



‘Immokalee Wouldn’t Exist Without Fast Food’: The Relational Spatial Praxis of the Coalition of Immokalee Workers

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In 2005 the Coalition of Immokalee Workers won a four-year campaign against Taco Bell that resulted in the food retailer agreeing to contribute to a pay raise and system for strengthening and monitoring the rights of workers who pick the tomatoes it purchases from growers in the Immokalee-area of southwest Florida. This paper examines the spatiality of the CIW’s praxis in that campaign. I focus explicitly on the spatial thinking and practices that were central to the CIW’s Taco Bell campaign. Previous studies observed a scalar element involving the up-scaling of the tomato pickers’ “local” dispute over wages and workplace rights. In this paper, I interpret the CIW’s scale jumping as part of a larger relational politics of space incorporating a “global sense of place” that connected Immokalee, the place in which workers experienced exploitation and rights violations, to a larger system of socio-spatial relations, connections, sites, and flows. This understanding was fundamental to the CIWs presumption that a small organization of farmworkers could successfully engage a “global” force like Taco Bell as well as to the strategic actions that it undertook.

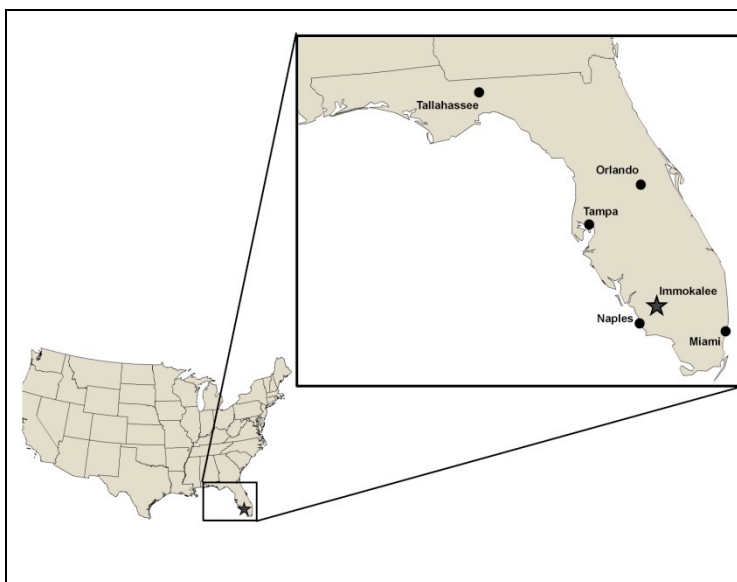


Introduction

In September 2009 a small group of farmworkers achieved what *Fast Food Nation* author Eric Schlosser described as “the greatest victory for farmworkers since Cesar Chavez in the 1970s” (Williams, 2009). The “victory” occurred when East Coast Growers and Packers (ECGP), one of the largest tomato growers in the United States, announced that it would pay Florida farmworkers one penny more per pound for tomatoes they pick, an increase of the piece rate that will raise the pickers’ wages by as much as 60 percent (Walker, 2009). The news was carried by the business news wires and published in a range of national publications, from *Forbes*, *CBS Market Watch*, and *Business Week* to the *Washington Post* and *Gourmet* magazine. In addition to the wage increase, ECGP announced that it would involve an independent third party in auditing worker pay, recognize worker participation in monitoring and discussing improvement of worksite conditions, and allow workers to educate each other about their rights while on the job (CIW, 2009). Importantly, these substantial changes were not the outcome of internally-motivated decisions by the company but were instead the result of concerted, sustained action by the Coalition of Immokalee Workers (CIW), a small farmworker organization based in southwest Florida.

Formed in 1993 and composed almost entirely of Mexican, Guatemalan, and Haitian immigrants, many undocumented and most speaking little or no English, the CIW has achieved a remarkable degree of success in its struggle to improve the wages, workplace conditions, and rights of tomato pickers and other farm workers in the Immokalee region (Leary, 2005) (Figure 1).

