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# **Locating a politics of knowledge: Struggles over intellectual property in the Philippines**

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## **Locating a politics of knowledge: Struggles over intellectual property in the Philippines**

### **Abstract**

Intellectual property is increasingly a key item on the US-Japanese-European trade agenda, and the globalisation of the US patent standard, which includes patents on plants and processes, has become a key objective of 'information rich' corporations and countries. While social movements act against the legal structures and spaces of knowledge associated with privatised knowledge, they also work to construct alternatives both through the development of practical alternatives like seed saving networks and the articulation of new discourses like Farmers Rights. In doing so, farmers' organisations are actively creating and maintaining spaces of alternative knowledges and formulations of property. The articulation of Farmers Rights by social movements as a response to intellectual property is a way both of resisting regimes of intellectual property and of creating a normative framework within which claims to intellectual property are made obsolete. Drawing from empirical work based in the Philippines, I propose a concept, woven space, which refers to the diverse and overlapping alternatives and resistances that emerge from the situated and embodied struggles taking place around the world to form a differently imagined and realised global. This is a decentralised, networked space, rich with experience, shared belief, and possibilities for shared action.

**Keywords:** Social movements, globalisation, intellectual property, epistemologies, Philippines, situated knowledges, scale, resistance, patents on life, ethnography



## **Locating a politics of knowledge: Struggles over intellectual property in the Philippines**

### **Introduction**

A politics of knowledge and knowing underpins our social world. Constructions of knowledge are bound up with power, they encircle and are encircled by political and economic relations, and are fundamental to the ways that we know and create space. Some knowledges and ways of knowing are not easily recognised as Knowledge - as ownable, important, scientific, legitimate - but are trivialised as local, anecdotal and irrelevant. In geography and development studies, the role of knowledge in (re)creating the colonial order (Mitchell 2002; Said 1978), and the neo-colonial present (Escobar 1995; Ferguson 1990, 2006) is increasingly recognised. Modernisation itself, and modern projects such as the 'agricultural modernisation' associated with the Green Revolution are criticised for locating knowledge and skill in the institutions and experts of the West. An active subjectivity, one that allows for knowing and for creating knowledge, is not a subject position awarded those deemed in need of developing. Rather, in the world of stereotyped, mainstream development, this is a subjectivity available to technocrats, development experts and other such authorised institutions and individuals. Of course, the reality of people's lives is neither as dire nor as foreclosed as such a portrayal suggests. Diverse epistemologies overlap and coexist while unexpected knowledges and ways of knowing remain; claimed, created and authorised by unexpected subjects in unexpected ways.

While epistemological politics are now recognised as a central terrain of struggle, changes in regimes of knowledge-as-property, or intellectual property, have bound



questions of knowledge ever more tightly to the capitalist system. The privatisation of knowledge associated with intellectual property has emerged as a central feature of global neo-liberal restructuring (Lai and Qiu 2003; Merges 1995; Trebilcock and Howse 1995; Tzotzos 2001). The inclusion of intellectual property into the WTO has meant all member countries are required to institute an ‘effective’ regime of intellectual property including provision for intellectual property to cover plants, animals and biological processes. In combination with unilateral and bilateral pressures from the US, EU and other pro-IPR countries and coalitions, this has meant an unprecedented change in knowledge and property regimes (Love 2007; Parry 2002). The Western knowledge space and its property regime of patents and plant variety protection is effectively being globalised. Working against, beneath and beyond neoliberal prescriptions of knowledge-as-property, however, social movements respond with multiscalar strategies that both oppose Western, corporate spaces of knowledge/property and create alternative spaces of possibility.

In this article I will look to social movement responses to intellectual property protection on plants and animals (so-called ‘patents on life,’) to tease out the processes at play in one epistemological struggle. The work is based on 18 months participant observation in the Philippines. During this time, I worked with a network of small and subsistence farmers called MASIPAG that focuses on sustainable agriculture and farmer empowerment. In this article, I trace the process through which the MASIPAG network identified, articulated and implemented the concept of Farmers Rights<sup>1</sup> drawing on its work in the Philippines and its connections with its international network partners. While social movements act against the legal structures and spaces of knowledge associated with privatised knowledge, they also work to construct alternatives both through the



articulation of anti-PVP counter-discourses and through networked, practical alternatives. In transcending the borders offered by elites, and in taking the step of creating new visions of the future, social movements are in the process of imagining and creating spaces of possibility. I draw on the ways they make knowledge claims and reconstruct scale-as-connection to suggest a different way of conceptualizing the global that I call woven space.

