

Advance Praise for *Contested Global Governance Space and Transnational Agrarian Movements*

“I highly recommend this manuscript for its high value in scientific and political debate for a critical understanding of global governance issues and core issues such as agroecology and biotechnology.”

— Alessandra Corrado, Università della Calabria, Italy

“This is a very original book. Most analyses on financialization of food and agriculture are not linked to transnational agrarian movements, and most studies of transnational agrarian movements are not linked to financialization of food and agriculture. This book is the first attempt at combining analyses of the two. It is done from a scholar-activist perspective, making the book extra-ordinary and important.”

— Saturnino M. Borras Jr., International Institute of Social Studies (ISS), Netherlands, co-author, *Scholar-Activism and Land Struggles*

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Contested Global Governance Space and Transnational Agrarian Movements

A CRITICAL DEVELOPMENT PERSPECTIVE

MAURO CONTI

CRITICAL DEVELOPMENT STUDIES



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To my mother Giuliana (of Alberta and Natalino, subproletarians from Trastevere in Rome), my father Carlo (of Leonilde and Alberto, peasants from the countryside of Fossombrone), and my sister Ilaria

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Critical Development Studies Series

Three decades of uneven capitalist development and neoliberal globalization have devastated the economies, societies, livelihoods and lives of people around the world, especially those in societies of the Global South. Now more than ever, there is a need for a more critical, proactive approach to the study of global and development studies. The challenge of advancing and disseminating such an approach — to provide global and development studies with a critical edge — is on the agenda of scholars and activists from across Canada and the world and those who share the concern and interest in effecting progressive change for a better world.

This series provides a forum for the publication of small books in the interdisciplinary field of critical development studies — to generate knowledge and ideas about transformative change and alternative development. The editors of the series welcome the submission of original manuscripts that focus on issues of concern to the growing worldwide community of activist scholars in this field. Critical development studies (CDS) encompasses a broad array of issues ranging from the sustainability of the environment and livelihoods, the political economy and sociology of social inequality, alternative models of local and community-based development, the land and resource-grabbing dynamics of extractive capital, the subnational and global dynamics of political and economic power, and the forces of social change and resistance, as well as the contours of contemporary struggles against the destructive operations and ravages of capitalism and imperialism in the twenty-first century.

The books in the series are designed to be accessible to an activist readership as well as the academic community. The intent is to publish a series of small books (54,000 words, including bibliography, endnotes, index and front matter) on some of the biggest issues in the interdisciplinary field of critical development studies. To this end, activist scholars from across the world in the field of development studies and related academic disciplines are invited to submit a proposal or the draft of a book that conforms to

the stated aim of the series. The editors will consider the submission of complete manuscripts within the 54,000-word limit. Potential authors are encouraged to submit a proposal that includes a rationale and short synopsis of the book, an outline of proposed chapters, one or two sample chapters, and a brief biography of the author(s).

Series Editors

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Acronyms

Copa-Cogeca	Committee of Professional Agricultural Organisations– General Confederation of Agricultural Cooperatives in the European Union
CSO	civil society organizations
DNA	deoxyribonucleic acid
DSI	digital sequence information
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization
GATT	General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade
GMO	genetically modified organism
IFAP	International Federation of Agricultural Producers
IFOAM	International Federation of Organic Agriculture Movements
IMF	International Monetary Fund
IPC	International Planning Committee for Food Sovereignty
ITPGRFA	International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture
NBT	new breeding technique
NGO	nongovernmental organization
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PGRFA	plant genetic resources for food and agriculture
TAM	transnational agrarian movement
TRIPS	Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights
TNC	transnational corporation
WFO	World Farmers' Organisation
WTO	World Trade Organization

Introduction: A Strategic Vision for the Agrarian Institutional Guerrilla

The dilemmas of the antisystemic movements seem to be even more profound than those of the dominant forces of the world-system. In any case, without a strategy, there is no good reason to believe there is an invisible hand that will guarantee transformation in a good direction, even when and if the capitalist world-economy falls apart. (Arrighi, Hopkins, and Wallerstein 1992: 242)

For almost a decade I served as general coordinator of the secretariat of the International Planning Committee for Food Sovereignty (IPC). Convening eleven global and six subregional transnational agrarian movements (TAMS), the IPC includes more than 6,000 national member organizations and represents the voices of more than 300 million small-scale food producers. TAMS are organizations, networks, coalitions and solidarity linkages of farmers, peasants, pastoralists, and their allies that cross national boundaries and seek to influence national and global policies (Edelman and Borras 2016). Since 2003 the IPC has had a formal relationship with the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) to facilitate the participation of TAMS in FAO processes according to common priorities and axes of work. This includes civil society consultations leading to the FAO regional conferences, which are meant to set FAO priorities.