Figure 1. Immokalee, Florida



A key feature of the CIW's mode of struggle is its focus on actors and sites of contestation beyond the farmworkers' direct employers and their workplaces (Husebo, 2011). Indeed, the CIW has not been exceptionally successful in actions targeting the labor contractors and Immokalee-area growers who pay and supervise them in the tomato fields. Rather, its victories resulted from campaigns effectively targeting firms downstream in the tomato commodity chain, primarily fast food retailers. The first of these was the four-year effort to compel Taco Bell to hear workers' wage and workplace rights demands and to participate in fulfilling them by means of a formal agreement struck in 2005 with the CIW. By 2012 six of the 10 largest fast food retail firms in the United States, in addition to several large supermarket chains (Whole Foods and Trader Joe's) and a major food services company, had signed agreements with the CIW (Table 1). The CIW's agreement with ECGP was modeled on these and represented "the greatest victory" for the CIW because it was the first time in the organization's decade-and-a-half struggle that a grower, rather than a retailer, acknowledged the CIW as a bargaining agent for workers and agreed to the workers' terms.

Table 1: Fast food retail firms that have signed agreements with the CIW

<u>Fast Food Retailer</u>	<u>U.S. Ranking</u> <u>(2011 sales)</u>
McDonald's	1
Subway	2
Burger King	3
Taco Bell	6
Pizza Hut	8
KFC	9
Long John Silver's	32
A&W	< 50

Sources: CIW (2010a) and QSR Magazine (2011)

All of the CIW's agreements build on three principal demands: First, for improved wages; second, for recognition and enforcement of crop workers' rights in the picking fields; and third, that the large tomato retailers play a role in implementing the first two. In each case, and usually after a period of targeted activism by CIW members and their allies, these firms formally acceded to these demands. In other words, although they do not directly employ tomato pickers, they agreed to play an active role in shaping and regulating Immokalee

farmworkers' relations with their local employers. Specifically, they agreed to participate in a pass-through arrangement, paying one penny more for each pound of tomatoes they purchased from Immokalee-area growers on the condition that the extra penny-per-pound was used to raise the piece rate. They also committed to establishing codes of conduct for their supply chains that would set the terms by which tomato suppliers (e.g., Florida growers and packinghouses) would be held accountable for recognizing workers' rights.

In this paper, I examine the spatiality of the CIW's Taco Bell campaign. The Taco Bell campaign was the first in what has become the CIW's primary strategy—the targeting of large image-conscious national and global buyers of tomatoes (i.e., fast food and grocery retailers) rather than direct actions against local employers. I argue that the Taco Bell campaign involved a series of strategic practices informed by a relational understanding of space. In doing so, the CIW constructed a political subjectivity that explicitly incorporated the power-geometry of social relations shaping farmworkers' working and living situations in Immokalee. Previous analyses have pointed out that in the Taco Bell campaign the CIW up-scaled a “local” dispute over wages and rights to the national or global arena. In this paper I situate this up-scaling among other spatial elements that were crucial to the CIW's praxis in its Taco Bell campaign. This article is based on extended interviews with six members of the CIW and the closely affiliated and Immokalee-based Student Farmworker Alliance (SFA) conducted during 2007, as well as analysis of primary documents obtained from three main sources: fieldwork in Immokalee, the organization's website (www.ciw-online.org), and its email listserv. These data were analyzed in an endeavor to draw out the spatial or geographical elements implicated in the CIW's strategizing and actions in the Taco Bell campaign. In the next section of the paper I review the literature on the CIW and critically examine the geographical analyses found therein. In the following two sections, I describe the CIW's Taco Bell campaign and then examine the relational politics of space incorporated into its struggle.

