

**The Coalition of Immokalee Workers vs. Taco Bell:
The Role of Skillful Framing in Creating Social Change**

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INTRODUCTION

The following paper begins with an assessment of the recent agreement between the Coalition of Immokalee Workers (CIW) and Taco Bell. The agreement put an end to the CIW-led consumer boycott of Taco Bell and has been hailed as groundbreaking and historic. Beginning with a statement of this ‘success,’ the paper uses the CIW as a case study for examining how framing analyses can deepen our understanding of social movement outcomes. The paper starts by outlining Cress and Snow’s theoretical framework on framing and then applies the model to the CIW. I first establish that the CIW is a viable organization and that it values framing as part of its approach to organizing. I further demonstrate that the CIW is not only skilled at framing, but its framing is in many ways unique and innovative. I draw out the specifics of the CIW’s diagnostic and prognostic frames and demonstrate how their strategies and tactics – most notably, the tactic of boycotting Taco Bell – emerged from these frames. Finally, I infer that the reason the tactic worked is due, at least in part, to the CIW’s ‘frame alignment process’ which served to recruit a broad range of support from the wider public.

Background: The Historic Agreement

On March 8, 2005, the Coalition of Immokalee Workers (CIW) – a membership-led organization of tomato pickers based in Immokalee, Florida – reached an agreement with Taco Bell that made headlines throughout the nation. Bringing an end to a four year CIW-led boycott of Taco Bell, the agreement has been hailed as historic, precedent-setting, and a significant first step in a larger project of transforming the entire fast food and supermarket industry.

Part of the victory was that Taco Bell agreed to pay a penny more per pound of tomatoes and would require its Florida suppliers to pass the increase directly to farmworkers. While this concession may seem negligible at first, it is in fact quite considerable. Prior to the agreement, farmworkers in Florida received, on average, 1.3 cents per pound of tomatoes (roughly 40 to 45 cents for every 32 pound bucket); the additional penny per pound therefore amounts to a 75 percent increase for workers picking Taco Bell tomatoes.¹ According to Reverend Noelle Damico, of the Presbyterian Church *Campaign for Fair Food*, “never before has a fast-food company paid money back *down* their supply chain so that it would address the workers’ sub-poverty wages.”²

But the significance of this victory is not only about an increase in wages for tomato pickers. It is, perhaps more importantly, about exposing systemic human rights abuses within the agribusiness and fast-food industries; and it is about holding corporations accountable for the conditions of long-neglected farmworkers who are, according to Oxfam, “among the poorest – if not *the* poorest – laborers in the United States.”³ The wage increase was therefore but one of several significant concessions, including the first-ever enforceable Code of Conduct for agricultural suppliers in the fast-food industry; not only is such a code unprecedented in the industry, it is also particularly impressive for its incorporation of the CIW as part of the investigative body for monitoring complaints.⁴ The end of the boycott also included a commitment by Yum! Brands (Taco Bell’s parent company) to work towards overhauling the

¹ Coalition of Immokalee Workers, “Victory at Taco Bell,” from CIW website (hereinafter CIW: Victory), available at: <http://www.ciw-online.org/agreementanalysis.html>

² PBS, *The Coalition of Immokalee Workers vs. Taco Bell*, May 27, 2005. Short documentary film available on PBS website: <http://www.pbs.org/now/society/ciw.html#>

³ Oxfam America, *Like Machines in the Fields: Workers without Rights in American Agriculture* (2004), p. 2 (hereinafter “Oxfam”). Available at: http://www.oxfamamerica.org/pdfs/labor_report_04.pdf

⁴ CIW: Victory, available at: <http://www.ciw-online.org/agreementanalysis.html>

entire fast-food industry by encouraging other companies to follow suit.⁵ Lucas Benitez, a CIW organizer, summed up the importance of the victory as follows: “With this agreement we are laying the groundwork both in the concrete conditions of farmworkers’ everyday lives and in the market itself, where this agreement is establishing important new standards of social responsibility.”⁶

Rationale for CIW Case Study

Given the success of this campaign, it is an interesting case study for applying concepts from social movement theory relating to the factors which contribute to the achievement of social change goals. How was the CIW able to achieve its objectives? What accounts for the CIW success? Certainly, there were pivotal moments in the campaign which, according to some analysts, may have tipped the balance in CIW’s favour. For instance, Amanda Shanor, a program officer at the Robert F. Kennedy Memorial Center for Human Rights – one of CIW’s partner organizations – believes that having the Presbyterian Church on board was particularly helpful. She notes that both Yum! Brands and the Presbyterian Church are headquartered in Louisville, Kentucky and that as a result, the boycott provoked an intimate battle between the “town church” and the “town company.” Upper management executives from Yum! Brands had to endure weekly sermons about their responsibility to address the injustice of farmworker labor conditions; their children were lectured in Sunday school about how their parents were complicit in condoning modern-day slavery. In Shanor’s opinion, this kind of moral suasion had a decisive

⁵ Taco Bell Press Release, “Coalition of Immokalee Workers, Taco Bell, Reach Groundbreaking Agreement,” available at: http://www.tacobell.com/ourcompany/press/2005_3_8.htm

⁶ Coalition of Immokalee Workers, Press Release, “Comments by Coalition of Immokalee Workers Co-Director Lucas Benitez at Press Conference, Announcing Settlement of the CIW’s Taco Bell Boycott” (hereinafter, CIW: Press Release), available at: <http://www.nfwm.org/pdf/boycotts/tbviictorylucas.pdf>

impact.⁷ According to Damico, the turning point actually came in 2003, when 50 workers, students, and church-members began an historic ten-day hunger strike on the steps of Taco Bell headquarters in Irvine, California. She observes that,

The Taco Bell executives and employees needed to drive by these workers every single day. I still say that what the company had to take away from that was that the workers and their allies were determined, that these were not fly by night people, that they took this with the utmost seriousness. I think that was a turning point.⁸

While the agreement was still two years away, this action triggered the beginning of a negotiation process between Yum! Brands and the CIW.

