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Oliver Pye

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The biofuel connection – transnational activism and the palm oil boom

Oliver Pye

The 10 percent mandatory target for ‘renewable energy’ adopted by the European Parliament in December 2008 is fuelling a frenzy of investment in palm oil across Southeast Asia, leading in turn to the emergence of new, transnational campaign alliances. The specific dynamics of alliance building, political strategies and impacts of palm oil activism are shaped by the key role of the Indonesian environmental and agrarian justice movement, the broadening and radicalisation of groups in Europe and the ways in which these are interconnected by transnational activists. Campaigning has been successful in creating a transnational political debate around palm oil and biofuels and in influencing public opinion in Europe. Peasant activists have played an important role by combining issues of biodiversity and climate change with food sovereignty and by embedding the critique of biofuels within the global movement for climate justice. However, discontented palm oil smallholders and plantation workers are conspicuously absent at the transnational level. Building alliances between agrarian movements and plantation workers could strengthen the movement against biofuels by tapping into the potential offered by the transnational social and economic spaces which characterise the palm oil industry.

Keywords: biofuels; palm oil; transnational activism; climate justice; Southeast Asia

Introduction

The plans to introduce mandatory targets for ‘renewable energy’ in the transport sector of the European Union have fuelled a frenzy of investment and expansion in the palm oil sector across Southeast Asia and beyond. They also led to an unprecedented politicisation of climate change policy in Europe. Within a period of perhaps two years, ‘biofuels’ changed from being a little-known technology seen as vaguely ‘environmentally sustainable’ to a household term associated with rainforest destruction and the food crisis. The transnational campaigns around the negative consequences of the palm oil boom were a key factor in this shift in public opinion.

A new transnational political space has emerged between Europe and Southeast Asia in which Europe’s climate change policies and the spatial drift of their consequences are contested by a corporate biofuel agenda on the one hand, and new ‘transnational campaign alliances’ on the other. This paper seeks to analyse the

I would like to thank the editors and three anonymous reviewers for their painstaking review of the earlier drafts of this paper and also Ben White, Jenny Franco and John McCarthy for their comments at the global workshop on Biofuels, Land and Agrarian Change in Halifax sponsored by *JPS* and Initiatives in Critical Agrarian Studies (ICAS). I would also like to thank activists from AMAN, Gemawan, WALHI, Sawit Watch, SPI and FSPM for taking time to discuss some of the issues raised in this paper.

specific dynamics of alliance building, political strategies and impacts of the palm oil related biofuels activism. How is the current expansion of plantations transforming Southeast Asia and what kind of opposition has emerged because of it? Which European groups are involved in biofuels activism? How are they linked to social movements in Southeast Asia? How has the biofuels agenda changed the nature of palm oil activism? How is this reflected in the way the campaigns are conducted? What impacts have they had so far? Finally, what strategic questions arise from the way in which these campaign alliances have developed until now?

Sidney Tarrow (2005) sees the basis for the emergence of transnational campaign alliances in a large number of 'rooted cosmopolitans', which he defines as 'individuals and groups who mobilise domestic and international resources and opportunities to advance claims on behalf of external actors, against external opponents, or in favour of goals they hold in common with transnational allies' (p. 29). These rooted cosmopolitans work together if a 'transnational contention' develops, defined as 'conflicts that link transnational activists to one another, to states, and to international institutions' (p. 29). The biofuel agenda is a classic example of a 'transnational contention'. As the implications of the proposed mandatory targets for Southeast Asia and Latin America became clear, activists started questioning the merits of biofuels. The experience with palm oil in particular, and linkages with activists in Indonesia who could explain what was happening on the ground, became crucial in developing hard-hitting campaigns that delegitimised biofuels as a 'false solution' to climate change.

Biofuel-related palm oil expansion is happening across Southeast Asia, and Malaysian corporations are also investing in places like Liberia, Brazil, and Colombia. However, by far the biggest expansion is taking place in Indonesia. It is here that the most vocal opposition to the palm oil boom is emerging and where most of the impulses for the transnational campaigns come from. And it is here that the story of transnational palm oil activism must start.

The first section of this paper examines how transnational economic processes contribute to agrarian transformation in Southeast Asia. In the standard literature on transnational activism, the term transnational is often used synonymously with international or global (Smith 1997, Tarrow 2005, Della Porta *et al.* 2006). However, a more specific use of the term has emerged in migration studies (Pries 2001, 2008, Vertovec 1999, 2009) to analyse transnational social spaces created by migrant networks, which transcend the 'national container state' (Pries 2001, 3–33) and which are neither between nation states (international) nor global. This distinction is useful in this context because the biofuel-palm-oil trajectory involves specific 'transnationalised circuits of accumulation and production' (Robinson 2004, 14–15) and a specific, contested political space linking Southeast Asia and Europe (and not to the same extent, for example, linking Southeast Asia and the United States or China). I will argue that a process of social differentiation and class formation is taking place which is creating new social classes involved in palm oil production, including a specific transnational social space of Indonesian migrants in the Malaysian oil palm plantations.

This agrarian transformation is a contested and conflictive process, leading to a multitude of local land conflicts, negotiations between palm oil smallholders and plantation companies, and struggles by plantation workers over wages and working conditions. The second section of this paper discusses these different discontents and how the Indonesian environmental and agrarian justice movement has reacted to the

biofuel challenge. I will argue that there is a division between defensive struggles by peasants, indigenous peoples and environmental justice activists against further palm oil expansion and social struggles taking place within the new social relations of palm oil production. This division influences the way the transnational campaigns developed.

The third section of the paper analyses how the biofuel agenda transformed the transnational campaigning around palm oil. It looks first at the European groups involved in the campaign alliance and how they are linked to the Indonesian social movements discussed in section two. The differences in the class composition of the European and Indonesian movements that make up the campaign alliance is pronounced, and structurally imposed by the spatial drift of the European biofuels policy. A key question here is which transnational activists link up across this transnational political space. Secondly, the political strategies of the campaigns are discussed, particularly the question of whether 'friction' (Tsing 2005) leads to a spatial shift in terms of framing and issues. I will argue that while there is a certain drift away from social problems towards biodiversity and climate issues in the European arena, the biofuel agenda has expanded and radicalised the critique of palm oil to award more prominence to land conflicts, working conditions and the food crisis. Thirdly, this section examines the impact of campaigning so far. While the key objective of stopping mandatory targets was not achieved, the campaigns were very successful in framing debates and influencing public opinion, and achieved some success at the policy level as well.

When analysing transnational activism around palm oil, we need to differentiate between transnational protest campaigns with a specific focus and 'the movement against neoliberal globalisation [that] links different transnational protest campaigns and provides a shared master frame and a series of organisational structures [. . .] that interact periodically in transnational events' (Della Porta *et al.* 2006, 61). In this way, the campaigning around biofuels can be seen as a particular *transnational campaign alliance* (Tarrow 2005) and as part of an 'emerging broad inter-TAM [Transnational Agrarian Movements] alliance around climate change or agrofuels' (Borras *et al.* 2008, 30). I will argue that disaggregating and linking the two can contribute to the 'under-explored' question of how thematic movements relate to each other and towards a 'better and fuller understanding of actually existing local-national-global linkages' (Borras *et al.* 2008, 11). So, whilst the direct input of the agrarian justice movement was fairly minimal in the *transnational* campaigning, Indonesian peasant organisations have played a prominent role in bringing the biofuels issue to the *global* movement for climate justice.