During my time at the IPC, I supported hundreds of delegates from TAMS in the policy dialogue spaces of the FAO. Although these delegates attended a wide range of negotiations, covering issues such as access to land to responsible investments in agriculture to recognition of small-scale fisheries, the overarching target was the same: opposing neoliberal policies in agriculture. The narrower focus of negotiations did not allow delegates to directly affect the neoliberal policy framework, but the unspoken underlying assumption was a strong connection between agricultural policies and the international economic framework.

The global movement for food sovereignty and the creation of the IPC as a space of coordination between different TAMS originated with the 1996 FAO World Food Summit and the parallel NGO Forum, held to oppose the newly established World Trade Organization (WTO). The political strategy of the time was based on using the FAO as an entry point to oppose neoliberal policies, but this did not always guide TAMS' participation in the various FAO negotiations. Indeed, in many internal meetings, IPC representatives expressed concern that their strategy was reactive and passive with respect to the priorities dictated by the FAO agenda, as participation and negotiation lines were not defined in the 1996 strategy or later updates. From this experience emerged the need to understand how agricultural policies are shaped by and reshape the economic cycle, and in particular how normative and policy dialogue in the global governance space is connected with the dominance of neoliberal policies.

The importance of prioritizing the connection with the economic cycle (e.g., oil prices, financial markets) was made clear by the world food price crisis in 2007–08, which fuelled the Arab Spring and other social uprisings in about thirty-three countries (Perez 2013; Zurayk 2011). Price fluctuations threatened global food security and increased the number of undernourished people to over 170 million (FAO 2010). This price shock showed that the global governance of agriculture is not working and is deeply affected by external economic factors, including financial ones.

Despite many analyses rooting the financialization of agriculture in post-Bretton Woods neoliberal globalization (Epstein 2005, 2008; Kotz 2008, 2015; Krippner, Lemoine, and Ravelli 2017; Palley 2007), most of them do not examine the root causes of financialization at the global level in order to then see how these play into the financialization of agriculture. One of the major limitations of these analyses, including the one presented by civil society organizations (CSOs) (CSM 2011), is that the relationship between the economic cycle and the agricultural sector remains unclear, ultimately resulting in findings and recommendations that are limited to the agricultural sector or to some kind of regulation of financial markets, as if this could protect the agricultural sector from its connection with the economic cycle of accumulation and from the broader framework of neoliberal policies, which have shrunk the traditional functions of the nation-state.

In this context, TAMS have engaged in negotiations with governments and the private sector to confront neoliberal policies without having an explicit analytical framework to drive the *institutional guerrilla* strategy that was supposed to use the entry points of policy dialogue and norma-

tive work at the institutional level to provide support to national and local struggles. Thus, I started to research the connection between the collapse of the Bretton Woods agreements and neoliberal policies in agriculture to better understand the ongoing financialization of agriculture and to read the ongoing negotiations at the FAO level within a broader framework.

This broader framework sheds a different light on what was at stake in the FAO policy dialogues on agroecology and biotechnologies for family farming under José Graziano da Silva's two terms as FAO director-general from 2011 to 2019. In this period, the most relevant negotiations occurred through the FAO International Year of Family Farming (2014), the FAO agroecology symposia (2014–18), and the FAO symposia on biotechnologies, innovation, and digitalization (2016–19). TAMS took part in negotiations of FAO policy frameworks (through the facilitation of the IPC) based on a common agenda promoting agroecology (IPC 2015) as a pathway toward the realization of food sovereignty and the transformation of the food system. These FAO negotiations resulted in the recognition of family farming and agroecology.

