**Thinking and Nurturing Transnational Activism in Southeast Asia :
Connecting Local Struggles With Global Advocacy** [1]

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Today's global challenges are such that they call for original thinking if we are to affect social transformation and shift the current neo-liberal globalization in favour of global social justice. One of the ways such possible project is being conceived and thought of is through transnational activism.

In its bare form, transnational activism has been defined as social movements and other civil society organisations and individuals operating across state borders.[2] This definition was further refined by two social movement specialists, Della Porta and Tarrow who referred to *transnational collective action* as "the coordinated international campaigns on the part of networks of activists against international actors, other states, or international institutions."[3]

In Southeast Asia, as in many other regions of the world, there has been a growing tendency to organize and work transnationally. One could further argue that this tendency accelerated following the 1997 financial crisis. While it is now common to identify a wide range of transnational organizations, social movements and activist networks based and operating within Southeast Asia, the understanding of its significance as well as its impact on social transformation remains open for interpretation.

In the following pages, I discuss how transnational social mobilization and activism constitute one form of response to global socio-economic and political processes associated with globalization. In doing so, I argue that transnational activism might contribute to social transformation and constitute an increasingly relevant modality of action for social justice organizations. At the same time, this form of collective action has its own set of dilemmas

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[2] See, Piper, Nicola and Anders Uhlin (eds.). (2004). Transnational Activism in Asia : Problems of Power and Democracy, London: Routledge; p. 4-5. The same authors define activism as "political activities that are: (1) based on a conflict of interests and thus are of a contentious nature; (2) challenging or supporting certain power structures; (3) involving non-state actors; and (4) taking place (at least partly) outside formal political arenas." (p.4). Using Thomas Risse-Kappen's work, they define *transnational* as "interaction across state borders involving at least one non-state actors" (p.5). See, Risse-Kappen, Thomas ed. (1995). Bringing Transnational Relations Back In: Non-State Actors, Domestic Structures and International Institutions. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

[3] Della Porta, Donatella and Sidney Tarrow (2005). Transnational Protest and Global Activism, Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield; p.7

that need to be examined if one hopes to build greater synergy with local and national level activism and influence political processes, especially democratic and participatory gouvernance within Southeast Asia.

To illustrate these possibilities and dilemmas, I will present four short case studies, four transnational activist organizations involved in research and alternative discourse production, highlighting their similarities and tracing the genealogy for their emergence and their own perception of their *raison-d'être*. As these brief case studies reveal, transnational organizing in the form of activist NGOs has been around for sometime and has followed various logics that were contingent of domestic and international opportunities as well as by key protagonist's self-perception and collective action frame. However, it is important to underline here that this comparative exercise is still very much a work in progress.

Beyond the narrow confines of academic circles' discussions, what is particularly challenging is to develop an informed understanding of this modality of activism in relation to the broad range of initiatives and endeavours for social change. This is especially true for international development agencies (in particular Northern NGOs), which find themselves increasingly involved in supporting this type of work in addition to locally-based community organizations and nationwide NGOs. Among international development practitioners and solidarity advocates, there is some questioning going on in terms of what are the priorities, what type of activities should be given greater attention and at what level (local, regional, national or supranational), or even, how can integration between these various levels of efforts can be insured.

In his foreword to a recent book on transnational coalitions, Charles Tilly identifies four questions that should be addressed while seeking to understand the emerging transnational networks and social movement organizations, especially those that are challenging the international capitalist financial architecture and its increasing marginalization of workers and regional economies:

1. "What circumstances, processes, and connections promote or inhibit coordinated international action among exploited people and their representatives?
2. Under what conditions and how does that sort of coordination produce (or fail to produce) significant benefits for exploited people?
3. Under what conditions and how do such people and their representatives participate democratically in internationally coordinated action?
4. What processes produce or would produce the equivalent of durable, effective democratic consultation (…) on a world scale?" [4]

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[4] Tilly, Charles (2005). "Foreword," in <u>Coalitions Across Borders: Transnational Protest and the Neoliberal Order</u>, Edited by Joe Bandy and Jackie Smith. Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield: p.xiii.

I. The "Emergence" of Transnational Activism

It is nearly impossible to identify a single event or an historic birthmark for the emergence and accelerated growth of the current form of transnational activism. First, it is important that transnational social movements have been around for quite some time[5]. However, for some, the Zapatista uprising in January 1994 and their call for transcontinental (and even, intergalactic) resistance to global neoliberalism were particularly significant.[6] Few years later, the "Battle of Seattle" became the symbolic moment of this rising wave of transnational mobilization. Québec and Genoa later followed it in 2001.

September 11 momentarily dampened the mobilization efforts. However, the success of the peace mobilizations of early 2003 showed its resilience. In fact, the February 15, 2003 peace rallies around the globe represented the "single largest international demonstration in history."[7] Side-by-side with global mobilizations, activist networks and international NGOs continued to be very active at the transnational level.

Della Porta and Tarrow suggest that we have now entered an era of transnational coalitions moving away from state-centric movements. According to the two, three types of changes help explaining this:

1) Change in the international environment:
    a) The end of the Cold War with the breakdown of the socialist block and the implosion of the USSR "encouraged the development of forms of non state action" that were previously difficult;
    b) The rapid expansion of "electronic communication and the spread of inexpensive international travel" have allowed movements and organizations that were previously isolated movement "to communicate and collaborate with one another across borders;"
    c) The increasing role of international and multilateral actors as illustrated in particular "by the growing power of transnational corporations and international institutions events, like the global summits of the World Bank, the Group of Eight, and especially the World Trade organizations."[8]

While being important factors, these changes are not "sufficient" to explain the transnationalization of social protest. Two other types of change are essential to consider:

1) Cognitive change: Social movements and activists are 'reflective' actors. As a result, "their international experiences have been critically analyzed" and "[T]actics and frames that appear to succeed in more than one venue have been institutionalized."

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[5] A useful historical treatment of this question can be found in, Hopkins, A.G. ed. (2002). Globalization in World History, London: Pimlico.

[6] See, Schulz, Markus. (1998) « Collective Action Across Borders: Opportunity Structures, Network Capacities, and Communicative Praxis in the Age of Advanced Globalization », Sociological Perspectives, 41 (3) : pp.587-616.

[7] Tarrow, Sidney and Donatella Della Porta. (2005). "Conclusion: "Globalization," Complex Internationalism, and Transnational Contention." In Transnational Protest and Global Activism, p.227.

[8] Ibid. pp.7-8.

2) <u>Relational change</u>: The growing possibility of identifying "common 'vertical' targets" such as international institution has contributed to the 'horizontal' formation of transnational coalitions through "the relational mechanisms that are bringing together national actors in transnational coalitions" and "resulting in the growth of common identity and therefore reduces national particularism."[9]

Beyond those changes, there are social processes already known to social movement analysts that contributed to this new era of transnational activism. As Della Porta and Tarrow describe, these are:

1) <u>Diffusion:</u> This represents "the most familiar and the oldest form of transnational contention". It does not require that actors connect "across borders, but only that challengers in one country or region adopt or adapt the organizational forms, collective action frames, or targets of those in other countries or regions."[10]

2) <u>Internalization</u>: This process describes that "the playing out on domestic territory of conflicts that have their origin externally." This form of mobilization has become increasingly common with protesters challenging their national governments for decisions and policies that "originated or were implemented at a supranational level."[11]

3) <u>Externalization</u>: This process refers to the "informational and lobby campaigns in which national and international NGOs attempt to stimulate international alliances with nationally weak social movements." In the process, social movements and activist organizations "look to international institutions for the mobilization of resources that can be used at the national level."[12]

II. <u>How Does Transnational Activism "Fit" Within Social Change Activism?</u>

These three types of changes and three sets of processes have opened a new agenda for research[13] but have also raised a series of questions for social movement analysts. Using social movement theory lenses, Della Porta and Tarrow

1. What are the modalities (especially, *organizational forms*) that "have developed to connect very loose networks of activists?"

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[9] Ibid, pp.8-10.

[10] Della Porta, Donatella and Sidney Tarrow. (2005). "Transnational Processes and Social Activism: An Introduction," in <u>Transnational Protest and Global Activism</u>, p.3

[11] Ibid, p.5 An example of this would be the various demonstrations organized against a specific Southeast Asian government for a decision adopted by APEC, ASEAN or the WTO

[12] Ibid, p.5

[13] This is true not only for research, but also for activist practices. See, Prokosch, Mike and Laura Raymond (eds.), <u>The Global Activist's Manual: Local Ways to Change the World</u>. (2002). Edited by Mike, New York: Thunder's Mouth Press / Nation Books.

2. "How do *repertoires of protest* adapt to address institutions with low democratic accountability and transparency?"

3. "Are *movement identities* undergoing changes in their content and structure as the result of transnational exposure and activism?

4. "What are the *main resources* (knowledge, capacity for disruption, legitimacy, links to institutional actors, etc.) that movements mobilize in order to assess the political claims in a complex system of governance?"

