

TRANSNATIONAL PEASANT POLITICS IN CENTRAL AMERICA *

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Since the late 1980s, peasants throughout Central America have begun to coordinate political and economic strategy. Agriculturalists from the five republics that constituted "*la patria grande*" of Spanish Central America (Guatemala, El Salvador, Honduras, Nicaragua, and Costa Rica) as well as representatives from Panama and Belize have founded regional organizations that meet to compare experiences with free-market policies, share new technologies, develop sources of finance, and create channels for marketing their products abroad. They have also established a presence in the increasingly distant arenas where decisions are made that affect their livelihood. Small-farmer organizations now lobby at the United Nations, the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, the European Union, and regional summit meetings. Central American *campesinos* have attended numerous regional gatherings of agriculture ministers and presidents, as well as events like the 1992 Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro, the 1995 Western Hemisphere Presidents' Summit in Miami, the 1995 World Summit for Social Development in Copenhagen, and the 1996 Food Security Summit in Rome.

Scholars of "transnationalism," collective action, and agrarian issues have barely kept pace with the rapid internationalization of peasant politics. The anthropology of globalization and transnationalism has emphasized migration, "deterritorialization," and "cultural hybridity" rather than

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new forms of supranational politics (Appadurai 1990; Schiller et al. 1992; Kearney 1995, 1966). Recent anthologies on collective action research (Laraña et al. 1994; Morris and Mueller 1992) and Latin American social movements (Eckstein 1989; Escobar and Alvarez 1992; Sinclair 1995) have not mentioned any processes of internationalization. The “globalization from below” and “networks” literatures on the growing transnational ties among grass-roots organizations have generally ignored peasants (Alger 1988; Brecher 1993; Clark 1995; Falk 1987; Keck and Sikkink 1998; Laxer 1995; Risse-Kappen 1995; Tarrow 1995, n.d.). Instead, they have focused on indigenous groups (Brysk 1996), human rights (Sikkink 1993), women (Elshtain 1995; Palley 1991), labor (Kidder and McGinn 1995), and environmentalist groups (Keck 1995)—even though the new transnational peasant organizations sometimes have close links to these other efforts. Finally, cutting-edge analyses of agrarian studies (such as Roseberry 1993) have rightly underscored the importance of historicizing rural identities and resistance but have said nothing about how these goals might be achieved in the transnational peasant organizations that sprang up in the 1980s and 1990s. The few works that analyze the new transnational peasant movement have been written largely by intellectuals from European institutions that fund it or by Latin American researchers who work for it. These studies have tended to be overly sanguine about the movement’s prospects, although lately they have become more critical (Biekart and Jelsma 1994; Biekart 1997; Morales and Cranshaw 1997; Smith n.d.; Tangermann and Ríos Valdés 1994).

The inattention of scholars of transnationalism, collective action, and agrarian issues to cross-border peasant politics is not related to any fundamental incompatibility of vision between researchers operating in these different traditions (or to any divergence between them and the author of this article). Rather, proponents of these and related approaches have tended to labor in separate but parallel intellectual universes, often at such high levels of abstraction that certain objects of study have largely escaped their attention. I will suggest here that contemporary transnational peasant activists share the material or class-based passions of “old social movements” as well as a concern with seeking changes in the policies of individual states. At the same time, they embrace much of the focus of the “new social movements” on identity and cultural specificity (see Calhoun 1993 and Hellman 1995). Similarly, while these activists constitute dense personal “networks of trust” and mobilize domestic constituencies, characteristics that some view as essential features of “social movements,” they also engage in the global “information politics” and “accountability politics” said to be more typical of transnational “advocacy networks” (Keck and Sikkink 1998; Tarrow n.d., chap. 11).

If transnational peasant politics seem to fall between the cracks of existing theoretical paradigms, the concept of “peasant” too has long been

viewed as intellectually “awkward” (Shanin 1972) or “disruptive” (Kearney 1966). In an astute reconceptualization of peasant studies, Michael Kearney (1996) indicated recently that this “troublesomeness” results from the confrontation of an ambiguous analytical construct—“the peasant”—with the complex realities of migrating deterritorialized peoples engaged in multiple occupations and depending on diverse income streams.¹ This article will suggest instead that the real challenge may well be to confront abstruse “postpeasant,” “postdevelopment,” and “new social movements” frameworks with a group of troublesome empirical referents that stubbornly assert “peasant identities” as well as aspirations for improved economic and social well-being—which they happen to call “development” (compare Warman 1988, 657–58). One need not share Teodor Shanin’s preoccupation with defining generic peasant attributes to recognize the validity of his assertion that peasants “are not only an analytical construct, not only ‘bearers’ of characteristics . . . but a social group which exists in the collective consciousness and political deeds of its members” (1990, 69).

This article has three basic objectives: to analyze the formation, practice, and discourse of the principal regional peasant organization in Central America, the Asociación Centroamericana de Organizaciones Campesinas para la Cooperación y el Desarrollo (ASOCODE), which has member coalitions in all seven countries of the isthmus;² to consider what cross-border peasant organizing suggests about the representation of peasant identity in contemporary Central America; and to examine the extent to which this regional campesino association has transcended traditional sources of weakness and division that afflict peasant organizations in Central America and elsewhere.

Roots of Internationalization

In Central America in the 1980s, peasants often joined armed opposition movements (as in El Salvador, Guatemala, and Nicaragua) or engaged in bitter struggles with governments over economic adjustment programs (as in Panama, Honduras, and Costa Rica). But as the civil wars of the 1980s ebbed or ended and free-market policies began to appear in-

1. This is not a novel argument. Anthony Leeds made much the same point two decades ago in a too-often overlooked essay entitled “Mythos and Pathos: Some Unpleasantries on Peasantries” (1977).

2. *Region* and *regional* are used here to refer to Central America as a whole. Other peasant organizations covering all of Central America include sector-specific groups such as the Unión de Pequeños Productores de Café, de Centroamérica, México y el Caribe (UPRO-CAFE), founded in 1989, and the Confederación de Cooperativas del Caribe y Centroamérica (CCC-CA), founded in 1980, which has an agricultural co-op section. Banana workers’ unions have participated since 1993 in the Coordinadora de Sindicatos Bananeros de Centroamérica y Colombia.

exorable, smallholding agriculturalists in different countries increasingly recognized that they faced similar problems. These interrelated difficulties were numerous. First, steps by governments and entrepreneurial groups toward regional political and economic integration had created new loci of decision making above the national states and threatened to leave grass-roots sectors behind.³ Second, economic structural adjustment programs, which slashed social services (like agricultural extension) and credit, reduced farm price supports and other subsidies (such as those for loans and inputs), reversed hard-won agrarian reforms and facilitated the penetration of transnational capital in agriculture (Fallas 1993; FONDAD 1993; Pino and Thorpe 1992; Stahler-Sholk 1990; Thorpe et al. 1995). Third, lowered extraregional tariffs required grain producers to compete with foreign farmers. Fourth, the liberalization of grain trade within Central America exacerbated sectoral and regional inequalities (Fallas 1993, 87–99; Solórzano 1994). Fifth, U.S. food aid glutted cereal markets and led consumers to substitute imported wheat for domestically grown maize (Garst and Barry 1990). Sixth, coffee prices collapsed following the termination of the International Coffee Agreement.⁴ Seventh, a severe environmental crisis worsened, marked by growing agrochemical contamination of soil and water and a vicious process of deforestation, erosion, and declining fertility. Eighth, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) were proliferating, often supported by “social compensation” funds from bilateral aid and multilateral lending agencies, which peasant organizations often viewed as interlopers or competitors (CCOD 1990; Edelman 1991; Kruijt 1992). Finally, the longstanding lack of access to transport, storage, and processing facilities and to market information heightened peasants’ vulnerability to and dependence on intermediaries and large-scale agro-industries and thereby lowered their incomes.

3. Regional integration accelerated following the Central American Presidents’ Summit in Antigua, Guatemala, in June 1990. In December 1991, the Tegucigalpa Protocol created the Sistema de la Integración Centroamericana (SICA), which incorporated the periodic regional meetings of presidents and ministers and the regional parliament (PARLACEN) founded as part of the 1987 Esquipulas Peace Accords. In contrast to the Central American Common Market (CACM) of the 1960s, which relied on high extraregional tariffs to stimulate industry geared toward regional markets, current integration efforts are anti-protectionist and emphasize nontraditional agricultural exports and *maquilas* or garment-assembly plants as the engine of growth. The creation of SICA and of regional business lobbies (such as FEDEPRI-CAP) are among the examples that peasant leaders cite in explaining why they felt the need to organize at the regional level. In the Managua Declaration II of September 1997, the Central American countries and the Dominican Republic stated their intention of moving toward a European-style political union.

4. In 1989 negotiations for a new coffee agreement stalled, and world prices plummeted 40 percent in one month to the lowest levels in more than twenty years (Pelupessy 1993, 39–40). Prices registered a modest rise in 1994, tumbled precipitously in 1995, and began a more sustained recovery in 1997.

Internationalization also resulted from efforts by a young generation of movement leaders who hoped to propagate a new collective identity for Central American peasants. These activists—products of two decades of upheaval, war, and crisis—constitute a type of “peasant intellectual” that has received little attention from social scientists.⁵ Like other peasants, they have had to adapt to major technological changes in agriculture (first “green-revolution” input “packages” and then high-risk nontraditional export crops) and to interact with complex financial, marketing, extension, cooperative-sector, and land-tenure institutions. Urban and rural culture have also converged—and not just because of rural-urban migration or electronic media reaching into the countryside. In much of Central America, a significant proportion of the economically active population in agriculture now resides in urban areas, and a growing portion of the economically active rural population is engaged in non-agricultural activities (Ortega 1992).

In some countries—particularly Costa Rica but also Panama under Omar Torrijos and later Sandinista Nicaragua—higher education significantly expanded the horizons of the younger generation, including some from low-income rural families. Many more peasant activists participated in courses offered by the cooperative movement, church and government institutions, political parties, guerrilla movements, NGOs, and campesino organizations.⁶ Many activists who have little formal education are well traveled, computer-literate, and conversant in macro-

5. Feerman’s masterful *Peasant Intellectuals* (1990) concerned a kind of African leader whose exoticism seems to confirm old social scientific and popular stereotypes of rural peoples. The “peasant intellectuals” discussed in this article, in contrast, are probably closer to what Antonio Gramsci (1967) envisioned as “organic intellectuals,” although most of them adamantly reject “organic ties” to political parties.