With the benefit of hindsight, these moments, and perhaps others, may indeed prove to have been significant in persuading Taco Bell to heed the CIW's call. But rather than assessing the movement's victory through a series of specific turning points, it is possible to examine the CIW's *overall* approach for a likely key to its success. More specifically, it is helpful to apply the notion of framing, from social movement literature, to an analysis of how the CIW was able to achieve its goals. Through this kind of analysis, it becomes apparent that turning points such as the ones discussed above are themselves a result of tactics chosen through the CIW's particular diagnostic and prognostic frame. And it is this frame, more generally, as opposed to the tactics themselves, which may account for the outcomes that the CIW was able to generate.

Theoretical Framework: Framing Analysis

Cress and Snow argue that "the attainment of movement goals is strongly facilitated by viable organizations that are skilled at diagnostic and prognostic framing."⁹ The three criteria for

⁷ Personal communication with Amanda Shanor, May 1 2006.

⁸ PBS, *The Coalition of Immokalee Workers vs. Taco Bell*

⁹ Daniel M. Cress and David A. Snow, "The Outcomes of Homeless Mobilization: The Influence of Organization, Disruption, Political Mediation, and Framing," in *The American Journal of Sociology*, 105:4, January 2000, p. 1099.

viability are: 1) survival (existing for one year or more), 2) meeting regularity (at least twice a month), and 3) collective action campaigns (planning and conducting protest campaigns).¹⁰

Elsewhere, Snow et al explain that “the term ‘frame,’ is borrowed from Goffman to denote ‘schemata of interpretation’ that enable individuals ‘to locate, perceive, identify, and label’ occurrences within their life space and the world at large.”¹¹ In other words, “by rendering events or occurrences meaningful, frames function to organize experience and guide action.”¹² Framing analysis therefore assumes that when marginalized communities mobilize to put an end to their misfortune, the issue “is not merely the presence or absence of grievances, but the manner in which grievances are interpreted and the generation and diffusion of those interpretations.”¹³

More specifically, the diagnostic frame,

Problematizes and focuses attention on an issue, helps shape how the issue is perceived, and identifies who or what is culpable, thereby identifying the targets or sources of the outcomes sought.¹⁴

Prognostic framing builds from diagnostic framing in that it “stipulates specific remedies or goals for the SMO [social movement organization] to work toward and the means or tactics for achieving these objectives.”¹⁵ While Cress and Snow do acknowledge that other factors contribute to an organization’s capacity to achieve its stated goals, they conclude that “framing activity comes more closely than any of the other conditions for constituting a *necessary condition* for attainment of the outcomes in question (my emphasis).”¹⁶ It is for this reason that identifying the CIW’s diagnostic and prognostic frame may be helpful in trying to understand

¹⁰ Cress and Snow, p. 1078.

¹¹ David A. Snow et al, “Frame Alignment Processes, Micromobilization, and Movement Participation,” in *American Sociological Review*, 51, August 1986, p. 464.

¹² Snow et al., p. 464.

¹³ Snow et al, p. 466.

¹⁴ Cress and Snow, p. 1071.

¹⁵ Cress and Snow, p. 1071.

¹⁶ Cress and Snow, p. 1100.

how one of the country's poorest communities managed to wrest meaningful concessions from one of the most powerful corporations in the world.¹⁷

The Grievances Leading to CIW Organizing

Since framing aims to assign meaning to peoples' life circumstances, it is necessary to understand the details of the farmworkers' actual working and living conditions before determining how framing can deepen our analysis of the CIW. Put simply, Immokalee tomato pickers – and agricultural laborers in general – are some of the most vulnerable workers in the country. According to the National Agricultural Workers Survey (NAWS), “low wages, sup-poverty annual earnings, significant periods of un and underemployment, and low utilization of safety net programs all add up to a labor force *in significant economic distress* (my emphasis).”¹⁸

The situation is such that farmworkers are said to be facing “sweatshop conditions” in the fields.¹⁹

In 2000, the US Department of Labor (DOL) reported that while agricultural production in the US has increased in recent decades – as has global demand for US produce – “agricultural worker earnings and working conditions are either stagnant or in decline.”²⁰ Indeed, Oxfam notes that “the piece rate for tomato pickers has barely risen in 20 years, and workers today are

¹⁷ Both the CIW and Yum! Brands agree on this – that Yum! Brands is the world's largest restaurant company, exceeding even McDonald's in its scope and influence. Yum! Brands owns 34,000 restaurants in over 100 countries and is the parent company for Taco Bell, Pizza Hut, KFC, Long John Silver's, and A&W. See Yum! Brands website at: <http://www.yum.com/about/default.asp>.