The paper is based partly on participant-observation made as a scholar-activist in the context of biofuels campaigning and the Copenhagen protests and partly on shorter research trips to Indonesia and Malaysia since 2006, during which I conducted various discussions, interviews and workshops with activists from agrarian, environmental and labour movements. I write therefore from a position of engagement and commitment but, as Edelman (2009a) suggests, also with a view to challenging some of the assumptions and strategies that are currently in place. So, I argue that despite important successes, particularly in creating a transnational political debate around palm oil and agrofuels and in influencing public opinion in Europe, the transnational activism around palm oil has yet to tap into the potential offered by the transnational social and economic spaces which characterise the palm oil and biofuel industries.

Palm oil and transnational agrarian transformation in Southeast Asia

The prospect of a subsidised and long-term guaranteed market for biofuels has substantially accelerated the expansion of oil palm plantations. Plantation area in Malaysia and Indonesia has already doubled since 1997, reaching around 10 million hectares by 2005. Current plans aim to treble the area devoted to oil palm in Indonesia alone to 20 million hectares by 2020, or, if plans of the ‘National Team on Biofuel’ are believed, to nearly 30 million hectares by 2025 (BWI 2007). Plantations are also expanding in Sarawak, Southern Thailand, the Philippines (mainly Mindanao) and in Papua New Guinea. The biofuel-related expansion imposes new, palm oil plantation ‘social relations of nature’ (*‘gesellschaftliche Naturverhältnisse’*; Görg 1999) that lead to a complex and spatially differentiated process of agrarian transformation and, consequently, to emerging opposition to the palm oil boom which has different but interconnected class bases.

To understand the causes, processes, mechanisms and contexts of this agrarian differentiation (White 1989, 26) it is important to see the different places and scales in which it is happening. While each new palm oil plantation has a specific impact in a given locality and is shaped by national policies and local power relations, they are all related to transnational economic, social and political spaces that determine the ways in which the biofuels agenda is promoted and contested.

In the case of palm oil, the *cause* of the current agrarian differentiation can be located within a ‘corporate food regime’ (McMichael 2009, 148), in which a ‘palm oil industrial complex’ (Pye 2008) made up of transnational corporations (TNCs) and state capital and government agencies from Malaysia, Singapore and Indonesia controls global commodity chains reaching from the plantations via mills and refineries to processed fats, oleochemicals, cosmetics, etc. The commodity chains and TNCs create a specific transnational economic space of production across Southeast Asia, with Malaysian TNCs driving plantation expansion, and another specific transnational economic space linking Southeast Asia to agribusiness and food TNCs in Europe. In the context of a neoliberal climate governance system, the Palm Oil Industrial Complex is hybridising to form a ‘biofuel regime’, in which agribusiness allies itself to European oil and automotive corporations (Pye 2009a) by adding biodiesel factories to existing structures of production. A new ‘transnational biofuels space’ between Southeast Asia and Europe is thus emerging. Correspondingly, these TNCs dominate the current expansion (Wakker 2005) and the process of differentiation, i.e. the ‘shifts in patterns of control over means of production’ (White 1989, 26).

How does the biofuel-related expansion of palm oil contribute to the ‘actual condition of the social differentiation of the peasantry’ (Borras 2009, 18)? From ‘outside’, palm oil is inserted into a landscape already characterised by ongoing class differentiation, accelerating this process in different ways. It is important to factor in the particular sequence and geography of palm oil expansion. At issue is not just a quantitative expansion, but also a qualitative shift. In a first, ‘national’ phase, palm oil was established in the plantation heartlands on the western coast of Peninsular Malaysia and in northern Sumatra, which had been dominated by the (rubber) plantation economy since colonial times. In a second, ‘transnational’ phase, transnational corporations responded to increased demand for processed fats by expanding into Sabah and Sarawak in Malaysia and into Riau and Jambi on Sumatra. The current (third) phase of biofuels-related expansion and planned

expansion is taking place in Kalimantan, Sulawesi and West Papua. If the first phase of oil palm expansion basically involved the replacement of existing rubber plantations by oil palm, the second and third phases (perhaps from 1997 onwards) are taking place in 'frontier' regions where the new plantations are established on logged or degraded forest areas and agricultural land.

Sequential geographic expansion leads to a spatial continuum of social differentiation. Established areas in North Sumatra and Riau correspond to conditions in Java, where wage-labour prevails (White and Wiradi 1989) and where an 'independent peasantry does not in any way constitute the basis of the system of agrarian production' (Hüsken and White 1989, 259). The new palm oil expansion, however, is taking place in areas where peasant smallholder mixed farming systems still prevail, and where between 12 and 60 million people are estimated to be 'living in and around forests' (Li 1999a, xiv). On the outer islands of Indonesia, a 'combination of market-oriented and extensive, subsistence-oriented agricultural practices is quite common' (Dove 1996, 44) and managed forest gardens and community forests are still important sources of livelihoods (Peluso and Padoch 1996). Here, the defence of customary land and agro-forestry systems forms the basis for opposition by an 'independent peasantry' to further palm oil expansion.

The key mechanism by which palm oil is introduced to these socially differentiated landscapes is the *inti-plasma* system. Going back to the developmental state period (see McCarthy 2010, this volume), this model was initially introduced by state enterprises,¹ but has now become the chosen method of implementation for the palm oil TNCs as well. According to this model, the plantation company (private or state) enters into a partnership agreement with the local population whereby the company receives (or takes) (customary) land to establish the nucleus (*inti*) plantation (usually with a palm oil mill at its centre) and in exchange the villagers receive two-hectare parcels of land on which they can grow and harvest palm oil (the *plasma*).²

The *inti-plasma* system creates a basic trend of social transformation from independent peasants and landless migrants to contract farmers, creating a new class of indebted palm oil smallholders and a new area of conflict between them and the parent company. However, a process of further differentiation sets in amongst the contract farmers, with 'wealthy armchair NES farmers' (White 1999, 247) and those opting for 'off-farm work' hiring labour to work on their plots. McCarthy (2010) shows that the options open to *plasma* contract farmers depended on location, the time of entry point, prior social position, and political influence. Depending on the context, i.e. on the region and stage of palm oil development, a picture emerges of 'land concentration and capitalist farming on the one hand and (near) landlessness and proletarianisation on the other' coupled simultaneously with the 'tenacity of the small-peasant households in contexts of overall capitalist penetration of the economy' (White 1989, 28). Farmers crowded out by the palm oil expansion join the 30 million unemployed (Wakker 2005, 35) and are forced to accept the miserable working conditions on the plantations. The simultaneousness leads to 'different

¹For example, for rubber plantations (Dove 1996, 46–47). See also White's study (1999) of the state PTPN XII Cisokan hybrid coconut Nucleus Estate in West-Java.

²In its 'PIR-trans' form, the *inti-plasma* system was a key component of the *transmigrasi* programme, bringing Javanese migrants as indebted contract farmers to the outer islands (van Gelder 2004, 19).

forms of labor and of surplus extraction [being] found not only in the community but also in one person' (White 1989, 21). Thus, independent farmers from adjacent villages or plasma contract farmers take up work as temporary labourers on the plantations, which make up the majority of the jobs on offer.³ Conversely, former peasants who take up permanent work retain ties to the village, or are given garden plots in the plantation housing estates (West Kalimantan field research 2009), becoming Lenin's 'allotment-holding wage workers' (Bernstein 2009, 65).

One important dimension of the ambiguous class position of the 'part-time plantation proletariat' is the 'coexisting processes of cyclical and permanent mobility' (White 1989, 19), which, in the modern era of palm oil expansion, can take on a transnational character. Most of the 500,000 plantation workers in Malaysia are now from Indonesia (in addition to perhaps 1.5 million workers in Indonesia; Marti 2008, 77), and they create a new transnational social space. This space is defined by the precarious state of their existence in Malaysia, contacts and exchange with their families and friends in Indonesia and the social networks necessary to obtain employment, negotiate borders and if necessary, to continue working illegally. Rural livelihoods in the palm oil context become multidimensional and multi-local (Borras 2009, 8).