In conceptualising woven space I have drawn on Brecher and Costello's (1994) work on globalisation-from-below and Richard Falk's (1993, 1995) concept of humane governance. A bottom-up globalisation works against 'top-down' globalisation as 'people at the grass roots around the world link up to impose their own needs and interests on the process of globalisation' (Brecher, Costello and Smith 2000). I look to feminist theory and critical work on scale to nuance this work in a way that emphasises the importance of informal networks, discursive aspects of resistance, issues of power and contestation within movements, and the need to understand social movement participants as people with complex, multilayered subjectivities (Bergeron 2001; Fernandez-Kelly and Wolf 2001; Glassman 2001; Nagar et al 2002; Prempeh 2004; Routledge 2003). Woven space is a term that emphasises the multiscalar nature of resistance, moving beyond the idea of 'above' and 'below' to see scale as socially constructed (Howitt 1993; Gough 2004; Purcell and Brown 2005). Woven space does not arise from an unproblematic local to act upon an unproblematic global but crosses, (re)constructs, and (re)interprets scalar politics. At the heart of this concept is the role of knowledge in underpinning connections and inviting alternative geographies. As social movements negotiate, rework and in some



form adopt the agendas, knowledges and imaginative landscapes of woven space, they become a node in the rich tapestry of possibility it offers.

As I explore the concept of Farmers Rights and its broader implications for understanding social movements, epistemological struggle and the emergence of alternative geographies, I draw from my ongoing interaction, both in her village in the Visayas region of the Philippines and in various ‘national’ forums, with a woman farmer called Erlinda. I do this in part to disrupt the easy scalar assumptions associated with discussions of globalisation. A conceptualisation of woven space as situated and contingent, bound up with constructions of knowledge and identity, and constantly unfolding through negotiation and struggle, calls for a methodology and analysis that is open to the multiple, complex sites and practices through which the space is constantly (re)created. Erlinda is a ‘local’ subsistence farmer, an upland peasant from a marginalised and depressed area in the Philippines which had been a major stronghold for the communist insurgency, and a woman in a heavily male dominated culture, at the same time as she is an activist, an educator and an inspirational figure for many in the movement. I also want to avoid the tendency, often seen in discussions of globalisation and resistance, to over-generalise and lose the specificity and richness on which a movement is built. The farmers of MASIPAG are actors taking bold, political steps in reworking their destiny. Although they work within and through political and structural constraints, they are not reducible to them and remain a heterogeneous group. In bringing the minutia of Erlinda’s life with her family and community to discussions of globalisation, nationalist discourse and collective identity, I want to draw out the ways resistance and libratory imagination are (re)constructed in private as well as public



settings, are embodied and flexible, and are created through the actions of remarkable women and men.

### **The Farmers Rights workshop**

MASIPAG is a network of approximately 30,000 farmers, organisations, and scientists based in the Philippines which aims to contribute to farmers' empowerment, soil regeneration and rehabilitation of biodiversity among marginalised farming communities. The name MASIPAG is condensed from the longer name *Magsasaka at Siyemtipiko para ang Pagunlad ng Agrikultura* (Farmer-Scientist Partnership for Development). The organization supports small farmers in developing and promoting farmer-bred and farmer-selected seeds. More broadly, MASIPAG is concerned with the construction of new forms of agriculture that aim to reflect the needs and priorities of local farmers. Seed saving networks, farmer education and workshops to facilitate the adoption of organic, farmer-centred agriculture at the community level are all prioritised as crucial parts of the articulation of alternatives.

MASIPAG is engaged in campaigning against intellectual property rights at local government (working with municipal governments to draft resolutions), national (to reject and at other times to reform existing legislation), island (to campaign for 'ecological islands' free of privatised genetically modified seeds) and international scales (working with international movements and networks). One of the key elements and points of contention is that intellectual property on plants restricts the ability of farmers who use protected seed to save, exchange or sell it. At a minimum, it changes what has been an unchallenged right of farmers into a privilege (Dutfield 2000; Shiva 2000, 2001). Through intellectual property rights, farmers ironically stand to lose not only their control



over production inputs but also their right to experiment and innovate through on-farm seed breeding (Correa 2000a; Pottier 1999). If varieties are identifiably public, shared, sold or discussed, however, they cannot be patented. So MASIPAG, in promoting farmer empowerment and farmer-bred seeds is not only contesting patents in oppositional ways but is busy creating spaces within which intellectual property on plants is redundant.

In August of 2002, the MASIPAG network brought its key farmer-members to Los Baños in the Philippines for a three-day workshop on Plant Variety Protection (PVP) and Farmers Rights. The aim was to brief the farmers on issues associated with intellectual property including the international perspective, and for the network to develop its response to the threats. Their response took the form of a proactive envisioning process in which farmers worked with the skeletal concept of Farmers Rights and developed their own definition of this new concept. The defining of Farmers Rights was a way of consciously creating a discursive framework within which the right to collect seed was framed as a fundamental right, a right more historically and ethically valid than the right to intellectual property.

The definition and articulation of the concept of Farmers Rights was developed using a process aimed at maximum participation of the membership. A gathering of some 50 farmer-breeders with representation from each of the three major regions of the Philippines - Luzon, Visayas and Mindanao - converged at a hot spring resort outside Los Baños. The discussion of Farmers Rights began on the second day, the first being used for briefing and information sharing. The attendees split into four groups. Each group was to generate its own conception of Farmers Rights. The results would be brought



together and made into a position paper that would encapsulate both MASIPAG's stand on PVP and a definition and articulation of Farmers Rights.