In response, the corporate sector sought to co-opt the focus on family farming and agroecology, using the new biotechnologies as a Trojan horse to appropriate the biodiversity at the core of family farming. Through the regulation of genetic information referred to as digital sequence information (DSI), and the production of plant varieties through the new breeding techniques (NBTs), industry could patent genes without distinguishing them from naturally occurring genes found in peasants' seeds, such that the entire crop biodiversity would be brought under the control of a few multinationals. In the FAO and Committee on World Food Security, TAMS' attempts to discuss seeds and genetic resources were blocked by a few governments referring to the jurisdiction of the WTO's Agreement on Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS).

Only through a broader theoretical lens referring to world-systems theory (Giovanni Arrighi, Jason W. Moore), international critical agrarian studies (Marc Edelman and Saturnino M. Borras Jr.), and nonterritorial governance approach (William Coleman) can the negotiations over the appropriation and patenting of seeds and biodiversity through NBTs and DSI be understood, not just as a casual phenomenon but as a strategic step in the current stage of capitalist development and the continuation of the existing hegemony. Indeed, seeds and biodiversity are central to the definition of the model of agriculture and the autonomy of peasant agriculture. The introduction of external inputs makes farming more dependent on

agribusiness practices and capital-intensive approaches. In fact, the industrial agriculture model depends on the intensive use of resources, including industrial seeds and fertilizers produced with fossil fuels (Clapp 2017).

This explains the ongoing concentration in the agricultural inputs market: the nexus of seed and agrochemical corporations offering farm packages of seeds and pesticides, the creation of new products, the technological development related to digital farming platforms, the dematerialization of genetic resources (i.e., DSI) as big data become increasingly important for farming, and the high fixed costs of research and development (Clapp 2017; OECD 2018). It also explains the private sector's rationale for using the FAO normative processes to overrule the definition of living modified organisms in the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety, and for considering plant varieties resulting from NBTs as not genetically modified organisms (GMOs) to generate a new policy framework and move beyond all the conflicts that blocked the old GMOs from fully penetrating the European market (Peschard and Randeria 2019). Building on the FAO discussions, the seed industry is concentrating its efforts on public policies and regulation, seeking homogenous regulation of NBTs across countries in order to eliminate the need for different products and thus reduce costs.

The broader theoretical framework composed of the three tiers of world-systems theory, international critical agrarian studies, and nonterritorial governance approach reads the inclusion of NBTs and DSI in agroecology as a way of expanding the external agroecological frontier (Webb 1964) and including all of the world's biodiversity in the capital accumulation system. The corporate sector's goal is further capital penetration into peasant agriculture to lower the costs of food production by dispossessing peasant farmers of natural resources and to shift capital accumulation to a new phase of material expansion (Moore 2010a, 2010b; Smith 2007). At the same time, this is part of an attempt to resolve the conflict between intellectual property rights and collective rights in the global governance of agriculture in favour of intellectual property rights through the appropriation of world biodiversity as a constitutive base of collective rights and agroecology.

This book focuses on the financialization of agriculture, which after the end of the Bretton Woods system reshaped the global governance space for agriculture, leading to the emergence of new TAMS. In particular, I look at how policy negotiations in recent years are defining the pathway of a new material expansion of the economy based on agroecology (labour intensive) or biotechnologies (capital intensive). Chapter 1 explores the literature to reach a definition of financialization, which in Chapter 2 is applied to agriculture. Chapter 3 describes the global governance of agri-

culture in relation to the hegemonic cycles of capital accumulation and the emergence of new TAMS supporting food sovereignty in the post-Bretton Woods financialization phase. Chapter 4 analyzes the clash over seeds and biodiversity in the global governance space, as hegemonic powers aim to achieve further capital penetration in peasant agriculture to shift to a new phase of capital accumulation based on material expansion. Chapter 5 draws some conclusions on TAMS' work to reshape the contested space of global governance of agriculture.

In order to redefine the political framework and the historical process, I have used official FAO documents, the IPC archive — housed at Centro Internazionale Crocevia, a Rome-based nongovernmental organization (NGO) in charge of the IPC secretariat — documents and articles published on the websites of CSOs, and academic literature. This book has been greatly informed by my position as general coordinator of the IPC secretariat in Rome from 2011 to 2020 and my experience supporting the efforts and strategies of TAMS in the FAO, working to realize the food sovereignty agenda, managing daily liaisons with the FAO Partnership Office, and reporting to the cabinet of the FAO director-general.