¹⁸ Coalition of Immokalee Workers, “Facts and Figures on Farmworkers and the Agricultural Industry,” (hereinafter, CIW: Facts and Figures), available at: <http://www.ciw-online.org/8-stats.html>

¹⁹ Inter-American Commission on Human Rights: Hearing 122nd Period of Sessions, “Joint General Interest Hearing Regarding the Rights of Migrant Workers in the United States: Materials in Support of the Written Testimony,” March 3, 2005, (hereinafter, IACHR General Interest Hearing), p. 4.

²⁰ CIW: Facts and Figures, available at: <http://www.ciw-online.org/8-stats.html>

effectively paid 30% less than they were in 1980.”²¹ The NAWS found that the median annual income from farm work is between \$2,500 and \$5,000; farmworkers who engage in other work to compensate for their meager salaries can earn up to \$7,500 per year. Average farmworker household income is between \$7,500 and \$10,000. These figures are significantly below the national poverty line.²² In addition, Oxfam reports that 99% of farmworkers have no social security pension or disability insurance (up from 90% in 1989) and that 95% have no health insurance for non-work-related injuries.²³ Oxfam further notes that their situation is even more precarious due to the growth of temporary, as opposed to permanent, employment, which in turn leads to increased migrancy.

The work itself is hazardous, due to exposure to toxic pesticides and lack of proper facilities (including drinking water).²⁴ Transportation to work sites in overcrowded and poorly maintained vehicles is also dangerous.²⁵ To make matters worse, “farmworkers are amongst the worst-housed groups in the US,” with low ownership rates, astronomical rental costs, severe overcrowding, and substandard quality.²⁶ Moreover, rather than dealing directly with farmworkers, employers (known as ‘growers’) increasingly rely on farm labor contractors (FLC’s), notorious for their abusive practices, to recruit, transport, pay, and supervise the workers.²⁷ During harvest, farmworkers often labor ten to twelve hours a day, seven days a week, without overtime pay. The overtime itself is not even voluntary, as noted by one worker:

“It is compulsory because once you are in the field, you can’t get back to your house. The boss is

²¹ Oxfam, p. 2.

²² For specific details on American poverty measurements, see the US Department of Health and Human Services, *2006 HHS Poverty Guidelines*, available at: <http://aspe.hhs.gov/poverty/06poverty.shtml>

²³ Oxfam, p. 3.

²⁴ Oxfam, p. 16.

²⁵ Oxfam, p. 3.

²⁶ Oxfam, p. 21.

²⁷ Oxfam, p. 20.

the one who takes you to the field and brings you back home.”²⁸ Not only do FLCs control the workers, in many cases they are involved in full-fledged slavery outfits. With the collaboration of courageous CIW members, working undercover for the Federal Bureau of Investigation, the Department of Justice has successfully prosecuted five cases of modern-day slavery in the agricultural sector since 1996; other investigations are currently underway.²⁹

Finally, as if to add insult to injury,

Farmworker rights today are diminished in two significant ways: first, by the failure to enforce those rights which farmworkers are legally guaranteed, and second, by the exclusion of farmworkers from many of the fundamental labor rights guaranteed to other US workers, including the right to organize and the right to overtime.³⁰

Indeed, agricultural workers are conspicuously absent from most federal labor laws. Oxfam provides a detailed account of the many legal loopholes rendering farmworkers that much more vulnerable to systemic mistreatment. Most notably, farmworkers (as well as domestic workers) were deliberately excluded from the National Labor Relations Act when it was passed in 1938. They remain excluded today, meaning they are not legally permitted to organize. Until recently, farmworkers were also excluded from the Fair Labor Standards Act, the law which guarantees minimum wage and overtime pay. Most – though not all – farmworkers were brought under the FLSA in 1996, but only with respect to minimum wage and not with respect to overtime pay. Moreover, child labor laws offer less protection to agricultural workers than to children working in any other industry. Finally, farmworkers are denied the same health and safety laws as other workers.³¹

²⁸ Oxfam, p. 13.

²⁹ IACHR General Interest Hearing, p. 2.

³⁰ CIW: Victory, available at: <http://www.ciw-online.org/agreementanalysis.html>

³¹ See Oxfam, pp. 38-41.

The CIW as a Viable Organization

In applying the Cress and Snow framework, the first thing to consider is whether the CIW meets their criteria for organizational viability. The CIW has been around for more than one year, meets on a regular basis, and is continually organizing campaigns to improve their working conditions. Formed in 1993, the CIW boasts approximately three thousand members, many of whom are undocumented workers of Latino, Haitian, or Mayan Indian origin. Their website describes the values which drives their work:

We strive to build our strength as a community on a basis of reflection and analysis, constant attention to coalition building across ethnic divisions, and an ongoing investment in leadership development to help our members continually develop their skills in community education and organization.³²

Other than their organizational growth and development, they see themselves as working towards the following concrete goals (what Cress and Snow might describe as ‘direct outcomes’):

We fight for, among other things: a fair wage for the work we do, more respect on the part of our bosses and the industries where we work, better and cheaper housing, stronger laws and stronger enforcement against those who would violate workers' rights, the right to organize on our jobs without fear of retaliation, and an end to indentured servitude in the fields.³³