During the second day of the workshop, the participants split into groups to discuss Farmers Rights and develop a definition. I accompanied a group of farmers who met on the front porch of one of the bamboo huts at the resort. The discussion took place in Cebuano, Tagalog, Visayan and English with translations because many of the group understood only one or two of these languages. The break-out groups of farmers reported back to the collective and the final definition included all their contributions. Some issues were discussed further with requests for clarification while other issues were grouped together. The final definition was large and wide-ranging, as much a manifesto as a classical definition. The statement included rights relating to land, seeds and genetic resources, production, biodiversity, politics and decision-making, culture and knowledge, information and research, and sociopolitical factors. The preamble of the final statement (MASIPAG 2002a, p. 1) developed from the workshop reads as follows:

Collectively, farmers share the social responsibility to feed society. For generations, they have nurtured and bred our food crops, and have conserved and improved the genetic resources that form the basis of food and agriculture. With farmers' responsibility to feed society, and stemming from their enormous contribution, comes Farmers' Rights. Farmers have rights over their innovations, practices, knowledge, technologies and biological resources evolved through generations, over the factors and processes of production (land, capital, technology, inputs), and over legal



and political decisions that undermine their ability to produce food and conserve genetic resources. The seeds, food, animals and associated knowledge that farmers have conserved and developed are not the product of any single farmer but are the collective products of many farming communities through many generations. Farmers Rights are thus collective rights and farmers are not owners, but stewards, of our biodiversity and genetic resources.

With this definition, social movements have created a Farmers Rights that refuses to be contained to the issue of ownership over germplasm. Instead it transgresses boundaries to include access to land, culture, seeds, politics, and knowledge. The focus links materially based campaigns about land reform and redistribution of resources with an effort to articulate a new moral economy. In proclaiming their stance against PVP in a positive form, that is, as an articulation of Farmers Rights, MASIPAG avoided engaging in the debate on PVP on the terms set by the establishment(s). Their response was not framed as merely a rebuttal of PVP, but as a visioning process that went above, beyond, and beneath the established frameworks. In doing so, the concept of breeders' rights was made redundant, symbolically swept aside by the more vital rights and obligations associated with subsistence.

The statement on Farmers Rights is a campaign tool and an exercise in building collective identity, a moral framework and a discourse that works against the 'plant breeders rights' enshrined in intellectual property laws. In this discussion I do not want to understate the power of state sanctioned ideas of rights against which social



movements define themselves. As legally enshrined norms, state sanctioned rights such as the right to intellectual property have important material effects and organising against them is not a frivolous exercise. The farmers groups are aware of the risks. Rather than wordplay, exercises rooted in the imagination and articulation of alternatives are a serious effort in organising, awareness building and empowerment. Meaning making is not enough to stop people from going to jail, from getting into debt and losing their land or experiencing oppression but it is an important step in building opposition and viable movements.

### **Introducing Nang Erlinda**

Nang Erlinda, from Panay, was invited to the workshop as a key farmer leader from the Visayas region. She is an organiser in the local community, a rice breeder and regional trainer in organic agriculture. Like many of the farmer leaders in MASIPAG she is active in the practical side of the work -in her case she is a key innovator and organiser in her area as well as a trainer and breeder -as well as in advocacy. Erlinda was born and lives in the isolated mountain village of Puno in the Philippines. She had to leave school when she was 12 years old to help support her younger siblings and worked as a domestic helper in Manila for six years until her youngest sister graduated from high school. She is 35 years old and un-married. She supports her parents and houses several nephews and nieces permanently or temporarily in their bamboo house set on a terraced hill. She was looking after two of her young nieces during my visits to Puno as their mother was working in the regional centre 5 hours away.

On her ½ ha rice plot located a 20 minute walk from her village of Puno, Nang Erlinda is developing a new strain of pest resistant, high yielding, locally adapted rice.



She is also testing a new method of growing organic rice, trialing 60 different varieties, and growing enough food to feed herself and her extended family. She travels throughout the island of Panay and to different islands in the Philippines to give training to other small farmers on breeding and sustainable agriculture. The network nominated her for an overseas trip to the US to attend a meeting of small farmers in North Dakota. This hectic schedule is very demanding and her family sometimes expresses a wish that she will settle down and put more of a focus on meeting the needs of the extended network of kin.

Talking of Farmers' Rights, Erlinda replies adamantly that farmers had a right to collect and save seed and a right to be able to continue their farming practices because, 'how else will they feed their family?' Nang Erlinda positions herself at the centre of a series of concentric circles not so much of rights as responsibilities; to her immediate family, to her extended kin, to her village, to MASIPAG, to the broader movement. It is from these responsibilities that her rights come. She explains:

I have a right and responsibility toward my family, to MASIPAG and to others. If our rights are not protected, how can we meet these responsibilities? How can I nurture the land, my family, the village and the network? It is about defending my ability to create and sustain.