5. "How do *national (or even local) political opportunities* influence the strategies of social movements that are active on global issues?"[14]

From a review of case studies, Della Porta and Tarrow suggest that transnational activists are very seldom only working at the transnational level exclusively. Instead, they tend to be "rooted at the local level and national level" and engaging simultaneously different levels of government institutions. But most significantly, transnational activists are able to create linkages and form coalitions among various types of actors operating on different levels (local, national, regional, international) and respond to various political contexts, each offering a different range of political opportunities.

What now appears to be the overall organizing master-frame is the concept of "global social justice". As Della Porta and Tarrows note: "...at the local level, 'global social justice' has become a master-frame of new mobilizations, including those addressing the environment and the conditions and rights of women and workers, native people, peasants, and children."[15] As a result, transnational networks of activists, sometime quite informal, organize "particular campaigns or series of campaign, using a variety of forms of protest, adopting and adapting repertoires of protest from the traditions of different movements."[16] Specific and localized concerns are then weaved together around the theme of resistance to neoliberal globalization and the need for global social justice.[17]

In terms of forms of protest, what distinguishes this new form of activism (especially in the West), is a return to the "streets", a re-appropriation of public space and a growing emphasis on civil disobedience. This contrasts with the more routinized and institutionalized forms of dissent that marked the prior decades. However, its overall significance is still to be assessed:

> Whether a qualitatively new repertoire of contention has developed around transnational contention remains to be seen, but what is clear is that new targets, new frames, and new combinations of constituencies have produced major innovations in the existing repertoire.[18]

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[14] Ibid., p. 11 (my emphasis)
[15] Ibid., p.12.
[16] Ibid., p. 12.
[17] See for example, Bello, Walden. (2001). The Future in the Balance: Essays on Globalization and Resistance, Oakland, Food First Books.
[18] Della Porta and Tarrow, op.cit., p.12.

Beyond the formation of a new repertoire of collective action and a new collective master frame, contemporary transnational activism, especially in the West, has shown substantial adaptive skills to overcome the hurdles to collective action brought about "growing social heterogeneity and fragmentation of society along with a global culture favouring individualism". Flexibility, lightly institutionalized networks paired with an emphasis on diversity and subjective plural identities have all combined to foster new forms of political involvement that "taps into cultural changes – which some have called "postmodern" – that builds on the thesis that the "personal is political.[19]

III. <u>Understanding Transnational Contention and Protest:</u>

Again, Della Porta and Tarrow's synthesis offers an interesting and relatively simple model made of three variables to explain the emergence of transnational activism. These three variables are: the emergence of complex internationalization; the resulting multilevel opportunity structure; and, the formation of a new stratum of activists.

1. <u>Complex Internationalism</u> is defined as "the expansion of international institutions, international regimes and the transfer of resources of local and national actors to the international stage, producing threats and opportunities and resources for international NGOs, transnational social movements, and indirectly, grassroots social movements;"

2. <u>Multilevel Opportunity Structure</u>: "complex internationalism offers resources and opportunities for nonstate actors to challenge elites and – on occasion – to collaborate with insiders, just as domestic movements sometimes cooperate with political parties or interest groups."

3. <u>Rooted Cosmpolitans</u>: "*people and groups who are rooted in specific national contexts, but who engage in regular activities that require their involvement in transnational networks of contacts and conflict*."[20]

Two other remarks have to be made regarding this new stratum of activists. One is that they have "multiple belongings" meaning that activists have "*overlapping memberships linked with loosely structured, polycentric networks*." Second, these activists share "flexible identities" meaning "*identities characterized by inclusiveness and a positive emphasis on diversity and cross-fertilization, with limited identifications that develop especially around common campaigns on objects perceived as 'concrete' and nurtured by search for dialogue*."[21]

The combination of these elements offers an interesting lens to apprehend the growing transnationalization of social activism and protest. Synthesizing their approach, Della Porta and Tarrow write:

> the combination of rooted cosmopolitans with multiple belongings and flexible identities, working within the structure of complex internationalization, offers new

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[19] Ibid., p. 13.
[20] Ibid., pp.234-237 (their emphasis).
[21] Ibid., p.237 (their emphasis).

resources and opportunities for transnational social movements. Neoliberal globalization is one of the forces against which these movements mobilize, and the Internet is a tool they can use. But it is the nature and resources of the activists who link domestic and international institutions within the structure of the international system that provides both the challenges and opportunities of contention.[22]

IV. Distinguishing Transnational Activist Organizations

Transnational activism is a heterogeneous field of social contention and comprises of a range of different actors. Three types have been identified and one can find their equivalence in Southeast Asia.[23] A 2001 article by Tarrow brought greater clarity on this and his typology is worth mentioning.[24] In the article, he proposes that transnational contention actors can be grouped into three: global social movements, international NGOs (INGOs) and transnational activists networks (TANs). These can be described as:

1. Transnational Social Movements: are "socially mobilized groups with constituents in at least two states, engaged in sustained contentious interaction with power holders in at least one state other that their own, or against an international institutions, or multinational economic actors;"[25]

2. International NGOs: are "organizations that operate independently of governments, are composed of members from two or more countries and are organized to advance their members internationally or provide services to citizens of other states through routine transactions with states, private actors, and international institutions;"[26]

3. Transnational Advocay Networks: include "those relevant actors working internationally on an issue, who are bound together by shared values, a common discourse, and dense exchanges of information and services."[27]

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[22] Ibid., p.240

[23] The literature on transnational activisms can be sometime confusing, as distinctions are not necessarily made. For example on global social movements, see Smith, Jackie and Hank Johnston, eds. (2002) Globalization and Resistance : Transnational Dimensions of Social Movements. Lanham : Rowman & Littlefield; Bandy, Joe and Jackie Smith, eds. (2004) Coalitions Across Borders : Transnational Protest and the Neoliberal Order. Lanham : Rowman & Littlefield; Sen, Jay, Anita Anand, Arturo Escobar and Peter Waterman, eds. (2004) The World Social Forum : Challenging Empires. New Delhi : The Viveka Foundation. On INGOs, see Fox, Jonathan and L. David Brown, eds. (1998). The Struggle for Accountability : The World Bank, NGOs,and Grassroots Movements. Cambridge : MIT Press; Boli, John and George Thomas, eds. (1999). Constructing World Culture : International Nongovernmental Organizations Since 1875. Stanford : Stanford University Press. On Transnational Activists Networks (TANs), see Keck, Margaret and Kathryn Sikkink. (1998). Activists Beyond Borders. Ithaca : Cornell University Press; and, Risse, Thomas, Stephen Roop and Kathryn Sikkink, eds. (1999). The Power of Human Rights Norms and Domestic Political Change. Cambridge : Cambrige University Press. For an alternative typology, see Clark, John ed. (2003) Globalizing Civil Engagement, London : Earthscan.

[24] Tarrow, Sidney, (2001). « Transnational Politics : Contention and Institutions in International Politics. » Annual Review of Political Science. 4 : pp.1-23.

[25] Tarrow (2001), op.cit., p. 11

[26] Tarrow (2001), op.cit., p.12

[27] Keck, Margaret and Kathryn Sikkink (1998). Activists Beyond Borders. Advocacy Networks in International Politics, Ithaca: Cornell University: p.2. Laura MacDonald also offers a similar definition of TAN as "a

For each type of actors, it is possible to identify their equivalents in Southeast Asia.[28] For example, transnational social movements would include Via Campesina, the Jubilee 2000 and Jubilee South campaigns, People's Global Action, the Asian People's Forum, and the various opposition movements to WTO. In terms of international NGOs, Focus on the Global South, Third World Network (TWN), ALTASEAN, Asian Forum for Human Rights And Development (Forum-Asia), and the Asia Pacific Women, Law and Development (APWLD) represents some of the better known examples. Finally, examples of TANs would be ARENA, the Asia Pacific Research Network (APRN), the Jakarta Consensus network, the Anti-US Bases network, GRAIN, etc.

V. <u>Nurturing and Sustaining Transnational Activism in Southeast Asia Through Critical Analysis and Discourse Production</u>:

As it was just mentioned, Southeast Asia, in particular the Philippines, Thailand, Malaysia and more and more Indonesia host various forms of transnational activist organizations. An overall picture of the region that would examine the three different forms of transnational actors remains to be developed.[29]

In the following sections, I wish to examine three activists organizations rooted in Southeast Asia: Third World Network (TWN) in Malaysia, Focus in the Global South in Thailand, and the Asia Pacific Research Network (APRN) in the Philippines. I will also analyze the Asian Regional Exchange for New Alternative (ARENA) which secretariat is currently based in Hong Kong but with a history closely linked to Southeast Asia.

All four shares several characteristics. They are all involved in the production and dissemination of alternative and critical discourse. They all can be considered as think tank of civil society (or social movements). Except for Focus, that sees itself as an international NGO with offices in various countries, the other three describe themselves as regional and international networks. The four are all connected to various international networks around international development issues, global financial architecture, food security and people's struggles. While they may be part of the same international networks, they are recognised as distinct actors with their own specificities. All four to use Tilly's initial question seek to promote and sustain "coordinated action among exploited people and their representatives" and all four have been supported by international, mostly Northern NGOs.

relatively small number of individuals and groups organized around specific issues and shared values and ideas." In MacDonald, Laura (2005). "Gendering Transnational Social Movement Analysis: Women's Groups Contest Free Trade in the Americas," in <u>Coalitions Across Borders: Transnational Protest and the Neoliberal Order</u>, edited by Joe Bandy and Jackie Smith. Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield, 2005: p. 22.

