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Cross-Movement in Latin America: Lessons from the Mercosur Confederation of Family Farming Organisations (Coprofam)

ABSTRACT

In this article, we analyse the Mercosur Confederation of Family Farming Organisations (Coprofam), a transnational organisation of South American rural social movements and trade unions. Based on the dialogue mirrored in the literature on coalition formation, a contextual-spatial perspective and a pragmatist approach, we aim to understand the process of alliance building that led to the creation of Coprofam, as well as its sustainability and longevity. The paper highlights the importance of political context, previous social ties, political cultures and historical memories, debates about coalitional identity, as well as Coprofam's actions to expand relations with other movements, organisations and regions, which have influenced Coprofam's formation and development, through the decades. In terms of data and methods, the research is based on the analysis of documents, participant observation and interviews with Coprofam's activists.

Keywords: transnational rural movements; family farming; Coprofam; Latin America; cross-movements, coalitions

Introduction

The Common Market of the South (Mercosur) was established by Argentina, Brazil, Paraguay and Uruguay in 1991.¹ Shortly afterwards, rural activists from Argentina, Brazil and Uruguay activated previous connections and gathered to discuss the poten-

1 Mercosur was officially established with the Asunción Treaty in 1991. Later, other countries joined Mercosur as associated countries: Chile (1996), Peru (2003), Colombia (2004), Ecuador (2004), Guyana (2013) and Suriname (2013). Venezuela and Bolivia, which were also

tial impacts of Mercosur in rural areas, despite their different political backgrounds, organisational profiles and languages. In 1994, they created the Mercosur Confederation of Family Farming Organisations (Coprofam),² bringing together trade unions and rural social movements from the Southern Cone of the Americas.

The main question that drives this paper is centred on how a coalition among social movements and trade unions emerges and how it can manage to remain active over time. We analyse these questions based on the Coprofam experience, a Latin American cross-movement composed of around a dozen national organisations,³ whose constituencies range from small farmers to indigenous groups, from peasants to milk producers, from sub-national social movement organisations to national trade union confederations. They claim to represent more than 5,000 grassroots organisations (trade unions and associations) that together represent approximately 35 million rural workers, family farmers, peasants and indigenous people, according to Coprofam.

These diverse constituencies make Coprofam an interesting case of a cross-movement cooperation, which we define here as a situation in which two or more social movement organisations act together to address a common task. Scholars have also described this process with terms such as ‘coalition’, ‘alliance’, ‘network’, and ‘solidarity’.⁴ Based on empirical evidence, Nella Van Dyke’s work has shown that dissimilar

associated countries (1996), applied for full membership in 2012. Venezuela formalised its membership in 2014. Bolivia continues with a pending formalisation to date.

2 In Spanish, *Coordinadora de las Organizaciones de Productores Familiares del Mercosur*. This name has been translated in several forms: Confederation of Family Farming Organisations of Mercosur; Mercosur Confederation of Family Farming Organisations; Mercosur Confederation of Organisations of Family Producers or Mercosur Family Farmers Confederation.

3 The number of members varies but the most active organisations remain. In Feb. 2020, Coprofam’s website listed nine members. From Uruguay: National Commission for Rural Development (CNFR), Uruguayan Rural Women’s Association (AMRU); Paraguay: National Agricultural Union (UAN); National Peasant Organisation (Onac); Chile: Unitary Movement of Peasants and Ethnic Groups of Chile (Mucheche); Bolivia: Coordinator of the Integration of Peasant Economic Organisations of Bolivia (Cioec); Peru: Central Peasant of Peru (CCP); Argentina: Argentine Agrarian Federation (FAA); Coordinating Table of Organisations of Family Producers of Argentina; Brazil: National Confederation of Agricultural Workers (Contag). In 2017, when this paper was first drafted, other organisations composed Coprofam: Uruguayan Colonists Association (ACU), Intergremial of Milk Producers (IPL), both from Uruguay, and National Confederation of Peasant Family Agriculture *Voz del Campo*, Chile. This shifting constituency indicates the historical dynamics of cross-movement alliances.

4 See: Nella Van Dyke/Holly J. McCammon: Introduction: Social Movement Coalition Formation, in: N. Van Dyke/H. J. McCammon (eds.): *Strategic Alliances: Coalition Building and Social Movements*, Minneapolis, MN, 2010, pp. xi–xxviii; Nella Van Dyke: *Crossing*

groups usually decide to operate together: 1) when one specific group has a better political opportunity, or 2) when several groups fear a common threat. For both cases, activists recognise the strategic logic towards unified actions, but the permanence of these coalitions requires a more detailed explanation. In the following works, Van Dyke develops her arguments, together with Bryan Amos, by pointing out other factors that facilitate coalition formation, such as:

- 1) social ties;
- 2) conducive organisational structures;
- 3) ideology, culture, and identity;
- 4) the institutional environment; and
- 5) resources.⁵

Through situating Coprofam as a case of a cross-movement, which emerged mostly in response to Mercosur, our research has shown that other aspects are important for grasping the complexity of the formation and permanence of this alliance at the transnational level. Among these are previous social ties, political cultures and historical

Movement Boundaries: Factors that Facilitate Coalition Protest by American College Students, 1930–1990, in: *Social Problems* 50:2 (2003), pp. 226–250; Nathalie Lebon: Taming or Unleashing the Monster of Coalition Work: Professionalization and the Consolidation of Popular Feminism in Brazil, in: *Feminist Studies* 39:3 (2013), pp. 759–789; Suylan Midlej: Redes de Movimentos Sociais, in: Breno Bringel/Maria Gohn (eds.): *Movimentos Sociais na era global*, Petrópolis 2016, pp. 211–227; Janet Conway/Anabel Paulos: Popular Feminist Politics of Cross-Movement Alliances in Latin America and the Decolonial Challenge, in Germany: Paper presented at an international conference on cross-movement mobilisation, Ruhr University Bochum, 5–7 April 2017; Nella Van Dyke/Bryan Amos: Social Movement Coalitions: Formation, Longevity, and Success, in: *Sociology Compass* 11:7 (2017), pp. 1–17, available at: <https://doi.org/10.1111/soc4.12489> (accessed on 19 December 2019); Sabrina Zajak et al.: Talking about the Same but Different? Understanding Social Movement and Trade Union Cooperation through Social Movement and Industrial Relations Theories, in: *Industrielle Beziehungen* 2 (2018), pp. 166–187, available at: <https://doi.org/10.3224/indbez.v25i2.03> (accessed on 19 December 2019); Dominique Masson/Anabel Paulos: Solidarity-Building as Praxis: Anti-Extractivism and the World March of Women in the Macro-Norte Region of Peru, chapter submitted for the book: Janet Conway/Pascale Dufour/Dominique Masson (eds.): *Cross-Border Solidarities in 21st century Contexts: Feminist Perspectives and Activist Practices* (forthcoming); Marco Antonio Teixeira/Renata Motta: Unionism and Feminism: Coalition and Solidarity Building in the Brazilian Marcha das Margaridas. in: *Social Movement Studies* (forthcoming).