6. “I’ve taken any number of courses,” Amanda Villatoro remarked matter-of-factly. Born in 1961, she finished the ninth grade in eastern El Salvador and went on to become a prominent leader of the Unión Comunal Salvadoreña (UCS). She elaborated, “Statistics, microeconomics, macroeconomics, political theory. . . . I have a long curriculum vita. The UCS helped train me, with very high-level professors, and although I never went to the university nor even finished high school, I believe the knowledge I’ve acquired is equivalent to the fourth year of [a university] economics [major]. These are the tools we need to interpret the numbers the governments and the business groups present to us.” Interview with Amanda Villatoro, San Salvador, 21 July 1994. Jorge Amador, a leader of the Central Nacional de Trabajadores del Campo (CNTC) and the Consejo Coordinador de Organizaciones Campesinas de Honduras (COCOCH), completed a year and a half of high school. But he also received extensive specialized education later: “I’ve participated in many training programs in Honduras, programs of the CNTC, such as a three-and-one-half-month program called ‘technician in agrarian development,’ as well as other subjects: sociology, a bit of philosophy, planning, agrarian law. I’ve also been trained abroad in Panama for three months. I’ve been in a great number of training programs and traveled to training events in Mexico, Nicaragua, Colombia, and England. . . . I’ve always taken the initiative to read a little, as much as possible, and I have a little library in my house.” Interview with Jorge Amador, Tegucigalpa, 29 July 1994.

economic policy, national and international politics, and the latest developments in agronomy and forestry.⁷ They have joined forces with a committed corps of “peasantized” or “pro-peasant” intellectuals and technicians working with their organizations who were also caught up in the turmoil of the 1970s and 1980s and sometimes spent years in the countryside. Together, they aim to replace the image of peasants as atavistic rustics with that of peasants as politically savvy, dignified, and efficient small producers.⁸ Adept at appropriating and refashioning discourses about democracy and civil society, these peasant intellectuals claim to articulate an alternative and more just model of development. Increasingly, they have forged ties with nonpeasant groups and small-farmer organizations outside Central America.⁹ And they adamantly affirm their “peasant-

7. Another example from El Salvador suggests something about the personal trajectories of these peasant intellectuals, as well as how field research frequently challenged the preconceptions about “campesinos” held by the urban author of this article. In July 1994, I went to an unmarked building in a grimy working-class neighborhood of San Salvador to interview René Hernández, a leader of the Sociedad de Cooperativas Cafetaleras de la Reforma Agraria (SOCRA). Born in 1957, Hernández had managed to complete the fifth grade in his hometown of Candelaria de Santa Ana. A beneficiary of the first stage of El Salvador’s agrarian reform, he belongs to a cooperative founded in 1980 that owns 25 *manzanas* (175 hectares) of coffee. In the early 1980s, he attended courses on cooperative administration at the Centro de Capacitación Cooperativista (CENCAP), a government agency. By the late 1980s, he was a leader of FESACORASAL and CONFRAS, above-ground cooperative organizations that were nonetheless influenced by one faction of the armed opposition FMLN (Goitia 1994, 181). As a representative of Salvadoran cooperativism, he traveled to Germany, France, Israel, Mexico, Puerto Rico, and the rest of Central America. Since 1990, he has been on the board of directors of the state agricultural development bank and a member of its credit commission, a post he received as part of a deal between peasant organizations and the minister of agriculture. Hernández commented, “This has been like a university degree for me.” During our conversation, Hernández, at times jumping up to scribble on a white board with a marker, gave me a complex lecture about rediscount policies and interest-rate “spreads,” value-added taxes, banks’ loan portfolios, and government privatization policies. On the way out, he nodded toward a room down the hall with some computer equipment and asked, “¿Querés ver el volado?” (“Do you want to see the thingamajig?”). Peasants with computers were no longer a novelty to me, but to be polite, I responded “Va’ pues” (“Okay”). He nudged the mouse and a screen full of columns of constantly changing numbers appeared. The “Best Investments” modem next to the 486–66 IBM-compatible had a cable running to a huge parabolic antenna on the roof. Hernández had hooked into the New York coffee market and was looking at up-to-the-minute price shifts and futures options. Grabbing the mouse, he started to open up windows with graphs of seven-, thirty- and ninety-day price trends. “You see,” he remarked with a sly smile, “now they can’t lie to us about the price any more.”

8. This goal has sometimes conflicted, however, with organizations’ need to mobilize politically, because to a certain extent the peasant-as-rustic remains a critical symbol for garnering sympathy from policy makers and the public (Edelman 1991).

9. In 1994, for example, regional cooperative, community, labor, NGO, small enterprise, and agriculturalists’ networks formed a lobbying group called the Iniciativa Civil para la Integración Centroamericana (ICIC). Outside the region, ASOCODE has links to the international network called “Vía Campesina.” It first met in Mons, Belgium, in 1993, with fifty-five

ness," delighting all the while in challenging the dominant groups' and social scientists' "binary semiotics of identity" (Nelson 1996), which assumes that an individual cannot be both a peasant and sophisticated or modern at the same time.

Early International Contacts

In Central America, a region of small states and permeable frontiers, migration and participation in social movements abroad are not new to the rural, poor (Acuña 1993). For example, thousands of Nicaraguans participated in the 1934 strike against the United Fruit Company in Costa Rica (Bourgeois 1989, 203). Twenty years later in Honduras, hundreds of Salvadoran banana workers joined their local counterparts in a massive walkout against the United Fruit–owned Tela Railroad Company (González 1978). "Transnationalism"—the circulation across borders of persons, technology, money, images, and ideas that has lately fascinated anthropologists (Appadurai 1990; Kearney 1995)—has been well known to Central Americans for decades, if not centuries.

The 1970s and 1980s nonetheless witnessed an intensification of these transnational flows. In 1978–1979, as the Sandinista campaign against the Somoza dictatorship gathered steam, young people throughout the region (and beyond) swelled guerrilla ranks or collaborated from the Honduran and Costa Rican rear guards. With the triumph of the Frente Sandinista de Liberación Nacional (FSLN), numerous "internationalists" (many of them political exiles) obtained positions in the government, party, media, and pro-Sandinista research institutes and mass organizations. With the escalation in 1980 of armed conflicts in El Salvador and Guatemala (and renewed warfare in Nicaragua beginning in 1981–1982), hundreds of thousands of refugees—most of them peasants—fled their homes to seek safety abroad, often elsewhere on the isthmus.

These movements of Central Americans—often spontaneous, usually prolonged, and sometimes traumatic—brought activists from different countries into contact. Members of Guatemala's Comité de Unidad Campesina (CUC), exiled in Costa Rica, sought contacts with Costa Rican campesino organizations. When Nicaraguan refugees began to pour across Costa Rica's northern border, Costa Rican campesinos who had backed the Sandinistas began to develop doubts about the revolutionary government's sometimes arbitrary land confiscations and the indiscriminate violence directed at communities suspected of harboring Contras.¹⁰

organizations participating from thirty-six countries in the Americas, Europe, Asia, and Africa (Stichting Paulo Freire 1993; *Vía Campesina* 1996).

10. Interviews with Wilson Campos, ASOCODE, San José Costa Rica, 11 June 1994, and Panama City, 16 June 1994. See the appendix for a list of abbreviations.

Leaders of agricultural cooperatives from throughout the isthmus met in events sponsored by the CCC-CA (Confederación de Cooperativas del Caribe y Centroamérica). Representatives of rural workers' unions encountered each other in meetings of the Coordinación Centroamericana de Trabajadores (COCENTRA), founded following the 1987 Esquipulas Peace Accords. Many participants in the CCC-CA and COCENTRA had links to organizations that represented campesinos outside the cooperative or union sectors.¹¹

The "internationalism" of Nicaragua, promoted by a revolutionary party and state, provided an impetus for more frequent encounters. In the polarized Central America of the mid-1980s, revolutionary movements and campesino activists alike viewed allies elsewhere in the region as crucial for political success and even physical survival. The main clearinghouse for these contacts was the Nicaraguan Unión Nacional de Agricultores y Ganaderos (UNAG). It was founded in 1981 by smallholders, cooperative members, and medium-sized landowners who felt unrepresented in the Sandinista-dominated rural workers' union, the Asociación de Trabajadores del Campo (ATC). Despite its status as a "mass organization," UNAG had a sometimes rocky relationship with the FSLN.¹² Leaders of left-leaning Costa Rican and Honduran organizations passed through UNAG offices and toured rural cooperatives and commercialization projects, but these visits remained at the level of "exchanges of experiences." Salvadoran and Guatemalan leaders also called, but at home they were often living clandestinely and had more urgent concerns than thinking about the shape of their postwar agricultural sectors.

In addition to receiving visitors from outside Nicaragua, UNAG assumed a central role in the *Campesino a Campesino* program. This effort at technology transfer trained peasant extensionists in sustainable cultivation practices (such as cover crops, mulches, and zero-tillage techniques) and then had them provide technical assistance in and around their communities. Initiated by foreign NGOs in Guatemala in the early 1980s, this

11. Interviews with Carlos Hernández, CCJYD, San José, Costa Rica, 16 June 1994; José Adán Rivera, ATC, Managua, Nicaragua, 29 June 1994; and Sinfiorano Cáceres, FENACOOOP, Managua, Nicaragua, 4 July 1994.