[28] It is worth mentioning that it has now become possible to organize transnational activist organizations into directory, see for example: "A Movement Yellow Pages" in <u>The Global Activist's Manual: Local Ways to Change the World</u>. (2002). Edited by Mike Prokosch and Laura Raymond, New York: Thunder's Mouth Press / Nation Books: pp. 284-308.

[29] A noted exception is Piper, Nicola and Anders Uhlin (eds.). (2004). <u>Transnational Activism in Asia : Problems of Power and Democracy</u>, London: Routledge. However, rather than focussing on the type of formation, the emphasis is on thematic organizations.

At the same time, the four have emerged in different national contexts and at different times. Their "repertoire of collective action", their linkages with social movements and their interaction with government authorities vary. Before embarking on an analysis of each one, it is important to underline that this research is only at its initial stage, in-depth interviews and archival research have still be conducted.

1) Asian Regional Exchange for New Alternatives (ARENA)

ARENA is the oldest transnational network-NGO among the four examined here. It was established in 1980 and contrary to the other three, ARENA secretariat is located outside Southeast Asia, in Hong Kong. It was established after an initial consultation that brought together "progressive scientists and church people" who recognised at the time that it was not possible to do critical research in mainstream universities.[30] The goal was to bring together "intellectual activists" (or "activist intellectuals"), that would collaborate to produce research outputs and conceptual work that would be relevant to social movements in Asia and to build a community of concerned Asian scholars. A small secretariat was established in Hong Kong and was responsible for coordination. Up until 1992, the network grew slowly gathering about 20 fellows into the Council of Fellows. Those were left-wing academics; many concerned with human rights and linked to various social movements, including anti-dictatorship movements, like in the Philippines. During the first decade, the Christian Council of Asia played a central role in supporting the network; fellows helped identified other fellows and work focussed mostly on research and advocacy.[31] Following a five-year evaluation in 1992-93, ARENA became more formalized with the Hong Kong secretariat assuming greater responsibilities as program implementer and coordinator. At the same time, the number of fellows grew rapidly to reach 60 fellows and an Executive Board was established. As pointed out during an interview, in the early days, ARENA was quite "an old Boys network" loosely connected. After 1992, the number of fellows increased with a greater number of women fellows joining and putting women's and gender concerns on the agenda and enlarging the range of interests from political economy to comparative studies of culture and inter-disciplinary approached.[32]

Responsibilities and roles were further specified. Its main organisational structures are the ARENA Council of Fellows (ACF) and its Executive Board, and its Secretariat. The ACF constitutes the "base for the emerging community of concerned Asian scholars that ARENA is striving to develop."[33] Its roles are: 1) to provide "a flexible system for linking with those who have been and will be involved with ARENA"; 2) to act "as a pool of experts on a wide range of issues and topics related to ARENA's work" where "fellows participate in ARENA by contributing their studies, engaging in research cooperation, and conceptualising, developing and implementing ARENA programmes."; and 3) to meet one every three years and define

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[30] Interview by the author with Jeannie Manipon, Executive Director and Titos Escuetas, Program Officer, ARENA, Hong Kong, December 5, 1998.
[31] Ibid.
[32] Ibid
[33] ARENA, "ARENA online: What is ARENA." www.arenaonline.org, accessed on March 21, 2005.

"the scope and direction of ARENA's programmes and undertakes major policy decisions on organisational matters." [34] At the moment, the ACF has 79 fellows based mostly in East, Southeast and South Asia[35] but with a small numbers based in Australia, the United States, and United Kingdom.

The Board functions as "the network's policy-setting and decision-making body in between the triennial ACF [ARENA Council of Fellows] Congress" and overseeing "on behalf of the ACF, all aspects of ARENA's work." [36] It also supposed to be "composed of individual who are balanced according to programmatic and gender considerations, plus subregional and generational representation."[37] While the Secretariat is responsible of: 1) "day-to-day implementation, monitoring, and planning of ARENA's programmes"; 2) providing "back-up support to the ARENA community" and, 3) playing "a dynamic role in promoting and initiating specific interventions, providing a forum for exchanges, facilitating communication and information flow within the ARENA[38]

Since its formation, ARENA has always had an Asia-wide approach. It is defines itself as an "interdisciplinary programme for Asian studies and research cooperation", an international NGO as well as a regional network "of concerned Asian scholars – academics, intellectuals, activists, researchers, writers and artists – which aims to contribute to a process of awakening towards meaningful and people-oriented social change." [39] Its goals reflect this orientation:
1. Promote equity among social class, caste, ethnic groups and gender;
2. Strengthen popular participation in public life as against authoritarian centralization;
3. Prevent marginalization of communities in the face of incursion by modern influences;
4. Improve the quality of life for Asia's underprivileged;
5. Nurture ecological consciousness;
6. Draw upon aspects of indigenous knowledge systems which enhance social emancipation;
7. Articulate new visions encompassing a holistic worldview.[40]

It has also identified for itself a precise constituency: "ARENA is a unique NGO because it has chosen to focus on the concerned Asian scholar as its immediate constituency, believing that this sector can play a vital role in the process of social transformation."[41] In ARENA's view, concerned scholars are:

> Individuals capable of conceptualising, theorising, analysing, interpreting and articulating issues and concerns as direct participants of or in support of struggles for social transformation in the interests of disadvantaged peoples.[42]

Moreover, its Founding Consultation in 1980 specified:

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[34] Ibid.

[35] In East Asia (Beijing, Hong Kong, Taiwan, Korea, and Japan), Southeast Asia (Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, and Vietnam), South Asia (Bangladesh, India, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka).

[36] ARENA, "ARENA online: What is ARENA." www.arenaonline.org, accessed on March 21, 2005

[37] ARENA (n.d.) "The Asian Regional Exchange for New Alternatives: An Interdisciplinary Programme for Asian Studies and Research Cooperation." Pamphlet.

[38] ARENA, "ARENA online: What is ARENA." www.arenaonline.org, accessed on March 21, 2005

[39] Ibid.

[40] Ibid, and ARENA (n.d.) "The Asian Regional Exchange for New Alternatives, op.cit..

[41] Ibid.

[42] Ibid.

> The concerned Asian scholar not only affirms the necessity of commitment to social change and liberation. More immediately, the concerned Asian scholar confronts and transforms a whole tradition of conformism and elitism that has long immobilised the traditional scholar.[43]

Since its creation ARENA has sought to strengthen and sustain civil society organisations recognising that those "play an important role in the process of social transformation and the search for peace and social justice."[44] At the same time, its perception of its role gradually adjusted to change in the way fellows perceived Asia itself: "

> Before, Asia was a rallying point for anti-imperialist struggles. Now, it has shifted, as people want to problematize what it means to be a new centre for global economic activities. [45]

Its first coordinated response was developed during its October 1996 Congress held in Seoul, South Korea. Attended by 42 fellows, a three-year plan entitled "People's Alliance in the Age of Globalisation: Sustaining Equity, Ecology and Plurality" was approved and served as the basis of programming. Beyond understanding and deconstruction "globalisation" and analysing the impact of global trade and investment, ARENA emphasized the need to contribute to the creation and nurturing of people's alliance "being built across borders by social movements, grassroots organizations, NGOs and like-minded groups.[46] This questioning remains as a central one in ARENA's development: "how best ARENA could play a role in generating new ideas, visions, and paradigms in the region, of supporting and facilitating people's movement and alliances, of engaging in alternative discourses and promoting alternative practices, of 'locating the possibilities and locating the possible.'"[47] Beyond its regular gatherings and its publications (its primary means of disseminating ideas

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[43] ARENA, 2000. "Reimagining 'Asia': Redefining 'Human Security' and 'Alternative Development'; Movements and Alliances in the Twenty-First Century." Communiqué, No.55-56 (March-October): p.9. In more recent years, it has sought to break a possible dichotomy between what some may define as intellectual versus non-intellectual work: "The boundaries separating intellectuals and activists have been collapsing in recent years … and there is more appreciation of the unity and interdependence between the two…. Given the fact that the long practical experience of social movements in the transformative process in Asia has also produced the 'organic intellectuals' that could render the conceptualising process as universal activity, the term 'concerned Asian scholar is to be redefined as referring to individuals in all sectors of society who are capable of undertaking theoretical, conceptualising, academic, and abstractive work as direct participants or in support of struggles for social transformation in the interests of disadvantaged peoples." Taken from ARENA's document: "People's Alliances in the Age of Globalisation: Sustaining Ecology, Equity and Plurality, ARENA's Three-Year Programme 1997-2000." Quoted in "Reimagining 'Asia', op.cit. p.9

[44] ARENA (n.d.) "The Asian Regional Exchange for New Alternatives: An Interdisciplinary Programme for Asian Studies and Research Cooperation." Pamphlet. Furthermore, ARENA sees itself as advocating "alternative paradigms and development strategies" that can contribute to seven goals: "1) promote equity among social class, caste, ethnic groups and gender; 2) strengthen popular participation in public life as against authoritarian centralization; 3) prevent marginalisation of communities in the face of incursions by modernizing influences; 4) improve the quality of life for Asia's underprivileged; 5) nurture ecological consciousness; 6) draw upon aspects of indigenous knowledge systems which enhance social emancipation; 7) articulate new visions encompassing a holistic world view." ARENA, "ARENA online: What is ARENA." www.arenaonline.org, accessed on March 21, 2005.