5 Nella Van Dyke/Bryan Amos: *Social Movement Coalitions: Formation, Longevity, and Success*.

memories, the need of building unity within heterogeneity, as well as expansion of relations with other movements, organisations and regions.

In addition to a dialogue with the literature on coalition formation among social movements that is mentioned above, we deploy a two-fold analytical model to present and situate Coprofam within the trajectory of activism in Latin America. In doing so, we depart from Bringel and Cabezas' contextual-spatial perspective that identifies the cycles of activism in a post-authoritarian Latin America after 1989. By relating the emergence of Coprofam to these cycles, we highlight its connections to general social and political regional features and to the broad organisation of civil society existent in Latin America. We agree with Bringel and Cabezas that the regional experience is relevant for understanding transnational activism.⁶ However, we need tools for a deeper analysis of the internal efforts made towards building Coprofam. For this purpose, we engage in dialogue with Cefaï's model of public experience that stresses the importance of the experience lived by the actors, instead of considering only rational, objective behaviour.⁷ By focusing on experiences, we also extend our analyses to how these experiences manage to promote unity within diversity.

For over 20 years, Coprofam has played a fundamental role on several fronts regarding family farming, food security, rural development policies, trade policies and their impacts on small farmers, regional phytosanitary regulation, as well as gender and age-related issues. It has contributed to the establishment of a family farming agenda in Mercosur through the creation of an institutional arena for the issue: the Specialised Meeting on Family Farming (REAF).⁸ Yet, Coprofam's current connections are beyond Mercosur and have extended to the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO). Coprofam has had seats on the council of the Civil Society and Indigenous Peoples' Mechanism for relations with the United Nations Committee on World Food Security. The regional confederation has been one of the

- 6 Breno Bringel/Almudena Cabezas: Geopolítica de los movimientos sociales latinoamericanos: Espacialidades, ciclos de constestación y horizonte de posibilidades, in: Jaime Coronado (eds.): Anuário de integração latinoamericana y caribenha, Guadalajara 2011, pp. 324–342.
- 7 Daniel Cefaï: Como uma associação nasce para o público: Vínculos locais e arena pública em torno da associação La Bellevilleuse, em Paris, in: Daniel Cefaï et al. (eds.): Arenas Públicas: Por uma etnografia da vida associativa, Rio de Janeiro, 2011, pp. 67–102.
- 8 Juliana Luiz: As linhas vermelhas para o desenvolvimento rural: A internacionalização da agenda da agricultura familiar e seus impactos na agenda global, PhD Dissertation, IESP-UERJ, Rio de Janeiro 2018; Priscila Delgado de Carvalho: Ação Coletiva Transnacional e Mercosul: Organizações Da Sociedade Civil Do Brasil e Do Paraguai Na REAF. Masters' Thesis, Universidade de Brasília, Brasília 2011; Paulo André Nierdele: A Construção Da Reunião Especializada Sobre Agricultura Familiar (REAF) Do Mercosul: Sociogênese de Uma Plataforma de Diálogos Entre Governos e Movimentos Sociais, in: Estudos Sociedade e Agricultura 24:2 (2016), pp. 539–603.

leading groups of the International Year of Family Farming (IYFF) in 2014 and the current United Nations Decade of Family Farming (2019–2028), both connected to the World Rural Forum (WRF), of which Coprofam is also a member.

By acknowledging the trajectory and relevance of Coprofam, we intend to contribute to the literature on the transnational coalitions of rural workers, which has been attentive to the activism of the “rural poor” and has shown that connections among rural workers date back to the early 20th century with initiatives such as the Associated Country Women of the World established in North Atlantic countries or the Green International in Central Europe. This literature mostly focuses on the experience of *La Via Campesina*, which is currently the most relevant global network of peasants.⁹ The narrative of the Coprofam experience adds a layer to this research agenda by showing how rural workers connected to unions, social movements and associations of different political and social profiles have also managed to act transnationally.

The data presented in this case study were generated through the analysis of documents, interviews and participant observations carried out individually by each of the three authors in the context of producing their master’s thesis and Ph.D. dissertations from 2009 to 2018. Access to Coprofam archives was provided mostly by the National Confederation of Agricultural Workers (Contag, in Portuguese), the Brazilian trade union confederation that has been part of Coprofam since its creation. Interviews were held either during Contag events or during REAF meetings and conducted in Portuguese or Spanish.

This paper is organised in five sections and a conclusion. The first section situates Coprofam in relation to the contentious cycles of activism in a post-authoritarian Latin America after 1989.¹⁰ The following four sections are dedicated to the debate of each sub-cycle. These debates highlight the main activities and point out general characteristics of Coprofam and its activism, driven by the processes of previous connections (1991–1994), blockage (1994–1998), cooperation (1999–2005) and expertise (2005–2015). In the concluding section, we return to the cross-movement agenda, arguing that this experience can be useful for understanding social movement coalitions.

- 9 Saturnino M. Borras Jr./Marc Edelman: *Political Dynamics of Transnational Agrarian Movements*, Nova Scotia 2016. Saturnino M. Borras Jr./Marc Edelman/Cristóbal Kay: *Transnational Agrarian Movements: Origins and Politics, Campaigns and Impact*, in: *Journal of Agrarian Change* 8:2-3 (2008), pp. 169–204.
- 10 Breno Bringel/Almudena Cabezas: *Geopolítica de los movimientos sociales latinoamericanos: Espacialidades, ciclos de constestación y horizonte de posibilidades*.

Coprofam: From its Inception to Transnational Campaigning

The modern social movements emerged in connection to the building of national states.¹¹ Several of those movements had international interactions early on, but nation-states and their domestic policies remained their main targets and objectives.¹² The cultural, social, geopolitical and economic transformations of the 20th century changed the *modus operandi* of collective action, opening up both threats and opportunities to social movements that act transnationally.¹³

According to Donatella Della Porta and Sidney Tarrow,¹⁴ this transformation was only possible because of three main changes: *contextual changes* (the end of the Cold War and the expansion of demands, the increase of communication and media, the reduction of costs for international displacements, the increase of migratory flows and the growth of international institutions and corporations), *cognitive changes* (movements ‘mirroring’ the actions and tactics practiced by similar agents around the world) and *relational changes* (movements working together during campaigns, fostering the construction of larger identity frameworks).