Thinking Geographically about the CIW's Politics

In her book, *For Space* (2005), Doreen Massey develops her longstanding argument for an explicit focus on the spatiality of politics. “The political” is intrinsically geographical and so the ways in which political movements, strategies, and subjectivities incorporate particular understandings of space and place matters fundamentally. As she puts it, “The way we imagine space has effects” (Massey, 2005, p. 4) and it follows, therefore, that a new politics “might require a different geography” (Ibid., p. 148). While it has not been their primary objective to analyze the geographies of the CIW's politics, a review of previous analyses of the CIW's Taco Bell campaign suggests a geographical dimension to the organization's shift in focus from local growers to Taco Bell and other large tomato retail firms. These studies have been principally concerned with the ways in which the CIW worked to form a political identity and critical collective consciousness among migrant farmworkers and the role of migrants' transnational subject positions in CIW

strategy development (Drainville, 2007; Lear,y 2005; Rodrigues, 2006, Sellers, 2009). In this literature, geographical terms appear most frequently in the context of describing the character of the CIW's praxis in its Taco Bell campaign. The most common observation is that the Taco Bell campaign involved a "generalization", "nationalization", and even "globalization" of "local" issues. This literature also highlights the value of the CIW's ongoing "local" scale efforts in its "global" struggle and the resultant challenge of "figuring out the balance" between them (Leary, 2005). For the most part, the scalar vocabularies found in this literature reflect a descriptive role for space rather than an explanatory one. Several scholars, however, do engage theoretically with the multiscale dynamics of the CIW's praxis in its Taco Bell campaign (e.g., Drainville, 2007; Sellers, 2009).

In his study of the CIW as a social movement, Sellers (2009) connects the organization's success to the "local-global linkages" it forged, primarily through alliances with non-labor, mostly non-local organizations including student, faith, and human rights groups, which "broaden[ed] its audience and situate[ed its struggle] within worldwide struggles for social justice" (Sellers, 2009, 106) This, in turn, came about as the migrant workers in the CIW translated models from their native countries of popular education and coalition building for a new place and political context. Drainville (2007) makes a broadly similar argument, but one that rests on a deeper analysis of the spatiality of the CIW and its praxis. In his paper, he examines the Taco Bell campaign as means of understanding how "global [political] subjects might actually be making themselves in the world economy" (Drainville, 2007, 358). In particular, he theorizes that "what might be most substantial, and radical, about [global political subjects] . . . [is] the putting into dialectical relation of two relatively autonomous, spatially specific, modes of struggle" (Drainville, 2007, 358). Drawing on Gramsci, he describes these as, first, a "war of position", an *in place* ("in situ") or "local" politics seeking to improve daily material life by achieving autonomy from hegemonic institutions and structures embedded in local place; and second, a "war of movement", an *across space* or "global" engagement involving campaigns for justice and rights over a more extensive and socio-politically less constrained arena of struggle. Drainville concludes that while the CIW has been successful in both of these scale-specific struggles, its success in the latter (e.g., the national and global campaign for human rights and economic justice) threatens to undermine the former (the CIW's political effectiveness in the local place of Immokalee).

In the literature on the CIW there is little evidence of engagements with labor geographic scholarship. Only Drainville (2007), whose analysis is the most incisive regarding the dimension of space, makes reference to labor geographic scholarship, citing two papers and one book by Andy Herod (1995, 2001a, 2001b). Labor geographers in recent years have examined many of the questions and geographical dynamics that concern observers of the CIW's politics, although they have done so on the basis of explicit and critical engagements with the concepts of