The group of peasants brought together under the rubric of Farmers Rights, including Nang Erlinda, is international in scale at the same time that it makes claims based on the groundedness of farmers and their duties to their families and local communities. It



makes claims about the importance of different kinds of rights based on their relation to the right to subsistence, to fulfilling ones obligation and to environmental integrity. The definitions are located and situated. In the case of the farmers' experience, their definitions are being heavily informed by their work on the soil, their position within communities, their understanding of knowledge and property. Yet they are also being informed by their participation in social movements, and transnational alliances as well as a messy and hybrid history of colonisation, capital intensive agriculture and resistance.

In Erlinda's bamboo house in Panay, which is almost completely devoid of the paraphernalia that is deemed essential in most Western contexts (electricity, telephone, chairs, beds, cushions, books, decorations etc.), she showed me a photo of some fellow small farmers. In the photo Erlinda was wearing some kind of white protective uniform with a helmet tucked under her arm surrounded by the gleaming steel of a US farmers' operation. She was flanked by two people who, in contrast to Erlinda's size, looked massively tall and wide and bright, bright pink. The differences in experience seemed astounding, even humorous in their extremity. It almost looked as if she was proudly showing me her allies from a different planet. Yet the sense of commonality was real, based on the nature of a broadly defined shared work and an overlapping vision of justice and politics.

She referred to these farmers again when we talk about Farmers Rights at the workshop. 'It is difficult for the American farmers,' she said. 'This is what I found when I went there. They have the companies on them like police. These rights should be for them too.'



In Nang Erlinda's village of Puno, over thirty families have adopted a system of organic agriculture, farmer-led rice breeding, seed saving and farmer empowerment. They are linked in different ways through action, work, politics, and history to each other, and to national and international movements in their vision for change. The people of Puno, with their struggles to end dependency on chemicals and to revive *bayanihan* (collective labour and reciprocity) are [re]creating a space of knowledge and territory that is grounded in the soil, rich with the implosions of the rice seed and yet feeds into a broader space of alternatives and resistance. The seed breeding, saving and exchange between Nang Lyida and her neighbour Mang Jovenal, between fellow villagers Nening and Juidiricio, are multiscale transactions, deep with more liberatory constructions of property and ownership, and frameworks of justice and knowledge. In swapping the seeds, and stepping outside the frameworks of intellectual property, the farmers do not just step outside the realm of the moneylender and seed/chemical store in Bantugan, they are also stepping beyond the WTO, bilateral agreements, the machinations of multinationals and nimbly skipping beyond Western knowledge spaces and property regimes. The relations between people in the village are not a utopia; they are still deep with tensions and hierarchies based on gender and socio-economic status. Neither can the people completely shed the practicalities (they need to earn money to send children to school for example) or the knowledge frameworks that position them as passive outsiders and consumers. But in the steps they take to disrupt these oppressive relations, they are creating a node in a space of possibility (Gibson-Graham 2005).

In the next section I will look at the multiscale aspects of Farmers Rights and the way that 'globally' defined notions are absorbed, challenged and reworked in place to



(re)create a more grounded, diverse global stemming from material experience and political action.

### **International framework for Farmers Rights**

There is no one particular scale associated with Farmers Rights. It is grounded in the material, stemming from the seed itself and the rice plot while crossing scales in a nonlinear and non-reductionist way. At the workshop in Los Baños on Farmers Rights, the definition and development of the MASIPAG statement was preceded by a day of briefings on PVP, the WTO, TRIPS and other international agreements and negotiations.

The concept of Farmers Rights came to MASIPAG in a skeletal form from its international allies. In turn, MASIPAG worked with this minimal framework and created a definition both grounded and global. Before breaking into groups to develop the Farmers Rights statement, a brief history of Farmers Rights was presented. Billed as a ‘10 minute trip around the world,’ the Farmers Rights brief outlined the history and development of the concept in the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) and briefly discussed the positions of key international allies such as Via Campesina, the Third World Network, and IT Kenya.

The concept of Farmers Rights initially arose during debates at the FAO on the International Undertaking on Plant Genetic Resources (IU) (Mulvaney 1997). The International Undertaking, which was later renegotiated to become the ‘International Treaty’ was an international agreement dealing with plant genetic resources for food and agriculture. The Undertaking sought to ‘ensure that plant genetic resources of economic and/or social interest, particularly for agriculture, will be explored, preserved, evaluated and made available for plant breeding and scientific purposes’ (FAO 2004).



Concerns about the uneven distribution of benefits between, in FAO parlance, ‘the donors of germplasm’ (the Third World) and the ‘donors of technology’ (Industrialised Countries) led to a major effort by Third World Countries and NGOs to enshrine the rights of small producers and the poor in the international debates. The term itself was proposed by NGOs and Third World country representatives who maintained that ‘while breeders and corporations are covered by ‘breeders rights’ which provide financial benefits and protection, farmers and indigenous communities are not protected in this way. Farmers Rights emerged as a way to counterbalance the unfairness of intellectual property rights’ (MASIPAG 2002b).