Although the factors highlighted by Della Porta and Tarrow are important for understanding the process of transnational action, this process also has older historical roots. In Latin America, international ties among social movements and specifically among trade unions date back to the mid-20th century. Solidarity among workers has been a long-lasting justification for their international contacts and coalitions. This is important to take into consideration because, despite changes to the defining features of these connections after the 1990s, previous interactions were essential for the establishment of networks and for the level of reliability between different agents during contextual changes, as many scholars have affirmed.¹⁵

11 Charles Tilly: *From Mobilization to Revolution*, Boston 1978.

12 Sidney Tarrow: *New Transnational Activism*, Cambridge 2005.

13 Donatella Della Porta/Sidney Tarrow: *Transnational Processes and Social Activism: An Introduction*, in: Donatella Della Porta/Sidney Tarrow (eds.): *Transnational Processes and Social Activism*, Oxford 2005, pp. 1–17.

14 *Ibid.*

15 Catherine Corrigan Brown/David S. Meyer: *The Prehistory of a Coalition: The Role of Social Ties in Win without War*, in: N. Van Dyke/H. J. McCammon (eds.): *Strategic Alliances: Coalition Building and Social Movements*, pp. 3–21; Larry Isaac: *Policing Capital: Armed Countermovement Coalitions against Labor in Late Nineteenth Century Industrial Cities*, in: N. Van Dyke/H. J. McCammon (eds.): *Strategic Alliances: Coalition Building and Social Movements*, pp. 22–49; Dawn Wiest: *Interstate Dynamics and Transnational Social Movement Coalition: A Comparison of Northeast and Southeast Asias*, in: N. Van

The 1990s were, in fact, when contemporary transnational agrarian movements (TAMs) consolidated; regarding this recent experience, Borras and Edelman suggest that:

Instead of explaining the origins of TAMs largely or exclusively as a response to the growing weight of global governance institutions, such as the World Trade Organisation, or to the hollowing out of nation-states under neoliberal globalization, we consider regional and national experiences, political cultures and historical memories as important constitutive elements of contemporary transnational alliances. [...] In more recent decades, efforts to organize across borders in places such as Western Europe, Central America and Southeast Asia drew on eminently regional traditions and later brought into being wider coalitions, such as *Vía Campesina*.¹⁶

The Coprofam formation is tightly connected to these processes. Although Coprofam can be understood as a reaction to the impact of Mercosur on rural areas, the political opportunity¹⁷ does not fully explain the formation of this coalition. In this paper, we analyse the formation of Coprofam by highlighting the historical process that preceded its creation. Specifically, both the previous social ties between the organisations that comprised this alliance and the historical memories of alliances and solidarity between social and union movements in the region. Beyond Tarrow and Della Porta's contextual changes, the complexity of historical momentums shows that externally generated opportunities and threats are part of the bigger picture. Different social movements reacted in different ways facing the same changes, i. e., interpreting developments differently and choosing different strategies to confront the emerging international organisations and new transnational issues. Hence, we suggest analysing the emergence of transnational coalitions both through a historical-temporal perspective and by its spatial insertion which connects it to the development of activism in Latin America.¹⁸

Dyke/H. J. McCammon (eds.): *Strategic Alliances: Coalition Building and Social Movements*, pp. 50–76.

16 Saturnino M. Borras Jr./Marc Edelman: *Political Dynamics of Transnational Agrarian Movements*, p. 2.

17 The concept of 'political opportunity' is defined as "consistent—but not necessarily formal or permanent—dimensions of the political environment or of change in that environment that provide incentives for collective action by affecting expectations of success or failure" and allows (re)interpretation of what is 'timely' for the movements engaged. See Sidney Tarrow: *Power in Movement: Social Movements and Contentious Politics*, Cambridge University Press, 2011 [1994], p. 163.

18 Breno Bringel/Almudena Cabezas: *Geopolítica de los movimientos sociales latinoamericanos: Espacialidades, ciclos de constestación y horizonte de posibilidades*.

Bringel and Cabezas¹⁹ state that a cycle of protest has emerged in Latin America in the late 1980s, starting after most of the countries in the region had gone through processes of redemocratisation. This long cycle can be further divided into four smaller sub-cycles, 1) 1989–1994; 2) 1994–2001; 3) 2001–2005; 4) 2005–2010. Based on this model of sub-cycles, it is possible to place the emergence of Coprofam in its appropriate context. The periodisation may not overlap perfectly, but there are strong similarities among the regional process and the development of Coprofam. The founding of Coprofam (though not mentioned by Bringel and Cabezas) can be placed in the second sub-cycle.

Additionally, focussing on the interactional process, Cefai's research highlights the importance of actors themselves building up their own trajectory.²⁰ On the one hand, it is important to stress the relevance of the experience lived by the actors for the promotion of unity within Coprofam. On the other hand, we recognise some general processes which have influenced Coprofam.

Cefai's pragmatic approach presents the creation of a public arena as structured into three phases: the first one—*blockage*—represents the initial and usually confrontational aspect that comes with agenda setting. Here, mobilisation, protests and contentious activities are emphasised. The second phase—*cooperation*—is shaped by the establishment of partnerships. The different groups, united by a 'problem', are now immersed in a public space and, then, must (re)articulate themselves accordingly. The third and final one—*expertise*—is the one in which the coalition assumes the role of an expert, "a specialised agency in charge of establishing debates, proposing solutions and making decisions based on well-defined parameters" (translated by the authors).²¹ Both approaches will be explored in the sub-sections ahead.

First Sub-cycle (1989–1994): The Creation of Mercosur and the Rural Debate

In the 1980s, several Latin American countries went through processes of redemocratisation. Under authoritarian rule, human rights activists, pro-democracy agents and members of political parties who opposed dictatorships maintained transnational ties. The new political scenario allowed them to engage in a broader agenda.²² During the 1980s and 1990s, Latin American countries faced a deep economic crisis. The so-

19 Ibid.

20 Daniel Cefai: Como uma associação nasce para o público: Vínculos locais e arena pública em torno da associação La Bellevilleuse, em Paris.

21 Ibid.

22 Marisa Von Bülow: A batalha do livre comércio: a construção de redes transnacionais da sociedade civil nas Américas, São Paulo 2014, p. 86.

called ‘lost decade’ resulted in foreign pressure for macroeconomic reorientation in accordance with neoliberal principles. This restructuring reduced the amount of state intervention in the social, economic and political spheres.

In 1989, Brazil and Argentina signed the Economic Complementarity Treaty. They negotiated a bilateral economic agreement in the form of ‘open regionalism’, that is, agreements that go beyond the agenda of simple liberalisation of trade barriers (such as the North American Free Trade Agreement, NAFTA), and also incorporate measures to harmonise policies in different countries and to strengthen the regional flows of people.

