Long before transnational contention emerged as a major subject issue, research in protest and social movements was shaped by collaboration beyond national boundaries. The analysis of social movements has benefited particularly from the fruitful exchange between US research shaped by organisational and process oriented approaches on the one side, and the Western European tradition drawing on the analysis of new social movements, on the other. Conferences and joint projects helped the understanding of the influence of national trajectories and contexts on the dynamics of protest. Through this collaboration, researchers established a tight-knit community and developed a relatively homogeneous understanding of collective action, including concepts that were acknowledged and used by large parts of the community. In the mid 1990s, the increase in cross-border activism appeared on the screen of social movement researchers. Scholars began to assess the validity of their analytical repertoire – developed to understand movements within national boundaries – for the study of transnational protest.

The intricate genesis of this book is linked to one of the finest scholars of protest and social movements who played a central role in this transnational research network. When I realised that my teacher and Ph.D. supervisor, Dieter Rucht, would celebrate his sixtieth birthday in June 2006, I was determined to continue the academic tradition of a Festschrift in his honour. However, I just had to talk to a few experienced colleagues to find out that I was desperately late for such a project. John McCarthy and Doug McAdam encouraged me to think of a colloquium as an alternative to a rash book project. Convinced by the idea of bringing together Dieter with some of his friends and colleagues as well as young scholars of social movements, I organised the colloquium entitled ‘Crossing Borders. On the Road towards Transnational Social Movement Analysis’. Most of the chapters in this book go back to papers that were presented during this meeting. Some others were added when the outline for the volume emerged.

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