During negotiations on the IU, Farmers Rights became a central concern. International NGOs and farmers’ organisations such as GRAIN and Via Campesina saw the FAO as a possible venue for an agreement that could counterbalance the more overtly pro-industrialised country agreements that were emerging in the GATT/WTO and in bilateral treaties. The inclusion of Farmers Rights in the IU was intensely opposed by Northern Countries (Correa 2000b; GRAIN 2000).

The coalition of NGOs and Third World Country representatives were successful in getting Farmers Rights into the FAO. Resolution 5/89 of the FAO defines Farmers Rights as ‘rights arising from the past, present and future contributions of farmers in conserving, improving, and making available plant genetic resources, particularly those in the centres of origin/diversity’. Farmers Rights was also recognised in Agenda 21 and Resolution 3 of the Nairobi Final Act (FAO 2004).

Though the concept was defined in a broad, imprecise manner, it recognised the role of farmers as custodians of biodiversity and helped to call attention to the need to



preserve practices that are essential for a sustainable agriculture. The adoption of the definition fostered an intense debate on the ways to recognise and reward traditional farmers. However, the lack of grounded definitions was seen as a major weakness. There were no requirements for implementation and the vagueness of the definitions left the concept open for exploitation.

Negotiations were reopened after the adoption of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) as the FAO was requested to bring the IU in line with the new equity and benefit sharing provisions of the CBD which recognised states' sovereign rights over their own biological resources. The 'realisation of Farmers Rights' was one of the key issues for discussion and many NGOs and Third World countries had high hopes that Farmers Rights would be strengthened and even given formal status in international law. During the Leipzig Conference on Plant Genetic Resources, for example, in 1996, more than 200 civil society groups worked together to make the issue the major topic of the meeting (GRAIN 2000).

The final text fell far short of NGO and social movement expectations carefully avoiding new commitments and leaving realisation of Farmers Rights to national governments. The agreement fixes no minimum commitments and even the right to save and exchange seed is not guaranteed but made 'subject to national law as appropriate.'

The text is widely critiqued by social movement groups as being little more than a weak statement of principles. The repeated qualification that the agreement is subject to national legislation leaves the agreement without bite, bereft of any international mechanism or enforcement procedure. This can be contrasted to the international scope and enforceability of intellectual property rights. Intellectual property, emerging from the



Western space of knowledge/property, has been more successful in claiming (and so defining) the global scale. While Farmers Rights have been left as arbitrary, able to command at most a national scale, IPR has been institutionalised by the WTO with national governments compelled to enforce it or face sanctions. The case is an example of the power of constructing the scale of definition and political action.

In organising a workshop in the Philippines to articulate just what Farmers Rights mean to farmers, MASIPAG was attempting to (re)claim the term and articulate it in a way that met the needs of the farmers themselves. In MASIPAG's analysis, 'The fact that there is no clear definition of what Farmers Rights are is a weakness that allows the idea to be manipulated and dismissed by powerful interests. The fact that the definition was developed during international negotiations means that it has been subject to major political wrangling and influence by rich countries. All this negotiation has been done far from the fields of farmers and ideas of self-determination, the right to food and food security issues have been sidelined' (MASIPAG 2002b).

The campaign to articulate and further Farmers Rights is a multiscale strategy. It links farmers' groups in different parts of the world, provides a bridge between 'local' groups and international peak bodies such as Via Campesina, and is imbricated with negotiations associated with supranational bodies like the FAO. The workshop participants at the MASIPAG Farmers Rights workshop were briefed on these instruments and many are involved in international networks in their own right. The importance of the international struggle was also discussed at the workshop at the same time that the role of grounded practical responses was stressed. The workshop participants recognised the space for internationally linked campaigns to 'scream out'



that PVP is wrong and to bring it down. Yet the soils and the seeds were also prioritised. As one resource person stated, 'Because at the end of the day, PVP relies on farmers and their genetic resources. So they can overturn PVP.'

### **Weaving space**

The multifaceted approaches of social movements that respond to, intervene in, and so create the global scale recall Brecher and Costello's (1994) work on globalisation-from-below and Richard Falk's concept of humane governance which consists of an 'array of transnational social forces animated by environmental concerns, human rights, hostility to patriarchy, and a vision of human community based on the unity of diverse cultures seeking an end to oppression' (Falk 1993, pp. 39-40; see also Appadurai 2002; della Porta et al 2006; Farrell 2006; Perera 2003).