[45] Interview by the author with Jeannie Manipon, Executive Director and Titos Escuetas, Program Officer, ARENA, Hong Kong, December 5, 1998.

[46] ARENA (n.d.) "The Asian Regional Exchange for New Alternatives: An Interdisciplinary Programme for Asian Studies and Research Cooperation." Pamphlet

[47] Nacpil-Manipon, Jeannie. (1999) "Of 'Human Security' in the Face of Insecurity, of the Journey to Colombo, and ARENA's Possibilities." Communiqué, No.53 (November): p.2.

produced by "the process of networking and intellectual discourse in the region,"[48] ARENA conceived the "exchanges - school for alternative praxis" as an opportunity to "blur the division between intellectuals and activists by providing an educational environment for them to transgress their roles" and as a "platform and an information network for sharing of ideas and resources among alternative education organizations and NGOs."[49]

The next three-year programs (2000-2003) entitled "Reimagining 'Asia': Redefining 'Human Security' and 'Alternative Development': Movements and Alliances in the Twenty-First Century" came in the wake of the financial crisis that hit many country of the region. At the same time, it fostered a greater sense of regional identity that was reflected in the program emphasis on the importance of acting jointly:

> For concerned Asian scholars, people's movements and civil alliances, facing the challenges of the 21st century will mean greater effort at reorienting and redirecting the future of Asia towards one that provides better guarantees to people's aspirations for equity, plurality, genuine peace, and a sustainable future. The process of orienting the future and of 'reimagining' 'Asia' will also entail the pooling together o Asian people's political energies and cultural imagination – bringing linkages between the local, national, and the regional – towards articulating and interpreting the experiences of resistance and reconstruction."[50]

Most recently, ARENA adopted its new three-year program (2003-2006), this time in the context of post-September 11 and the US-led invasion of Iraq. In fact, ARENA held its ARENA Council of Fellows from March 28 to 31 just few days after the invasion had begun. This time, the theme was "Hope Amidst Despair: Resistances and Alternatives to Hegemonies" and it was very much framed around the notion of Empire building and violence:

> The search for alternatives – for 'other' possibilities that transform the prevailing relations of power and usher in a more just and equitable order – necessarily confronts and addresses the violence that is engulfing the world today. The violence of relentless hegemonic pursuits and Empire building. The violence of militarism and wars of aggression. The violence of deeply-rooted structure of patriarchy. The violence of racism and the culture of prejudice and intolerance. The violence of capitalist exploitation of humanity and all the earth's resources.[51]

At the same time, the 2003 Congress became the occasion for self-reflection in terms of ARENA's functioning and need to strengthen linkages among Fellows as well as with local groups. In fact, an initial effort at decentralisation was planned, the possible relocation of ARENA's secretariat outside Hong Kong has been proposed, and an evaluation was organized.

ARENA's biggest challenge seems to be how to create synergy among its fellows and reach out to a broader community. Its impact in terms of affecting exploited people's lives remains at the centre of ARENA's concerns. At the same time, as the previous discussion revealed, as

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[48] ARENA (n.d.), "The Asian Regional…" op.cit.
[49] ARENA, (circa 1999), "Project Proposal for an Asian Regional Alternative School." Hong Kong: p.4.
[50] ARENA, (2000). "Reimagining 'Asia'", op.cit. p.7.
[51] ARENA (2003). "Hope Amidst Despair : Resistances and Alternatives to Hegemonies." (ARENA's Three-Year Plan 2003-2006). Hong Kong. Unpublished document.

as transnational network, it has provided a critical space for intellectual to meet and explore areas of thinking that might have been limited with traditional academic circles and universities operating under authoritarian or semi-authoritarian governments. ARENA's involvement and spearheading of the Asian Peace Alliance (APA) as well as a series of alternative schools might become modalities for creating those bridges and foster democratic space for exchange among intellectual activists within the region.

2) Third World Network (TWN):

TWN describes itself as "an independent non-profit international network of organizations and individuals involved in issues relating to development, the Third World and North South issues".[52] Its international secretariat is based in Penang, Malaysia where it was first established in 1984. TWN has now offices in Delhi, Montevideo, Geneva, London, and Accra. The network has also affiliates in several countries, India, the Philippines, Thailand, Brazil, Bangladesh, Malaysia, Peru, Ethiopia, Uruguay, Mexico, Ghana , South Africa and Senegal.[53]

The history of TWN goes back to the late 1970s, when Dr. Martin Khor working at the time as Research Director with the Consumers' Association of Penang after having studied economics at Cambridge and thought at the Science University of Malaysia thought with a group of local and foreign activists in Asia to establish such network.[54] As he recalls in a 2004 interview:

> During my years in CAP, my colleagues and I became involved with the problems faced by consumers related to food, health, housing, transport, and the environment. We brought their complaints to the various government departments, and fought for better laws and policies. (…)
>
> CAP got in touch with other NGOs in Asia and other parts of the world and by 1984 we realised that many local problems had global roots. Together with many of these other NGOs, we formed Third World Network in 1984, to link the local problems of communities in the South to the global policy-making arenas.
>
> Since then, we have been involved in processes relating to the United Nations and its agencies, the World Bank, and IMF, and the WTO, and in efforts, with other NGOs, to make corporations socially responsible and accountable"

The formation of TWN took place well before the newest wave of transnational social movement activism. As two program officers from Inter Pares, a Canada-based social justice organisation that was one of the original supporters of TWN: "the creation of TWN emerged

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[52] TWN web site, http://www.twnside.org.sg/ last accessed on March 20, 2005.
[53] Ibid.
[54] As Khor explains: "CAP and its charismatic leader, S M Mohammed Idris, enabled me to make the link between the academic world of theory and the real world of people and their problems. The world of NGOs and involvement in community issues became so interesting to me that eventually I left the academic world and joined the NGO movement full time". "Connecting people – Dr. Martin Khor" Interview. "Creating Change by Making People's Voices Heard", Commonwealth Foundation (News Archive): http://www.commonwealthfoundation.com/news/news/archive/details.cfm, accessed on March 20, 2005.

from the process of taking a broader view at consumerism linking issues of public health, environment to North-South relations. In fact, TWN emerged very much with the logic of the non-aligned movement."[55]

According to the same two, this orientation towards international advocacy was not a coincidence; it was very much a reflection of the blocked channel of political expression at the national level. Malaysia's political system, despite its democratic façade had and still has little tolerance for direct political challenges (add references on Malaysia[56]) As Khor himself recalls, during the years that he was teaching at the Science University of Malaysia:

> While I was there I got into contact with a local NGO, CAP, for which I did volunteer work in activities such as research into local transportation problems, helping fishing communities fight against chemical pollution of their waters, and food safety.
>
> CAP and its charismatic leader, S M Mohammed Idris, enabled me to make the link between the academic world of theory and the real world of people and their problems. The world of NGOs and involvement with community issues became so interesting to me that eventually I left the academic world and joined the NGO movement full time.[57]

This shift from local to national and to international advocacy is not uncommon to transnational networks, however, what distinguishes TWN from three other organizations here examined, is TWN's explicit commitment to work when possible with government officials to affect public policies. Asked how he can reconcile the two roles of being a civil society activists as well as an advisor to governement leaders, Khor offers the following response:

> In the end, the social activist wants to achieve concrete results in terms of better public policies and improvement in the lives of people. The organisations I am involved with are critical of several government policies or projects that we believe are not socially beneficial or environmentally sustainable, and we help consumers and local communities to advocate for change.
>
> Yes, the government has invited us to take part in some consultative processes and institutions in which we are able to put forward our views and inputs for government policy-making. Taking part in these processes helps us put forward our perspectives more directly. But it does not compromise our ability to have independent views and to remain critical.[58]

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[55] Interview with Karen Seabrooke and Peter Gillespie. Program officers at Inter Pares. Ottawa, March 01, 2005.

[56] Loh, Francis K.W. (2005) "National Security, the Police and the Rule of Law: Militarisation by Other Means." Asian Exchange, (Special issue on Militarising State, Society and Culture in Asia: Critical Perspectives), vol.20, no.2, vol.21, no.1. See, Trocki, Carl A. (1998) « Democracy and the State in Southeast Asia » Gangsters, Democracy, and the State in Southeast Asia. Edited by Carl A. Trocki. Ithaca : Southeast Asia Studies Publications, Cornell University: pp. 7-16; Taylor, Robert H., ed. (1996), The Politics of Elections in Southeast Asia. Cambridge : Cambridge University Press.

[57] "Connecting people – Dr. Martin Khor" Interview. Op.cit.

[58] "Connecting people – Dr. Martin Khor" Interview. Op.cit.