12. Virtually all UNAG leaders belonged to the FSLN, and some held high positions. Nevertheless, as UNAG functionary Amílcar Navarro recalled, "at that time [circa 1981], to own means of production was to be bourgeois. It was thought that the peasant movement had the same interests as the workers movement, as salaried agricultural workers, but that's not so. . . . The Frente Sandinista supported the workers movement much more than the peasant movement. The Frente had intellectuals, students, workers—and very few campesinos. They didn't understand the campesino who wanted to make his land produce, to sell his products at a good price, to have technical assistance. . . . The workers struggled to work less, five hours instead of ten. But we're employers, and we're paying these guys, so I can't support them when they say they want to work less." Interview with Amílcar Navarro, Managua, 1 July 1994.

loosely organized movement eventually led to exchanges between peasants from throughout Central America and Mexico (Bunch 1982; Holt-Giménez 1996).¹³ UNAG member Sinforiano Cáceres recalled,

The Mexicans helped us systematize our knowledge. How to make organic fertilizer. We knew that already, but they helped us to perfect it, giving us the quantities of each component. How to make live fences, wind breaks, dikes, how to convert an ox yoke so that a mule or horse could pull it. And there we met Guatemalans, Ticos [Costa Ricans], Panamanians, Central Americans. . . . From the Hondurans we learned about [nitrogen fixing] velvet beans. From the Ticos we learned more about crop rotation. And they in turn learned something from us too.¹⁴

The European Connection

To understand how these intermittent contacts gave rise to a Central American association of peasant organizations, it is necessary to examine briefly European policies. In the early 1980s, European governments looked on with alarm as the administration of U.S. President Ronald Reagan tried to topple the Sandinistas in Nicaragua and roll back the revolutionary movements in El Salvador and Guatemala. This apprehension—based on fears of a major regional war and an interpretation that stressed inequality and injustice rather than communism as causes of the conflicts—led to extensive European backing for the Contadora peace process initiated in 1983 by Mexico, Colombia, Venezuela, and Panama. European leaders also endorsed the subsequent efforts of Costa Rican President Oscar Arias that culminated in the 1987 Esquipulas Peace Accords.¹⁵

In 1983–1984, as part of Contadora, European governments provided funds to the Sistema Económico Latinoamericano (SELA), the consultative body of economics ministers, to set up the Comité de Apoyo al Desarrollo Económico y Social de Centroamérica (CADESCA). Headquartered in Panama, CADESCA became a channel for peace-oriented initiatives that other regional bodies could not easily handle and an alternative to the United States' near monopoly on aid to the region.¹⁶ Initially, its programs focused on microenterprises, energy, the environment, and regional economic integration. But as its director, Guatemalan economist Eduardo

13. Expanding the Campesino a Campesino program to the rest of Central America became a central focus of ASOCODE's work after 1996 (ASOCODE 1997b, 10–11).

14. Interview with Sinforiano Cáceres, 4 July 1994.

15. Relations between the European Community and Central America have been institutionalized in the "San José Dialogue," ministerial-level meetings held each year since 1984 (see Sanahuja 1994).

16. CADESCA was originally intended to be a short-term undertaking. In 1994 it ceased to exist as an intergovernmental entity and was replaced by a private foundation, FUNDESCA, funded primarily by the EEC, European governments, and Scandinavian NGOs participat-

Stein, recognized, "there was a political aim in our technical efforts, which was maintaining places where dialogue could take place among Central Americans."¹⁷

Within a few years, CADESCA was asked by the Central American ministries of agriculture and planning to start a major research program on food security, the Programa de Seguridad Alimentaria (PSA). The ministers' concern grew out of their recognition that the region's dependence on imports for more than a fifth of its cereal consumption (Arias Peñate 1989, 67) made it vulnerable to fluctuating world prices and threatened by free-market policies that discouraged grain production. Funded by the European Economic Community (EEC), the PSA also reflected European criticism of free trade in agricultural commodities, one of the main sticking points in the Uruguay round of negotiations of the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) (see Santos 1988, 642–44). Because the Europeans had the most highly protected agriculture in the world (with the exception of Japan) and politically influential peasant sectors in key countries, they tended to view self-sufficiency in basic foods as a matter of national security and cultural survival for French, Spanish, or other peasants. Many attributed the stalling of the GATT negotiations in part to popular pressure, such as a December 1990 demonstration in Brussels by thirty thousand farmers, including a hundred from North America, two hundred from Japan, and others from Korea, Africa, and Latin America (Brecher 1993, 10; Kidder and McGinn 1995, 18; Risse-Kappen 1995, 12). These European apprehensions contrasted with U.S. efforts in the GATT talks to gain access to European (and other) grain markets and with the U.S. aid strategy in Central America, which involved huge shipments of PL-480 surplus food and aggressive advocacy of liberal trade and pricing policies.¹⁸

ing in the Copenhagen Initiative for Central America (CIFCA). FUNDESCA took over CADESCA's Panama offices and carried on its existing projects.

17. Interview with Eduardo Stein, Panama City, 22 June 1994. In 1996 Stein was named chancellor (foreign minister) of Guatemala in the government of President Alvaro Arzú.

18. The PL-480 "Food for Peace" program, established in 1954, was intended to win goodwill abroad and to reduce agricultural surpluses in the United States. It provides soft credits to finance grain purchases. Importing countries not only benefit from balance-of-payments savings but also resell the U.S. products at market prices to domestic agro-industries, thus generating local currency that becomes part of government budgets. PL-480 agreements, however, specify which agencies and programs may receive this budgetary support, in effect establishing a new kind of external conditionality like that of the World Bank or the IMF (Garst and Barry 1990, 6–15). The EEC and European governments, in contrast, did not share the U.S. insistence on influencing macroeconomic policies. Most U.S. assistance went through bilateral agencies, primarily USAID, which often attached political conditions to grants or used them to complement military strategies of "low-intensity conflict" (Cuenca 1992; Saldomando 1992; Sojo 1992). This approach contrasted with the European and Canadian practice of channeling most assistance (usually called "cooperation") through private organizations that supported small-scale grass-roots efforts at development.

The PSA's main activities were analyzing macroeconomic policies and gathering data on the agricultural sectors in the various Central American countries. Apart from some national-level seminars with peasant leaders, it worked largely with government functionaries. The PSA produced a series of technical studies that demonstrated the important role of smallholding grain producers in maintaining food security and "food sovereignty" (Arias Peñate 1989; CADESCA 1990; Calderón and San Sebastián 1991; Dévé 1989; Martínez 1990; Torres and Alvarado 1990). It also developed a macroeconomic model that (in contrast to most mainstream models) was concerned primarily with measuring the impact of adjustment policies on a broad range of income and sectoral groups (Arias Peñate, Jované, and Ng 1993).

As the PSA wound down in 1990, CADESCA started a food-security education program, the Programa de Formación en Seguridad Alimentaria (PFSA) to make the PSA's findings available to government functionaries, who would then be better able to formulate policy, and to peasant leaders, who could then participate in the debate over food security.¹⁹ This concern with training leaders of popular organizations reflected a view of democratization shared by CADESCA and the Europeans that stressed the participation of civil society in policymaking, a conception contrasting with the U.S. emphasis on free elections, legal reforms, and formal institutions (Cohen and Arato 1992). Directed by Salvador Arias, a European-trained economist and former Minister of Agriculture in El Salvador, the PFSA hired consultants to direct key program *ejes* (areas): credit, marketing, land reform, technology, and the environment.²⁰ Most

19. The PFSA, in conjunction with CADESCA's French counterpart IRAM, also carried out a number of short-term field studies on credit, pricing, and profitability issues. The results were reported to local (and not just national) agriculturalists' organizations. This aspect of the PFSA appears to have had relatively little impact, at least partly for reasons that I observed in July 1991, when I accompanied two French IRAM professionals on a one-week tour in northern Costa Rica. One IRAM expert, a middle-aged male credit specialist, did not speak Spanish. The other, a young woman, spoke Spanish fluently. She tried with fervor to convince groups of cooperative members and other campesinos that the era of subsidized production credit had ended and that from now on, they would have to increase productivity dramatically and work with high-interest loans. This bad news, combined with the culture clash involved in having a young European woman address large audiences made up almost exclusively of men, made it difficult for IRAM to get its message across at the grass-roots level. PFSA leaders, acting together with the Salvadoran representatives to ASOCODE, later managed to sack the young Frenchwoman, even though some program participants considered her more knowledgeable about the region and the peasant organizations (and less dogmatic) than the young Frenchman who succeeded her.

20. Salvador Arias received a *licenciatura* in economics from the Jesuit-run Universidad Centroamericana in San Salvador in 1974. In 1975–1976, he served in the government "at a time when efforts were being made to carry out an agrarian reform. I was vice minister, the minister was a military officer. In the process of discussion, of defining the character of the agrarian reform, we confronted each other and *el baboso* [the jerk] lost the battle. My position won, he resigned, and I was left [as minister] in charge of the process. But I only lasted

consultants came from outside Panama and also served as liaisons with campesino organizations in their countries. Generally economists and sociologists with considerable field experience, they became strategic figures in articulating PFSA objectives and identifying which organizations to invite to seminars.²¹

Although campesino PFSA participants differ regarding the program's usefulness, they concur in describing the seminars as having important side effects that were to some degree unintended. Sinforiano Cáceres recalled,

In the first meeting, we discussed our problems and found that many were the same, that we had more in common than we had differences. The *corte de chaleco* ["vest cut"] that structural adjustment had done on us left us all in the same condition. . . .²² They screw us in different ways, but in the end they're the same. . . . The IRA in El Salvador, ENABAS in Nicaragua, the CNP in Costa Rica [state commodities boards] all now play the same role: cheap food for consumers, low prices for us. . . . The "agricultural modernization law" in Honduras is the same as the plan to destroy the *asentamientos campesinos* [land-reform projects] in Panama. . . . And [in Nicaragua], through the market, a process of agrarian counterreform is also taking place.²³

In the first PFSA seminar in November 1990, several organization leaders demanded, as a condition of their participation, that the program provide extra time so that peasant groups from different countries could discuss common problems. This demand as well as the overly academic tone of program documents and specialists' presentations caused friction and misunderstandings at times between peasant leaders and CADESCA.²⁴ But as sociologist Rubén Pasos, who was present at this first encounter, pointed out,

four or five months. We pushed [for the reform], but the government backtracked." In 1977–1979, Arias studied at the London School of Economics. He returned to Central America in 1979–1980, when he served briefly as an advisor to the Sandinista government. He then spent nine years in Mexico and earned a doctorate in economics from the University of Paris VIII with a thesis on biotechnology (Arias Peñate 1990). In 1989 he moved to Panama to direct the PFSA. Interview with Salvador Arias, Santa Tecla, El Salvador, 11 Aug. 1995.

21. The PFSA's initial contacts tended to be with left-leaning organizations. But as national-level unity proceeded, centrist and occasionally conservative organizations also attended regional meetings. For example, one of the two Honduran representatives elected to ASOCODE's first coordinating commission was Víctor Cáliz, of the conservative Consejo Nacional Campesino (ASOCODE 1991b, 31). Interview with Cáliz, CNC, Tegucigalpa, 28 July 1994. The centrist Costa Rican union UPANACIONAL was also involved in ASOCODE from the beginning.