This was how the 1990s started: with different juxtaposed processes influencing state-society relations profoundly. On the one hand, the structural reforms of the neoliberal agenda reduced the role of the state, allowing the adoption of private sector interests; on the other hand, the process of regional integration in the framework of open regionalism required coordination between countries to articulate their domestic policies on a new scale of regional performance. The question was, according to Paulo Nierdele: “how to reconcile trade liberalisation, deregulation of markets, and downgrading of national states with the legitimacy that was expected to be assigned to a set of countries for joint strategies in response to the effects of globalisation?” (translated by the authors).²³

This was the context in which Mercosur was constituted. Mercosur inaugurated “a new scenario of struggles and conflicts” (translated by the authors),²⁴ notably because it was designed with few participatory institutional structures. Together, Argentina, Brazil, Paraguay and Uruguay had a strong impact on five food commodities globally consumed—wheat, corn, soy, sugar and rice—in addition to exporting beef.²⁵ In percentage terms, the agricultural export of Mercosur to the rest of the world was around 38 per cent of its total exports by the time Coprofam was created.²⁶ Agricultural transactions—either the liberalisation of intra-Mercosur tariffs or negotiations with other international partners—had important repercussions, since a significant percentage of the countries’ total population still lived in rural areas and depended on agricultural production (notably for subsistence).

23 Paulo Nierdele: *A construção da Reunião Especializada sobre Agricultura Familiar (REAF) do Mercosul: Sociogênese de uma plataforma de diálogos entre governos e movimentos sociais*, pp. 569–603, p. 576.

24 Alberto Riella: *Las organizaciones rurales y el proceso de integración regional*, in: *Revista de Ciencias Sociales* 15:20 (2002), pp. 75–86.

25 See the homepage of Mercosul, at: www.mercosul.gov.br (accessed on 14 March 2017).

26 Maria Auxiliadora de Carvalho/César Roberto Leite da Silva/Arthur Antonio Guilardi: *Intensidade do comércio no Mercosul*, in: *Rev. de Economia Agrícola*, São Paulo, v. 56, n. 2, jul./dez. 2009, pp. 77–90.

Mercosur did not only affect the countries' national agricultural production but also the very survival of some sectors affected by trade liberalisation. According to Riella,²⁷ it was possible to identify four stakeholders immediately impacted by the agriculture agenda of Mercosur:

- 1) large farmers and landlords,
- 2) rural entrepreneurs associated with agroindustry chains,
- 3) small farmers and family farmers, and
- 4) rural workers.

With asymmetric power in the negotiations, these stakeholders had different views regarding the integration strategy of the rural sector.

Shortly after Mercosur was created, large farmers and landowners were pushing for a strategy of integration based on the opening of markets and liberalisation. They were organised in the Federation of Mercosur's Rural Associations and had influence over national governments. Their priorities were the elimination of all intra-Mercosur trade barriers and the opening of markets with the United States and the European Union. Rural entrepreneurs were interested solely in the liberalisation of *certain* sectors (such as machinery), as they were also beneficiaries of subsidies for certain niche industries.

The small farmers and family farmers defended national autonomy on agriculture-related issues, often maintaining a more protectionist agenda even when they supported cultural integration. The capacity of this group to influence political decisions was, however, limited. Finally, rural wage workers had practically no influence on regional debates. Riella presented two reasons for the absence of rural wage workers. First, weakness of national organisations and, second, the little importance given to the rural theme by the national union centrals.²⁸

In the late 1980s, all these sectors had recognised the importance to monitor, on the regional scale, the transformations in agriculture. One of the first regional forums created regarding this issue was the Consultative Council for Agricultural Cooperation of the Southern Area Countries (Spanish acronym: Conasur). Regarding the groups of small farmers, at least two important organisations were present within Conasur: the Uruguayan National Commission for Rural Development (CNFR) and the Argentine Agrarian Federation (FAA).

After Mercosur was created in 1991, the CNFR and the FAA decided to leave Conasur, recognising it as an inadequate venue to defend the specific demands of small farmers. They also criticised the hegemonic participation of agribusinesses, which maintained direct contact with the National Ministries of Agriculture. Then, CNFR

27 Alberto Riella: Las organizaciones rurales y el proceso de integración regional.

28 Ibid.

and FAA engaged with other national organisations of small (and medium-size) farmers to join forces in defending their common agenda.²⁹

Looking for information and allies, previously established contacts were reactivated among rural unions. It is important to mention that these organisations already had loose contacts amongst them. However, the formalisation of Mercosur paved the way for this collaboration to be transformed.³⁰ Associations situated in border cities, especially in the Southern Cone, played an important role in this period because the trade unionists had previous contacts to draw upon. These contacts were activated when national-level trade union confederations looked for allies in order to present their agenda to Mercosur.³¹

Second Sub-cycle (1991–1994): the Creation of Coprofam and the Definition of a Common Framework

In 1994, nearly 60 leaders of small farmers organisations met in the city of Porto Alegre to strengthen ties and coordinate their efforts. There, organisations with political and thematic affinities from Argentina, Brazil, Bolivia, Chile, Paraguay, Peru and Uruguay created what they later named the Mercosur Confederation of Family Farming Organisations.³² Despite the existence of other rural organisations in the region with similar agendas, not all of those organisations were aligned. Different priorities and strategies for alliances (that did not include Mercosur at that point) highlight the relevance of each organisation's choice for action.

This first period of Coprofam may be understood as the moment of public presentation, with the establishment of official meetings and the construction of a common discourse. By exchanging information between the leaders of the member-organisations, the group established its own political platform and strategies in a process similar to what Cefai has dubbed as *blockage*.³³

29 Ibid.

30 Marisa Von Bülow/Priscila Delgado de Carvalho: Entre o nacional e o transnacional: O caso da agricultura familiar no Mercosul.

31 Interview given by a Contag activist to Priscila Delgado de Carvalho as a subsidy for her PhD Dissertation, on 2 December 2016. Priscila Delgado de Carvalho: A Produção do Transnacional: Compilações da Agricultura Familiar e Camponesa na Contag e no MPA. PhD Dissertation, Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais, Belo Horizonte, 2018.

32 Coprofam: Memória Histórica de Corpofam, Arquivo Contag (Assessoria da presidência), 2005.

33 Daniel Cefai: Como uma associação nasce para o público: Vínculos locais e arena pública em torno da associação La Bellevilleuse, em Paris.