In fact, through the years, Khor and the TWN network have been regularly involved with multilateral processes such as the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) and the Association of South Asian Nations (ASEAN).[59] Beyond participation in official and parallel summits, TWN produces a wide range of publications (two magazines, its monthly *Third World* Resurgence and its bi-monthly *Third World Economics*, books and monograph and occasional briefing papers, many circulated through Internet). Its website has become its primary portal for the dissemination of its materials and analysis. As TWN explains:

> The various TWN's publications are targeted at different audiences and are useful as policy advocacy, lobbying, networking and campaigning tools. The books, which promote in-depth scientific and policy oriented understanding of critical issues, are targeted at scientists, university academics, students and policy-makers; shorter booklets and papers for NGO workers, policy makers and the general public; Third World Resurgence for NGO activists and the general public and Third World Economics for those involved in economic issues.[60]

In recent years, TWN played an increasingly important role in supporting and advising trade negotiators from the South around WTO issues, especially through its Africa branch, located in Ghana. In fact, its arena of struggles has become increasingly focussed on international work, especially on multilateral processes. Apart from WTO, TWN has been quite active on issues of Biosafety Convention, the World Summit on Sustainable Development.

While it has successfully become a key transnational policy advocacy network, TWN headquarter in Malaysia has been perceived as remotely involved in domestic advocacy and sometimes disconnected from more grassroots work. The shift from local and national to transnational issues appears to have been in part in response to limited domestic political opportunities, a growing and rapid integration of Malaysia in the world economy bringing home many of the issue of globalization as well as a capacity to provide alternative analysis and policy discourse on issues of the day for many Third World activists and even government officials.

3) Focus on the Global South (FOCUS)

Conceived between 1993 and 1994 by its first two co-directors, Kamal Malhotra and Walden Bello, Focus on the Global South (hereafter referred only as FOCUS) was officially established in January 1995.[61] At the time, Bello, a Filipino economist who had been living for years in the US and had been very active in the anti-dictatorship struggle against Marcos in the international solidarity movement was working with a Northern NGO, the Institute for Food and Development Policy – Food First while Malhotra was involved with an international NGO, Community Aid Abroad (CAA – Oxfam Autralia). According to an external evaluator,

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[59] "Martin Khor. Malaysia. Activist, Scholar, Journalist." Dropping Knowledge: http://www.droppingknowledge.org/participants_search.php?id=557, accessed on March 20, 2005.
[60] Excerpt from a proposal submitted to Inter Pares for support in 2003. Inter Pares Archives, Ottawa.
[61] Malhotra, Kamal and Walden Bello. (1999) "Background and Rationale.", *Focus on the Global South: An External Assessment* (Final Draft), Unpublished document, (July): p.1. In the concept paper that led to its formation, FOCUS was initially called "The Center for the South".

Kanjana Kaewthep, discussion around social change led Bello and Malhotra to a common set of ideas:

1. Both were dissatisfied with the existing North-South division paradigm;
2. They were also sceptical about mainstream economic analysis, and the economics-culture-politics methodology. (…)
3. They saw the need for linking micro-macro perspectives in analyzing current situations. (…)
4. They both saw the gap between activists who mobilize while holding incomplete or simplistic analysis and researchers / academics who have abilities to make good analysis but lack the opportunities for action. (…);
5. They saw the importance of East and Southeast Asia as a locale in light of its dynamic economic, social and political dimension in global development.[62]

The choice of its name also reflected a specific lens on how globalisation was affecting both the South and the North.[63]   For FOCUS, "the current globalisation process is making the traditional definition of South and North less clear-cut" as there "is a rapidly growing North in the South, and at the same time a rapidly growing South in the North."[64] Moving gradually out of a traditional North-South perspective, FOCUS proposes a more nuanced conception:

> Notwithstanding the continuing relevance of the traditional North and South for many issues, North and South are increasingly redefined as concepts to distinguish between those who are economically able to participate in and benefit from globalised markets and those who are excluded and marginalized from them.[65]

Yet, it chooses to "give priority to its work in developing countries with a particular emphasis on the Asia Pacific region."[66]

Initially, FOCUS was to focus on two main thrusts, policy-oriented research and analysis on critical regional and global socio-economic issues (the Global Paradigms Program), and documentation, analysis and dissemination of "innovative civil society, grassroots, community-based efforts in democratic, poverty reducing and sustainable development."(Micro-Macro Issues Linking Program) [67]   While FOCUS appeared to be quite innovative as an organisation, the reputation, track records and networks of its co-directors helped the organization take off the ground with an original set of funders committing to support it.   Thailand's relative political stability and the possibility of being associated with the Chulalongkorn University Social Research Institute (CUSRI) were two key factors why FOCUS head office was established in Bangkok.[68]   Starting with a small staff, there were six in 1996, FOCUS team expanded to close to 20 by 1999 with two other offices eventually opening, one in India and the other in the Philippines.

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[62] Kaewhtep, Kanjana. "A Program and Organizational Assessment of Focus on the Global South." *Focus on the Global South: An External Assessment* (Final Draft), Unpublished document, (July): p.45-46.

[63] Many others would also use the concept of a "global south" afterwards. For example, Inter Pares. "An Honourable Commitment: Policy Coherence in Canada's Relations With the Global South," February 2001.

[64] Focus on the Global South (circa 1997), "A Program of Development Policy Research, Analysis and Action", Pamphlet

[65] Ibid.

[66] Ibid.

[67] Kaewhtep. "A Program and Organizational…" op.cit. p.46.

[68] Ibid.,p.46.

Similarly to ARENA, FOCUS seeks to be a "place where thinker / activist thinkers are linked."[69] Its main goals are:

- strengthen the capacity of organisations of poor and marginalized people in the South and those working on their behalf to better analyze and understand the impact of globalisation process on their daily life and struggles;
- improve critical and provocative analysis of regional and global socio-economic trends and articulate democratic, poverty-reducing, equitable and sustainable alternative that advance the interest of the poor and marginalized peoples around the world, but especially in the Asia Pacific region;
- articulate, link and develop greater coherence between local community based and national, regional and global paradigm of change. This is the intended niche of Focus – creating a distinct and cogent link between development at the grassroots and the macro level.[70]

FOCUS expanded relatively rapidly and has become a key reference for civil society organisations in Southeast Asia and also within the anti-globalization movement. Two types of factors can explain such success story in building and consolidating FOCUS. The first are endogenous and have to do with FOCUS' capacities to "to build networks and strengthen linkages between and among civil society organisations at the global, national and local level."[71] Through the years, FOCUS staff have been involved not only in the production of research and policy analysis but have played central role in organizing civil society networks within the region around a range of issues (food security, APEC, ASEAN, ASEM) and have also be closely involved in many global processes, such as the World Social Forum, anti-WTO coalitions (Our World is not for Sale), and the peace movement. The second are exogenous to FOCUS. One was the Asian financial crisis that began in Thailand before spreading to the region that made Focus analyses and staff highly in demand. As one of the external evaluator noted:

> The Asian financial crisis and the role of the international financial institutions have undoubtedly become the burning issues of the day. The controversies revolving around WTO and APEC, in different periods, have likewise occupied center stage. It is thus understandable and, more to the point, correct for FOCUS to have concentrated on these issues.[72]

The crisis virtually catapulted FOCUS at the center of critical discourse on the impact of economic liberalisation in Southeast Asia. The large protest against WTO in 1999 and FOCUS participation, especially of one of its co-director, Walden Bello also raised the organization profile globally. At the same time, other identified research areas did not develop as much such as the issue of "cultural responses to globalisation, as well as it micro-macro programs.

In recent years, the issue of peace and the opposition to US foreign policy has become a key area of research and advocacy for FOCUS as well as networking efforts. In the wake US-led invasion of Iraq, Focus played a central role in convening a large peace conference in Jakarta

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[69] Ibid, p.49.

[70] Focus on the Global South (circa 1997), "A Program of Development Policy Research, Analysis and Action", Pamphlet.

[71] Sta. Ana III, Filomeno, (1999). "Executive Summary of Assessment", *Focus on the Global South*, op.cit. p.6.

[72] Sta.Ana III, Filomeno (1999). "An Assessment of Focus on the Global South," *Focus on…*, op.cit. 24.

that resulted in the "Jakarta Peace Consensus" and brought together representatives and organisations from the large peace movement that had emerged prior to the invasion.[73] Again, as it did for the Asian Crisis and the anti-WTO movement, FOCUS capacities and skills for networking as well as an amazing speed at producing analyses and policy documents has placed the organisations at the center of several transnational coalitions. In its 2003-2005 Workplan, the organization recognized such particular position:

> Focus has also traveled considerably from its starting point. It is today widely considered a 'key player' in the global movement for a different and better world. Its analyses of global developments are extensively consulted, as are its suggestions for structural changes.[74]

As a 2002 review report, conducted by three consultants explained, FOCUS has become increasingly a key transnational activist network with significant capacity to link with social movements:

> We have the impression that Focus has started its action with a strong focus on the production of ideas and analysis but that today it is more and more involved in global strategy and activism. It has to help defining more strategically the role of academics, social scientists, intellectuals and NGO like Focus in the global movement. The structure and organisation seem to be more adapted to the research / analysis aspects of work than to the advocacy/campaign/capacity building parts of the work. In this sense, Focus should analyse carefully the expectations it creates among the social movement and the way, in the future, it can answer these expectations.
>
> (…)
> Focus has the following four sources of power or attributes which seem to attract NGOs and social movements into partner relationships:
> - political radicalism: a clear political position based on power relations;
> - intellectual leadership: clear and credible analyses;
> - convening power: the ability to bring people and organisations together;
> - financial resources: the ability to raise funds and finance the relationship.[75]

Lastly, one has to underline that much of FOCUS' clout revolves around the persona of Walden Bello, one of its co-founder and current director. With Kamal Malhotra taking a leave in the late 1990 to join the UNDP program, more and more has revolved around Bello and similarly to TWN with Martin Khor, his imprimatur is highly significant despite a growing team of prolific and dedicated staff. As the 2002 pointed out: "At present, Focus without the current Executive Director is unthinkable."[76]

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[73] As described in the founding document, "The hurriedly organized conference, held in Jakarta, Indonesia, 19-21 May 2003, was open to all. Those who attended come from some of the biggest national and regional peace and justice coalitions and groupings all over the world." These included members of the Asian Peace, the UK Stop the War Coalition, the US United Peace and Justice, the Italian Social Formum, the Istanbul Not to War Coalition. "The Jakarta Peace Consensus." (n.d.) Pamphlet.