The CIW uses Paulo Freire style popular education techniques to raise farmworker consciousness and mobilize support.³⁴ In explaining the CIW’s focus on worker awareness, Lucas Benitez, a leading CIW member, says, “If you want true change, it won’t come from Washington, or from the lawyers. It will come from the people in the field.”³⁵ I will return to this

³² Coalition of Immokalee Workers, “Consciousness + Commitment = Change: How and Why We Organize,” from CIW website (hereinafter CIW: Consciousness), available at: <http://www.ciw-online.org/about.html>

³³ CIW: Consciousness, available at: <http://www.ciw-online.org/about.html>

³⁴ Jane M. Walsh, *Migrant Mobilization: Factors Contributing to the Success of the Coalition of Immokalee Workers*, A Thesis Presented to the Faculty of the Graduate Center for Social and Public Policy, McAmulty Collette and Graduate School of Liberal Arts (Duquesne University, November 2005), p. 35.

³⁵ Cited in John Bowe, “Nobodies: Does Slavery Exist in America?” *The New Yorker* (April 21, 2003), available at: http://www.ciw-online.org/2003_New_Yorker_Article_on_CIW_4-03.pdf

skepticism with respect to government and the legal system below; for now it is important to note the emphasis Benitez places on workers as drivers of change. Indeed, the CIW motto, ‘Consciousness + Commitment = Change,’ guides their approach. One member of CIW explains his loyalty to the group as follows:

I think that the Coalition, for all the work that we are doing, is the salvation for all of the workers. Because if we don’t get together, if we don’t organize, in order to fight for our rights, we aren’t going to be able to change, now or in the future. Because you can’t have change without mobilizing. One needs to move, you need to speak up, you need to do something in order to be heard, right?³⁶

Indeed, the CIW has organized a wide range of protest activities, including strikes, marches, and most recently, the boycott, to improve the quality of their lives. As Shanor explains, they are different from your average American ‘labor union’ working strictly to secure contract victories with their employers; they are, instead, “a vibrant community working towards more fundamental change in the greater structures which oppress them.”³⁷ They host weekly meetings to maintain this sense of community, and to ensure that their actions reflect a dynamic process of constantly re-evaluating their collective position. They function as a community organization with a wide range of resources, including a community centre and a community radio station (with programming in five different languages). They organize social activities and ‘know your rights’ trainings, and they run a cooperative store for basic goods.³⁸ In short, the CIW is a viable organization.

CIW Position on the Importance of Framing

³⁶ Pan Left Productions, *Immokalee: A Story of Slavery and Freedom* (2004), short film available at: http://www.emanon.info/panleft/qtclips/immokalee_051404.mov

³⁷ Personal communication with Amanda Shanor, May 1 2006.

³⁸ Personal communication with Amanda Shanor, May 1 2006.

The CIW provides workers with an opportunity to develop a diagnostic and prognostic frame that can help them identify both the reasons for their plight as well as ways of trying to improve their lives. The CIW website includes a ‘virtual tour of Immokalee’ which provides a window into the notion of the CIW as a vehicle for framing. The virtual tour consists of a slideshow where audiences are invited to witness a ‘day in the life’ of an average tomato picker. Starting with a series of photos depicting the grueling experience of waking up at 4:00 am, waiting for hours before learning if there is work, traveling long distances in overcrowded vehicles, and picking bucket after 32-pound bucket of unripe green tomatoes, the slideshow then introduces the CIW as having been established to “fight for better wages and working conditions in the field.” What is more notable, though, is the photo of a young worker with the caption, “the CIW holds weekly meetings to *help workers analyze* the reasons for their poverty and harsh working conditions (my emphasis)”³⁹ Analysis is, indeed, a central part of the CIW’s approach. As one worker explains, “There are many workers who don’t analyze and continue being slaves. And here in Immokalee, *we analyze so that we will no longer continue being slaves*. We want a fair wage, respect, and dignity (my emphasis).”⁴⁰

The Unique Character of the CIW’s Frame: An Alternative to Legal Analyses

If we apply Cress and Snow’s perspective on framing, the CIW’s emphasis on analysis is arguably one of the reasons it is so successful in its campaigns. That said, it is not merely the act of analyzing that renders the CIW so successful, but the actual *conclusions* they arrive at through the process of analyzing as well as the tactics they choose by virtue of those conclusions. At the heart of their framing analysis is the position that their conditions are dictated, in large measure,

³⁹ To view the slideshow, see <http://www.ciw-online.org/images/images.html>.

⁴⁰ Pan Left Productions: *Immokalee: A Story of Slavery and Freedom*

by the structure of the global economy and the increasing power of multinational corporations. They conclude that a fundamental restructuring of the economy is necessary to improve the quality of their lives, and they design tactics that can serve as first steps in the process. But to fully appreciate the unique character of the CIW, it is important to understand that their specific diagnostic and prognostic frame, which I elaborate in greater detail below, is by no means inevitable.

Other advocates for worker rights have taken significantly different approaches to understanding the source of the problem and to identifying potential solutions. Some see the weak, and indeed unenforced, labor laws as the diagnostic frame; they believe the key to success – the prognosis – is to focus on trying to amend the laws and demand greater enforcement, from the state and from employers themselves. They envision the formation of agricultural trade unions along the lines of the traditional American labor movement and they seek to create opportunities that enable collective bargaining with the ‘growers’ who employ the farmworkers.