Humane Governance is a 'politics of aspiration and desire' navigating the fault lines of neoliberalism as it works to create new futures. Richard Falk's framework sees the processes of 'top-down' globalisation as open to debate, to challenge and modification. A bottom-up globalisation 'facilitates communication across civilizational, nationalist, ethnic, class, generational, cognitive, and gender divides, but there is also implicit respect and celebration of difference and an attitude of extreme scepticism towards exclusivist claims that deny space for expression and exploration to others, as well as toward variants of universalism that ignore the uneven circumstances and aspirations of peoples, classes and regions' (Falk 1995, p. 242). The political geography that is 'globalisation from below' is intertwined with that of 'globalisation from above,' at once reacting to it and developing new vision of a 'one-world- community.'



This schema of globalisation from below and above is a useful way of emphasising the undercurrents associated with globalisation. It moves beyond an economistic approach and one that denies agency to social movements and other non-corporate actors. The schema, however, has been criticised as portraying a unified opposition and so missing the contested, exclusionary and politically fraught nature of such alliances (Glassman 2001; Prempeh 2004). It also uses a simplistic idea of scale and space. Below and above, for example, are problematic terms in that they imply both that they are distinct from each other and that the 'below' is somehow more local and authentic than that from 'above.' These terms are not well defined. Above what, from where? In actuality, both the below and the above refer to situated political and ideological multiscalar realities.

It can also be difficult to separate the two forms of globalisation (Sakr 2006; Wilkin 2001). As Grewal and Kaplan (1994, p. 11) state, 'How one separates the local from the global is difficult to decide when one thoroughly infiltrates the other.' Is an NGO inputting into the drafting of legislation on PVP with the aim of bringing amendments (within the bounds of what is required by the WTO) to protect a farmer's right to save seed part of a move of globalisation from above or below? They are *de facto* helping to implement the requirements of the WTO, and yet they see themselves as working in opposition to it albeit in a pragmatic way. And what of the local people agreeing to trial Monsanto's new genetically engineered seed in Isabela? One of the small farmers there, Diego Colimlim, sees himself as a farmer leader, an innovator who has agreed to trial the seeds because they may be of assistance to the community. Where does



Diego fit in? This speaks to Falk's tendency to oversimplify the linkages and positions of social movement actors and of 'top-down' globalisers.

To avoid the 'above' and 'below' dichotomy, I have proposed the concept of 'woven space' to illustrate the way that the experiences and ideas of different localities can interweave to produce a thick, many centred space of international proportions. Woven space recognises that scale is imploded in a rice seed and that the actions of woman tilling her field in the Philippines is as global and non-innocent as are the diplomatic actions of a delegate attending a trade meeting. In each case contours link the situatedness of experience, the causes and effects, ideologies and knowledges in this messy, vibrant world. Although participatory and expansive, the decentralisation of woven space allows for differentiation. This space is not dominated by formal institutions or by spaces of legality and regulation. It is fractured, contoured, and constantly in motion. Its creation is an ongoing process of weaving and reweaving. A movement, after all, is about movement (Pile 1997; Routledge 2003).

In theorising woven space, I draw upon work from geographers and critical social scientists who have grappled with place and space as relational and multiscalar (for example Amin 2002; Cumbers et al 2008; Katz 2001; Massey 1999, 2006; Routledge 2003). Cindi Katz's (2001) work on topography and globalisation, for example, explores the contours between a village in East Sudan to New York City and back to point the way for a politics of locatedness and association. She suggests, 'Topographies provide the ground - literally and figuratively -for developing a critique of the social relations sedimented into space and for scrutinising the material social practices at all geographic scales through which place is produced' (2001, p. 1228). Katz employs the idea of a



topography to stress the way specific historical geographies are involved in producing space, and are grounded in broader patterns and connections in ways that are both situated and translocal.

Yuval-Davis' exploration of the activities of the 'Women in Black' also sheds light on the geography of, and scales associated with, social movements. She reveals a 'transversal politics' that 'avoids the constraining politics of the 'international/national' and 'global/local' and allows an imaginative leap beyond the concept of the 'transnational,' which still presumes that the state and state system provide the framework for all politics' (1997, p. 207). Yuval-Davis' work encompasses difference and coalition, where participants seek to avoid both the homogenisation of uniformity and the isolating, polarising effects of non-reflective difference (see also Cockburn and Hunter 1999). The women in this movement were brought together through material political reality, dialogue and negotiation based on a critical approach to boundaries, borders and imposed scales.

The farmers of the MASIPAG network connect to other farmers and social movements throughout the Philippines and internationally in ways that mirror the ideas raised both by Katz and Yuval Davis. Indeed, the concept of woven space invites different ways of analysing and understanding the work of movements, calling for attention to process, to struggles over identity and knowledge, and to the complex spatial imaginaries that underpin and inform movements. Woven space is an embodied and material place. The construction and imagination of alternatives grow from lived experience, from the field, the household and the community, and in daily practices of reproduction and alternative politics (Nagar et al 2002). Yet these farmers are also



intentionally intervening in political action at different scales, for example at the WTO, the FAO, and in the national and municipal governments' response to plant variety protection. As they do so, they assert knowledge claims based on often radically different assumptions, priorities and socialities. They are engaged in producing different spaces of knowledge and authorising, as a social movement and as social movement participants, more empowered and knowing subjectivities. So while MASIPAG is creating a space of locatedness and connection, they are also creating and authorising new moral economies and new ways of knowing. The space they create is bound up with the ways that identities are forged and knowledges asserted. It is to the questions of identity and knowledge that I now turn.