22. *El corte de chaleco* ("vest cut") is a Nicaraguan expression originally referring to a method of executing prisoners and traitors said to have been used by Sandino's forces during the war (1927–1932) against the U.S. occupation of Nicaragua—after the Marines displayed the heads of captured Sandinistas (see Black 1988, 44). As used here, the phrase suggests that free-market policies crippled peasant producers.

23. Interview with Sinforiano Cáceres, 4 July 1994.

24. According to Carlos Hernández, "many of the documents were too technical. Having

Once the leaders met and got to know each other, many for the first time, they realized they've all always been more or less in the same situation. . . . Well, as always in these things, the whole is more than the sum of the parts, and the people began to elaborate their own agenda. The program's agenda had another rhythm. Our agenda turned out to be too rigid for the needs and expectations of a movement that was just beginning to find its identity. We had to reorganize the Program several times and adjust it and adjust it. They were telling us what themes to cover, what things they wanted to know more about. But this turned out to be precisely the virtue of the program. It wasn't easy, because when you're managing a program, you're the contracted technical personnel, you understand that things have to follow a certain schedule. But that doesn't always coincide with the rhythms of the people. So there were a lot of difficulties. But the vision that prevailed was to take a chance on them, to accommodate their process.²⁵

By the end of the second PFSA seminar in February 1991, representatives of peasant organizations had formed a provisional commission with a view to forming a regional association (ASOCODE 1991b, 4). The process took on urgency because of the Central American presidents' plans to hold a summit in mid-1991, where major decisions would be made about agricultural trade. The support of PFSA specialists and the prospect of continued European funding, through CADESCA and other agencies, clearly conditioned the pace of organization as well.

In April the provisional commission sent a lengthy letter to the Central American presidents on the eve of their summit. It opened by condemning "economic structural adjustment, which even the international financial institutions recognize directly attacks the interests of the majorities of our peoples." The letter called on the presidents "to promote the ongoing processes of political opening and *concertación* [reconciliation]" and reminded them "that we have already elaborated alternative and integral

read a bit, I might be able to understand them, but for other *compañeros*, it was as if they were given a document in Chinese." Many other PFSA participants echoed these comments. I acquired a sizable box of PFSA documents in 1991 from an articulate activist in northern Costa Rica, a voracious reader who had come close to graduating from high school. While packing his belongings prior to moving, he threw up his hands and exclaimed, "If these things interest you, take them! I'll probably never read them." But for PFSA Director Salvador Arias, "this was a conscious thing on our part. At times there is an oversimplification of the training given to campesino leaders. It is almost reduced to ABCs. We didn't agree with that. We said, we'll give them complicated topics and we'll explain them, so that they raise their level. . . . Some resisted, but in the end, it was positive because the campesino leadership began to have a new capacity, a new vocabulary, a new use of social and economic categories. They pressured us to write things in a certain language. But we said 'No, we're not going to do that. I can explain globalization in the simplest way, and you will understand me. But if you can't handle the terminology used by the politicians with whom you're negotiating, even if you know about globalization, you're not going to understand them because they aren't going to use your categories. You have to use their words. When you're negotiating, you can't ask ministers to negotiate at your level. You have to raise the level.' Now it's easy to find campesino leaders in Central America who can speak about macroeconomics, about economic adjustment."

25. Interview with Rubén Pasos, FUNDESCA, Managua, 6 July 1994.

development proposals, which we believe are possible to execute . . . ,” such as “vertically integrated production, which will permit us to break out of our historical situation of producing only raw materials and to obtain the profits that are generated by the agro-industrial processing of our production.” Finally, the letter cautioned, “if our rights are not respected, the process of peace, so precarious and difficult to achieve, will escape from our hands and then, with the deepening of our *miseria* and marginality, social confrontation and war will continue, frustrating our peoples’ desire to live in harmony, in a stable and peaceful social climate, with justice and real democracy” (Consejo Nacional 1991).

Another summit communiqué (Comisión Centroamericana 1991) employed the novel rhetorical strategy of appropriating discourses of incontrovertible legitimacy: the Latin American bishops’ condemnation in Puebla in 1979 of “economic, social, and political structures [that cause] inhuman poverty”; the Central American presidents’ own call at Esquipulas for “egalitarian societies, free of misery”; and UN economists’ ideas about “economic adjustment with a human face” (e.g., Bustelo et al. 1987). The authors of the communiqué declared that since beginning “the slow process of regional coordination in 1988,” they had manifested “mature and responsible attitudes,” a phrase that in the Central American context could be understood to mean that they eschewed guerrilla violence. They pointed out that in Costa Rica, Nicaragua, and Honduras, they had negotiated with ministers of agriculture and presidents. Finally, the authors noted that the international financial institutions and “the governments and dominant sectors in the different countries and the international solidarity cooperation agencies themselves” were beginning to operate at the regional level and that campesino organizations must now do the same to influence policies affecting them (and presumably gain access to “cooperation funds”).

Nations in the Region

The creation of a Central American peasant association grew out of shared problems, but it nonetheless raised issues related to national particularities. The political situations in the different countries varied greatly, from openness in Costa Rica to continuing repression in Guatemala. Economic stabilization and structural adjustment, which began in Costa Rica in 1983, were just starting in Honduras and El Salvador. Nicaragua and El Salvador were emerging from wars, and Panama from the U.S. invasion. Belize, largely English-speaking, related more to the Caribbean than to Central America. Honduras had the oldest and largest peasant movement, while Panama—with its canal- and service-based economy—had neither numerous peasants nor strong campesino

organizations.²⁶ Peasant leaders had different backgrounds, constituencies, aspirations, political loyalties, and levels of sophistication.

From the beginning, the Costa Ricans and Nicaraguans played key roles, although for different reasons. The Nicaraguans had in UNAG the most consolidated organization in the region. They also maintained ties to a revolutionary party that, at the beginning of the 1990s, appeared to retain the possibility of returning to power. And early on, Nicaraguans had seized the initiative in meeting with organizations from elsewhere in the isthmus. At least some Nicaraguan leaders believed that UNAG, by virtue of its size and position, ought to dominate any Central American association.

The Costa Rican movement was smaller and more heterogeneous. It consisted of several large but resolutely apolitical cooperative-sector organizations, some independent local groups, a centrist small producers' union based in highland coffee- and vegetable-growing zones (the Unión Nacional de Pequeños y Medianos Productores Agrícolas, or UPANACIONAL), and a left-leaning coalition called the Consejo Campesino Justicia y Desarrollo (CCJYD), which included diverse small organizations and cooperatives. In 1991 UPANACIONAL and Justicia y Desarrollo, previously distant from one another, united in a single coordinating body, the Coordinadora Nacional Agraria (CNA), to carry out joint negotiations with the Costa Rican government (Román Vega 1994, 79; Voz Campesina 1995).²⁷ The Costa Rican organizations had the longest experience with structural adjustment programs and the most developed analysis of them. In particular, some leaders of Justicia y Desarrollo, which in the mid-1980s had taken a belligerent stance against Costa Rican neoliberalism, felt that

26. The Honduran campesino movement, despite its large size and deep historical roots, was severely divided. In 1991–1992, negotiations over the “agricultural modernization law” exacerbated splits between opponents and supporters of the government of Rafael Leonardo Callejas. In an effort to secure peasant backing for the measure, Callejas provided conservative peasant leaders and their organizations’ base groups with considerable state resources, including public-sector jobs, vehicles, and promises of land titling and technical assistance. As a result, several large Honduran organizations split, with one part remaining in the anti-Callejas coalition COCOCH and the other joining the pro-Callejas UNC. In 1994 the two sectors began to discuss reuniting, in part because groups that had supported the agricultural modernization law now sought to amend provisions that had negatively affected their constituencies. Interviews with Marcial Reyes Caballero, UNC, Tegucigalpa, 27 July 1994; Rafael Alegría, COCOCH, Tegucigalpa, 7 Aug. 1997; and Víctor Cáliz. In Panama, key organizations were especially weak after 1989. The Confederación Nacional de Asentamientos Campesinos (CONAC) was linked closely to populist military leader Omar Torrijos and then to the regime of his successor, Manuel Antonio Noriega, who was overthrown in the U.S. invasion. Following the intervention, CONAC became a target of considerable repression. Interview with Julio Bermúdez, APEMEP, Panama City, 27 June 1994, and Leis (1994, 104–5).

27. This coordinating body, which had incorporated several additional organizations, was renamed the Mesa Nacional Campesina (MNC) two years later. The CCJYD dissolved in 1995 as a result of factional disputes and allegations of financial impropriety.

they were in a privileged position to foretell what would befall campesinos in other countries where structural adjustment programs were just beginning.²⁸ In 1988, before the PFSA seized the initiative for regional organizing, the Costa Ricans had already formed a short-lived three-person committee to seek EEC funds for a gathering of agriculturalists from El Salvador, Nicaragua, and Honduras (Hernández Cascante 1992, 1). Despite the Costa Ricans' concern for regional organizing, the very sophistication of their analyses prevented them from transcending the negative stereotypes of Costa Ricans held by other Central Americans.²⁹

28. Justicia y Desarrollo leader Carlos Hernández recalled, "The Honduran case was very sharp and definitive. The campesino organizations didn't expect [the structural adjustment program]. When we told them about the impact of adjustment in Costa Rica and what neoliberalism was going to mean in [the rest of] Central America, they thought it impossible that this could affect the Honduran agrarian reform. . . . This was a very clear position of the peasant leaders we saw in the [PFSA] seminars. They said the agrarian reform was a conquest of the people, that there were laws, that it would never happen, that we were crazy" (interview with Hernández). Between 1962 and 1990, the Honduran state distributed over 376,000 hectares of land to some 66,000 rural families (Sierra and Ramírez 1994, 59). In March 1990, the government announced plans for a structural adjustment program. Two years later, the "agricultural modernization law" took effect, permitting private titling and sales of agrarian reform lands (Honduras Poder Legislativo 1992). In 1992 alone (the first year of the law), official data suggest that some 17 percent of reform beneficiaries abandoned or sold their land (Thorpe et al. 1995, 113). Many more subsequently sold their holdings to large investors (Posas 1996, 141–47).