Florida Legal Services (FLA), for instance, takes this kind of legalistic approach. A longtime advocate of worker rights, attorney Greg Schell of FLA’s Migrant Farmworker Justice Project, is therefore less concerned with corporate power than he is with legal protections, or the lack thereof. In his view, employers need to respect the laws that exist to protect farmworker rights; lawyers can help farmworkers secure such rights by bringing employers (growers) to court when violations occur. Moreover, he believes in the power of using the courts to advance class action lawsuits that can compel employers to implement systematic changes in their employment practices. The ultimate goal, he admits, is to change legislation, but he insists that, “I’d be happy

if they [farmworkers] get paid what the law requires, or get workers compensation when it's owed to them." He asserts that the government has never been particularly strong at enforcement in this area, but that the current political climate is especially hostile to farmworker rights and that "what we're doing is trying to hold the fort against a steady degradation of labor standards." He laments that "many times, we are the only game in town as far as bringing any kind of enforcement," but he insists that this is the best, though perhaps not the only, way to secure farmworker rights.⁴¹

The CIW's "Novel" Understanding of Human Rights: Impact on Framing

The CIW's framing analysis shifts away from farmworker-grower contractual and legal relations and focuses, instead, on the broader economic context which enables their oppressive conditions. They do *acknowledge* the damaging role played by the legal framework in which they operate, but this is not at the heart of their *diagnostic* analysis. Rather than viewing the lack of legal protection as the source of the problem, they see it as a *symptom* of a more fundamental problem. To use Cress and Snow's terminology, more just laws would be a desired *outcome* of their organizing, but unjust laws are not a central feature of their *diagnosis*.

Shanor, who has spent several years working in partnership with the CIW, explains that the CIW has a "novel understanding of human rights," in so far as they "understand rights as being much more about power than about laws."⁴² Indeed, the human rights movement has, in large measure, been about identifying state violations and trying to remedy them through the courts – particularly in 'Western' countries. Schell and the Migrant Farmworker Justice Project, are by no

⁴¹ Personal communication with Greg Schell, May 1, 2006.

⁴² Personal communication with Amanda Shanor, May 1 2006.

means unique in this regard. One might even argue that the diagnostic frame of conventional human rights activists – including conventional labor activists – is often quite limited; it does not always consider the multiple forces contributing to violations but rather applies a formulaic diagnostic framework for the abuses suffered (that a government / employer is not living up to its legal human rights obligations). In looking to identify the reasons behind the systemic abuses which they suffer, the CIW is more inclined to examine, in a pragmatic way, the power dynamics that *lend themselves* to weak laws, exploitation, and abuse. They place large multi-national corporations at the heart of this power analysis. As Shanor explains,

[Their approach is] about people having human rights and the *conditions* that are created that allows them to realize those rights. And because the multinational corporations are the ones that hold the power, they're the ones that hold the obligation in the eyes of the CIW. That's not the current state of international law, but it could be. The CIW believes that human rights obligations are binding on corporations. They think that it's through organizing [to change the corporate structure] that eventually *the laws will catch up*, but changing the laws is not their explicit goal (my emphasis).⁴³

Without more in depth ethnographic research, it may be hard to say with any certainty why the CIW takes this more “novel” position on human rights. But Shanor speculates that their experiences in their countries of origin may be a contributing factor. She asserts, “Look at where they're coming from - if you're from Guatemala, you probably think that government is *not* on your side. But you do *know* you have rights... and it only makes sense to them [the farmworkers] that corporations have obligations because, like governments, they have power.”⁴⁴ She explains further that many people from Latin America and the Caribbean have experienced years of international intervention which have undermined the rule of law, so that, “if you're coming from there, you're at once in a legal vacuum and also aware that folks with power have obligations they need to live up to and respect.”

⁴³ Personal communication with Amanda Shanor, May 1 2006.

⁴⁴ Personal communication with Amanda Shanor, May 1 2006.

The CIW's Diagnostic Frame: Supply Chain Dynamics in a Global Economy

This power analysis is expressed in the CIW's 'virtual tour' slideshow (referred to above) which includes a segment called 'Hierarchy in the fields.' The segment consists of a series of photos of farmworkers toiling to pick and carry 32-pound loads of tomatoes at breakneck speed. Under the photos, the following three captions serve to sensitize audiences to the position of farmworkers within the global economy: 1) "Today, a handful of huge corporations with multi-state operations control the majority of agricultural production in Southwest Florida;" 2) "They sell tomatoes to even bigger buyers, including fast food chains. Farmworkers are at the very bottom of the hierarchy in the fields;" and 3) "There is virtually no interaction between farmworkers and the large corporate growers."⁴⁵ In the view of the CIW,

The fast-food industry as a whole... purchases a tremendous volume of fruits and vegetables, leveraging its buying power to demand the lowest possible prices from its suppliers. Through this *unprecedented market power*, the fast-food industry exerts a powerful downward pressure on wages and working conditions in its suppliers' operations (my emphasis).⁴⁶

Drawing in part from Oxfam's study of farmworker rights, the CIW highlights the significance of the increasing marketing spread in the agricultural industry. Defined as the "disparity between the price a consumer pays for a product and the price received by the grower," the marketing spread's widening gap is "concrete evidence of the growing power of major corporate buyers like Yum over prices at the farm level."⁴⁷