### **Identity, knowledge and space**

As I sat in Erlinda's house eating organic rice (a different variety for breakfast, lunch, and dinner) that she had grown, with the labouring help of her father, grandmother, sister, nieces, nephews and neighbours, I sat in a complex site of resistance and possibility. The rice itself, an implosion of labour, knowledges, property relations, culture and history, weaves a different story to that of a so-called high-yielding variety of seed. On the rice is written shared labour and community knowledge. The story of Erlinda's new role as farmer-breeder and educator weaves its way through tales of intra-community negotiation and tension in response to change, and multiple and fluid visions of the past, present and future.

Material, cultural and social changes within the community, intra-household relations, decision-making frameworks, the gendered consequences of change and alternative kinds of resistances and coping strategies were revealed in the food and the



presence and absence of those at the table. Nang Erlinda was not in Manila working as a domestic. I was there as a participant and observer, a testimony to the links between the household and the MASIPAG network and beyond. Nang Erlinda's father was there, no longer the ultimate authority in the household due, in part, to some long-term health problems and in part to the recognition of his daughter as an able and respected farm manager (and indeed in part to her stubbornness and persistent vision). Nang Erlinda's eleven year old niece was there after a day of missed school due to her need to care for her baby sister in the absence of their mother working in Bantugan (yet she was still at school and in a month's time would graduate from primary at the top of her class and continue on to high school unlike her mother and Nang Erlinda herself.) The lack of fish on the table was a testimony to the lack of money to pay for fish from the market two hours walk away in Bantugan, the lack of refrigeration in the community to keep the fish for more than the day, changing food preferences as a result of involvement in the network and other community activities that promote the consumption of vegetables and non-animal sources of protein, the history of pesticide use that has killed the fish in the streams, the decisions in Manila that made that possible, the actions of the pesticide companies that resulted in the widespread use of pesticide use in the Philippines, and in contrast to the household's rejection of pesticide use and (partial) autonomy from the corporations and the webs that surround them. The Tayaca household in which Erlinda is daughter, aunt, provider, reproducer, and farm manager, for example, with its dynamics of gender and generation, is an important site for contestation and for the production of identities and alternatives.



Nang Erlinda and her fellow movement participants are engaged in the articulation of different kinds of knowledge claims, situated knowledges that emerge from their own lives but speak to, and so help create, multiscalar realities (Wright 2005). Nang Erlinda's work breeding seed varieties comes from a very different place than the kinds of knowledges eligible for IPR. She breeds seeds drawing upon the support and expertise of her neighbours and fellow MASIPAG farmers. The rewards she expects are those associated with fulfilling her responsibilities along with the status that comes from having something to offer the village and other farmers. An obligation and ability to share is at the centre of her knowledge production strategies. Her words and her practices intentionally and knowingly push back against the tendency of high input agriculture to enforce a passivity on peasant farmers of the Third World.

As Haraway (1997) has revealed, borderlands are important sites for the emergence of critical understandings of the world (See also Haraway 1991; Harding 1998; Hartsock 1983; Hill Collins 2000). The solutions and alternatives that are generated through processes of knowledge production, and posited as 'world claims', are spatially, culturally and temporally specific. Thus, the claims that underpin the articulation of Farmers Rights reflect the realities of farmers and are embedded in sets of culturally specific norms and ideas at the same time that they are networked within broader international visions of rights to seed. This does not imply that such knowledge claims are automatically privileged, 'better' or even more 'true' (Harding 1998; Hill Collins 2000). It does, however, acknowledge that those whose lives are lived outside centres of elite knowledge production are well positioned to see through the machinations of power imbalances living, as they do, the contradictions associated with elite



knowledge frameworks every day. Woven space is a space within which certain liberatory knowledges become recognisable and knowable. The knowledges of woven space are, as Eschle (2001, p. 199) points out of feminist knowledge, ‘rooted in hard won, practical coalition.’ Rather than looking for more truthful knowledges, woven space is constructed with knowledges that make the connection between power and knowledge explicit and are more effective in working toward a more just, postcolonial future.

It is important, then, that the attention to the lived experiences of people, households and communities, and to the details of movements themselves, is not an uncritical populism. Critical attention to woven spaces of possibility considers ethical and political questions as central to the process of knowledge making and accountability.