At least three international Coprofam meetings were held during this phase (1994, 1996 and 1997) to foster internal agreements on the main political agenda of family farming in the Southern cone of the Americas. The meetings also tried to gather information about national policies for small farmers.³⁴ By 1996, Coprofam published the document “Characterisation of family farming and proposals for specific policies”.³⁵

The core issue for Coprofam was the categorical recognition of the coexistence of two distinct agricultural models, agribusiness and family farming, in South America. Then, it was mandatory to identify the characteristics of ‘family farming’ so that they could build a common political identity that considered the diversity of national experiences. Moreover, it was important to specify these traits in a way that could be appropriated by different groups dispersed across very diverse regions and with different productivity capacities. Family farming was identified as “an intention, a political project [...] to transform farmers who were in situations of socioeconomic instability, facing risks of exclusion as a category” (translated by the authors).³⁶

Coprofam formulated its discourse upon the duality of agribusiness and family farming, and based on this differentiation, demanded specific public policies to protect the sector of family farming from the transformations promoted by Mercosur. The option for such a conceptualisation helps to explain the absence of other existing rural social movements from South America, which did not engage with this agenda, namely those associated with the Confederation of Latin American Countryside Organisations (Coordinadora Latinoamericana de Organizaciones del Campo—Cloc, in Spanish).³⁷ Usually, members of Cloc would rather present themselves as rural workers or peasants. Cloc and, later, La Via Campesina members would criticise “family farming agriculture” for being market-oriented and indifferent to the impact of capitalist agricultural chains on small farmers. Additionally, Mercosur was seen as an expression of the trade liberalisation process they wanted to avoid.³⁸ As pointed out by Nella Van Dyke and Bryan McCammon, cultural similarities between agents in a coalition and flexible or congruent ideologies can facilitate coalition formation and foster the longevity of those coalitions. What we find in this case is a similar process: different

34 Coprofam: Antecedentes, objetivo y estructura organizativa, directiva y asociadas, realizaciones y logros: Arquivo Contag (Assessoria da presidência), S/d.

35 Coprofam: Declaração de Rosário (Argentina), 16 October 1996.

36 Everton Picolotto: *As mãos que alimentam a nação: agricultura familiar, sindicalismo e política*: CPDA/UFRRJ, Rio de Janeiro 2011, p. 25.

37 Cloc is a regional transnational network later associated with La Via Campesina, also emerged in 1994. Annette Aurelie Desmarais: *La Vía Campesina: Globalization and the Power of the Peasants*, Halifax and Winnipeg, Canada 2007.

38 Priscila Delgado de Carvalho: *Ação Coletiva Transnacional e Mercosul: Organizações Da Sociedade Civil Do Brasil e Do Paraguai Na Reunião Especializada sobre Agricultura Familiar (REAF)*.

ideologies and organisational cultures did prevent other social movements from aligning with Coprofam.³⁹

In the beginning, Coprofam and Cloc had overlapping memberships, including the Brazilian Contag and the Landless Workers Movement (Movimento dos Trabalhadores Rurais Sem Terra, MST, in Portuguese).⁴⁰ By the end of the 1990s, however, Coprofam and Cloc had chosen different priorities. Despite dealing with similar issues, Coprofam/Contag and Cloc/MST did not necessarily form long-lasting regional coalitions, notably due to political and ideological differences amongst them; yet, they have later aligned over issues such as human rights or the protection of national oil companies, which highlights the processual and historical features of coalitions.

Cloc's main agenda was the fight against the neoliberal model of economy. According to João Pedro Stédile, MST activist and a participant of Cloc's inauguration, the decision for its creation came as a "reflection of a political line", established previously through contacts to peasants and indigenous movements. These contacts were established during the mobilisation to oppose the official celebration of the fifth Centennial of the Discovery of the Americas.⁴¹ According to Victor Quintana, a Mexican activist: "For us, it is clear that countries have the right to subsidise their agriculture, but they also have the right to close their borders. The question of market access is a trap" (translated by the authors).⁴²

Coprofam, on the other hand, was structured mainly by rural trade unions' movements and producers' organisations. Regarding the trade unions' origins, it should be noted that, since 1991, the Southern Cone Trade Union Confederation had already considered the issue of a process of regional integration, offering "critical support" to Mercosur.⁴³ Consequently, they criticised the way in which the process was being conducted by the countries but were also confident that integration could contribute to national and regional growth and development.⁴⁴

- 39 Nella Van Dyke/Bryan Amos: *Social Movement Coalitions: Formation, Longevity, and Success*.
- 40 José Seoane/Clara Algranati: *Cloc (verbete): Enciclopédia Latinoamericana*, Boitempo/São Paulo 2015.
- 41 Flávia Vieira: *Via Campesina e a "globalização da esperança": Um estudo sobre as lutas rurais na escala internacional*, 33º Encontro Anual da Anpocs, 2009, p. 8.
- 42 Marisa Von Bülow: *A batalha do livre comércio: A construção de redes transnacionais da sociedade civil nas Américas*, p. 131.
- 43 Confederations that joined the declaration: Argentina—General Confederation of Labor (CGT); Bolivia—Central Bolivian Workers; Brazil—Central Única dos Trabalhadores (CUT) and General Confederation of Labor (CGT); Chile—Central Única dos Trabalhadores (CUT); Uruguay—Intersindical Plenary of Workers (PIT) and National Convention of Workers (CNT).
- 44 Marisa Von Bülow: *A batalha do livre comércio: A construção de redes transnacionais da sociedade civil nas Américas*, p. 87.

As the decision to “participate in international forums is not an automatic consequence of a process of regional integration [...] [but] the result of a complex interpretation process of the best way forward” (translated by the authors),⁴⁵ it can be argued that Coprofam identified a political opportunity in that scenario and decided to act upon it to assert its claims. The strategies promoted by Coprofam members were framed as compatible with the project of regional integration via Mercosur, however, this view was not commonly shared by other rural social movements existing in the same period and region.

Once established, Coprofam sought to focus on two of Mercosur’s arenas: the Economic and Social Regional Consultative Forum and the Sub-Working Group 8 (SGT-8)⁴⁶—a technical working group for agricultural issues. Mercosur had an exclusive policy-making institution for agriculture directly linked to the highest-level agency of Mercosur, the Common Market Council (CMC). However, as CMC is under direct influence of the Ministers of Agriculture (traditionally associated with the agribusiness), it was inside SGT-8 that Coprofam saw an opportunity for exerting influence.