⁴⁵ CIW website, slideshow, available at: <http://www.ciw-online.org/images/images-Pages/Image6.html>

⁴⁶ CIW: Consciousness, available at: <http://www.ciw-online.org/about.html>

⁴⁷ Coalition of Immokalee Workers, "FAQ's on the Taco Bell Boycott" (hereinafter, CIW: FAQs), from CIW website, available at: <http://www.ciw-online.org/faq's.pdf>

Oxfam provides statistical evidence to this effect, noting that “in 1990 grower-shippers received 41% of the retail price of tomatoes,” and that “by 2000, they were receiving barely one quarter,” despite the fact that “inflation adjusted prices for fresh tomatoes at the retail level have increased significantly.”⁴⁸ This helps to explain why growers are increasingly forced to cut costs in order to maintain profits, and how workers ultimately pay the price through stagnating or declining wages and working conditions. As the CIW explains, growers are unable to demand cheaper inputs (in terms of machinery or pesticides), but they can “hold wages stagnant, or even cut the piece rate, and still obtain desperately poor workers to pick their crops.”⁴⁹ Oxfam expresses this trend in terms of supply chain dynamics: “Squeezed by the buyers of their produce, growers pass on the costs and risks imposed on them to those on the lowest rung of the supply chain: the farmworkers they employ.”⁵⁰ In the CIW’s analysis, then, the corporations hold the power to improve the lives of farmworkers; negotiating with growers is likely to prove futile. More specifically, explaining why they chose Taco Bell as the boycott target, the CIW notes that “Taco Bell directly profits from farmworkers’ sub-poverty wages and substandard working conditions.” More importantly, CIW asserts that, “Taco Bell and its parent company Yum! Brands actually have a hand in keeping those prices [to growers] so low and therefore *bear a significant degree of responsibility* for the inhumane working conditions of the men and women who pick their tomatoes (my emphasis).”⁵¹

⁴⁸ Oxfam, p. 35.

⁴⁹ CIW: FAQs, available at: <http://www.ciw-online.org/faq's.pdf>

⁵⁰ Oxfam, p. 36.

⁵¹ CIW: FAQs, available at: <http://www.ciw-online.org/faq's.pdf>

One important aspect of this economic system is the *invisibility* of workers at the bottom of the supply chain. As described by one observer,

Food corporations and grocery chains would rather not advertise how food is brought to the consumers, thereby *obscuring* the presence of farmworkers in their communities and in the food system as a whole... hence the hands that feed us are often invisible hands, hands of people who work in the shadows of a multibillion-dollar industry without enjoying its rewards (my emphasis).⁵²

The CIW is aware that their invisibility is in large measure a product of corporate marketing which aims to obscure the reality of their lives. They understand the power imbalance between the farmworkers and the corporate buyers, and how this plays out in the “battle for the truth”⁵³ about how food is planted, harvested, processed, packaged, and sold. The CIW website asserts, “The fast-food industry spends millions studying its consumers and billions advertising its products. We, on the other hand, don't have millions for research, much less billions for advertising.”⁵⁴ Perhaps an ironic effect of this imbalance – and certainly an indication of how strong the animal rights lobby has become – is the fact that farm *animals* receive greater attention than farm *workers*, not only in the public imagination but also in the realm of corporate social responsibility. At the time of the boycott, Yum! Brands actually had a policy on the conditions of farm animals in their supply chain, but no policy on the conditions of farmworkers. The policy states, “Yum! Brands is the owner of restaurant companies and, as such, does not own, raise, or transport animals. However, as a major purchaser of food products, we have the opportunity, *and responsibility*, to influence the way animals supplied to us are treated (my emphasis).”⁵⁵ This double standard is not lost on the CIW, who during their boycott argued, “We

⁵² Charles D. Thompson Jr. and Melinda F. Wiggins, “Introduction,” in *The Human Cost of Food: Farmworkers' Lives, Labor, and Advocacy*, (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2002), available online at <http://www.utexas.edu/utpress/excerpts/exthohum.html>

⁵³ Coalition of Immokalee Workers, “CIW Media” (hereinafter CIW: Media), from CIW website, available at: <http://www.ciw-online.org/media.html>

⁵⁴ CIW: Media, available at: <http://www.ciw-online.org/media.html>

⁵⁵ Yum! Brands, “Animal Welfare Program,” available at: <http://www.yum.com/responsibility/animalwelfare.asp>

are only asking that Yum give the same consideration to farmworkers they already claim to give to farm animals.”⁵⁶ Interestingly, in the early stages of the boycott, Taco Bell passed out fliers in its restaurants alleging the following: “The Immokalee tomato pickers are not employees of Taco Bell. We would never interfere with the policies or procedures of other companies that are completely unrelated to Taco Bell.”⁵⁷ As I will describe below, the CIW would put itself up against a commercial giant, with enormous resources at its disposal to spread misinformation (misdiagnose) about the realities of supply chain dynamics. The CIW was going to have to find a way to reveal the truth about invisible farmworkers to an oblivious public and resistant corporate structure.