space, place, and scale. Labor geographers have analyzed workers' geographical agency, producing explanations of the myriad ways in which workers, alongside capital and the state, are subjects, as opposed to merely objects, of capitalism's workings and geographical dynamics (see Lier (2007) for a recent comprehensive summary). Also, as in the CIW literature, the capacity of organized labor and the nature of workers' struggles in the era of neoliberal globalization has generated considerable interest among labor geographers, in particular their efforts to confront spatially mobile capital and geographically restructuring states and to organize within increasingly extensive commodity chains (Hartwick, 2000; Harvey, 2005; Herod, 2001b; Peck 1996). While, as Lier (2007) points out, labor has always faced an 'up-scaling imperative' to counter capitalism's geographical expansionism, geographers have also demonstrated that workers confront and shape global capital processes through strategic local-scale or "place-based" organizing and resistance (Castree, 2000; Herod, 2001; Walsh, 2000). Finally, labor geographers' analyses of emergent community (or social movement) unionism and consumer-based or -oriented worker struggles and their role in the multiscale dynamics of labor politics echoes attention given to the role of alliances with non-labor organizations and actors in the sphere of social reproduction in the CIW literature (Hartwick, 2000; Husebo, 2011; Johns and Vural, 2000; Lier and Stokke, 2006; Tufts, 1998; Wills, 2001; Wills, 2005; Wills and Simms, 2004).

In this work, labor geographers have generally sought to move away from absolute conceptions of "pre-existing space in which things are passively embedded . . . in a web of co-ordinates" (Thrift, 2009, 86). Like others in critical human geography, they have developed understandings of space that conceive it as the product of social relations and practices and have sought to develop the political implications of this. In this view, space is not independent of the things or objects that occupy it but rather it exists in the relations between those things, even as it shapes those relations between them. As Massey (2005) puts it, space "unfolds as interaction" (p. 61) and consists in "the open ended interweaving of a multiplicity of trajectories" (p. 100). The territories and spatial flows these produce are therefore not only socially dynamic spheres but also political ones, inasmuch as the social practices and relations that construct them are always open to negotiation, contestation, and engagement. On this basis, Massey made one of her most important and well-known contributions (Massey, 1991), a re-conceptualization of place as an open, porous, dynamic product of "routes rather than roots" (Cresswell, 2004, 53). Places are historical-geographical products of flows or "criss-crossings in the wider power-geometries that constitute both ['the local'] and 'the global'" (Massey, 2005, 101). As she has argued, a politics that incorporates this open, spatially constructed "global sense of place" avoids the tendency to draw a "sharp separation of local place from the space out there" (p. 7) and engages instead in "an outward looking local politics which reaches out beyond place" (p. 148).

The development of a relational understanding of space is connected with a re-thinking about geographical scale and the implications for political agency. Here, too, scale is conceptualized as a dynamic social construct. In contrast to a reified and absolute view of scale (i.e., scales as already-existing, fixed, and separate), scale is thought of as a contingent outcome (or product) of social relations and practices (Marston, 2000) or, as Swyngedouw (1997, 169) puts it, “Social relations are grounded and therefore extend over a certain material/social/discursive space and operate over a certain distance. It is here that the issue of geographical scale emerges centrally.” This relational understanding of scale plays an important role in Massey’s notion of “power-geometry”, a concept that captures the socially differentiated experiences of geographical mobility and organization (Massey, 1991). As a central dimension of power-geometry, geographical scales are not merely strategically occupied and moved between but are (re)constructed by social agents, who are consequentially (dis)empowered. Important as well for the analysis of the CIW’s Taco Bell campaign, relational scale neglects binary, hierarchical thinking about “local” and “global”, whereby these scales are aligned with other dualisms, including place/space, immobility/mobility, labor/capital. Many geographers have thus sought explicitly to move away from understandings of the “global” as the scale of capital, with its ability to range freely and extensively over space, and the “local” as a confined ‘field of play’ where labor and other social actors struggle to react and adjust (Herod, 2009). The “flat scale” debate, to cite a prominent example, has emphasized the networked character and horizontality of social power and collective action—an understanding of power as operating horizontally through socio-spatial networks rather than vertically (downward) through a hierarchy of geographical scales, revealing myriad “entry points into politics” (Marston et al, 2005, 427) for social movements and labor organizations (Leitner and Miller, 2007). On these relational grounds, labor geographers have revealed the role of workers in pro-actively (re)constructing the scales of labor relations, regulation, reproduction, organizing, and resistance activity and, in general, the capitalist process itself (e.g. Peck, 1996; Walsh, 2000; Swyngedouw, 2004; Savage, 2006; Castree, 2000; Herod, 2001a).