[74] Focus on the Global South. (circa 2003). "Work Plan 2003-2005",.p.3. Its various Annual Reports (1997-2004) revealed also such development and expansion of the organisation's activities.

[75] Banpasirichote, Chantana, Singh, Ramesh, Van der Borght, Dominique. (2002) "Report of the Review: Focus on the Global South," (October): p.2

[76] Ibid., p.3.

Asia Pacific Research Network (APRN)
The creation of the Asia Pacific Research Network was the product of a year long process of consultation and exchanges of materials among 17 organizations on the Asia Pacific region involved in research and documentation efforts.[77] It was first formalized during the "International Conference on the Impact of Trade Liberalization through the WTO and APEC" that ran July 29-30, and then followed by the "International Conference on Research Methodologies" on July and a two-day training workshop on "data banking." The first conference had been initially planned for November 1998, just few days prior to the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation summit in Kuala Lumpur due to scheduling problems.[78] Spearhead by IBON, a Manila-based research and data-banking centre, APRN initial activities pursued the following objectives:

1. Develop the capacity of selected Asian NGOs in the conduct of research;
2. Develop at least one NGO in each target Asian country that can become a research-information provider by introducing data banking and research as a general service;
3. Develop common strategies in research information work through sharing of experiences and raise the general level capacities in research;
4. Develop capacity and common research platform to support social movements in their respective countries in the emerging issues related to the WTO Millennium round, the IMF and the APEC.[79]

The first conference brought together 85 individuals from 50 organizations located in 11 different countries and included 10 of the 17 founding organizations of the network. It was during the Conference on research methodologies that concrete activities were defined for the network.   These included "common and/or coordinated research projects", "training in research and related technologies", and "publications."[80]   Common research areas were: Research on transparency; Research on the impact of globalization on Workers' Rights and Labor Migration, Research on the Impact of Globalization on Food Security; and, Research on the Impact of GATT-Agreement on Agriculture. The third event led by IBON, the training-workshop on data banking was particularly useful as participating organizations[81]   It was suggested that regular training workshop on documentation and data-banking be organized by the network.

APRN grew steadily afterwards. Through a small grant from a Northern funding agency, it established a small secretariat located in IBON office in Manila, responsible for communications among network members, developing and maintaining a website and a

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[77] Asia Pacific Research Network (APRN).(1999) "Narrative Report," (submitted to Inter Pares, September 3): p.1.
[78] "Invitation to the International Conference on Alternatives to Globalization," (sent by IBON Foundation and BAYAN (New Patriotic Alliance).
[79] APRN, "Narrative Report,"op.cit., p.3.
[80] Ibid. p.4.
[81] People's Solidarity for Participatory Democracy (PSPD) from South Korea, the Asia Monitor Research Center (AMRC) from Hong Kong, INFID from Indonesia, Pesticide Action Network – Asia Pacific (PANAP) from Malaysia and the Canadian Asia Pacific Resource Network (CAPRN), which participated as potential associate network member. (Ibid, p.4)

listserv and coordinating the publication of APRN Journal.[82] Its first issued came out if December 1999 and comprised papers presented during the July 1999 Conference. APRN was involved in organizing the People's Assembly, a parallel summit held during the WTO Third Ministerial meeting in Seattle. Early 2000, it conducted a series of workshops in Malaysia that were attended by members and non-members of the network. These activities focussed on information documentation, research training on women and globalization, in relation to food security and the agreement on agriculture and a symposium on the Agreement of Agriculture. Later the same year, it held its second annual conference in Jakarta on the theme of debt and poverty.

By 2000, APRN had expanded its membership to 23 organisations from 12 countries of the Asia Pacific.[83] As initially decided, the Second Annual Conference took place in Indonesia around the theme "Poverty and Financing Development." The conference sought to: 1) highlight the issues of debt and poverty; 2) identify issues for advocacy and research; and 3) generate interest in conducting research on debt, trade, and other aspects of neo-liberal globalization.[84] As it would be the case for conference afterwards, APRN co-organised the conference with a local organization, the International NGO Forum on Indonesian Development (INFID), an APRN member. Initially, APRN targeted 130 participants, divided between 80 foreign delegates and 50 local participants. According to APRN report:

> Participating organizations and individuals were invited and selected to attend the conference on the basis of their experiences, performance, and commitment to research work as service to their respective grassroots organizations and NGOs and their involvement in campaigns and advocacy in general.[85]

In the end, almost 70 participants from Indonesia joined another 60 foreign participants that came from 20 different countries.[86] The conference included a long list of presentation and was officially opened by Indonesian Economic Minister and a representative of the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD). Following the presentations, participants broke into workshops to identify key priority research areas that could serve as the basis for collaborative research, including the Agreement on Agriculture of the WTO, monitoring of Overseas Development Assistance (ODA), debt and debt relief, labour, poverty issues, and the Asian Development Bank.

In the following years, APRN would follow a similar pattern of organizing an annual conference, co-hosted by one APRN member. In 2001, the 3rd Annual Conference took place

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[82] APRN (2000). "Asia Pacific Reseach Network Conference on Poverty and Financing Development," (project proposal submitted to Inter Pares) (March): p.1.

[83] APRN (2000). "Project Accomplishment Report – Asia Pacific Research Network – 2nd Annual Conference (August 21-23) / Business Meeting (August 24) / Training on Information Documentation." (November): p.1.

[84] *Ibid.*

[85] *Ibid.*

[86] Participants came from a range of organisations: research institutes, NGO, government, academia, popular organizations and the media. The majority of the foreign participants came from the Asia-Pacific region: Korea, Japan, Hong Kong, PRC, Malaysia, Singapore, Thailand, Pakistan, India, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Australia, New Zealand, Fiji, Tajikistan, the Philippines and Indonesia. Apparently, delegates from Uzbekistan and Nepal were not given visa. Other participants came from the US, Canada, Palestine, Tunisia and some from Europe.

in Sidney, Australia with the theme "Corporate Power or People's Power: TNCs and Globalization."[87] (to be completed)

VI. The Ecology of Transnational Activism in Southeast Asia

As any global phenomena, the type transnational collective action undertaken by the four activist networks discussed above is rooted and contingent of a specific context. These contextual elements need consideration as they represent important variables in order to comprehend the specific contours of transnational activism in the region. For now, it is possible to identify at least six elements:

1. *Three-tiered regional political opportunity structure*: Contrary to the Western political economies, Southeast Asia represents a heterogeneous mix of states and societies. In the context of the present analysis, at least, four groupings can be identified: the ailing "tigers"; the small capitalist enclaves; the liberalizing socialist states; and the "odds ones." The first is composed of Thailand, Malaysia, Indonesia and the trailing Philippines. These share to a certain degree a similar economic orientation consisting of export-led industrial strategies, relatively liberalized commercial and financial markets and important direct foreign investment and presence of multinational corporations. They are also recovering from the 1997 financial crisis and have all relatively active civil society hosting several key transnational activist networks and regional NGOs. The second group are smaller states, Singapore and Brunei can be seen as small enclaves, each with a different form of capitalist economies, the former being an increasingly "post-industrial" economies and the latter being a "État rentier" based on oil export. In both cases, civil society organizing is limited and closely monitored by the state. Transnational activism is more limited and few networks operate from these states. The "liberalizing socialists" are Vietnam and Laos where one-party socialist state persists along with gradual economic liberalization. Autonomous civil society organizing is either only emerging or being constrained by state authorities. The "odds ones" would be the newly independent Timor Oriental and Burma. In the case of the first, there is an important presence of international NGOs and multilateral organizations in the country, however, it is not clear how social movements and civil society organizations are developing and gaining their autonomy from the newly established government and state institutions. In the second case, the persistence of the military junta and the authoritarian rule has meant that much of the organizing is happening transnationally while domestic resistance is struggling both through civil disobedience and armed resistance. In a certain way, one could argue that these two cases represent a similar pattern except that they are in different phases of a process of political liberalization.