29. As citizens of the region's only demilitarized and democratic social-welfare state, Costa Ricans have long enjoyed levels of literacy, health, and well-being far above those of other Central Americans. Often, they consider themselves more "advanced" than their "less cultured" and "more violent" neighbors. In turn, other Central Americans often view Costa Ricans as snobbish, pro-gringo, and pacifistic to the point of cowardice. Even though Costa Rican campesino leaders did their best to overcome these prejudices, the fact that many had some higher education and considerable familiarity with urban culture complicated relations with representatives from other countries. An economist who participated in early PFSA seminars recalled, "the Costa Ricans were tremendously articulate [and] able to speak about the issues. They often ended up speaking most at these meetings. They were never able to get beyond the others' severe anti-Costa Rican attitudes. Their articulateness served them poorly in this dynamic; it was associated with being effeminate. They didn't talk like peasants." A Panamanian social scientist had similar recollections of the PFSA but noted that the Costa Ricans' greater experience with democratic decision making helped the emerging regional peasant association. "That antipathy toward Ticos is always mixed with a bit of envy. 'Costa Rica is a petty-bourgeois, boring country where nothing ever happens and Ticos are all *maricones* [faggots].' They're envious because they know that Costa Rica has a social system and a certain social peace that doesn't exist in the other countries. . . . That capacity for compromise that is part of Costa Rican political culture, one of its positive aspects, has contributed to the process of ASOCODE, to the practice of hard argument followed by consensus." The sophistication of Costa Rican leaders had earlier impressed PSA specialists. In their first meeting in 1988, "the national technicians who worked with the PSA–Costa Rica were surprised by the peasants' arguments. It was not common to hear campesino proposals, and it was even odder to find that those proposals constituted a broad alternative to what the government's economic team was then negotiating with the World Bank and the IMF" (Hernández Cascante 1992, 1–2).

Not all participants in the emerging Central American association rejected relations with political parties. The Costa Ricans years earlier had broken with the organized Left (Edelman 1991), and UNAG had declared its autonomy from the FSLN after the Sandinistas' 1990 electoral defeat. The Honduran organizations, for the most part, did not have "organic ties" with parties, although they constantly cut deals and formed conjunctural alliances with them. In El Salvador, in contrast, peasant groups on the Left, Right, and Center maintained close links with parties. These ties were a legacy of the civil war (1980–1991), when each of the five parties in the guerrilla coalition of the Frente Farabundo Martí de Liberación Nacional (FMLN) as well as the right-wing and centrist parties sponsored parallel union and peasant organizations. Salvadoran participants in the PFSA and subsequent regional meetings claimed that they separated union and party loyalties, but they also remained proud members of their respective party groups.³⁰ This apparent inconsistency led to charges of "verticalism" from other countries' representatives, who disliked Leninist-style party discipline and "sectarian" work styles (Biekart and Jelsma 1994, 10; Hernández Cascante 1992, 3, 1994, 252).

Belize and Guatemala did not participate in the PFSA and were secondary players in the new campesino association. Identified culturally, linguistically, and politically with the English-speaking Caribbean, Belize was little known to PFSA organizers and had few agriculturalist organizations. Moreover, the Belizean government was relatively uninterested in Central American integration because it already belonged to the Caribbean Common Market (CARICOM).³¹ Guatemala remained on the sidelines for reasons of its own. The largest Guatemalan organization, the Comité de Unidad Campesina (CUC), maintained ties to the armed Left and still operated clandestinely to some degree. The CUC as well as the many smaller and less militant organizations in Guatemala were fre-

30. The 1994–1995 divisions in the FMLN appear to have had little effect on ASOCODE's Salvadoran affiliate, the Alianza Democrática Campesina (ADC). Activists from both the ERP (which quit the FMLN) and the FPL (which remained in the FMLN) continue to participate in the ADC.

31. Ethnic divisions were also more pronounced in Belize than elsewhere. Much commercial agriculture was controlled by Mennonites, who were often not well liked by the English-speaking (and frequently urban) Afro-Belizeans and the Hispanicized Kekchi Maya. These two groups also felt pressured by Guatemalan and Salvadoran refugees who flooded Belize in the 1980s and competed for land and government services. ASOCODE finally attracted Belizean participants after it sent emissaries to identify leaders and cooperative organizations. Interview with Julián Avila, BFAC, Panama City, 23 June 1994. The Belizean representatives came exclusively from the Hispanic and Hispanicized Maya population. They nonetheless were often less comfortable speaking Spanish than English and at first found it hard to understand the technical and political discussions of the other Central Americans. Interview with Rodolfo Tzib, Confederation of Cooperatives and Credit Unions of Belize (CCC-B), Panama City, 24 June 1994; see also Candanedo and Madrigal (1994, 36, 104) and Hernández Cascante (1995).

quently targeted for brutal repression. Their leaders consequently accorded greater priority to physical survival and the struggle within Guatemala than to establishing high-profile links with counterparts in neighboring countries.³² They also argued that the emerging association's orientation in favor of "small producers" and cooperativists had limited relevance in Guatemala, where the huge rural proletariat had little or no land and the only agrarian reform had been aborted by the CIA-backed coup against President Jacobo Arbenz in 1954.

The Organization of ASOCODE

In Tegucigalpa in July 1991, the Primer Conferencia Regional Campesina brought together delegates from throughout the isthmus who agreed to found the Asociación Centroamericana de Organizaciones Campesinas para la Cooperación y el Desarrollo (ASOCODE). The conference approved a position paper to be relayed to the region's agriculture ministers and the tenth Central American Presidents' Summit, which was to meet later that month in San Salvador. This statement—ASOCODE's "productive strategy" (1991a)—affirmed that small producers were making rational and intensive use of scarce resources but were still "threatened with extinction." It condemned structural adjustment programs, skewed patterns of landownership, the reversal of agrarian reforms, and the "hypocritical protectionism" of the countries providing "food aid" that actually undermined grain producers. Finally, the statement called for several specific changes: offering preferential fiscal, credit, and pricing policies to small producers; allowing participation by peasant organizations in agricultural-sector policy-making bodies and state development banks; giving campesino organizations first-purchase options for public-sector agro-industries undergoing privatization; establishing free trade in grain within the region, but with protection from highly subsidized non-Central American producers; and improving the governments' capacity for evaluating and controlling imported technologies, especially biotechnologies.³³

The presidents' summit produced the Plan de Acción para la Agri-

32. Interviews with Guatemalan campesino leaders, Panama City, June 1994, and New York City, Dec. 1994. All Guatemalans interviewed for this project before the 1996 signing of the peace accords requested anonymity. In a meeting of ASOCODE's coordinating commission that I observed in June 1994, one of the Guatemalan representatives became irate because his name appeared in a draft of the association's newsletter. He insisted that if published, it could have caused him serious problems at home.

33. This mention of biotechnology is one of several factors that suggest that Salvador Arias played a significant role in drafting ASOCODE's 1991 "productive strategy." Arias wrote his doctoral dissertation on the potential dangers of biotechnologies for Central America (Arias Peñate 1990). In more than fifty in-depth interviews with Central American campesino activists in 1994–1995 and 1997, the subject of biotechnology rarely came up, suggesting that the topic was not a major peasant concern.

cultura Centroamericana (PAC), which instructed the agriculture ministers to develop data on the numbers of producers, the production costs, and the output and productivity of each key crop. The PAC included measures to liberalize intraregional trade, especially a reduction in state involvement in commercializing agricultural products and a system of uniform regional "price bands" for basic grains (see *Presidentes Centroamericanos* 1991).³⁴ To the surprise of many, the final summit declaration resolved "to receive with special interest the proposals of the Asociación Centroamericana de Organizaciones Campesinas para la Cooperación y el Desarrollo and to instruct the appropriate institutions to consider and analyze them in order to find adequate responses to the issues they raise" (ASOCODE 1991b, 23). This gesture was largely rhetorical but represented a degree of recognition that few campesino activists had expected.

In December 1991, campesino organizations throughout Central America sent members to Managua for ASOCODE's founding congress, an event that mixed resolutions, speeches, and association business with "a rich and lively flow of sentiment, denunciation, and synthesis from the singers, poets, and musicians" in the different delegations (ASOCODE 1992).³⁵ The congress formalized a coordinating commission of two delegates from each national coalition.³⁶ It also elected as General Coordina-

34. The "bands" set price ceilings and floors for key basic grains and common tariffs on extraregional imports well below the levels already established in the GATT negotiations (Ministros de Agricultura 1993; Segovia 1993; Solórzano 1994). Campesino leaders who had attended PFSA seminars participated in the regional meetings of agriculture ministers that led up to the basic-grains free-trade agreement. These discussions in 1991 were so heated that the ministers and World Bank representatives "asked for the head" of PFSA Director Arias. He recalled that "the campesinos by now had been studying this for two or three years and they started a confrontation with the ministers and wiped them out. The campesinos took apart all their arguments. [The ministers] were unable to respond." Under pressure from the angered ministers, CADESCA's director had to urge the campesino leaders to be more diplomatic in future negotiations. Interview with Eduardo Stein. Even though several Central American foreign ministers began to push for Arias's removal from the PFSA, the representatives from Mexico, Colombia, Venezuela, and Panama on CADESCA's board as well as the influence of the EEC thwarted their efforts.

35. Individuals and groups at the congress are listed in ASOCODE (1991b). Also present were observers from the CCC-CA, small agriculturalists organizations in Mexico and Cuba, and the Federación Internacional de Productores Agropecuarios (FIPA), an umbrella group with member organizations in fifty-five countries, headquartered in France. Other attendees were representatives of the diplomatic corps, development agencies, the Catholic Church, and the Nicaraguan and Honduran governments in addition to CADESCA functionaries.

36. The participating national coalitions were APEMEP (Panama), CNA (Costa Rica), UNAG (Nicaragua), ADC (El Salvador), COCOCH (Honduras), and BFAC and CCC-B (Belize). The Belizean organizations created a formal coalition (BAPO) to participate in ASOCODE only in 1996, years after this step had been taken in the other countries. A range of Guatemalan organizations (including the CUC) attended the congress but asked for observer status because they had not yet founded a national coalition to participate in ASOCODE. CONAMPRO, the coalition that came to represent Guatemala in ASOCODE, was founded shortly after the congress. It was hurt, however, by factional disputes and the

tor Wilson Campos, a charismatic thirty-two-year-old Costa Rican who had played a key role in organizing regional meetings since 1988.³⁷ Largely at the insistence of the Nicaraguans, the congress decided that if the coordinator was from Costa Rica, then the association's headquarters would have to be in another country. In an effort to balance tensions between Costa Ricans and Nicaraguans, a UNAG functionary was elected Vice Coordinator and Nicaragua was chosen as the seat of ASOCODE.