In this paper I build on Drainville’s and Seller’s accounts of the CIW’s successful scalar praxis in the Taco Bell struggle. I shall argue that the CIW’s scalar praxis was woven into a politics of relational space involving three elements not explicated in those previous analyses. First, the CIW’s Taco Bell campaign expressed a global sense of place that connected Immokalee, the place in which workers experienced exploitation and rights violations, to a larger system of socio-spatial relations, connections, sites, and flows that not only produced conditions in Immokalee but was, in turn, produced or enabled by them. Second, building on these conceptual grounds, strategic actions by the CIW incorporated a networked understanding of space (“flat thinking”) that located Taco Bell’s “global” power in a network whose nodes and links were used to map the actual routes of activism and to envision concrete practices of jumping scale in order to contest the “global”

firm. Third, this “routed” inter-scaling of the struggle enabled the CIW to not (only) act between different already-existing scales but construct new ones, in particular the scale of wage and workplace regulation.

In the next section of the paper I describe the CIW’s Taco Bell campaign, emphasizing the conventional geographical narrative in which the CIW struggled initially “in place” at the local scale before up-scaling and acting “across space” at the national and global scales. In the subsequent section I re-interpret this account by situating the CIW’s well-established up-scaling within a larger relational spatial praxis.

The CIW’s Taco Bell Campaign as Scalar Politics

In both statistics and pictures, Immokalee looks very much like a farmworker town. According to the 2000 Census, Immokalee’s population stands out with high percentages of Hispanics, migrants, non-citizens, agricultural employment, and poverty. The built landscape reflects this statistical profile, especially the eastern side of the town, which includes the area of most farmworker housing, the tomato packinghouses, and the bus depot, which advertises connections to major cities throughout Mexico (Figures 2 and 3).

Figure 2. Farmworker housing near CIW headquarters in Immokalee, Florida.



Source: Author

Figure 3. Bus depot in Immokalee, Florida, featuring destinations in Texas and Mexico.



Source: Author

Immokalee tomato pickers work in growers' fields but are not specifically hired nor supervised by them. Like a growing number of farmworkers across the United States, tomato pickers are actually hired by labor contractors, intermediaries paid by growers to assemble and manage crews of workers, usually on a short term basis (Rothenberg, 1998). Described by Bowe (2007, 57) as the "lowest rung of employers in the long chain that brings produce from the field to the table" labor contractors often provide and control workers' transportation to and from work as well as their housing, and allow growers to distance themselves legally from labor issues (Oxfam America, 2004). In Immokalee during the harvest season, labor contractors typically put together work crews each morning, hiring workers for particular growers and transporting them to the fields, some of which are more than a two hour drive from town. Inasmuch as these labor contractors directly control the hiring process as well as conditions in the workplace, the CIW initially focused its organizational and resistance efforts at the local and regional (i.e., sub-state) scales. The CIW organized and carried out various marches, general strikes, work-stoppages, and a hunger strike in Immokalee (CIW, 2001; CIW, 2010a). In these various ways, the CIW sought to pressure growers into action by publicizing their low and stagnant wages—in the late 1990s tomato pickers were paid at approximately the same rate as they had been in the late 1970s (Bowe, 2007; CIW, 2003b)—and workplace violence at the hands of employers (crew leaders). In the late 1990s, the organization played a primary role in exposing and investigating several cases of slavery in the region's agriculture industry, which raised its profile

considerably both locally and beyond (Oxfam America, 2004; Bowe, 2007; Sellers, 2009).