2. *Fragility and limitations of the democratic space*: There are important differences in the nature and degree of democratic space that exist among Southeast Asian countries. In many cases, the "democratic space" is very limited and there are few domestic political

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[87] APRN (2001). "Project Accomplishment Report / Asia Pacific Research Network / 3rd Annual Conference," (report submitted to Inter Pares).

opportunities that exist for domestic organizing. In such context, transnational networking might become an important modality of struggle as Keck and Sikkink and others have shown in analyzing human rights struggles and advocacy in Latin America.[88] At the same time, such type of organizing might be seen as a diversion to the more pressing local and national issues of enlarging democratic space. There is already a wide range of experiences (Philippines 1986, Burma 1990, Thailand 1992, and Indonesia 1998), where the limits of the democratic space were tested by mass mobilization and civil disobedience. It would be an important and useful exercise to examine if and how did transnational social networks interact with these mobilization efforts and whether they contributed positively to open and enlarge democratic space. Another level of questioning is whether transnational organizing is sometime used as an alternative to local and national organizing in cases where the domestic political space is limited and constrained. One could think of the various regional networks based in Malaysia that are active and vocal at the regional level while having to be much more careful when dealing with domestic political issues.

3. *Impact of neoliberal globalization*: Neoliberal capitalist globalization has affected and continues to mark the economic development and orientation of Southeast Asian states. The 1997 financial crisis in particular revealed the costs of global processes and vulnerabilities of national economies. While the crisis had differential impacts across the region, it nonetheless provoked a widespread "wake-up" call that economic liberalization and openness were not without significant dangers. At the same time, it revealed in broad daylight that they were now similar supranational economic processes that were at work across the region. In terms of transnationalizing resistance and shifting people's response to globalization from a national to a regional level, the crisis helped built a common understanding of the limits of globalization and the needs to construct regional and global alternatives.

4. *Heterogeneous societies, languages, cultures, and uneven access to communication technologies:* A second element of heterogeneity is the political, cultural and demographic diversity of the region. Contrary to Latin America and much of the Western world, Southeast Asia continues to host a wide range of cultures, languages and societies. Such diversity represents both an asset as well as a challenge for transnational collective action. The capacities of organisations and networks to understand and enrich their praxis from such diversity appear a central factor to ensure that transnational activism will become an important component and a complementary means to affect social transformation. Another important factor to consider is the uneven access to communication technologies. As it was pointed out early on in this paper, the availability and accessibility of communication technologies, the knowledge of a common language (usually English), and the possibility of relatively cheap travel are three factors that permits and facilitates the organizing of transnational mobilization and protest.

5. *Importance of the rural sector:* To a different degree, all Southeast Asian states (except for Singapore and Brunei) have important proportions of their populations living and working

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[88] See, Keck and Sikkink (1998), op.cit; Brysk, Alison ed. (2002). Globalization and Human Rights. Berkeley: University of California Press; and Risse, Thomas, Stephen C. Ropp and Kathryn Sikkink eds. (1999). The Power of Human Rights: International Norms and Domestic Change. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

in rural areas. It is also in those areas where poverty and exploitation are most obvious and widespread. This reality requires a critical examination of the relevance of transnational collective action, in particular how rural issues - such as land reform, land tenure, right to food, people's control over seeds and genetic resources, fair trade, ecological agriculture, etc. – can be addressed. Alos, how linkages can be established and sustained over time among rural sectors. Moreover, a key challenge here is to determine what value-added participation of transnational rural networks might add to local struggles and how they can be organized as to promote and ensure the participation of rural-based social movement organizers. As it stands now, most of the literature describes and explains mostly urban-based form of transnational actions, one obvious exception being the different analyses of Via Campesina.[89]

6.   *Other type of transnational movements (religious, diapora, etc.):* Global social justice transnational movements are not the only one active within Southeast Asia. There are many other forms of movements present, for example, religion-based and diaspora-based movements. These deserve to be well understood in terms of their nature, goals and activities. Beyond their caricatured and grotesque descriptions by American policy-makers, regional Islamic movements are an important dynamic within Southeast Asia and are much more variegated than it is oftentimes depicted in mainstream magazines. The Chinese diaspora networks are clearly determining factors in Southeast Asian political economies that influence policies and that have been around for much longer than activist-based NGO networks. Organized crime networks (narco-trafficking, women and children trafficking, illegal migration, arms, etc) are also present in many parts of Southeast Asia. These as well require understanding in terms of how their functioning affects local, national and regional dynamics.

These above six features, of what I called the "ecology" of Southeast Asian transnational activism, do not exhaust the range of differences and commonalities that exist. Rather, they were presented here as a first attempt to identify some of the defining features of the context in which transnational collective action takes place.[90] The assumption being that the clearer the understanding of such "ecology," the easier it becomes to identify axes of action and modalities of organizing.

VII. Potentials and Possibilities

There are at least five aspects of the current context within Southeast Asia that represent significant possibilities for transnational organizing and highlight the relevance of such modality of collective action for social transformation.

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[89] See, Desmarais, Annette (2003). « The WTO… Will Meet Somewhere, Sometime. And We Will Be There," Prepared to VOICES: The Rise of Non-Governmental Voices in Multilateral Organizations. Ottawa: North-South Institute (September); and Borras Jr. Saturnino.(2004). "La Via Campesina: An Evolving Transnational Social Movement." TNI Briefing Series No.2004/6. Amsterdam: Transnational Institute.
[90] One might want to read a similar effort by Piper and Uhlin, in their chapter « New Perspectives on Transnational Activism », in particular the sub-section "Contextualizing Transnational Activism in East and Southeast Asia". Piper and Uhlin eds. (2004). Transnational Activism in Asia., pp.19-20.

1. Existing models and frames of collective action: The region has a rich history of social mobilization ranging from national revolutionary movements to very local resistance struggles. Throughout those struggles collective action frames and *repertoires* of collective actions were developed and tested. Social movements organizers, activists and NGO workers learned from previous failures and successes. Successful patterns of mobilization and themes of action are internalized and disseminated within societies and across societies. With the growing access to international information and the global connections that exists among activist networks, forms and theme of protest are now rapidly diffused. The challenge is to learn from other movements' experiences and struggles and adjust those to a particular context.

2. *Emergence of regional identity*: One might argue that the 1997 crisis also contributed to create a deeper sense of a common regional identity as people's movements and organizations could see how they were confronting similar challenges that were beyond their nation-state. At the same time, economic integration projects, Asia-Economic Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC), AFTA (Asia Free Trade Area), EAEG (East Asia Economic Grouping and regional political bodies such as ASEAN seem (or at least seemed) like significant processes to monitor and engage with along with global ones like WTO, and multilateral agencies such as the Asia Development Bank (ADB), the IMF and the World Bank. The emergence of a shared common identity although with varying degrees according to specific countries represents an important asset for organizing region-wide policy responses as well as coordinated mass mobilization and protest. It also constitutes an important opportunity to foster the sharing of experiences and learning amongst NGO, popular organisations and social movements in terms of development activities, policy advocacy and networking activities.

3. *High density of social movement activists, NGO and networks:* The growing number of social movements, NGOs and networks, in particular those that have regional connections means that it has become increasingly possible to organize coordinated campaigns and activities. The expanding density of civil society organisations also means that there are often several NGOs and networks working and addressing the same issues, oftentimes with differing views on tactics and strategies. This organizational plurality and diversity of responses is oftentimes depicted as a dilution and diversion of energy and dynamism. It nonetheless constitutes a significant achievement in terms of having now a ticker civil society capable of mobilizing a wide range of exploited sectors and proposing innovative alternatives. In the coming years, the challenge seems to lie on how to construct deliberative processes and build common grounds that can strengthen the overall capabilities of grassroots organizations and activist networks to resist and offer counter-hegemonic proposals on democratic and participatory governance, ecologically sustainable socio-economic development, and women's rights and feminist practices.

4. *Unevenness of civil society organizing*. As a whole the unevenness of civil society organizing and experiences has to be considered and factored in while assessing the potentialities and possibilities of transnational activism in Southeast Asia. The density, the qualities and the attribute of social movements, activist networks and NGOs vary significantly from one country to the other in the region. In the recent past, there have several initiatives wherein social justice activists from one country have travelled to another to help organize and

strengthen emerging civil society organizations. That was true soon after the downfall of Suharto in Indonesia and after the liberation and independence of East Timor. There have also been similar initiatives where seasoned Filipino activists traveled to the Thai-Burma borders to assist Burmese resistance and ethnic minorities group to help develop and consolidate organizing and advocacy efforts. Regional activist networks and organizations such as Focus on the Global South or Third World Network for example, have also played a similar role by providing analyses and regional and national perspectives to resource-poor social movements and NGOs improving and enhancing the quality and depth of the policy advocacy.

5. *High level of expertise*: A fifth asset is that there is now within Southeast Asian civil society organizations with significant levels of expertise on global issues. As mentioned earlier, some of the most established and appreciated worldwide transnational activist networks are located within Southeast Asia. In recent years, popular education and advocacy campaigns have enhanced the level of economic literacy among activists and social movement organizers. This constitutes a determining element for effective transnational mobilization and organizing since global issues are oftentimes depicted as complex and undecipherable to ordinary citizens.