The palm oil boom is thus creating multiple and ambiguous social formations and is affecting different classes in different ways. Independent peasants in the frontier areas where plantations are being introduced might welcome them as a development option or might resist them and defend their land and forests against encroachment by palm oil corporations. Palm oil smallholders in the *inti-plasma* system have accepted palm oil but have new issues relating to prices, debt and infrastructure. Plantation workers within the palm oil industry have different contestations concerning wages, working conditions and the right to organise. The multiple livelihoods related to palm oil expansion thus create the basis for different but interconnected struggles and social movements.

Biofuels and the environmental and agrarian justice movement in Indonesia

The way in which palm oil-related social movements emerge also depends on the specific historical development of environmental, agrarian and workers movements and on their political ideologies and the strategies they pursue. The most relevant opposition to palm oil expansion is taking place in Indonesia, not only because most expansion is happening here but also because a strong environmental and agrarian justice movement was already in place. Similar albeit smaller movements and dynamics are also developing in other areas of expansion, such as on Mindanao in the Philippines, in Sarawak and Sabah, in Southern Thailand and in Papua New Guinea. However, this section focuses on the Indonesian movements as they are the most relevant for the transnational campaigns.

A decisive turning point in the history of social movements in Indonesia was the massacre of 1965, which physically destroyed the peasant and labour movement, ushering in Suharto's 'New Order' and a development strategy based partly on

³For example, the Wilmar corporation stated for its Sambas plantation, an area of recent expansion, that of the 1,200 workers, only 26 percent were permanent staff, the rest being employed on a temporary basis (e.g. for establishing the plantation or for planting) or as daily labourers (Milieudefensie *et al.* 2007, 94).

'large-scale land dispossession by central state institutions and their corporate or other capitalist cronies' (Peluso *et al.* 2008, 213). As explained by Peluso *et al.* (2008), in the context of the expansion of state territorial control and state capitalist development where land conflicts were closely related to the imposition of state forests under the control of the Forestry Department, the environment became an issue where activists could organise without being associated with the communist-tinged land reform movement (see also Gordon 1998, 9–11). In 1980, environmental activists founded the environmental forum *Wahana Lingkungan Hidup Indonesia* (WALHI), which expanded quickly as a grassroots network of hundreds of NGOs and local initiatives that opposed the environmental costs of Indonesia's export-led boom, such as logging and industrial pollution of rivers and dams.

Towards the end of Suharto's rule, there was also a resurgence of clandestine peasant (and worker, see La Botz 2001) organisations (for example, the peasants union in North Sumatra, the *Serikat Petani Sumatera Utara* (SPSU) was founded in 1994; field research 2007) and the emergence of a 'nascent Indigenous Peoples movement' (Peluso *et al.* 2008, 211). Peluso *et al.* (2008, 219) argue that three interconnected movements developed around environmental justice, indigenous peoples, and agrarian reform, which found 'common ground against the Forestry Laws and the parts of the Basic Agrarian Law that enabled state land acquisition'. In Sumatra, Sulawesi, and Kalimantan, forestry laws 'defined many of [indigenous peoples'] agroforestry holdings or reserved areas as "empty" and "abandoned" land, and criminalised their agricultural systems of swidden cultivation' (Peluso *et al.* 2008, 218). Environmental justice activists allied themselves to indigenous peoples who were 'critical participants in early environmental justice struggles, in part because they were usually represented as having environmentally friendly "customary" practices' (p. 218). The alliance with the land reform movement, on the other hand, was centred on Java, where the Sundanese Peasant Union organised 30,000 mainly landless or extremely poor smallholders, and in North Sumatra, where the SPSU claims to have increased the number of local organisation membership from 40 to 163 since 1998 (field research 2006).

Peluso *et al.* also point to an important split between 'relatively coercive and justice-oriented environmental groups' (2008, 232), a division that will later become relevant for the development of conflicting transnational campaigns around palm oil (see below). The 'relatively coercive' (often international) conservationist organisations were not keen on land reform initiatives on forest land, preferring to make 'some previously unheard of deals with big capital, reflecting a neoliberal-era follow-up to the coercive conservation alliances made by international conservation groups with military and authoritarian states of the developmentalist era' (p. 228), whilst environmental justice activists used environmental framing to argue for access to land and forest resources, translating 'traditional practices of *Masyarakat Adat* [indigenous peoples] into notions of sustainable resource management' (p. 229).

The *Reformasi* movement that toppled Suharto opened up political space which was seized upon by activists, leading to heightened activity and organisation. According to Peluso *et al.* (2008, 220) 'tens of thousands of peasants and farmers, landless people and smallholders occupied state forest and plantation lands' in the post-*Reformasi* years, leading to a 'repeasantisation' (p. 210) process. Sumatra-based activists associated with the Synthesis Foundation and West Java/Bandung-based groups set up the Federation of Peasant Unions of Indonesia (*Federasi Serikat Petani Indonesia*, FSPI, dropping the F in 2007) in 1998 and the indigenous peoples

movement founded the Alliance of the Indigenous Peoples of the Archipelago (*Aliansi Masyarakat Adat Nusantara* [AMAN]) in 1999. This period of open organisation coincided with the accelerated expansion of palm oil (in connection with the increased Malaysian investment after the IMF induced liberalisation of the sector; Ginting 2005), and, with the forest fires of 1997 highlighting the ecological consequences of forest conversion to plantations, palm oil was to become a new focus of the environmental justice movement.

How has the environmental justice movement responded to the new challenges posed by the oil palm expansion? Following Peluso *et al.* (2008) I would argue that its previous role in combining environmental issues and paradigms with both the land reform movement and with the indigenous movement has given it the experience necessary in adapting to the new situation created by palm oil.

The most active opposition to palm oil plantations comes from the independent peasantry, as shown by the occurrence of numerous conflicts over land rights. A study of the years 1998–2001 documented over 800 arrests, over 400 cases of torture, and 12 deaths in connection with land conflicts with plantations (Down to Earth 2002). Another study found that all of the 81 palm oil plantations in South Sumatra had some kind of conflict with local communities (Marti 2008, 39) in the year 2000. The environmental forum WALHI documented 200 palm oil-related conflicts for West Kalimantan, one of the main areas of recent expansion (WALHI Kalimantan Barat, n.d). In 2008, the palm oil watchdog Sawit Watch registered 513 ongoing cases, and estimates the total number at up to 1000 (Marti 2008: 39).

In those areas characterised by new expansion, the indigenous movement led by AMAN acts defensively to resist further expansion. Often, communities defend ‘traditional’ social relations of nature, invoking and modifying customary law institutions or replacing them with modern organisations (Colchester *et al.* 2006). Some village-level struggles have been successful in preventing the imposition of plantations in their area (Sujarni 2009), while other indigenous groups have shown a high level of mobilisation and readiness for confrontational tactics after plantations have been introduced (for various examples see Colchester *et al.* 2006, Marti 2008, Potter 2008). The agrarian reform movement has adopted an offensive strategy in landscapes already shaped by oil palm plantations by occupying plantations and replacing them with small-scale agriculture. According to SPI representatives, the SPSU has occupied around 40,000 ha in North Sumatra (interview, December 2009). In the Medan region in 2007, the author witnessed an occupation by SPSU members of the state palm oil plantation PTPN II, who were reclaiming land expropriated by the state in 1966.