Prior to and alongside these actions, the CIW engaged in other important “local doings” (Drainville, 2007). These for the most part involved vigorous efforts to create a collective and political identity among crop workers in Immokalee. As one worker explained, “When someone arrives in Immokalee, you don’t have any support or know the lay of the land. You’re simply on your own” (quoted in Sellers, 2009, 32). This loneliness and alienation, combined with the constant turnover of the local farmworker population, represents a crucial challenge to the wherewithal of the CIW’s struggle and necessitates continuous efforts to engender a sense of community among a heterogeneous assemblage of mostly young men, as well as a critical consciousness regarding living and working conditions and rights and an awareness of the CIW’s role and its struggles against social and economic injustices. As a result, popular education and leadership development are central to the CIW’s praxis, with a primary goal of “encourage[ing] collective analysis and reflection by workers about their daily reality” (Rodrigues, 2006, 7). Weekly meetings, known as *formaciones*, constitute the principal way in which this is done by the CIW. These meetings are informational and collaborative strategizing sessions, often relying on videos, drawings, and theater, through which the CIW aspires to draw out the ideas of workers and foster a sharing of views and experiences. As one member explained in an interview, “the voice of the worker is given primacy. [We] want to follow that voice.”

Since the CIW’s inception, this crucial and necessarily ongoing process of identity formation and critical-political development has featured a basic yet profound geographical dimension that warrants attention. This emerged in my interviews with CIW members and is observed in other published accounts (e.g., Bowe, 2003; Rodrigues, 2006). It relates to the vulnerability of workers to various types of economic exploitation arising from the circumscribed spatial extent of their daily lives and the ways in which the CIW responded to that. Most farmworkers do not own cars and are geographically immobile in their everyday lives. As a result, farmworker life typically occurs in a relatively small area of town centered on the parking lot (Figure 4) where, during the harvest season, they are hired and picked up between four and five o’clock each morning by buses operated by crew leaders affiliated with different growers. Proximity to this parking lot is strongly desired, so most Immokalee pickers find shelter in nearby housing taking the form of trailers, barracks, and apartment buildings—most in visibly poor condition. According to CIW members, much of this housing is owned by a single local family and during the harvest it is densely occupied by workers who pay square-footage rates that approach those in Manhattan (Bowe, 2003). Geographical immobility also contributes to exploitation of farmworkers by food retailers, who, several research participants claimed, have charged high prices knowing that these customers have few other choices.

Figure 4. Parking lot adjacent to CIW headquarters where workers are hired by crew leaders and board buses to the tomato fields.



Source: Author

Shortly after the organization was founded, the CIW established its headquarters in a building on South Third Street, adjacent to the parking lot and geographically situated between the main farmworker residential district and the nearby commercial zone that serves them. While none of my research occupants was involved in the decision to site the headquarters there, several made the point that it was strategically located in a way that allowed the organization to intersect workers' daily space-time routines. The headquarters houses a large, open meeting room, office facilities, and food co-op, and small radio broadcasting studio. As the site of weekly *formaciones*, the headquarters functions as what social movements scholars refer to as a "safe space"—"a place whose occupants enjoy some protection from intervention [and surveillance and policing] by authorities and enemies" and therefore a space that "increase[s] the ease with which potential dissidents meet, communicate, organize, act, and evade repression" (Tilly, 2000, 144).

Figure 5. CIW headquarters in Immokalee in 2007.



Source: Author

The food co-op, meanwhile, serves a practical need—a source of affordable, culturally acceptable food and other necessities for the spatially constrained population of Mexicans, Guatemalans, and Haitians who, according to my informants, face higher prices in the two large food stores nearest the worker district. The food co-op also provides a means of connecting with the wider community—its use is not restricted to CIW members; anybody can purchase food, phone cards, and other items at the co-op that are priced at cost—and generating political awareness. Located within the CIW’s headquarters, the co-op brings patrons into physical contact with the organization and its work. Various forms of literature designed to capture shoppers’ attention and educate them about the coalition and its struggle adorn the walls and are stacked on tables (Figure 6).