The new association conceived of itself not as a supranational bureaucracy but as a "*mesa de encuentro*" for national coalitions, where decisions would be made by consensus, as well as a lobby for defending campesino interests in international, regional, and national arenas.³⁸ The congress specified that these interests included

(1) guaranteeing small and medium-sized producers access to land, credit and technical assistance, as well as processing and marketing of their production . . . ; (2) assuring respect for small and medium-sized producers' cultural roots, so that the development of Central American societies will be compatible with their idiosyncrasies and way of life . . . ; (3) achieving full recognition and participation in political and economic decisions at the national, regional, and international levels . . . ; (4) working for a true peace and true respect for the elemental human rights of small and medium-sized producers . . . ; and (5) promoting conservation of Central America's ecological systems. (ASOCODE 1991b, 25)

The delegates also addressed two resolutions to national governments. They called on Guatemala to free peasant leader Diego Domingo Martín, kidnapped by the civil patrol in Ixcumen, Huehuetenango; and

withdrawal of its largest constituent organizations, the CUC and CONIC. Interviews with two anonymous CONAMPRO leaders, Panama City, June 1994. The CUC and CONIC withdrew as a result of disagreements over NGO support for CONAMPRO and the high priority that ASOCODE gave to agricultural issues rather than to political and human rights concerns (Canadanedo and Madrigal 1994, 41). According to Carlos Hernández, CADESCA leaders apparently opposed the participation of the CUC because its identification with the armed Left would cause problems with the Guatemalan government. The CUC and CONIC went on to found the Coordinadora Nacional de Organizaciones Campesinas (CNO), which initially competed with CONAMPRO. By 1997, however, CONAMPRO, the CUC, and CONIC were all participating in the CNO. Even CONAMPRO supporters acknowledged that the CNO, because of its broader membership, might replace CONAMPRO as the Guatemalan affiliate of ASOCODE. Interview with Miguel Angel Lemus, CONAMPRO-ICIC, Guatemala City, 11 Aug. 1997.

37. Campos came from a rural community near the central Costa Rican city of Heredia. In a 1990 interview, he recalled that his father had "chosen" him as the one child out of eight who would attend a university. He completed two years at the Universidad de Costa Rica, dropped out to take a position with the health ministry in a remote northern zone, and in the early 1980s led the formation of the Unión Campesina de Guatuso (UCADEGUA), a member of the Justicia y Desarrollo coalition. Interview with Campos, San José, 1 Aug. 1990. In 1996 Sinforiano Cáceres, a Nicaraguan UNAG leader, succeeded Campos as ASOCODE's general coordinator.

38. ASOCODE's statutes specified that the coordinating commission's decisions must be consensual rather than by majority vote (1991b, 30). Members described this practice with

they urged the Nicaraguan government to provide titles for all lands “in the hands of campesinos, so that they may obtain credit and become active producers” and “to indemnify or provide new lands for those members of the former Resistencia Nacional [the Contras] whose properties were confiscated” (ASOCODE 1991b, 7–9).

Alternative Messages and Funding the Messengers

How was this challenging agenda to be funded? In 1992 and 1993, three delegations toured Europe. The third and largest group, whose trip was coordinated by the Amsterdam-based Transnational Institute, received a welcome beyond all expectations. Representatives of the governments of Holland, Denmark, Sweden, Norway, Germany, Belgium, and France as well as high-ranking EEC and European Parliament officials met with the ASOCODE envoys, often “for more time than protocol usually requires for this kind of interview” (ASOCODE 1993c). An internal organization report noted that the government representatives “listened with curiosity and at times with surprise at the level of our arguments and our knowledge regarding global economic and agricultural issues and the political, economic, and social problems of our region. In sum, the result is highly favorable to ASOCODE . . .” (ASOCODE 1993c). The tour also reinforced links with European NGOs, foundations, university groups, media, fair-commerce campaigns, and agriculturalists’ organizations, which, the report declared unselfconsciously, “helped us become aware of our backwardness” (ASOCODE 1993c).³⁹

How successful were ASOCODE’s European tours and related efforts in securing material support? By the end of 1992, the association inaugurated its headquarters in Managua, a spacious house in an upper-middle-class neighborhood a block from the home of President Violeta Barrios de Chamorro (and around the corner from the UNAG). The office resembles that of any large Central American NGO, with computers and copiers, offices for professional staff, secretaries, a guard, a maid, and a driver with a jeep. By 1993 the organization’s annual budget exceeded

pride and wonder at their capacity for dialogue mixed with frustration over the heated and sometimes inconclusive nature of the discussions.

39. Interviews with Inés Fuentes, COCOCH, Panama City, 24 June 1994, and Tegucigalpa, 28 July 1994. Campaigns for fair commerce seek to supply niche markets (like the one for organic or gourmet coffee) or to purchase the output of small producers, cooperatives, and democratically controlled peasant organizations at premium or “just” prices. One of the more notable successes is the Netherlands’ Max Havelaar Foundation, which imports coffee from small producers’ groups in over a dozen countries. Havelaar coffee is served in eleven out of twelve Dutch provincial government buildings, in 40 percent of municipal offices, and in the National Parliament. It is also available in most Dutch, Belgian, and Swiss supermarkets as well as elsewhere in Europe (see Stichting Max Havelaar 1992).

three hundred thousand dollars (U.S.). A monthly subsidy of a thousand dollars was paid to each of the seven national coalitions (ASOCODE 1993a, 18). By 1995 this subvention had risen to four to five thousand per month for each coalition.⁴⁰ The general coordinator's salary in 1993 was thirteen thousand dollars a year (not counting the "thirteenth month" year-end bonus), a handsome income for a mid-level professional in Central America (ASOCODE 1993a, 18).

These resources permitted ASOCODE to sponsor frequent seminars with campesino leaders on credit, marketing opportunities, agricultural and agroforestry technology, administrative and lobbying skills, and other needs. The association also produced a constant flow of proposals and position papers and maintained a regular presence at intergovernmental meetings. In Panama in 1992, after intense ASOCODE lobbying, the Central American Presidents' Summit issued the *Compromiso Agropecuario de Panamá* (CAP), a series of guidelines for regional policy. While the CAP called for eliminating remaining barriers to free trade, food security also figured as a concern throughout, suggesting that campesino lobbyists had achieved some impact. The presidents called for protecting small grain producers from "fluctuations and distortions" in international markets; creating a regional fund for improving smallholders' access to technology, credit, and processing facilities; and incorporating "representatives of the public and private agricultural sectors" into policy-making processes and international commercial negotiations (Presidentes Centroamericanos 1992). While it was clear that many of these promises would likely go unfulfilled, the CAP nevertheless constituted a significant reference point for future negotiations.

Despite the concessions in the CAP, some presidents were far from pleased about having peasant lobbyists attending their regional meetings. Especially since the 1991 confrontation between peasant leaders and government ministers over grain "price band" policies,⁴¹ the more conservative governments had viewed first the PFSA and then ASOCODE with consternation. The government of President Rafael Leonardo Callejas in Honduras took the perceived threat seriously enough to bring right-wing peasant leaders to the Panama summit and then to employ a classic Honduran tactic for dividing popular movements: the creation of a "parallel organization."⁴² In early 1993, pro-Callejas campesino groups convoked a

40. Interview with Wilber Zavala, ASOCODE, Managua, 10 Aug. 1995. ASOCODE's statutes provide for the possibility of the associated coalitions paying dues to ASOCODE (1991b, 26), and its 1993 congress approved in principle a dues payment from each national group (Candanedo and Madrigal 1994, 162). Nonetheless, resources have flowed exclusively in the other direction, from ASOCODE to the national groups.

41. See n. 34.

42. The creation of a "parallel organization" typically involves staged elections for a new board of directors. Government agencies or the courts then award the organization's "legal

meeting to form the Confederación Campesina del Istmo Centroamericano (COCICA), founded "to promote forms of organization that foment harmony among the actors that participate in agricultural development" (COCICA 1993a, 3). COCICA leader Nahún Cáliz put the matter more bluntly, echoing one of the goals of the recently passed Agricultural Modernization Law. Peasants, he declared, "have to get over their fear of associating with foreign capital."⁴³

Although COCICA attracted a half dozen Guatemalan, Salvadoran, and Costa Rican groups to its founding convention (as well as observers from Nicaragua's UNAG), the organization did not have the human or material resources to compete effectively with ASOCODE. Its links to Callejas, who was widely viewed as aggressively anti-campesino, condemned it to being just one more of the "paper" or "shell" organizations that periodically spring up in Central America, representing themselves as the embodiment of one or another sector of civil society.⁴⁴

ASOCODE rapidly succeeded in gaining regional and international recognition, although at times this pace caused tensions with the participating national coalitions. In December 1993, for example, the association held its second congress in Guatemala and invited President Ramiro de León Carpio to attend. This move was a calculated effort to shield the representatives of the Coordinadora Nacional de Pequeños y Medianos Productores (CONAMPRO, ASOCODE's affiliate in Guatemala) and ASOCODE leaders traveling there, who on earlier occasions had suffered harassment at the airport.⁴⁵ CONAMPRO representatives wanted to use de León's presence to raise pressing issues of "massacres . . . , forced

identity" (along with offices, bank accounts and other resources) to a favored faction, whether or not it represents the membership (Arita 1994; Lombrana 1989; Menjívar, Li Kam, and Portuguez 1985; Posas 1985; Thorpe et al. 1995, 131–43). According to Salvador Arias, Callejas may have been especially irritated with ASOCODE because he facilitated its first appearance at a summit (in San Salvador in mid-1991) as a result of concessions to ASOCODE's Honduran affiliate COCOCH. Interview with Arias. Well-informed sources indicate that Callejas's effort to form a "parallel" to ASOCODE also involved the government of Alfredo Cristiani in El Salvador.

43. "Presidente del CNC: Campesinos deben romper el temor de asociarse con capitales extranjeros," *Heraldo*, 18 Feb. 1993, p. 5.

44. COCICA's moribund status was evident in 1994 interviews carried out one day apart with pro-Callejas peasant leaders Víctor Cáliz and Marcial Reyes Caballero. Each one told me that the other was COCICA's current president. Clearly, this situation exemplified what Tilly once aptly termed "fictitious organizations" (1984, 311).

45. Similar harassment also occurred in Honduras and El Salvador. ASOCODE leaders wanted to be able to tell threatening Guatemalan police or immigration officials not only that they had met personally with the president but that he had stated his approval of their organization. Similarly, connections with ASOCODE (and ASOCODE's ties to European governments) constituted an important form of protection for national groups in the countries where repression of the peasant movement was ongoing.