In addition to movements resisting the further expansion of palm oil, the new social relations created by the palm oil industry are also contradictory and are giving rise to connected but distinct issues and organisations. As explained above, the *inti-plasma* regime creates a new social group of indebted contract farmers who are highly dependent on the parent company. The precariousness of their existence has increased with the current economic crisis and the drastic drop in palm oil prices in the second half of 2008. Smallholders demonstrated in Jambi for government intervention after prices for fresh fruit bunches dropped from Rp2000 to Rp200–300, or by 90 percent (Yayasan SETARA *et al.* 2008). Local protests of this kind led to the foundation of the first independent union of palm oil smallholders, the *Serikat Petani Kepala Sawit* (SPKS), in 2006 (Colchester and Jiwan 2006). The SPKS organises around basic issues such as prices and infrastructure to try and increase the

bargaining power of the smallholders vis-à-vis the parent company. However, it also demands a stop to further plantation expansion (SPKS 2006).

The new freedoms of the *Reformasi*-era have also been conducive to a wave of organising initiatives in the plantation industry. The Federation of Independent Trade Unions, *Federasi Serikat Perkerja Mandiri* (FSPM),⁴ has been able to significantly increase the rate of organisation in the established oil palm plantations of Sumatra over the past few years (Dharmabumi 2009). A well known conflict took place between a newly founded trade union, *Kahutindo*, and the company *Musim Mas* between 2004 and 2006, which involved strike action, arrests and mass dismissals (IUF 2006). There are also signs of movement among the transnational migrants in Malaysian plantations. Although their precarious situation is normally thought to be an impediment for organising, the migrant networks involved, ‘involving broad and deep contact between the rank and file across borders’ (Fox and Bada 2008, 268), seem to offer a basis for ‘informal’ and ‘covert’ forms of ‘everyday resistance’ (Scott 1985, 33). The palm oil industry, at least, is worried about the unruly nature of the Indonesian workers, who they see as ‘organised in a gang-like fashion’, prone to industrial unrest and with a strong ‘tendency to abscond’ (Daud 2006, 46).

The environmental forum WALHI plays a key role in connecting social issues with environmental concerns, and in relating to both the land reform movement and the indigenous movement.⁵ For example, the Riau branch of WALHI, in a region most affected by recent expansion, includes among its active members *Hakiki*, an NGO working with indigenous peoples; *Kabut Riau*, a think tank working on land use planning; *Alam Sumatra*, with a focus on river and coastal ecosystems; *Mitra Isani*, which is working on the use of pesticides on the plantations; and LBH, an NGO working with plantation workers (field research September 2007). In West Kalimantan, the WALHI member organisation *Gemawan* develops campaigns by combining community organising, community natural resource management, local governance, women’s empowerment and community development, focusing on land rights and on the situation of contract farmers (Gemawan 2009), with a certain amount of success, as with a recent campaign against the Ganda Group in Sambas. Recently, both WALHI and the NGO Sawit Watch have begun holding workshops for smallholders in West Kalimantan.

The environmental and agrarian justice movement, therefore, is not only defending (modernised) customary forest management systems as an environmental alternative to oil palm monocultures. At a local level at least, there are various attempts to overcome ‘the divide between “*struggles for land*” (by landless peasants’ associations) and “*struggles for labour reforms*” (by rural labourers’ trade unions)’ which Borras and Franco (2010, 12) locate as a key weakness of contemporary rural social movements. However, these are still very young shoots of an emerging alliance.

⁴A member of the International Union of Foodworkers (IUF).

⁵The relation between the SPI and AMAN is not always so harmonious, partly because of reservations by activists towards the ‘feudal elites’ of customary rights (Peluso *et al.* 2008, 230) and partly because of tactical differences regarding the reform of the Basic Agrarian Law. AMAN supported a revision in order to give adat rights more weight, whilst the SPI opposed a reform because of the neoliberal context of the reform and a perceived danger of ‘opening the Pandora’s box of corporate influence’ (interview 2009, see also Peluso *et al.* 2008).

In the first instance, the relation between indigenous communities and peasants and palm oil contract farmers and plantation workers is contradictory. Contract farmers have accepted the introduction and logic of palm oil, which, in the context of an expansion into a given region, can work against a movement trying to keep palm oil out. Sometimes, conflicting interests are structurally imposed, for example when migrants in the *transmigrasi* programme were incorporated into a palm oil project on land that had previously been used according to customary law. Different social positions between workers and peasants can lead to physical confrontations, for example when company employees are deployed to evict occupations by the agrarian reform movement (as in the case of the SPSU occupation in Medan).

Potentially, however, the multidimensional and multi-local character of rural livelihoods in the palm oil economy creates the material basis of peasant-worker alliances around family linkages and social networks of farmers, casual labourers and migrant workers. As explained above, the process of agrarian differentiation leads to the 'simultaneousness' of different class positions in one community or even person and means that peasants who are in conflict with a plantation company may also work there as casual or permanent labourers. As J.J. Polong, an SPI leader from Palembang, explains, plantation companies usually bring in workers from other areas when they want to evict occupying farmers, because within a given area 'peasants and workers are from the same family or are friends' (interview, December 2009). In the same interview, he focussed on three key issues, which he defined as farmers' rights (including contract farmers), workers' rights, and the environment, and talked in detail about workers' issues such as low wages, the temporary nature of work, lack of insurance and healthcare and too few employment opportunities in the community. Peasant activists, therefore, are aware of worker issues and there is at least some tentative collaboration at a regional level, for example between the SPI in Palembang and the *Serikat Buruh Sejahtera Indonesia* (SBSI), and between the SPSU in Medan and the *Serikat Buruh Sumatera Utara* (SBSU) (field research, October 2006).

There is also the potential of common ground between organised workers and smallholders and a conservation agenda of the environmental justice hue. Both the FSPM and the SPKS, for example, demand a stop to the further expansion of oil palm plantations. On this basis, union recognition, higher wages and better working conditions do not contradict a better deal for smallholders nor land use planning, forest conservation and respect of indigenous rights. Until now, though, the divide between workers and peasants remains the biggest impediment towards creating a national movement that could unite beyond local grievances and challenge the government's pro-palm-oil development agenda. Whilst WALHI and SPI have a close working relationship at the national level, collaborating for example in the alliance *Gerakan Rakyat Lawan Nekolim* (GERAKLAWAN), and Sawit Watch is closely connected to SPKS, there is no such collaboration between WALHI or SPI with the trade union movement (for example with the trade union FSPM, interviews, 2009).

Transnational campaigning around biofuels

Following Borras *et al.* (2008, 13), transnational campaigns around palm oil can be understood as multi-class and multi-sectoral 'thematic advocacy alliances', merging (sub)national movements with diverse class origins as well as different constituencies

with varying degrees of representation and with ideological and political differences. On the Indonesian side, the social transformations associated with the palm oil boom gave rise to social movements of peasants, indigenous peoples, contract farmers, and plantation workers. On the European side, there is no comparable agrarian transformation and – with the exception of the environmental movement – there are no social movements reacting directly to biofuels. Instead, the class basis of the anti-biofuels constituency is more diffuse, based around environmental groups, ethical consumers, ‘concerned citizens’ and political activists.

Rather than direct collaboration between national movements, linkages between local activists in Europe and Southeast Asia are mediated by ‘transnational activists’. These ‘engage in contentious political activities that involve them in transnational networks of contacts and conflicts’ (Tarrow 2005, 29). The differences between the groups involved in a joint campaign and the translation by transnational activists leads to what Tsing terms ‘friction’, i.e. ‘the awkward, unequal, unstable and creative qualities of interconnection across difference’ (Tsing 2005, 4). The specific dynamics of alliance building, political strategies and impacts in palm oil activism therefore depend on which social movements and organisations become involved in joint campaigns and how transnational activists create this interconnection.