VIII. <u>Key Dilemmas for Social Transformation Through Transnational Activism</u>

While transnational collective action offers many advantages and significant potential for transformative action, it is not without its own set of dilemmas. The following paragraphs discuss those. The list is not intended to be exhaustive but seeks to identify those important ones.

1. *Allocation of resources*: Supporting transnational social movements, INGOs or activists networks means that funding agencies are making certain choices in terms of allocation of resources. These choices require at least two types of consideration. A first one is to ensure that there is coherence within the choices that are made and complementarities exist among the various levels of interventions. Ideally, transnational activities should echo and amplify actions at the local and national levels. In some cases, when local and national channels for social and political transformation are blocked, one could think of Burma, transnational action (cross border interventions) might become the privileged axis of work. A second consideration is to avoid situations when limited resources are being substantially allocated for transnational events, such as the World Social Forums and other important gatherings, with the end result that support of grassroots programming is undermined. Finding some equilibrium is a challenge and it is important to be conscious that it might in fact be a changing equilibrium according to variations in regional and international contexts. Coherence and flexibility thus appear as critical elements.

2. *Democratic processes and "voice":* A second set of consideration has to do with the functioning of transnational activism. As it is true for local and national forms of organization, issues of democratic participation and "voice" are very much at the heart of sustainable transnational action. How are decisions taken? Who is speaking for whom? These are not easy issues to confront when dealing with relatively loose organizational

forms and several national contexts, cultures and languages. However, these seem unavoidable issues that require discussions and considerations.[91]

3. *Local versus global issues*: Transnational activism does not imply necessarily global issues. Very local issues such as the construction of dams, environmental threats by mining companies, or the impact of deforestation can all be sources of transnational mobilization. Thus, it would be ill advised to advocate transnational form of activism only for regional and global issues (trade agreements, regional security, global regulations, etc.). The decisive factors might be one of strategic and tactical considerations. What are the opportunities that exist to enable and initiate change processes? Are there clear connections and parallels between situations and problems in various countries and can resistance struggles be connected? Can such connections multiply or enhance the chances of policy changes?

4. *Oppositional versus propositional politics:* This is not a new dilemma and as time is passing, less and less is it perceived as a binary opposition. To the contrary, whenever the two can be combined, the better the advocacy. As time passes, the importance of developing alternative propositions is becoming a priority. In fact, the present time might be an opportune moment to document and present the growing range of alternative practices to globalization that have been set into motion. Two types of alternatives can be proposed. One would be constituted of the range of alternative organizational practices that have been proposed and set into motion by transnational civil society. This would require an effort of introspection by such actors to analyze and reflect on how global civil society organizes and functions in a way that is democratic, transparent and accountable. A second type would be made of the various development alternatives that have been put forward on the ground, especially those that have been implemented in more than one national contexts, for example, ecological agriculture, agriculture supported by the community (ASC), environmentally sound small-scale industrial, alternative urban settlement development, workers' managed coop. and community-managed programs, etc.

5. *Anti-globalization élites or shared participation*: As the anti-globalization develops and expands, there is a need to assess whether or not the transnational activist movement has ended creating its own sets of elites - the "rock-star" syndrome - who participate in all gatherings and campaigns. This might seem like an unavoidable situation, however, being conscious of it might trigger actions towards decentralized leadership, the development of a plurality of spokesperson and a greater concern for popular education and dissemination of analyses. Ideally, the more diverse the leadership and the more localized the better if we are to build up another "World" respectful of differences and rooted in the multitude of local experiences.

6. *Mobilization-driven and campaign-driven?*: Is transnational activism only rooted in mobilization and campaign activities? While it is clear to practitioners that it is much more than this, it might be important to reflect on the different components of

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[91] See for example, Bandy, Joe and Jackie Smith. (2005). « Factors Affecting Conflict and Cooperation in Transnational Movement Networks. » in <u>Coalitions Across Borders : Transnational Protest and the Neoliberal Order</u>. Lanham : Rowman and Littlefield : pp.231-252.

transnational activism. In what ways is it having its greatest impact? Is it able to make local and national governments and supranational institutions adjust and respond to pressures from below? Equally important is a discussion on the combination of forms of contentious politics. What issues, what forms and what timing are most likely to affect the dominant discourse and practices of ruling institutions and government.

7. *Policy influence and impact*: This is the most difficult aspect of transnational activism to assess. Part of difficulty is that policy influence is often hard to measure. In very few situations, it is possible to trace direct causal relations between a civil society action and a policy change. However, this is also true of true of national level campaigns. What seems like important variables are: 1) the level of knowledge and expertise that transnational networks and organizations are able to bring and offer on key certain specific policy issues; 2) the level of public support they generate, especially their capacities to mobilize widespread opposition movement; 3) the type of political opportunities that exists: Are there divisions within the ruling elites? Are there divisions among decision-makers on policy issues? Are there possibilities for tactical alliances?[92]

8. *Sustainable: Will it continue?* This represents another complex area to unravel. While having a relatively long history (one just has to think of diasporic social movements, the workers' movement and the religious movements)[93], transnational activism in its contemporary is relatively new. It arose in parallel and in reaction to global neoliberal capitalism as well as a by-product of the increasing density of NGOs organized in parallel to international conferences convened by the UN, and the gradual transformation of solidarity networks that had emerged in the 1960s and 1970s in support to national liberation movements. The question now that one can ask is whether it is sustainable on the long-term or will it just be another episode of collective action? Unless unexpected major transformations occur in the world-system, global collective action is likely to persist and increasingly becomes a key axis for social transformation. The question is how will it be sustained over time? What type of resources will ensure its perenniality? More precisely, how can flexibility and dynamism be maintained over time so that transnational collective action is able to "surf" on the crest of growing wave of opposition to global capitalism?

IX. Conclusion:

In this paper, I have tentatively argued that we have entered a new cycle of mobilization characterized by transnational activism. Within this field of social practices, international networking and policy advocacy based on critical knowledge production plays a central role. Contrary to the view that this is a contemporary phenomenon starting with the post-Cold War,

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[92] For a more detailed discussion, see O'Brien, Robert, Anne Marie Goetz, Jan Aart Scholte and Marc
[93] See for example, Keck and Sikkink (1998); and Bennison, Amira K. (2002). "Muslim Universalism and Western Globalization," in A.G. Hopkins (ed.) Globalization in World History, London: Pimlico; and, Hanagan, Michael (1998). "Transnational Social Movements, Deterritorialized Migrants, and the State System: A Nineteenth Century Case Study,"Mobilization. 3: pp. 107-124; and Arrighi,Giovanni (1990). "Marxist Century, American Century: The Making and Remaking of the World Labour Movement," New Left Review, 179 (Jan-Feb): pp. 29-63.

the review of the four cases have show that as early as the late 1970, regional advocacy networks were being organized. This form of collective action connects activist networks, NGOs and social movements across borders. In Southeast Asia, transnational activism that rely and demand alternative source of knowledge has been a defining feature of civil society processes, especially following the 1997 Financial Crisis.

This form of activism has been proposed as a complement to local and national activism as well as an activist modality on its own. Concrete impact and policy influence of such form of activism takes different forms and is often difficult to trace in a linear way.

At one level, transnational advocacy efforts produces shared identities and a common understanding of issues. It also generates common campaigns and proposals that can be put forward during regional and international gatherings and implemented both at the regional and national levels. In some cases, transnational activism influence the dominant discourse and forces its tenants to defend and justify their positions. In other instances, reformist policy-makers interested in developing alternative proposals to the more orthodox neoliberal agenda are seeking the expertise and knowledge generated by transnational networks. In other cases, transnational activism can expose the tensions and divisions that exist between states and economic blocs. Finally, by connecting community organizations and local NGOs' struggles to a broader set of issues and struggles, transnational activists are able to amplify and enrich both the work being conducted at the very local level and the advocacy and policy work conducted regionally and globally.

As mentioned before, this emerging form of activism is not without its own sets of dilemmas and challenges.[94] Nonetheless, it was suggested that it offers important possibilities and potentials to augment and enrich the practice of international development organizations and civil society organizations. The key challenge is to understand concretely and operationally how such form of transnational collective action "fits" in the overall picture of people's resistance struggles. The biggest research gap yet to fill is how to assess its policy impact over time, namely how has transnational activism in Southeast Asia influenced regional and global economic policies and contributed to strengthening deliberative processes and fostering alternative practices that can improve the lives of the exploited people.[95]

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[94] In their recent book on transnational coalitions, Joe Bandy and Jackie Smith proposes a list of "factors" that can generate tension and cooperation. See, Bandy, Joe and Jackie Smith (2005). "Factors Affecting Conflict and Cooperation in Transnational Movements Networks." In Coalitions Across Borders: Transnational Protest and the Neoliberal Order. Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield: pp.231-252.

[95] A recent work of Jonathan Fox can provide a useful starting point: Fox, Jonathan. (2002). "Assessing Binational Civil Society Coalitions: Lessons from the Mexico-U.S. Experience." In Cross-Border Dialogues: U.S.-Mexico Social Movement Networking, edited by D. Brooks and J. Fox. La Jolla: Center for U.S.-Mexican Studies, University of California-San Diego: pp.341-417. Another useful effort is Clark, John. ed. (2003). Globalizing Civic Engagement. London: Earthscan.