[military] recruitment . . . and political persecution."⁴⁶ But ASOCODE leaders, concerned about offending the president, exerted pressure to remove all such references from CONAMPRO's statement to the congress. The final version of the CONAMPRO coordinator's speech made only vague allusions to war and repression and to Guatemala's "long and dark night, which has no end in sight" (ASOCODE 1993d, 7).

For ASOCODE, the strategy of lobbying ministers and presidents had several strong points. First, it buffered national organizations against repression. Second, it provided a source of information about impending policy shifts. Third, it demonstrated to international organizations and funders that the peasant movement was not inveterately confrontational and was capable of offering alternative development proposals and willing to negotiate with policymakers. Fourth, the strategy contributed to democratization inasmuch as peasants and other sectors of civil society gained the right to express their demands and to insist on compliance with government commitments, along with access to the necessary forums. Fifth, it established a presence for popular movements in the new supranational bodies that increasingly direct Central American integration. Sixth, it widened debate over such issues as trade and fiscal policies, vertically integrated production, credit availability, and agrarian reform. Finally, in several countries, this lobbying strategy helped win national organizations' demands for participation in policy-making bodies, such as public-sector agrarian banks and bipartite agricultural-sector commissions composed of ministerial and peasant-organization representatives.

Successes in lobbying and negotiations depended significantly on the peasants' growing capacity for appropriating and reshaping official discourse—and not just the presidents' frequent but vague calls for "*concertación*" (consensus and reconciliation) or the participation of civil society. The specificity of this approach is suggested in the comments of one Salvadoran activist:

To speak of the development of El Salvador is to speak of the Lempa River Basin: half the country, ten thousand square kilometers, the source of 98 percent of our energy, our main water source. The country's future is bound up with the Lempa Basin. . . . We raise this issue to make the traditional demands of the peasant movement: land titling, credit, marketing, technical assistance. But we negotiate around what most interests the country: energy and water. Who lives on the slopes of the Lempa Basin? Poor agriculturalists producing basic grains without technology or assistance. They can't change their relation to the land because their rights to it have not been recognized. Even the U.S. Agriculture Department recognizes that if people don't own their land, it's difficult to change their relation to natural resources. So in negotiations we raise the banner of the Lempa Basin. "You're interested in energy? We don't even have energy, we don't have light. You're interested in preventing sedimentation of the dams? You invest millions of dollars in dredging. But if you want to *prevent* runoff and sedimentation, we have to conserve the

46. Interview with anonymous CONAMPRO leaders, Panama City, June 1994.

soils and only the agriculturalists can do that. . . ." This argument is like a new weapon for negotiation.⁴⁷

But however adroit peasant negotiators had become at appropriating and reshaping official rhetoric, their success in lobbying depended on the willingness of those in power to compromise. By mid-1994, members of ASOCODE's coordinating commission agreed that the region's governments "lacked political will." The promises of the *Compromiso Agropecuario de Panamá (CAP)*—and many others—had not been met. Wilson Campos summed up the mood: "We've forced them to recognize us as a legitimate force. But now, after two years, we've been in four summits and over twenty regional forums. We're seeing that they've made a lot of promises that haven't been kept" (Edelman 1994).

Governmental intransigence brought calls from within ASOCODE for a return to traditional pressure tactics: marches or even highway blockades or building occupations. Most agreed, however, that any demonstration should be carried out simultaneously in all seven countries and without abandoning efforts to affect policy through other means. Even before any show of force, the mere threat of action won concessions. As a coordinating commission report from September 1994 indicated, "in November, for the first time, we will have an [entire] day to work with the Central American Agriculture Ministers; but we only obtained this one-day audience because we sent a letter saying that ASOCODE was considering the possibility of regional pressure and their response was to immediately give us that working day" (ASOCODE 1994b, 5).

The possibility of regional pressure had already been determined. On 10 October 1994, organizations in five of the seven countries staged simultaneous marches to protest these governments' unwillingness to modify national structural adjustment policies (no demonstrations occurred in Belize, which was celebrating its national day, or in Nicaragua, where the government banned demonstrations during a visit by U.S. Vice President Albert Gore to the Central American "Ecological Summit"). The large turnouts—especially in Honduras and Costa Rica, where the presidents received delegations of demonstrators—constituted a significant show of strength and a useful morale builder. But the marches appeared to do little to break the impasse between the governments and the peasant organizations.⁴⁸ At the Central American Presidents' Summit in March 1995 in El Salvador, ASOCODE did not receive the customary invitation to address the meeting, despite the event's focus on issues of social welfare.⁴⁹

47. Interview with anonymous ADC leader, San Salvador, 18 July 1994.

48. In Honduras, however, the peasant march forced the creation of a new bipartite commission representing peasant organizations and the public sector to monitor Central Bank credits provided to the state development bank.

49. Interview with Wilber Zavala, ASOCODE.

Increasingly, the association turned inward, leaving lobbying activities at presidential summits to the *Iniciativa Civil para la Integración Centroamérica* (ICIC), a coalition of labor, peasant, and small business organizations (ASOCODE 1995a, 13).⁵⁰ ASOCODE continued to seek common ground with the region's agriculture ministers, with modest successes. But the main focus of its work shifted to strengthening the national coalitions and alliances with nonpeasant organizations, identifying whatever opportunities might arise as part of the free-market transition, and fostering campesino technical, entrepreneurial, and administrative capacities (ASOCODE 1997a, 1997b).⁵¹ In Honduras, El Salvador, and Guatemala, organizations linked to ASOCODE staged major land occupations in 1995 and 1996, producing occasional concessions but also new victims of state repression.⁵²

Conclusion

Transnational peasant organizing in Central America raises significant questions regarding social scientific approaches to transnationalism, collective action, and agrarian change. "Peasants," as Kearney (1996) has rightly suggested, constitute an "ambiguous" and "disruptive" classificatory category. But while this characterization may seem troublesome or precarious to social scientists, it is less so to those Central Americans who assume a "campesino" identity—not their "essential" or "univocal" identity but a central part of a spectrum of possible social positions. Nor does a politically inclusive subjective identification as "campesinos" prevent Central American peasants from making analytical distinctions between smallholders, cooperativists, squatters, and the landless. These differences loom large in the everyday work of creating programs, building organizations, and struggling for specific demands. Even though peasant politics now have a profound transnational dimension, they hardly reflect a "decline of class identity" or a displacement of political work from the space of the nation-state (Kearney 1996). On the contrary, material aspira-

50. Interview with Miguel Angel Lemus, CONAMPRO-ICIC.

51. Interview with Sinforiano Cáceres, ASOCODE, Managua, 31 July 1997.

52. On 23 October 1995, Honduran troops killed three campesinos and wounded two others when firing into a crowd of seventy in the Department of Yoro who refused to leave land claimed by the *Ministerio de Recursos Naturales*. In December 1995, Honduran police fired on peasant demonstrators outside the Central American Presidents Summit, killing one protester. In western El Salvador in October 1995, the ADC and its allies occupied seventeen properties. This initiative led to the formation of a mixed government-peasant-organization commission to investigate farms that exceeded the constitutional ceiling of 245 hectares. The group consisted of representatives of the state agrarian-reform agency and human rights office, the FMLN, the UN Observer Mission, and the ADC. On 20 February 1996, Guatemalan police violently evicted several hundred campesinos in a CONAMPRO-linked organization who were occupying land in San Lucas Tolimán, Sololá.

tions still occupy a privileged place in a peasant political practice directed simultaneously at particular nation-states and the supranational institutions to which the states now belong (compare Tarrow n.d., chap. 11).

Despite the evident successes of the transnational peasant movement in Central America, it faces troubling dilemmas. ASOCODE has proved to be more than the sum of its distinct national parts and much more than a project of European NGOs or governments. It has accomplished a great deal in strengthening its constituent organizations and advocating forcefully on behalf of small agriculturalists at a time when Central American elites' discussions about development are largely hostile to (or at best, silent about) peasants and their concerns. Yet it is not surprising that ASOCODE's most significant lobbying successes have been with foreign cooperation agencies rather than with multilateral lenders, presidential summits, or national governments. Many European and Canadian cooperation organizations are favorably disposed to peasant movements to begin with and are receptive to a kind of information and image projection that cannot by itself possibly achieve such major goals as altering the outcome of Central American agrarian struggles or the application of World Bank structural-adjustment programs.

In Central America in the late 1980s and early 1990s, diverse sectors of civil society formed regional networks to defend their interests, often building on transnational ties established during the upheavals of the previous decade. In the case of the peasant organizations that formed ASOCODE, European backing was and still is key, even if threats to a cherished smallholder identity and livelihood provided a goad to action at the individual or national level. Without foreign "cooperation," something resembling ASOCODE might have emerged anyway, but with a smaller budget and a lower profile. A mildly critical participant in the Central American labor-union group COCENTRA alluded to ASOCODE's higher profile in suggesting that its leaders should be "taking buses to Guatemala or Honduras the way we do rather than airplanes the way they do."

The flow of European (and other) funds inevitably raises questions about the mix of motives of those leading national and transnational peasant organizations, the long-term possibilities of movements vulnerable to the growing fiscal conservatism of European societies, and the ultimate political and economic impact of internationalization. ASOCODE leaders assert that "no governmental or nongovernmental organization has the right to represent itself as the parent or creator of this process" (1992, 4).⁵³

53. Another internal ASOCODE document offered a more frank assessment, describing the group's reliance on foreign "cooperation" as one of its "original sins." The document characterized such funding as "one of the temptations that we will have to face on a daily basis in order to guarantee that ASOCODE has full autonomy and is really at the service of the small and medium-sized agriculturalists of the isthmus" (Hernández Cascante 1992, 6). A number of ASOCODE participants mentioned dependence on foreign funds as a signifi-

Nevertheless, peasant identity is actively created and represented these days—sometimes consciously, sometimes not—with an awareness of the images, information, and discourses that play best before international audiences. To some extent, the agenda of ASOCODE and its constituent organizations is now donor-driven—a less onerous kind of conditionality than the domination of earlier peasant organizations by political parties but one that nonetheless preoccupies some of its constituents. Much of the attention devoted to gender, indigenous, and (to a lesser extent) environmental issues appeared at first to derive primarily from European rather than Central American sensibilities (Candanedo and Madrigal 1994, 119).⁵⁴

Being a “*dirigente*” (leader), moreover, has become a career path, with the security of a salary and possibilities for advancement and foreign travel.⁵⁵ As ASOCODE’s economic support for the national coalitions has increased, the number of activists on the payroll has grown. Even when these cadres conduct themselves with the utmost integrity (as generally appears to be the case), the perception that they form a privileged group causes frictions.⁵⁶ Those outside the top leadership sometimes mutter about “*yuppis campesinos*,” “*el jet set campesino*,” or “*la cúpula de cúpulas*.” In traditional Central American peasant politics, receiving a salaried position

cant preoccupation in one external evaluation of the organization (Candanedo and Madrigal 1994).