Activists involved in palm oil campaigning were able to build on existing networks and constituencies that had their roots in earlier transnational linkages around rainforest issues. In particular, solidarity action with the 1987 logging blockades by the indigenous Penan in Malaysia followed the classic ‘boomerang pattern’ where ‘domestic NGOs bypass their state and directly search out international allies to try to bring pressure on their states from outside’ (Keck and Sikkink 1998, 12). Despite criticism of the Penan campaign,⁶ it did give rise to a wide range of initiatives and NGOs in Europe with a transnational focus on the rainforests of Southeast Asia. The tropical timber boycott campaign (*Tropenholzboykott*) led to hundreds of municipal initiatives and to NGOs such as *Pro Regenwald*, *Rettet den Regenwald* and *Urgewald* in Germany. They were able to mobilise a constituency of ‘rooted rainforest cosmopolitans’⁷ within a discourse of ‘an indigenous people living in symbiotic and spiritual coexistence with the forest pitted against rapacious logging interests’ (Cooke 1999, 144).

As palm oil expansion in Southeast Asia accelerated, and particularly after the forest fires of 1997, several larger international NGOs (INGOs) such as the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) began mobilising around palm oil issues. The basic issue was the destruction of rainforest and the extinction of species (biodiversity), with high-profile mammals such as the orangutan leading the way. They began to tap into the consumer power of the ‘rooted rainforest cosmopolitans’ and were quick to

⁶The Penan campaign has been subjected to a vigorous critique, in part because of the strong reaction of the Malaysian government to the campaign and its depiction of environmentalism as neo-colonialism (Weiss 2004), in part because of the way the Penan were ‘objectified and dehumanised’ by their ‘romanticised, essentialised images’ (Brosius 2003, 326). The Malaysian NGO SAM reacted to the charge of being puppets of Northern NGOs by distancing themselves from parts of the campaign (Brosius 2003) and by stressing their national credentials.

⁷I am using Tarrow’s term in a broader sense than Edelman (2009b), who focuses his analysis on the leaders of La Via Campesina; the point being that rooted cosmopolitans are a far bigger constituency than ‘the leaders of contemporary transnational agrarian movements’ (2009b, 3), who I would place within the subgroup of transnational activists.

see the advantages inherent in transnational commodity chains, developing sophisticated campaigns by using precisely those linkages within the palm oil industry. On this basis, ethical consumers could be mobilised to put pressure on sensitive brands, or to ask their own bank if they invested in palm oil. In other words, NGOs used the specific transnational economic palm oil space to influence the behaviour of corporations involved in the production and processing of palm oil.

In reaction to negative campaigning at the European end of the commodity chains, key palm oil end buyers and retailers (Unilever, Migros, Sainsburys) teamed up with major producers (the Malaysian Palm Oil Association, Golden Hope) and the WWF to set up the 'Roundtable on Sustainable Palm Oil' (RSPO) in 2004. The RSPO is a kind of institutionalised consumer power campaign. As a 'stakeholder initiative' it brings industry together with 'civil society' in order to agree upon guidelines for the industry as a whole. In several annual 'Roundtable Meetings', principles and criteria for sustainable palm oil (including zero-burning, no conversion of high conservation-value forests, respect of indigenous land rights, freedom of organisation) have been discussed and agreed upon.

However, civil society representation in the RSPO was limited to just a few international conservation and charity NGOs (the only Indonesian NGO that joined was Sawit Watch) and was heavily criticised by social movements and organisations with links to the grass roots. After the RSPO member Musim Mas fired nearly 1000 trade union members in 2005, the International Union of Foodworkers denounced the RSPO as a 'hollow front for corporate greed and violence' in which 'the industry is certified as acceptable, responsible or sustainable by a branding operation' (IUF 2006). In 2008, 250 organisations signed an 'International Declaration Against the "Greenwashing" of Palm Oil by the Roundtable on Sustainable Palm Oil' (Anon 2008). The RSPO had no answer to the problem of new investments and further expansion to meet the politically induced demand for biofuels in Europe. Its claim that its certification programme could guarantee 'sustainable biofuels' did nothing to placate the fears created by the rapid rate of forest conversion and the fundamental question of whether it is sensible to use food crops as fuel.

Biofuels led to the broadening of anti-palm-oil groups and to a reframing of critique and alternatives. A large constituency remains the 'rooted rainforest cosmopolitans'. But the campaigning also involves groups involved in agrarian justice issues, North-South solidarity, and in the anti-globalisation (or *altermondialist*) movement. In Germany, for example, apart from 'rainforest' groups such as Rettet den Regenwald, solidarity groups such as INKOTA (a network of Christian North-South solidarity groups and fair trade shops), Watch Indonesia! (a network of activists working on Indonesian solidarity issues) and Misereor (the development agency of the Catholic Church); conservationist groups such as the Hedgerow Conservation Working Group (*Arbeitskreis Heckenschutz im Landkreis Lüchow Dannenberg*), the Westphalian Society for Conservation (*Westfälische Gesellschaft für Artenschutz*) and the German Friends of the Earth member *Bund für Umwelt und Naturschutz Deutschland* (BUND); altermondialist groups such as attac Wendland or the attac agriculture network (*attac Agrarnetz*); and local initiatives such as the Citizen's Initiative (*Bürgerinitiative*) BI 'Kein Strom aus Palmöl!' joined activities against the mandatory target of 10 percent.

An important role, particularly in how the anti-biofuel activities are framed, is played by a host of think tanks, many of which are rooted in the *altermondialist* movement, in the movement for food sovereignty and in the emerging climate justice

movement (see below). Key think tanks in the biofuel campaigning include specialists such as Biofuelwatch (UK) and Sawit Watch (Indonesia) and *altermondialist* NGOs such as Corporate Europe Observatory (Brussels), Transnational Institute (Amsterdam), GRAIN (an NGO working on agriculture in Barcelona) and FERN (an NGO associated with the World Rainforest Movement in Brussels).

Most social movements in Indonesia are not directly involved in the campaign at the European level. Transnational activists from Sawit Watch and WALHI provided the key Indonesian input. As we have seen, WALHI (and to a lesser extent Sawit Watch) are rooted in local initiatives which are part of both the indigenous movement and the land reform movement, and which are also involved in the new social relations of palm oil production, i.e. working with contract farmers and workers. The multi-class nature of the social movements in Indonesia, via WALHI, thus inform the campaigning of FoE sister organisations such as Mileudedefensie in the Netherlands and BUND in Germany. This is compounded by the fact that FoE's biofuel campaign is coordinated by WALHI from Jakarta. However, the key role of WALHI transnational activists in the campaign is not matched by similar influence by transnational activists from the peasant movement (i.e. SPI or La Via Campesina), the indigenous movement (i.e. AMAN), or the workers movement (i.e. FSPM or the IUF).

Extent, content and strategies of palm-oil-biofuel campaigning

Across Europe, a large number of activities and campaigns developed at different levels, with most activity in the United Kingdom, the Netherlands, and Germany. Some larger NGOs continued with brand attacks, linking palm oil expansion to climate change (e.g. Greenpeace's [2007] 'Cooking the Climate'). Plans to increase mandatory biofuel targets galvanised opposition and sparked a broad campaign coalition: in June 2007, European NGOs launched a 'Call for an immediate moratorium on EU incentives for agrofuels, EU imports of agrofuels and EU agroenergy monocultures' (EcoNexus 2007). Two hundred and fifty organisations signed up and many became actively involved in a campaign that aimed to prevent the inclusion of mandatory targets for biofuels in the planned European Union Renewable Energy Directive.⁸ Experience from partner organisations in areas affected by biofuel plantation expansion in the South – particularly palm oil in Indonesia – was an important part of the campaign.

