movements most critical of NGOs in fact have ongoing dealings with NGOs. The NGOs remain the most significant funders for peasant movement activities. They are also significant facilitators for TAMs in geographic areas where the latter have no previous contacts. The NGOs remain among the most reliable allies of the TAMs. Not all NGOs, of course. For example, *Vía Campesina* favours working with a select few, including FoodFirst Information and Action Network (FIAN) and the Land Research and Action Network (LRAN). It receives key economic support from nongovernmental agencies such as the Dutch Oxfam-Novib and the Inter-Church Organization for Development Cooperation (ICCO). Therefore, for *Vía Campesina*, it is not the NGOs per se that are problematic. Rather, it is the *terms* of the relationship that matter. Sweeping generalizations about, and against, NGOs by some TAM activists and some scholars are usually contradicted by empirical reality. Edelman (this collection), writing about transnational organizing in Central America in the 1990s, notes the irony that the vehemently anti-NGO tone in the political discourse of ASOCODE (which in turn heavily influenced the subsequent

position of Vía Campesina on this issue) did not prevent ASOCODE itself from developing many typical features of a 'bad' NGO.

(ii) *Sectoral alliances.* What makes the IPC for Food Sovereignty an interesting and important global rural-oriented alliance is not only the fact that it is perhaps currently the largest network of movements, but that it also brings in important organizations of various rural sectors: small farmers and poor peasants, middle and rich farmers, fisherfolk, pastoralists, peasant women, indigenous peoples and rural workers, among others. Among the major TAMs today, it is Vía Campesina that has the clearest policy about prioritizing alliances with the movements of other sectors in the countryside, including the generally weak rural workers' movements. To date, however, Vía Campesina has been able to work more closely with peasant women, fisherfolk and indigenous peoples and less with organized rural workers, despite what Nicholson (see above) said about how fundamental the alliance of farmers and rural workers would be in the struggle against neoliberalism. In theory such an alliance might be desirable and easily achieved because these groups have so many common issues and struggles. In reality, however, forging broad rural multi-sectoral alliances has not proven easy. One reason for this is that different sectoral movements (small farmers, indigenous peasants, rural workers, fisherfolk, and so on) often have overlapping constituencies. At times competition between organizations develops in the struggle to recruit and represent these overlapping constituencies. Many of them also compete for the same funds from northern NGOs.

(iii) *Thematic advocacy alliances.* Perhaps the most common type of actually existing alliances is those that form around thematic advocacy. These are usually multi-class and multi-sectoral alliances, cutting across the rural–urban and global south–north divides. Several are analyzed in this collection: the anti-GM crops campaigns (see the essays by Scoones and by Newell), the initiatives for organic food production and certification (see Friedmann and McNair), the Global Campaign for Agrarian Reform (see Borrás), and environmental-agrarian advocacy (see Peluso, Afiff and Fauzi). It is in this type of alliance that TAMs are currently engaged, giving them greater visibility and the campaigns greater substance. While many of these alliances are tactical, short-lived and oriented to specific campaigns, some have strategic importance to TAMs. This type of alliance will likely remain the most important type of coalition work in the years to come, and it is in this context that the emerging broad inter-TAM alliance around climate change or agrofuels should be understood.

## CONCLUSION

Transnational agrarian movements are political projects with deep historical roots in diverse national societies, multiple and shifting alliances, varied action repertoires, and complex forms of representation, issue framing and demand making. Their leaders and activists, hoping to advance the projects' objectives,

frequently paint pictures of organizational coherence, homogeneity and unity. Sympathetic scholars, similarly, have often tended to downplay TAMs' ambiguities and contradictions, just as has occurred in the study of social movements operating in local or national ambits (Rubin 2004). In some cases, these unitary claims result from scholars' heavy methodological reliance on contacts with movement leaders, while in other cases questionable claims about unified movements derive from researchers' own well-intended efforts to advance the political projects which they are studying.

The authors of the essays in this collection take a different approach. While their methods and subjects vary widely in geographical, temporal and political scope, they share an understanding of TAMs' complexity that grows out of an appreciation of the complicated historical origins and the delicate political balancing acts that necessarily characterize any effort to construct cross-border alliances that link highly heterogeneous organizations, social classes, ethnicities, political viewpoints and regions. The authors in this collection see this complexity as an essential element in understanding TAMs. By acknowledging TAMs' contradictions, ambiguities and internal tensions, they also seek, from the standpoint of engaged intellectuals, to advance a transformative political project by better comprehending its roots, past successes and failures, and current and future challenges.

We have noted above that TAMs have existed since the early twentieth century, but we also argue that a major qualitative shift occurs with the new TAMs that began to emerge in the late 1980s and early 1990s. Indeed, to the surprise of many, peasants and small farmers in diverse world regions have been among the most belligerent forces confronting and critiquing the free-market juggernaut that began in the 1970s with the collapse of the Bretton Woods framework for regulating the world economy and the onset of the globalization era (Helleiner 1994). The rising profile and growing influence of *Vía Campesina* and regional networks, such as CLOC in Latin America and ROPPA in West Africa, originate in and reflect the broader expansion of transnational civil society that occurred in the same period. The multiple, severe crises that have affected the rural poor, however, have given particular characteristics to these organizations and led them to employ a dazzling range of action repertoires in an ever greater variety of venues, from WTO ministerial meetings to GM crop test sites. Struggles against unfair trade rules, corporate control of crop genetic material and market-led agrarian reform, as well as for innovative approaches to development and to appropriating more of the wealth that peasants and small farmers produce, are among the important areas covered by the essays in this collection. The issue of alliance-building – with environmentalist, women's and indigenous and minority rights movements, as well as with non-governmental organizations and supranational governance institutions – has also been a fertile subject for scholarship and for debate among activists. Several of the contributors allude briefly to the complex and at times contentious role of academic scholars and other professional intellectuals in the movements' campaigns and projects of representation, but this and many other significant questions remain for future in-depth research.

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