The CIW’s Prognostic Frame: Making Corporations Accountable

Given the CIW’s diagnostic frame, they developed a prognostic frame which sought to make fast-food giants accountable for the ‘sweatshop conditions’ of otherwise ‘invisible’ workers at the bottom of the supply chain; they ultimately sought to fundamentally transform the agricultural industry in a way which would increase worker visibility, voice, and power. Instead of trying to get growers to agree to negotiate for better conditions, or trying to lobby for specific legislative changes, they designed a strategy that aimed to influence one of the industry’s major corporate players. As Benitez explains, “For years we’ve had our hand in the industry but we were always invisible, nobody saw us. So we decided to put our mark and our fight in front of these restaurants and we began with Taco Bell.”⁵⁸

⁵⁶ CIW: FAQs, available at: <http://www.ciw-online.org/faq's.pdf>

⁵⁷ PBS, *The Coalition of Immokalee Workers vs. Taco Bell*

⁵⁸ PBS, *The Coalition of Immokalee Workers vs. Taco Bell*

Targeting Taco Bell in particular was almost incidental – it was the only fast-food chain for which the CIW had what the industry calls ‘supplier information’ (the information linking particular growers with particular corporate purchasers). Generally speaking, this ‘competitive’ information is kept confidential. But in 1999, an industry journal called ‘The Packer’ published an article confirming “the existence of a long-term contractual relationship between Taco Bell and the Six L’s Packing Company, one of its Immokalee-based suppliers and one of the biggest producers of fresh tomatoes in the country.”⁵⁹ The CIW did not launch the consumer boycott immediately upon receipt of this information. They initially tried engaging with Taco Bell in a friendlier manner. As Damico explains, “When the workers saw this connection, they said, maybe if we go to Taco Bell, they’ll say, certainly, we don’t want to be purchasing tomatoes that are from suppliers that are exploiting workers.”⁶⁰ But when letter after letter fell on deaf ears in Taco Bell corporate headquarters, the CIW changed tactics. They called a consumer boycott on April 1, 2001.

Writing before the boycott’s resolution, Oxfam explains the strategy behind the tactic as follows: “By generating consumer and investor pressure on the corporate drivers of the supply chain, farmworkers and their supporters hope to re-shape the supply chain.”⁶¹ This strategy follows from the prognostic frame elaborated above. Eric Schlosser, author of the bestselling *Fast Food Nation*, shares the same prognostic frame and therefore endorses this approach. He notes, “The right pressure applied to the fast-food industry in the right way could produce change faster than

⁵⁹ CIW: FAQs, available at: <http://www.ciw-online.org/faq's.pdf>

⁶⁰ PBS, *The Coalition of Immokalee Workers vs. Taco Bell*

⁶¹ Oxfam, p. 2.

any act of Congress.”⁶² In *The Role of Power in Nonviolent Struggle*, Gene Sharp articulates the logic behind nonviolent tactics, such as boycotts. His analysis is worth quoting at length:

It is an obvious, simple, but often forgotten observation of great theoretical and practical significance that the power wielded by individuals and groups in the highest political positions of command and decision... is not intrinsic to them. Such power must come from outside themselves.... A closer examination of the sources of the rulers' power indicates that they depend *intimately* upon the obedience and cooperation of the governed. If the subjects reject the rulers' right to rule and to command, they are withdrawing the general agreement, or group consent, that makes the existing government possible.⁶³

When applied to the current global economic context, the ‘rulers’ of Sharpe’s analysis are the multinational corporations; the ‘governed’ are the consumers and shareholders. In other words, the corporations rely on the ‘obedience and cooperation’ of consumers and shareholders to maintain their power. Understanding this relationship, the CIW launched a boycott to raise the visibility of farmworkers hoping to thereby sensitize consumers and shareholders to the reality of their working and living conditions. This, in turn, would encourage the ‘governed’ to cease ‘cooperating’ (ie, to disinvest), thus shifting the balance of power between the farmworkers and the company and forcing Taco Bell to heed to the CIW’s demands. Appreciating the important role that the wider public has in influencing Taco Bell to concede, the CIW ‘Boycott the Bell’ site includes the following invitation: “You and your friends – your fellow students, neighbors, co-workers, or members of your church – are *the very heart of this campaign!* If you have come to this site because you want to help make FAIR FOOD a reality, you can use the tools below to bring the Taco Bell boycott to your community (my emphasis).”⁶⁴

⁶² Cited in Oxfam, p. 4.

⁶³ Gene Sharp, *The Role of Power in Nonviolent Struggle* (Boston: Albert Einstein Institute, 1990), p. 3-4.

⁶⁴ Coalition of Immokalee Workers, “Boycott the Bell,” available at: http://www.ciw-online.org/tz_site-revision/home/home.html

In order to get consumers and investors on board, the CIW needed to engage in what social movement literature refers to as ‘frame alignment processes;’ linking the interpretive frame of the social movement organization with the interpretive frame of potential supporters.⁶⁵ In other words, the CIW needed to get consumers and shareholders to interpret – ie, frame – the situation of farmworker working and living conditions in a way that corresponded with the CIW’s interpretation.⁶⁶ Snow et al identify a range of options for engaging in frame alignment. The most applicable to the current study is arguably ‘Transformation of Domain-specific Interpretive Frames,’ which Snow et al classify as being “a necessary condition for participation in movements that seek dramatic changes in the status, treatment, or activity of a *category of people* (my emphasis).”⁶⁷ According to Snow et al, this option involves,

Fairly self-contained but substantial changes in the way a particular domain of life is framed, such that a domain previously taken for granted is *reframed as problematic* and in need of repair, or a domain seen as normative or acceptable is *reframed as an injustice* that warrants change.⁶⁸