The 'Campaign for a Moratorium on Agrofuel Targets in the EU' developed a multi-layered strategy, utilising the diversity and different expertise within the network. At one level, intensive lobbying was carried out, using the resources and staff of Friends of the Earth Europe staff or of smaller, specialised Brussels-based NGOs such as FERN or Transport&Environment. This work was directed at the European Parliament and particularly at the European Commission. Europe-wide lobbying work was connected to national campaigns which focussed on the member states' positions within the European Council and on national renewable energy

⁸Including the 'The Climate Alliance of European Cities with indigenous Rainforest Peoples, EU' (or just 'Climate Alliance'). In theory, at least, this meant that over 1,200 European municipalities (including 650 towns in Austria and 450 in Germany) were in opposition to the European biofuel targets.

regulation. Here, national affiliations of Transnational Social Movement Organisations (TSMOs; Smith 1997), particularly Friends of the Earth, and local groups and initiatives played a central role. The campaigning activity was backed up by systematic media work aimed at influencing public opinion in general.

In Germany, there were scores of local and national campaigns, by different organisations, with different targets and in many places. ‘Renewable energy’ state subsidies had financed a spate of power plants which used palm oil as biomass feedstock. Several local citizens’ initiatives (*Bürgerinitiativen*) emerged in opposition, for example the ‘BI Kein Strom aus Palmöl!’ (another example is Schwäbisch Hall, see below). The *Bürgerinitiative* was founded in the little town of Saarlouis-Dillingen in reaction to the planned construction of a power station that wanted to burn palm oil as the main energy source. Despite a political atmosphere in which ‘bioenergy’ was predominantly seen as ecologically sustainable, the initiative was able to build an effective campaign that included the regional attac Saarland and the conservationist organisation NABU (Naturschutzbund) and that used the expertise of Watch Indonesia! and Rettet den Regenwald to politicise the situation in Indonesia. By pressuring the government of Saarland and the Deutsche Bank, the *Bürgerinitiative* finally manage to scare away the key investor (Personal communication, Boehme, 30 March 2009).

Parallel to power station protests, several organisations campaigned against the mandatory biofuels targets. One joint venture between INKOTA and Rettet den Regenwald collected 20,000 signatures under the slogan ‘Biosprit macht Hunger’ (biofuel creates hunger). The campaign featured a picture of an empty plate with petrol nozzles instead of knives and forks. One of the central campaigning points was the forced eviction of peasants for palm oil in Colombia. The objective was to stop the then Environment Minister Sigmar Gabriel from increasing the national mandatory blending quota for biofuel to 10 percent.

Media coverage became increasingly critical of biofuels, as seen by a series of influential films produced by Altemeier and Hornung which were aired prominently on German television.⁹ By 2008, millions of viewers had seen powerful images of clear-cut rainforests next to miles and miles of oil palms, orphaned orangutan babies, and hunter-gatherers without a forest to live in. Biofuels were publicly denounced as an ‘environmental crime’, responsible for large-scale forest destruction, and as a ‘con’ and a ‘trap’.

Given the different social bases of the groups involved in Europe and Indonesia, to what extent is ‘the moment of common cause [...] full of misunderstanding’ (Tsing 2005, 222)? Did the prominent role of environmental organisations and ‘rooted rainforest cosmopolitans’ create a shift from social issues in Indonesia to conservation issues within the European campaigning? And to what extent are the European campaigns embedded within the ‘fantastical categories’ of “‘indigenous’” people and “‘wild’” nature’ (Tsing 2005, 160)? Is their translation of the situation in Indonesia informed by a stereotyping of ‘traditional communities’ who are ‘imagined

⁹Including ‘Hier Bio - dort Tod: Vom Sterben des Orang Utans’, NDR, Phoenix; ‘Der Palmöl-Skandal - Wie Stromkunden Umweltvernichtung finanzieren’, BR Report München; ‘Der letzte Wald der Orang Utans’, ARD - W wie Wissen 2007; ‘Umweltsünde Biosprit’, ORF - Weltjournal; ‘Mogelpackung Biodiesel’, ARD - Monitor; ‘Ohne Rücksicht - Brandrodung für Biodiesel’, ARD- Tagesthemen 13.12.07; ‘Die Biosprit-Falle’, SWR-Auslandsreporter. See <http://www.globalfilm.de>.

to possess characteristics counterposed to those of state agencies and other forest destroyers' (Li 1999b, 22)?

It is certainly true that campaigns in Europe use 'simplifications and codifications of metropolitan fantasy' (Tsing 1999, 196) to delegitimise the sustainability claims of palm oil biofuels. This can be seen by the Altemeier and Hornung films and by campaigns by Rettet den Regenwald. Both used the symbolism of the orangutan¹⁰ and the 'construction of the position of tribal elder'¹¹ (Tsing 1999, 198) to associate European biofuel targets with the destruction of the Indonesian rainforest.

The prominence of the indigenous environmental discourse in the European campaigns can be partly explained by the key role of transnational activists from WALHI and Sawit Watch. As explained above, both organisations are primarily involved in a defensive struggle against further palm oil expansion, and to a much lesser extent in the social struggles within the new palm oil landscape. For the purpose of getting this message across, images of orangutans and of indigenous people's defence of their environment resonate powerfully with 'rainforest cosmopolitans' and with the general public in Europe.

However, it would be wrong to dismiss the indigenous biodiversity discourse as merely a 'metropolitan fantasy'. As discussed above, the invoking of *adat* customary rights was rooted in real struggles against the territorialisation of state control over forests and 'coercive' conservationism with its anti-people bias. Nor is the indigenous-oriented approach to biodiversity conservation a backward looking 'traditionalism' (Li 1999a) but rather a modernist movement invoking 'tradition' against 'a falsely uniform modernism' (Tsing 2005, 160), as the many recent examples in Kleden *et al.* (2009) show. As Tsing (2005, 160) argues, 'we do not need to reify either indigenous people or wild nature to explore its practical possibilities' of 'indigenous-conservationist collaborations'. Thus, despite some essentialising, Altemeier and Hornung let Kasimirus Sangara tell his story of opposition to oil palm to a German audience in order to deconstruct the myth of 'vacant land' pushed by the proponents of 'sustainable biofuels'.

Biofuels campaigns combined both the orangutan and the indigenous biodiversity discourse with a critique of the carbon credentials of biofuels and, increasingly, with other concerns of social movements in Indonesia. The argument that converting forests or, even worse, peatland into biofuel monocultures creates more emissions than were saved by replacing fossil fuel became a key plank of the campaigning (e.g. Hoijer *et al.* 2006, Greenpeace 2007). Publications by Friends of the Earth aimed at a European audience detailed land conflicts, the 'debt bondage' of smallholders and the working conditions in the plantations (e.g. Wakker 2005, Marti 2008). And publications by think tanks, in addition to questioning claims that biofuels are good for the climate, gave high prominence to questions of food security, rural development and jobs, labour conditions and human rights (e.g. Biofuelwatch *et al.* 2007, GRAIN 2007).

¹⁰e.g. in the films 'Hier Bio - dort Tod: Vom Sterben des Orang Utans' (Altemeier and Hornung 2008) or the Regenwald Report on the 'Thinkers of the Jungle' (Schuster and Ullal 2007).

¹¹E.g. in the film 'Die Biosprit-Falle. Indonesiens Wald in Gefahr' (Altemeier and Hornung 2007), which features the Papuan tribal elder Kasimirus Sanggara.

The impact of transnational biofuel campaigns

What have the impacts of the campaigning around biofuels in the palm oil context been up to now? As suggested by Borrás *et al.* (2008, 21), one way of disaggregating impact is to follow Keck and Sikkink's five stages of influence (1998, 201): (i) framing debates and getting issues on the agenda, (ii) encouraging discursive commitments from state and other policy actors, (iii) causing procedural change at the international and domestic level, (iv) affecting policy, and (v) influencing behaviour changes in target actors.