According to Paulo Niederle, SGT-8 included in its agenda the discussions about the impacts of regional policies for agriculture over family farming mainly because of the pressure exerted by Coprofam.⁴⁷ Yet, this inclusion had little tangible effect on the general orientation of Mercosur’s approach to agriculture. Nonetheless, the recognition of Coprofam as a valid interlocutor on the part of the agricultural specialists concerned with the issue on behalf of Mercosur can be seen as a positive outcome.⁴⁸

The second half of the 1990s was marked by the confluence of several transformations that impacted Latin American social movements and their strategies for collective action. The negotiation concerning the Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA) and the emergence of the World Trade Organisation (WTO) posed farther-reaching issues than mere intra-Mercosur negotiations. Because of that, they were also addressed by Coprofam. By engaging in these issues, Coprofam began to establish itself as a transnational network acting in a broader context. It expanded contacts and alliances with other networks of social movements in Africa and Europe, widening its horizons.⁴⁹

45 Marisa Von Bülow/Priscila Delgado de Carvalho: *Entre o nacional e o transnacional: O caso da agricultura familiar no Mercosul*, p. 231.

46 Working subgroups of Mercosur are subordinated to the Common Market Group (GMC). GMC is responsible for executing the decisions of the Council of the Common Market (CMC) which conducts Mercosur policies.

47 Paulo Niederle: *A construção da Reunião Especializada sobre Agricultura Familiar (REAF) do Mercosul: Sociogênese de uma plataforma de diálogos entre governos e movimentos sociais*, p. 584.

48 Alberto Riella: *Las organizaciones rurales y el proceso de integración regional*.

49 Coprofam: *Relatorio de la Gestión 2003–2005: Archivo Contag (Assessoria da presidência)*, Montevideo 2005.

The FTAA was officially launched in Miami in 1994, and aimed at a continental trade alliance among the 34 countries organised in the Organisation of American States (OAS) (except for Cuba). This agreement was based on the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA). If neoliberal reforms were already being questioned by civil society organisations, the FTAA emerged as the “central element of continental assemblage” of these groups (translated by the authors).⁵⁰ According to Fátima Mello, an NGO activist, the history of Latin America and the mobilisation of Latin American social movements had a watershed moment with the FTAA: “before we were scattered and fragmented, at the mercy of the neoliberal agenda, with very fragmented, isolated actions of resistance. By establishing the agenda *FTAA: the common enemy attacks*, we unified ourselves to make the regional movement reborn” (translated by the authors).⁵¹

In 1994, the World Trade Organisation (WTO) was created. Agriculture, under the influence of the North American and European lobby, had always been exempt from international trade agreements, notably regarding topics such as market liberalisation, the end of subsidies and tax incentives. With the WTO, agriculture was put onto the table of international trade of negotiations again.

These cases show that the founding of Mercosur (and its agricultural debates) occurred simultaneously with other larger trade processes, all of them threatening the regional family farming market. Coprofam was created within this period, fostering contacts between different national groups identified with a similar agenda: small agricultural production and family farming. During these early years, the Confederation managed to be recognised as a relevant political actor for the topic and searched for ways to establish a regional debate over family farming.

Third Sub-cycle (1999–2005): Coprofam’s growing Strength

The election of several left-wing governments throughout Latin America affected the orientation of foreign policies in some countries, moving the profile of Mercosur—at least at the rhetoric level—from a commercial perspective focussed on the liberalisation of trade towards a more political-social one. Through this process, new stakeholders were able to engage in regional debates and, finally, the family farmers of Coprofam were able to influence the regional agenda.

50 Suylan Midlej: *Redes de Movimentos Sociais*, in: Breno Bringel/Maria Gohn (eds.): *Movimentos Sociais na era global*, Petrópolis 2016, pp. 211–227.

51 Ibid.

Coprofam played an important role in convincing Mercosur member-countries to agree upon the creation of a Specialised Meeting on Family Farming (REAF).⁵² In fact, Coprofam disputed the very existence of the concept of ‘family farming’ and its inclusion into the agenda of the Common Market. Coprofam also stood for the idea that civil society ought to participate directly in REAF.⁵³ The role played by Coprofam was essential to guaranteeing that family farmers would be invited to the meetings and their demands would be taken into account, as mentioned by a Brazilian Public Officer: “the institutional design [of REAF] was mainly proposed by the Brazilian bureaucrats, but this would not have worked without the demand and the social pressure of Coprofam” (translated by the authors)⁵⁴. By the end of the 2000s, Coprofam believed that the creation of REAF had boosted its recognition as a representative of family farmers to governments, other multilateral organisations and to civil society in general. This was only possible as Coprofam managed to establish partnerships with national government officials, regional officials and international organisations’ personnel. Additionally, Coprofam engaged in other coalitions of civil society, expanding its connections, in a clear process of cooperation, as defined by Cefai.⁵⁵

Between 2001 and 2005, Coprofam received financial support from the United Nations International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD). One of the challenges faced by the Confederation was the absence of funding to keep the different organisations in constant contact.⁵⁶ The IFAD-Mercosur Agreement (launched in the late 1990s) was essential to improving this direct relation amongst Coprofam organisations, enabling comparison between national realities and the identification of common grounds. The fund was also instrumental during the pre-REAF phase and its first years, when the REAF could not afford regular meetings between several social agents from the region.

The institution building for REAF also helped to improve such contacts and proximity amongst social agents. Biannually, national and regional meetings offer real conditions for direct contact between organisations, making it possible for them to get to know each other better and to align positions. Since the creation of the gender and

52 This paper will not explore the REAF itself, although it recognises its importance for the consolidation of the ‘family farming’ agenda throughout the region and for the participation of social movements inside formal institutional arrangements.

53 Priscila Delgado de Carvalho: Ação coletiva transnacional e Mercosul: as organizações da sociedade civil do Brasil e do Paraguai na construção da Reunião Especializada sobre Agricultura Familiar (REAF).

54 Paulo Nierdele: A construção da Reunião Especializada sobre Agricultura Familiar (REAF) do Mercosul: Sociogênese de uma plataforma de diálogos entre governos e movimentos sociais, p. 588.

55 Daniel Cefai: Como uma associação nasce para o público: Vínculos locais e arena pública em torno da associação La Bellevilleuse, em Paris.

56 Alberto Riella: Las organizaciones rurales y el proceso de integración.

youth working groups inside REAF, Coprofam has also started to address these issues internally, allowing exchanges of information and exchanges of experiences.⁵⁷

In this phase, for the consolidation of allegiances, it was important to use a political category of identification that brought together several national entities representing an enormous diversity of players in the region, such as family farmers, small farmers, rural wage workers, etc. The coalition had adopted the term ‘family farmer’ from its beginning. The debate of the concept and its use as a political category of identification was important to differentiate family farmers from their counterparts: big agribusiness companies. Differentiating them from others was an important strategy to create some form of solidarity between the different agents that were subsumed under the term.