Within the context of globalisation, there have been a number of problematic developments in social movements (Mohanty 1987). This includes religious and nationalist fundamentalisms, and conservative and right-wing movements which promote some ways of being over others and are hierarchical and exclusionary. It follows that claims of social movements need to be investigated and understood as not being intrinsically more just, democratic or progressive than other types of knowledge claims. The diversity, autonomy, and processes of negotiation and occasionally conflict within woven space are in contrast to approaches that uncritically uphold members of *the* (undifferentiated) Third World as experts. This involves a rejection of the idea that movements *automatically* constitute a site and source of democracy. Even within progressive movements, the progressive goals of the movement are often unrealised. Much work on black and Third World feminisms, for example, critiques the mainstream feminist movement as containing racist exclusions and hierarchies (Hill Collins 2000).



Attention to power within movements and attention to the process and context of knowledge claims made by them is central.

Social movements themselves are sites of contestation and negotiation over knowledge, action and identity. Tensions, for example, exist in the broader movement against patents-on-life over the most appropriate scale of response (should it be, at the FAO, the WTO, the national level or locally?), over whether or not it is appropriate for the network to lobby the Filipino government about the plant variety protection law given the network's fundamental opposition to the concept of intellectual property on plants, and, whether it is the best course of action to collate information about existing use of plants so that it can be proven to be in the public domain (and so not eligible for IPR in its current form) or whether such a move would act as a 'recipe' book for transnationals looking for plants from which to source genes and patentable material, not to mention opening the way for flagrant abuses of the law known as biopiracy. Woven space is thus a space of negotiation at the same time as it is a space of possibility (see also Cumbers et al 2008; Routledge 2003 for a discussion of conflict and negotiation in the construction of complex geographies of resistance). Although much of the politics of this space are oppositional as movements work against imperialism or against oppression in many forms, from the stance of opposition come a plurality of interwoven 'yeses' (Kingsnorth 2003). The community of Puno alone has many 'yeses' as different families and individuals interpret and recreate their alternative vision in subtly different ways and for different reasons. The Vinggo family, for example, stopped using pesticides out of concern for their children who were developing rashes and suffering headaches, the Cruzadas because of debilitating farm debt, Arjene because she is a close friend and



relative of Nang Erlinda. There is no tidy meta-solution at work here but a process of embedded, difficult and reflexive struggle to create the mosaic of negotiated vision, understanding and action that is woven space.

The continued politics of negotiation and connection associated with woven space brings about a sense of collective identity that in turn determines the parameters, or borders, of the space. Such a collective identity consists of interwoven and interlinked relations. Identity is based on a level of shared experience, arising as a result of power imbalance and well as political choice rather than the result of pre-existing or natural categories. It comes from the process of articulation in which shared meaning is negotiated and a moral community is formed. The result is a networked and overlapping conception, elements of which participants can adapt and recognise. Not everyone who identifies with the collective is 'the same.' Far from it. Indeed, the woven space is a space of fluid and fractured subjectivities that have been brought together by a politics of location and overlapping libratory stories.

## **Conclusion**

Geographers such as Noel Castree, Gillian Hart, Cindi Katz and Philip Kelly have pointed to the need to understand the relationship between local and global processes (Castree 2004; Hart 2002; Katz 2001; Kelly 1999, 2000). This means an awareness of not only how the global is inscribed upon the local through changes in livelihoods and local ways of meaning but also how people, movements, places and other so-called local sites can feed into and create global discourses in meaningful ways. There is a need to look to the way global space is actively created and interpolated by translocal movements (Castree 2004; Herod 1991, 1997).



An investigation of the activities of MASIPAG and its allies reveals much in the way of translocal linkages and translocal space. Woven space is not strictly a translocal phenomenon, however. Although it does link situated realities and experiences, it recognises these realities as complex and multiscaled. It pays attention to micro-scales and embodiment, and the casualised and informalised spheres (of economies, cultures and politics) that are currently undertheorised in the critical globalisation literature (Bergeron 2001) as well as the multivalent practices and connections cultivated around the quintessential globalisers of the WTO and FAO.

Woven space is a concept that builds upon notions of globalisation from below and uses insights from the Filipino experience to suggest a different way of understanding contemporary social movements. As actors face a complex and diverse ‘globalisation from above,’ they draw on heterogeneous situated knowledges and multi-scalar responses to create a networked, overlapping and negotiated space of possibility. It is this space that the farmers of the MASIPAG work to construct as they create spaces free of individualised intellectual property; spaces based on communal ownership, sustainable agriculture and farmer empowerment. In creating these spaces, defying the norms and technoscientific knowledge spaces on offer from elites, they draw upon, nourish and create anew the networked spaces of a multiscalar resistance.

It is also this space that Erlinda reflects, joins and helps create as she promotes sustainable agriculture, farmer empowerment and Farmers Rights in her family, rice field, village, region and country. When she defies convention and insists upon running her own farm in her own way she is drawing strength from, and propagating, an alternative vision for the future. In doing so she sees herself as directly and indirectly related to



farmers in her village, in other villages and in the furthest flung areas of globe including those in the North and the South who share, in some way, a vision of justice.



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## **Notes**

- 1** I have capitalised Farmers Rights throughout following the convention of social movements and the FAO.



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