Although the campaign was to be ultimately unsuccessful in preventing mandatory targets for biofuels, it was extremely effective in framing debates in the media and in influencing public opinion. Here, a combination of the grassroots nature of many of the affiliated groups and the active nature of their involvement with professional campaigning and media work by transnational social movement organisations and think tank staff led to a major shift in how biofuels and palm oil were perceived. In several countries, the campaign was able to gain hegemony in both print media and television, for example in Germany where several television productions were aired which discussed the 'scandal' that power stations were being subsidised with taxpayers' money for burning palm oil (see above). One indication of the extent of critical media coverage is the way negative publicity is increasingly seen as a serious threat by the Malaysian palm oil industry. For example, Errol Oh (2009) argued in the Malaysian tabloid *Star*, that, 'Fuelled by a cocktail of environmental issues, the anti-palm oil lobby in the West is gaining traction, and failure to counter this well can be costly'.

Campaigning was also partly effective in 'encouraging discursive commitments from state and other policy actors' (Keck and Sikkink 1998, 201). Public criticism of biofuels led to government-sponsored reviews in the United Kingdom (the Gallagher Review) and in The Netherlands (the Cramer Report). The Gallagher Review responded to 'growing concern about the role of biofuels in rising food prices, accelerating deforestation and doubts about the climate benefits' by calling for a 'slowdown in the growth of biofuels' (Gallagher 2008, 8). One effect of the reviews was the inclusion of 'sustainability criteria' in the EU Renewable Energy Directive, which, despite widespread scepticism by campaigners, is an important procedural change in that biofuel users have to 'verify' that their source does not come from crops established on primary forests or wetlands (EU 2008, Article 17). The benchmark of at least 35 percent emissions savings in relation to fossil fuel could create difficulties for the palm oil industry, as the RSPO has now ditched a corresponding requirement in its certification programme after objections by palm oil producers.

In terms of policy, the campaign did not stop the binding biofuel targets, but the Renewable Energy Directive now specifies that an increasing percentage has to be met by 'non-food' fuels such as second-generation biofuels, green electricity and hydrogen, an amendment that was denounced by the biofuel industry. The arena of contention has now partly shifted to the implementation within national action plans, where some impacts can already be seen. In the revised version of the German Erneuerbare-Energie-Gesetz (Renewable Energy Directive, EEG) palm oil as a fuel source was explicitly excluded from further subsidies unless sustainability criteria can be met. In an ironic twist, plans to introduce mandatory biofuel additives to diesel were scaled down because of opposition by the influential car drivers' association, the ADAAC. In Schwäbisch Hall, a pretty little town in the south of Germany, the

municipal power station, which, a year earlier, had entered the power grid and had been enthusiastically acclaimed as a beacon of sustainability because it used bioenergy, declared in 2008 that it would no longer use palm oil as a fuel source (Pye 2009b).

In terms of influencing behavioural changes, a series of major palm oil users have declared their intention to switch to 'sustainable palm oil', with Unilever ending its sourcing from the Indonesian conglomerate Sinar Mas and supporting a moratorium on further palm oil expansion. However, the 'sustainable palm oil' discourse is more than problematic (Pye 2008), providing a new area of contention. Another success has been the suspension of financial support for the palm oil sector by the International Finance Corporation and the World Bank Group after a campaign by Indonesian and international groups, with a broad coalition seeking to influence the World Bank's 'revised strategy' in May 2010. At the EU level, debates around the interpretation and further development of biofuels policy continues, as demonstrated by a recently leaked document from the European Commission that suggests defining oil palm plantations as 'forests' (FoE Europe 2010). Ultimately, the future of biofuels is connected to the bigger questions of energy, transport and climate policy that cannot be addressed by a specific campaign around biofuels.

La Vía Campesina and the global movement for climate justice

Although agrarian movements in Indonesia were not directly involved in the *transnational campaign alliance* around biofuels, the SPI played a key role in bringing the critique of biofuels to a *global movement for climate justice* that emerged in the lead up to and the protests during the UNFCCC Summit in Copenhagen in 2009. Whilst the complexities of the climate justice movement cannot be discussed here, some points are pertinent for understanding the local-transnational-global linkages and raise important questions around alliance building and strategy.

A key moment in the dynamics of protest in Copenhagen was the alliance of two key Transnational Advocacy Networks (TANs) – Climate Justice Now! (CJN!), composed mainly of NGOs with a focus on North-South dimensions of climate justice) and Climate Justice Action (CJA, composed mainly of climate activists from the North with an anti-capitalist perspective) – around the slogan 'System Change not Climate Change'. Rather than following Keck and Sikkink's prescription that 'in order to bring about policy change, networks need to pressure and persuade more powerful actors' (1998, 23) the CJN!-CJA alliance was in clear opposition to this kind of 'leverage' approach pursued by the Climate Action Network (CAN) and campaigns such as tcktctck and avaaz, who called on the delegates to 'show leadership' in combating climate change. Whilst the latter's strategy collapsed in disaster with the Copenhagen Accord, the former saw the significance of Copenhagen in the birth of a new movement with a fundamental critique of the fossil fuel-addicted capitalist system and the 'false solutions' inherent in the UNFCCC such as emissions trading (CJN! 2009).

The climate justice movement has emerged from the *altermondialist* movement, which had developed common terms of reference and a 'global master frame' combining a criticism of neoliberal corporate-led globalisation and capitalism with alternatives of global social and environmental justice as epitomised in the slogan 'another world is possible' (della Porta *et al.* 61–91). Della Porta *et al.* (2006, 76–7) show how this master frame came to include the principles of social and

environmental justice, solidarity, peace, democracy, human rights, women's rights, antiracism and fair trade as the 'movement of movements' progressed from the anti-WTO protests in Seattle to the World Social Forum process. The climate justice movement not only adapted classic 'repertoires of contention' in the 'Hit the Production' and the 'Reclaim Power: Pushing for Climate Justice' actions,¹² it also successfully transformed the former global master frame by combining several 'multi-issue frames' (Tarrow 2005, 72–3) into a new global master frame on climate justice. The new global master frame combines the climate crisis with the biodiversity crisis and relates both to an 'unsustainable global economic system' and 'reckless profit-driven production'. In the Copenhagen declaration 'System Change Not Climate Change', climate change is linked to the dominance of TNCs, North-South inequalities (with the concept of climate debt), the WTO, and the 'conjunction of crises – climate, energy, financial, food, and water crises'. The declaration calls for the building of 'a strong and popular movement [. . .] that is able to act at all levels of society to deal with environmental degradation and climate change' (Klimaforum09 2009).¹³

La Via Campesina (LVC) is *the* key transnational agrarian movement within the *altermondialist* movement with its agenda to 'defeat the forces of neoliberalism and to develop an alternative revolving around the concept of "food sovereignty"' (Borras 2008, 92). The concept of food sovereignty, defined as 'the right of each nation to maintain and develop its own capacity to produce its basic foods, respecting cultural and productive diversity' and as 'the right of peoples to define their agricultural and food policy' (Desmarais 2007, 34) was already successful in reframing debates around land reform (Borras *et al.* 2008, 22) and in offering a concrete alternative to the agribusiness model of agriculture.¹⁴ In the run-up to Copenhagen, LVC successfully reframed the concept. In its brochure 'Small Scale Sustainable Farmers are Cooling down the Earth', LVC locates industrial agriculture as 'a major contributor to global warming and climate change' (La Via Campesina 2009, 2–5) and offers 'sustainable small-scale farming' as a viable solution due to the 'storing [of] more CO₂ in soil organic matter through sustainable agriculture,' 'replacing nitrogen fertilizers', and 'making possible the decentralised production, collection and use of energy' (p. 6). The brochure also comes out against biofuels, stating that 'agrofuel production will revive colonial plantation systems, bring back slave work and seriously increase the use of agrochemicals, as well as contribute to deforestation and biodiversity destruction' (p. 4)

As Borras and Franco (2009, 5–6) point out, opposition to biofuels is by no means self-evident for rural producers, with the International Federation of Agricultural Producers (IFAP) supporting biofuels, and with some member

¹²'Hit the Production' aimed to use civil disobedience to block the harbour of Copenhagen, thereby drawing attention to the linkage between the liberalisation of trade and increased emissions, whilst 'Reclaim Power: Pushing for Climate Justice' attempted to create a new 'space' made up of activists working on the 'inside', delegates, and activists on the outside to discuss the measures and social changes needed to combat climate change. Both actions were partly thwarted by police repression.