However, when new organisations joined the coalition, they began to point out the limits of this category. It could not fully represent the diversity of rural agents in the region. Some organisations that joined Coprofam did not have a sense of belonging to this category, because they used other categories in their own contexts, such as peasants and indigenous people. In an interview with a Brazilian leader of Coprofam (and Contag) about the challenges for political action at the international level when representing a group of different regional organisations, she stated:

[...] it is something very interesting, that most of the family farming organisations of Latin America include indigenous people in its constituencies. In Brazil, we do not have this anymore. If you look inside the old registers of Contag, you are going to see the indigenous people were part of it a long time ago [...]. The demands are very close, but they do not act together, and that’s a fact today. Our contact with other Latin-American organisations is driving us back to consider the indigenous agenda and it is important for us.⁵⁸

How do you construct an identity category that includes and represents the diversity of actors and experiences in an alliance such as Coprofam? The solution found by Coprofam was to use the terms ‘family farmer’, ‘peasant’, and ‘indigenous’ simultaneously, highlighting the diversity of social actors existent in all of Coprofam’s organisations. It did so in a process of building a coalitional identity that strengthens the alliance.⁵⁹

57 Contag: Anais do 7^o Congresso Nacional dos Trabalhadores e Trabalhadoras Rurais, Brasília 1998.

58 Interview with Coprofam and Contag leader granted to Marco Antonio Teixeira on 26 October 2015 as a contribution to his PhD Dissertation Teixeira, Marco Antonio dos Santos. *Movimentos Sociais, Ações Coletivas e Reprodução Social: a Experiência da Contag (1963–2015)*. PhD Dissertation, IESP-UERJ, Rio de Janeiro 2018, p. 177.

59 Regarding the debate on building up a coalition identity, see Marco Antonio Teixeira/Renata

It is possible to detect these changes in Coprofam's official documents. By 2003, in all Coprofam statements, they asserted that they represented family farmer organisations.⁶⁰ In 2003, they extended the term by using the category "family farming and peasant(s)".⁶¹ From 2005 on, they began to expand even more, including the term "family farmers, peasant and indigenous people".⁶² In an interview with a Coprofam leader, she mentioned the importance of organising around concepts and agendas, as this helps bring together different social actors and their experiences:

If you have the opportunity to see what the demands in Africa are, what the demands in in Asia are, what the demands in Europe are, [you will see that] these are totally different worlds. [...] We worked very hard to find unity, to identify what we shared internationally. We agreed that despite the way we identified ourselves in each country—shepherd, family farmer, small producer—we produce food in the countryside with a familiar basis.⁶³

The process of building unity around certain aspects and overcoming differences had its importance in this phase, but it did not end then. These kinds of processes are continuous and are important for the constitution, articulation, and maintenance of the coalition, enabling the establishment of agreements between dissimilar groups, as they facilitate the coexistence of distinct agents. The construction of a coalition identity is thus an end in itself.⁶⁴ From 2012 on, for example, the category of "family farmers, peasant(s) and indigenous people" was replaced by "family farmers, peasant(s) and native and indigenous people". In the 2012 statements, they also included gender equality, trying to highlight the existence and importance of women in their organisation.⁶⁵

Motta: Coprofam's Action to Expand Relations with other Movements, Organizations and Regions, in: *Social Movement Studies* (forthcoming).

- 60 Declaración de la Coprofam: Rosario, Argentina, 16 October 1996. Declaración de la Coprofam: Carta de Florianópolis, 1 October 1999.
- 61 Declaración de Coprofam: IV Asamblea Ordinaria, Ypacarai, Paraguay, 10–12 June 2003. Declaración de Brasilia (ministros, representantes de gobiernos y representantes de la sociedad civil), 20–22 August 2003.
- 62 Declaración de la Coprofam: V Asamblea Ordinaria, Montevideo, 28 October 2005. Declaración de Coprofam: Carta de Santiago de Chile, 1 September 2006. Declaración de la Coprofam: VI Asamblea Ordinaria, Paysandú, Uruguay, 23 November 2007.
- 63 Interview with Coprofam and Contag leader granted to Marco Antonio Teixeira on 26 October 2015 as a contribution to his PhD Dissertation. Teixeira, Marco Antonio dos Santos. *Movimentos Sociais, Ações Coletivas e Reprodução Social: a Experiência da Contag (1963–2015)*. This quotation was not used in the dissertation.
- 64 Angela Alonso: *As teorias dos movimentos sociais: Um balanço do debate*, in: *Lua Nova* 76 (2009), pp. 49–86, p. 66.
- 65 Declaración de la Coprofam: VIII Asamblea Ordinaria, Buenos Aires, 15 March 2012. Declaración de la Coprofam: X Asamblea Ordinaria, Montevideo, 15 July 2017.

The International Year of Family Farming (IYFF) in 2014 was another important moment for broadening the actions of Coprofam. While Coprofam was striving to be acknowledged as the representative of family farmers for the South American region, it also established wider connections beyond the institutional framework of Mercosur. In the early 2000s, its members were participating in seminars worldwide, such as the World Farmers Meeting, in Yaundé, Cameroon.⁶⁶ These activities in Coprofam's own words, were intended to "open communication channels with other groups" (translated by the authors).⁶⁷ This pattern was extended, and the connections multiplied during the fourth sub-cycle, as we will see in the following section.

Fourth Sub-cycle (2005–2015): International Visibility Beyond Mercosur

For Coprofam and its national members, REAF was an opportunity for face-to-face meetings biannually, helping them with agenda-setting and framing. Activists had to be prepared to present proposals regarding the very definition of family farming and other related issues. They had to dispute their points of view with government officials and international bureaucrats, frequently overcoming language barriers and educational and cultural inequalities. All of these factors affected their methods of collective action, as they were partaking in an institutional arrangement with specific norms and mechanisms.

Beyond the engagement of some national public agents (such as the policymakers working inside the Brazilian Ministry for Rural Development), the Confederation was a driving force for agenda-setting inside REAF and the range of issues multiplied proportionally to the diversity of working groups: trade regulation, sanitation barriers, insurance and risk management, agrarian policies, access to land and land reform.

During REAF's consolidation, the ties with IFAD were strengthened and, in 2007, they signed another agreement to enhance Coprofam's capacity for political dialogue in the region.⁶⁸ They also promoted contacts with the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO), both in its regional office for Latin America and the Caribbean and in its headquarters in Rome. By 2009, FAO supported a project for leadership capacity building, aiming to improve Coprofam's interventions during international meetings and negotiations. The project trained 270 activists from six coun-

66 Coprofam: Memoria de la Reunión de la Coprofam. Buenos Aires, 29–30 May 2006.

67 Coprofam: Relatorio de la Gestión 2003–2005, Archivo Contag (Assessoria da presidência), Montevideo 2005.

68 Programa Regional Fida Mercosur ClaeH: Plataformas de diálogo político sobre agricultura familiar campesina—La estrategia y experiencia de FIDA en el Mercosur ampliado, Montevideo 2013.

tries (Mercosur and associated countries, plus Ecuador) on Territorial Development in Latin America and helped to foster integration among the member organisations of Coprofam, in addition to strengthening their local initiatives.⁶⁹ By the end of the 2000s, the Confederation was engaged in the debates of the FAO Food Security Committee (CFS) reform, earning a seat on the Food Security and Nutrition Civil Society Mechanism to the Committee on World Food Security (or Civil Society Mechanism, in short) created in 2010, as a representation of family farmers from Latin America.