The domain ‘previously taken for granted’ is the fast-food industry’s supply chain. The CIW was aware that most consumers and shareholders simply do not consider the industry’s broader dynamics. The CIW’s strategy – as derived from its prognostic frame – was to use the boycott as a way of raising the visibility of those conditions, and thereby ‘reframe as problematic’ the supply chain dynamics within the fast-food industry. In the media section of their website, the CIW asserts the following (by way of helping audiences to ‘reframe’):

For workers from Immokalee, the *truth* about fast-food begins not behind the counter at your local restaurant, but in Immokalee, where the tomatoes that go into these products are planted, grown, and picked. We hope that, when you think about chowing down some fast food, you think about the workers who picked the tomatoes in that sandwich and the

⁶⁵ See Snow et al.

⁶⁶ I realize that frame alignment processes are also – and perhaps more importantly – involved in mobilizing actual farmworkers into the CIW (in addition to mobilizing allies and supporters), but I chose to focus on the broader coalition building because of the nature of the campaign in question.

⁶⁷ Snow et al., p. 474.

⁶⁸ Snow et al., p. 474.

sweatshop conditions that they continue to suffer in Florida's fields today -- sub-poverty wages, no right to organize, no right to overtime pay, and no benefits whatsoever (my emphasis).⁶⁹

In order to drive this point home, and to publicize the boycott, the CIW organized annual 'Truth Tours;' these tours involved speaking engagements and popular education workshops that served to 'reframe' the average consumer's understanding of the fast-food industry. Importantly, the 'Truth Tours' addressed the invisibility issue head on, by increasing the interaction between the farmworkers at the bottom of the chain and the consumers near the top. It also gave workers an opportunity to break the silence about their conditions in their own words. Their website explains that "we have had to work hard to document our struggle and tell our story, in our own words," and that none of the mainstream media stories on the campaign can capture the "harsh reality of farm labor conditions and the intensity of this campaign as we can ourselves."⁷⁰

In the end, four years of aggressive 'frame alignment' tactics paid off. The 'farmworker cause' was embraced by a wide range of supporters, including most notably, though by no means exclusively, national student groups and the Presbyterian Church. The 'Boycott the Bell' site identifies 14 labor groups, 7 global justice groups, 16 student organizations, 33 churches, and 22 community groups as endorsers of the campaign. Shareholders passed a resolution targeting the wages and conditions of workers in its supply chain, calling on Yum! Brands to "examine its programs, policies, and practices throughout its system of operations."⁷¹ The CIW also recruited a long list of public figures, celebrities and well-known activists to their cause, including former President Jimmy Carter, former UN Commissioner for Human Rights Mary Robinson, as well as

⁶⁹ CIW: Media, available at: <http://www.ciw-online.org/media.html>

⁷⁰ CIW: Media, available at: <http://www.ciw-online.org/media.html>

⁷¹ Oxfam Press Release: "Yum Shareholders Vote on Workers' Rights," May 18, 2004, available at: http://www.oxfamamerica.org/newsandpublications/press_releases/archive2004/art7259.html

scholar-activist Noam Chomsky, actress Susan Sarandon, the Indigo Girls music group, and writer Naomi Klein.⁷² Through skillful prognostic framing, the CIW was able to achieve its tactical objective: it rendered *visible* the most vulnerable, marginalized, and exploited workers in the country.

CONCLUSION

It becomes evident now that the two ‘turning points’ referred to at the beginning of this paper are, indeed, a result of tactics chosen through the CIW’s particular diagnostic and prognostic frame. For instance, getting the Presbyterian Church on board was part of a frame alignment process meant to get potential supporters to ‘reframe’ their understanding of the fast-food industry. And the hunger strike was a tactic used to increase farmworker visibility and sensitize Taco Bell executives to the plight of workers at the bottom of the supply chain. In short, frame analysis deepens our understanding of how and why some strategies and tactics are chosen over others. And in the case of the CIW, it helps us understand how and why a consumer boycott was able to generate such widespread support.

To recap, the CIW’s framing analysis, which focused on the corporation as the center of power, guided the CIW’s actions and dictated its tactics. As Benitez said, at the victory press conference, “Today’s message is simple: Taco Bell and the CIW – one a fast-food giant and the other a farmworker organization – are indeed part of the same industry.”⁷³ Making this simple

⁷² Coalition of Immokalee Workers, “Boycott the Bell: Endorsements”, available at: http://www.ciw-online.org/tz_site-revision/breaking_news/endorsements.html

⁷³ CIW: Press Release, available at: <http://www.nfwm.org/pdf/boycotts/tbvictorylucas.pdf>

fact public knowledge compelled both consumers *and* shareholders to pressure the entity with the most power to improve farmworker conditions – the corporation – to commit to doing so.

As a final thought, it is important to underscore the fact that the overall struggle continues, and that this victory, significant as it was, is only the beginning. Benitez himself asserts, “The real significance of this agreement lies in the promise it holds for much greater change in the future,” and that “now we must convince other companies that they have the power to change the way they do business and the way workers are treated.” Taking a long-term view, then, this victory can only be interpreted as a stepping stone in a broader project for transforming the entire industry. And if we consider the CIW’s framing analysis, this is also the *only* conclusion that we are in a position to reach.