¹³The anti-capitalist sentiments of the climate justice movement were taken a step further at the World People's Conference on Climate Change and the Rights of Mother Earth in Bolivia in 2010. The 'Cochabamba Protocol' identified 'the capitalist system' as the cause of climate change and called for a 'Universal Declaration on the Rights of Mother Earth' to be adopted by the UN.

¹⁴For a detailed discussion on food sovereignty, see Desmarais (2007) and McMichael (2008).

organisations of LVC discussing some forms of biofuels as a component of 'energy sovereignty' (see Borrás and Franco 2009, 21). The clear position of LVC against biofuels in Copenhagen is rooted in experiences of key member organisations with a mass base, particularly the *Movimento dos Trabalhadores Rurais Sem Terra* (MST) in Brazil and the SPI in Indonesia. SPI activists were vocal of their criticism of biofuels in Copenhagen, for example with the Palembang peasant leader J.J. Polong (2009) presenting on the theme 'Agrofuel expansion in Indonesia: violations of peasants' human rights' at the Klimaforum09, and SPI director (and LVC coordinator) Henry Saragih speaking out against biofuels at the Agriculture Action Day.

LVC's 'cool food sovereignty' not only deepens the critique of biofuels by relating it to the way in which production is fundamentally organised in industrial agriculture, it also offers an alternative that goes beyond the particular interests of an independent peasantry by 'transcending the subordination of food and agriculture to the price form' (McMichael 2008, 46). Crucially, embedding biofuels within a wider anti-capitalist movement for climate justice also offers the potential to expand alliances beyond sympathetic NGOs, 'concerned citizens' and ethical consumers to include social movements in the North (such as anti-coal initiatives, the anti-nuclear movement, campaigns for free public transport, and the negative growth movement) that are working to overcome the fossil-fuel production, energy and transport model in their own countries.

However, SPI and LVC do not have a specific transnational strategy regarding biofuels. In line with Climate Justice Now!, climate change is framed as a problem of 'neo colonialism-imperialism' (FSPI 2007) and biofuels are seen as an agenda imposed from the North. The role of transnational *Malaysian* corporations is not acknowledged in any concrete way, nor do the transnational social spaces of migrants or the transnational chains of production play a role in the agrarian activism against palm oil plantations.

Conclusion: expanding alliances, transnationalising struggles

The biofuel-related expansion of oil palm plantations in Southeast Asia and the struggles emerging from the complex and contradictory process of rural transformation in Indonesia radicalised the European debate over palm oil. A specific transnational campaign alliance has emerged in which transnational activists from the Indonesian environmental and agrarian justice movement, particularly WALHI, play a key role. Although friction can be observed along the transnational translation of issues, with rainforest destruction and orangutan extinction prominent in the critical palm oil discourse in Europe, social issues such as land rights, the debt bondage of contract farmers and labour issues are becoming more important. The Campaign for a Moratorium on Agrofuel Targets in the EU, in particular, was able to overcome the de-politicisation and cooptation inherent in the Roundtable on Sustainable Palm Oil. Activism around palm oil now draws on political arguments that see the biofuel solution as a manifestation of a multiple crisis of biodiversity loss, climate change, the agribusiness model, energy policy and neoliberalism and capitalism. The targeting of political decision-making at the national and European levels (i.e. the mandatory targets) also meant that activism in Europe went beyond ethical consumerism and became embedded within a broader movement for climate justice.

Peasant activists in the SPI and La Vía Campesina have been important in this emerging global climate justice movement. They have been particularly instrumental in contributing the transformation of the *altermondialist* master frame, placing the critique of industrial agribusiness agriculture and the alternative of ‘cool food sovereignty’ at the heart of the concept of climate justice. In doing so, these transnational activists contributed to embedding the transnational campaigning within a global perspective.

Although the climate justice movement has radicalised and broadened the framing of biofuels by connecting it to other issues of climate change and to the system of production, it lacks the concrete focus of the more specific transnational campaigns. Protests centred on the climate summits tend to focus on differences between nations, rather than on the transnational structures of the fossil capitalist system. In particular, the innovative use of transnational economic spaces (i.e. brand-focussed palm oil campaigning) and transnational political spaces (i.e. the Campaign for a Moratorium on Agrofuel Targets in the EU) has not been replicated in the global movement. A constructive engagement between the transnational and the global within biofuel activism could overcome some of the weaknesses both of transnational campaign alliances and of the emerging climate justice movement, for example by ‘transnationalising’ the concept of ‘cool food sovereignty’.

In both the transnational campaigns against palm oil and the global movement for climate justice, plantation workers and particularly transnational migrant workers are conspicuously absent. The key challenge of forging an ‘organic link’ between movements against the primitive accumulation of the palm oil boom and those emerging from the contradictions within the new ‘social relations of nature’ in the palm oil industry has both local and transnational dimensions. Local groups in the environmental and agrarian justice movement in Indonesia are already developing agendas of cooperation with contract farmers and plantation labourers. One useful and unexplored area of activist research would be empirical work on the implications of the simultaneousness of an ‘apparent staying power of small-scale/peasant farming’ (Bernstein 2009, 67) and the ‘pluriactivity’ of peasants and the ‘inter-penetration of city and countryside’ (Edelman 2008, 83) for the potential and limitations of such endeavours.

A crucial area for politically informed empirical research is the transnational social space created by migrant workers in the plantation industry of Southeast Asia. There is little empirical study of both ‘everyday resistance’ in the plantations and the potential of organised resistance across borders. Connected to this is the question of new global alliances between transnational agrarian movements and workers in the biofuels industry, not only in the plantations but also along the transnational commodity chains linking Southeast Asia and Europe.

Biofuels is not just an agrarian question, and cannot be fully answered without addressing energy production, transport systems and industrial production in general. La Vía Campesina’s demand for ‘the complete dismantling of agribusiness companies’ and the ‘replacement of industrialised agriculture and animal production by small-scale agriculture’ (La Vía Campesina 2009, 7), a radical break with the automobile industry and demands for ‘socially sustainable degrowth’ (Martinez Alier 2009) would all require a change in ‘productive relations, necessitating a green cultural revolution’ (Foster *et al.* 2009, 1094). For this kind of change in industrial production and industrial relations, LVC would therefore need to go beyond an alliance between small farmers and rural workers (as demanded by Paul Nicholson;

Borras *et al.* 2008, 26) and explore new ways of relating to industrial workers in these key industries. Deepening alliances with initiatives within the global climate justice movement that are working towards the ‘democratic control of energy production’ and the ‘conversion’ of industries such as the automotive industry to climate-neutral alternatives would be a place to start developing such innovative multi-frame coalitions.

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Oliver Pye is a lecturer in Southeast Asian Studies at Bonn University, with a research focus on environmental issues and social movements. He is the author of *Khor Jor Kor. Forest politics in Thailand*. He is currently working on the palm oil controversy in transnational perspective and coordinating a German Research Foundation research project on 'The making of social movements under conditions of precarity and transnationality in Southeast Asia'.