Coprofam also established partnerships with international NGOs such as Oxfam and Action Aid, and was invited by the World Rural Forum⁷⁰ to join the campaign for the UN International Year of Family Farming (IYFF). After 2010, Coprofam was the reference organisation for the IYFF in Latin America and was a member of the International Consultative Committee.

Beyond the Mercosur context, Coprofam also sought to act in different countries and multilateral spaces, as well as international bodies and entities. The expansion of their activities must be understood within the context of greater political openness, that was achieved notably through the creation of new participatory institutions (some of them inspired by the “REAF Model”). This enlargement also constitutes a strategy of political action, as it increases the possibilities to defend the family farming agenda in international contexts by means of a multi-engagement approach. Since Coprofam is a coordinator of national organisations, they have been able to increase their capacity to participate in international contexts, representing both regional and national organisations.

With this, they have sought to spread their understanding of family farming and their political project through forums around the world, such as the Community of Portuguese Language Speaking Countries (CPLP). The model of family farming existent in the region (and its correlation with the debate on food security) is being used as a parameter for agricultural recommendations in international arenas and as a reference for public policies for rural development in other parts of the world. The exchange of experiences does not only occur between Coprofam and external agents, but also between the organisations that compose the Confederation itself. According to a Brazilian activist:

Some countries have made more progress than Brazil. (...). The sanitary law of Argentina is considered the best law inside Mercosur. So now we are pressing the Brazilian government to use it as a model. The “Tenure of land law” of Bolivia—the

69 FAO: Formación de Líderes Rurales. Santiago 2012.

70 The World Rural Forum is an international NGO based in the Basque Country, Spain, created in 1998, working as a network-hub and an advocacy agent for rural development among different small-scale farmers’ organisations around the world. For further details, see: <http://www.ruralforum.org/en/who-we-are> (accessed on 19 December 2019).

recognition of territories, communities—is very interesting and another example. Coprofam is a space of exchange and setting common agendas (translated by the authors).⁷¹

They also have an impact on national struggles, as stated by a Paraguayan activist of the National Peasant Organisation (Organización Nacional Campesina, Onac, in Spanish): “to Onac, the affiliation with Coprofam is very important. Through the Confederation, we have a lot of contact with other countries and, also, with the government of Paraguay, because government officers know Coprofam” (translated by the authors).⁷²

The contact between nationally based organisations also helps to reinforce bonds of solidarity and foster the exchange of experiences between movements. Being contextual and relational, these transnational links can be made and remade, done and undone according to the context and the interactions. The alliance between and among movements is, therefore, a historical process.

In sum, the consolidation of REAF and its emergence as a good model for state-society interaction on the regional level helped Coprofam to reach new opportunities, and address new issues and agendas. Coprofam has played an expert role in the agenda of family farming, by continuously presenting its proposals on public policies for family farming and stressing the relevance of the participation of civil society organisations for building well-adapted policies—a process that is well summarised under the category of “expertise” according to Cefai’s proposal.⁷³ The result of this process has been an expansion of contacts with other international bodies. As the wave of leftist governments reaches its limits in many of the South American countries with the election of right-wing presidents, the maintenance of participatory spaces is now an open question, challenging the Confederation to create a new agenda of action and scholars to analyse these new situations.

71 Interview given by a Contag leader to Marco Antonio Teixeira on 23 October 2015 as a contribution to his PhD Dissertation. Marco Antonio dos Santos Teixeira: *Movimentos Sociais, Ações Coletivas e Reprodução Social: a Experiência da Contag (1963–2015)*. 2018, p. 179.

72 Interview given by a Onac/Paraguayan activist to Priscila Delgado de Carvalho on 8 September 2010 as contribution to her Master’s Thesis. Priscila Delgado de Carvalho: *Ação Coletiva Transnacional e Mercosul: Organizações Da Sociedade Civil Do Brasil e Do Paraguai Na Reunião Especializada sobre Agricultura Familiar (REAF)*. This quotation was not used in the thesis.

73 Daniel Cefai: *Como uma associação nasce para o público: Vínculos locais e arena pública em torno da associação La Bellevilleuse, em Paris*.

Conclusion

The work presented here sought to briefly present the development of Coprofam, aiming to discuss issues of the sociology of social movements, namely cross-movements cooperation. Coprofam, despite its political achievements and almost three-decade long history, has received very little attention from scholars. These initial reflections on its evolution are a step towards better understanding this transnational actor, as well as contributions to the debate: why do different social movements choose to act together and what conditions can facilitate the longevity of a coalition over time?

We have noticed that a *common external threat* is a possible and strong impetus for the establishment of ties between distinct groups who see collective action as a necessary strategy to achieve their own interests. In addition, previous social ties, political cultures and historical memories in the region were key to the creation of this alliance. It was also important to the formation and permanence of this alliance that the debates on the identity of Coprofam as a coalition, as well as Coprofam's actions, expanded relations with other movements, organisations and regions. As we demonstrated, the role as a coordinator, which Coprofam fulfilled as time passed, has not been exclusively limited to its activities in Mercosur and against its opponents.

In the beginning in 1994, small farmer organisations throughout the Mercosur area established and created the Confederation. It was a response to the regional processes in trade and their impacts on rural livelihoods. The strategy of Coprofam was, firstly, to distinguish production through family farming from the agribusiness model. Over time, Coprofam needed to tackle new forms of interaction, after being inside a public arena such as REAF. The enlargement of political constituencies presented new challenges, such as establishing common ground among different groups and improving use of REAF for national, regional, and international leverage. After the consolidation of REAF, some other forms of engagement between different movements manifested, including contacts with other transnational networks. Consequently, Coprofam helped to establish infrastructures that allowed civil society groups to become more active in regional politics.

At the present time, some South American countries are experiencing a revival of neoliberal policies, leading to a retraction of participatory opportunities established in previous decades. The future of this process remains open. At the same time, the regional links among male and female family farmers, peasants and native and indigenous people hold potential for developing new research, such as analysing the potential forms of cross-movement coalitions, in different political contexts.

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