54. Increasingly, however, these concerns are being shared and debated. One internal ASOCODE report on a European tour stated, “The ecological issue . . . is one of the problems of most concern to European civil society. Some groups tend to push us toward changes in our cultivation practices that are too drastic. We told them that we were not prepared for this and proposed a more moderate approach toward chemical-free agriculture . . . , introducing new practices little by little to achieve a gradual change” (ASOCODE 1993c, 4). Similarly, much of the initial impetus for expanding women’s participation came from foreign donor NGOs. But once such efforts began, they quickly developed a dynamic of their own, with campesina leaders demanding and attaining greater representation in the organization (ASOCODE 1995b). Nonetheless, as a recent external evaluation noted, “Work with women is still unfortunately conceived of as a problem of the women themselves” (Morales and Cranshaw 1997, 27).

55. ASOCODE sought to guarantee rotation of cadres in top posts, barring the coordinator and coordinating commission members from serving more than two terms in office. But the scarcity of skilled organizers in the national and transnational networks of which ASOCODE is a part (ICIC, CICAFOC, Vía Campesina, and so on) suggests that leaders can continue careers well after service to any one organization (compare Keck and Sikkink 1998 and Lichbach 1994, 408–9).

56. ASOCODE’s second congress in December 1993 resolved to place the two coordinating commission representatives from each country on the ASOCODE payroll because they were devoting most of their time to the regional organization. Some national coalitions later objected that this matter should have been discussed first at the national level, given that these individuals also worked for national- and base-level organizations. Some objected as well to a “lack of transparency” in approving the draft budget, which had not been distributed sufficiently in advance to permit detailed study and discussion (Candanedo and Madrigal 1994, 108).

was often a payoff and a cause for envy. Today it can still convey an odor of corruption, even when the employer is not a government but a popular organization and the newly fortunate employee is scrupulously honest.

Information flows between ASOCODE and national- and base-level organizations are often less than agile, a problem that fuels the perception that regional leaders constitute a distant elite. ASOCODE's concentration on high-level lobbying and organizational consolidation also meant that many ambitious alternative development plans hashed out in regional seminars have yet to be applied on the ground—yet “to land” or “come down to earth,” as the frequent fliers in the leadership put it. Clearly, it is easier and cheaper to be effective in transnational lobbying and information politics than in the protracted and frustrating work of domestic organizing or the formidable struggle to raise rural living standards.

As a campesino movement, ASOCODE has broken with the local and agrarian protest orientation that historically characterized so many peasant mobilizations in Central America and elsewhere. At the same time, ASOCODE rejects the strategy of “peasant wars,” which consumed so many of its supporters in the 1980s. Campesino involvement in lobbying, establishing international networks, building alliances with nonagricultural sector groups, and elaborating detailed and sophisticated development proposals marks a new stage in a social movement that is both very old and very new, as well as a new variety of “globalization from below.”

Central America's regional peasant movement does not share the “classlessness” and the emphasis on “cultural struggles” over “material struggles” said to typify other identity-based “new social movements” that have formed transnational networks, such as those of feminists, environmentalists, and indigenous peoples (Escobar 1992; Jelin 1990; Melucci 1989; Olofsson 1988). The movement's embrace of “development”—in the organizations' names and in the participants' aspirations for greater well-being—suggests that it was peasants' political and economic marginality that led them to organize and opened the doors to international recognition and alliances (compare Brysk 1996). The case of cross-border peasant organizing in Central America seems to confirm the argument of some transnational relations theorists that cooperative structures of international governance tend to legitimize transnational activities and to increase their access to national politics (Risse-Kappen 1995, 7). Here, the examples are the Sistema de la Integración Centroamericana (SICA), Parlamento Centroamericano (PARLACEN), and the San José Dialogue. It is less clear, however, that attaining access or building effective coalitions translates into sustained policy impact. The very conditions that made ASOCODE possible—the end or decline of armed struggle, the rise of organizations in civil society, the opening and regional integration of Central American economies, the weakening of states affected by neoliberal-

ism, the availability of foreign “cooperation”—also make it easier for the dominant groups to simply ignore pressure from below.

Yet in just a few years of existence, ASOCODE has surmounted several historical sources of weakness and division in peasant movements. Its rejection of political party ties, genuine ideological pluralism, and commitment to internal and external dialogue and consensus building have permitted the association to coordinate a diverse group of organizations in different national settings and to achieve a remarkable degree of regional and international recognition.

Perhaps the most encouraging aspect of these contradictions is that they are understood, debated, and addressed within ASOCODE with a frankness and sophistication that have few antecedents in peasant-movement practice. Campesino organizations are political projects, not profit-generating enterprises, and many of these tensions are probably unavoidable (compare Landsberger and Hewitt 1970). In Central America, at least, even elite business lobbies have relied heavily on foreign “cooperation,” usually from USAID (Rosa 1993; Sojo 1992). The fact that the peasant movement has sought funds abroad could even be interpreted as an indication of growing realism, specialization or professionalization, and maturity. Given Central American peasant movements’ long history of factionalism, ASOCODE’s success in bringing together such a diverse and fractious collection of groups from seven different countries is nothing short of remarkable.

APPENDIX

Abbreviations

ADC*	Alianza Democrática Campesina (El Salvador)
APEMEP*	Asociación de Pequeños y Medianos Productores de Panamá
ASOCODE	Asociación Centroamericana de Organizaciones Campesinas para la Cooperación y el Desarrollo
ATC	Asociación de Trabajadores del Campo (Nicaragua)
BAPO*	Belize Association of Producers’ Organizations
BFAC**	Belize Federation of Agricultural Cooperatives
CADESCA	Comité de Apoyo al Desarrollo Económico y Social de Centroamérica
CAP	Compromiso Agropecuario de Panamá
CARICOM	Caribbean Common Market
CCC-B**	Confederation of Cooperatives and Credit Unions of Belize
CCC-CA	Confederación de Cooperativas del Caribe y Centroamérica
CCJYD**	Consejo Campesino Justicia y Desarrollo (Costa Rica)
CCOD	Concertación Centroamericana de Organismos de Desarrollo
CENCAP	Centro de Capacitación Cooperativista (El Salvador)
CICAFOC	Coordinadora Indígena Campesina de Agroforestería Comunitaria Centroamericana
CIFCA	Copenhagen Initiative for Central America
CNA*	Coordinadora Nacional Agraria (Costa Rica)
CNC	Consejo Nacional Campesino (Honduras)

* National coalitions participating in ASOCODE

** Organizations participating in the national coalitions (partial list)

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CNOC	Coordinadora Nacional de Organizaciones Campesinas (Guatemala)
CNP	Consejo Nacional de Producción (Costa Rica)
CNTC**	Central Nacional de Trabajadores del Campo (Honduras)
COACES**	Confederación de Asociaciones Cooperativas de El Salvador
COCENTRA	Coordinadora Centroamericana de Trabajadores
COCICA	Confederación Campesina del Istmo Centroamericano
COCOCH*	Concejo Coordinador de Organizaciones Campesinas de Honduras
CODIMCAH**	Consejo de Desarrollo Integral de Mujeres Campesinas de Honduras
CONAC**	Confederación Nacional de Asentamientos Campesinos (Panama)
CONAMPRO*	Coordinadora Nacional de Pequeños y Medianos Productores (Guatemala)
CONFRAS**	Confederación de Federaciones de Cooperativas de la Reforma Agraria Salvadoreña
CONIC	Coordinadora Nacional Indígena Campesina (Guatemala)
CUC	Comité de Unidad Campesina (Guatemala)
EEC	European Economic Community
ENABAS	Empresa Nicaragüense de Productos Básicos (Nicaragua)
ERP	Ejército Revolucionario del Pueblo (El Salvador), after 1994, Expresión Renovadora del Pueblo
FEDEPRICAP	Federación de Entidades Privadas de Centroamérica y Panamá
FENACoop**	Federación Nacional de Cooperativas (Nicaragua)
FESACORA	Federación Salvadoreña de Cooperativas de la Reforma Agraria
FESACORASAL**	Federación de Cooperativas de la Reforma Agraria de la Región Occidental (El Salvador)
FIPA	Federación Internacional de Productores Agropecuarios (France)
FMLN	Frente Farabundo Martí de Liberación Nacional (El Salvador)
FPL	Fuerzas Populares de Liberación (El Salvador)
FSLN	Frente Sandinista de Liberación Nacional (Nicaragua)
FUNDESCA	Fundación para el Desarrollo Económico y Social de Centroamérica (Panama)
GATT	General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade
ICIC	Iniciativa Civil para la Integración Centroamericana
IRA	Instituto Regulador de Abastecimientos (El Salvador)
IRAM	Institut de Recherches et d'Applications de Méthodes de Développement (France)
MNC**	Mesa Nacional Campesina (Costa Rica)
PAC	Plan de Acción para la Agricultura Centroamericana
PARLACEN	Parlamento Centroamericano
PFSA	Programa de Formación en Seguridad Alimentaria
PSA	Programa de Seguridad Alimentaria
SELA	Sistema Económico Latinoamericano
SICA	Sistema de la Integración Centroamericana
SOCRA**	Sociedad de Cooperativas Cafetaleras de la Reforma Agraria (El Salvador)
UCADEGUA**	Unión Campesina de Guatuso (Costa Rica)
UCS	Unión Comunal Salvadoreña (El Salvador)
UNAG*	Unión Nacional de Agricultores y Ganaderos (Nicaragua)
UNC	Unión Nacional de Campesinos (Honduras)
UPANACIONAL**	Unión Nacional de Pequeños y Medianos Productores Agrícolas (Costa Rica)
UPROCAFE	Unión de Pequeños Productores de Café de Centroamérica, México y el Caribe
USAID	United States Agency for International Development

* National coalitions participating in ASOCODE

** Organizations participating in the national coalitions (partial list)

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