In addition, from its own broadcast studio the CIW operates a low-power radio station, Radio Conciencia, to create collective awareness and strengthen its organizational base. This is especially important for outreach among a population with a diverse array of tongues and varying levels of literacy.

The period from the CIW’s founding to the late 1990s was a phase of “local” struggle, and it resulted in several meaningful accomplishments whose larger effect was, in Drainville’s terms, to achieve some degree of “relative autonomy from Immokalee politics and markets, both under labor contractors’ stranglehold” (Drainville, 2007, 363). First, the organization achieved material gains for workers

Figure 6. CIW food co-op and popular education materials posted at the check-out counter.



Source: Author

in the form of wage increases and reductions in violence (Sellers, 2009). Second, according to various research participants, workers and community members developed a collective identity that was, according to my informants, unprecedented in Immokalee, a consciousness about their rights, and a sense of empowerment and an expectation of justice. Third, the CIW demonstrated to workers in Immokalee its potential as an inclusive and effective agent in the local political economy.

In interviews, these latter two accomplishments were expressed in various ways. One worker began by saying that prior to CIW actions in the early and mid-1990s, “Immokalee . . . was like the Wild West. Crew leaders could openly threaten you, the workers . . . [and] they could openly brandish weapons”. Another CIW member asserted that “[Among workers] I think we’ve elevated the level of awareness of their rights . . . There is now a different culture in the town. And there is a sense of community for people – mostly young, single men – who are here without their families. It’s a shitty status to feel alone, that you don’t belong.” He also emphasized that this collective mindset extends beyond farmworkers to the larger community. So, he pointed out,

There’s been a shift in the power dynamics in Immokalee . . . Crew leaders and contractors know that they don’t have absolute power, because people know they aren’t alone now. If you’re violent against an individual then you know you are against the whole community. And the CIW community is larger than the formal membership.

These accomplishments notwithstanding, according to my interviewees and other writings, CIW members believed that improvements in workers' wages and rights in the late 1990s were tentative, shallow, and inadequate. Even though there had been an increase in the picking rate, workers continued to earn below-poverty wages. In addition, according to CIW and SFA members I interviewed, local growers continued to view workers' right to participate in negotiations and, specifically, the role of the CIW as illegitimate. Illustrating this latter issue, at the US Social Forum in Atlanta in 2007 I observed one of the leaders of the CIW claim to a group that in 14 years of working in Immokalee he had "never seen the face of a grower" because none would negotiate face-to-face with a worker. Thus, as one CIW member recalled, "[Local s]trikes showed us our power and what we're capable of, they got us some improvements but not the systematic, industry-wide changes we are seeking" (quoted in Rodrigues, 2006).

Eventually, the CIW began to extend the political scope and, as a result, spatial scale of its struggle beyond its local place (Immokalee and southwest Florida). With Immokalee-area growers still their primary target, in the late 1990s the CIW conducted several marches across the state to strategic destinations, such as Orlando, where the business association representing growers, the Florida Fruit and Vegetable Growers, is headquartered, and Tallahassee, the state capital, where they unsuccessfully sought an intervention from the governor's office (CIW 2001). With the Taco Bell campaign in 2001, the CIW expanded the spatial extent of its praxis.

This scale shift related to another strategic shift. The nature of the latter shift is reflected in the way the organization began to articulate its struggle as a "campaign for fair food" (CIW, 2010b). The framework of "fair food" explicitly situated tomato pickers within the tomato commodity chain, bringing their low wages and violent workplace conditions, and hence the CIW's struggle for justice, in relation to wholesale and retail buyers, such as Taco Bell and its customers. A large mural was painted at main entrance to CIW headquarters in Immokalee to represent this newly understood context of their struggle. (Figure 7). Importantly, this strategic re-framing was profoundly informed by ongoing analyses, discussions, and experiences of workers themselves (Rodrigues, 2006; Sellers, 2009).

In an interview a worker explained the impetus and rationale for re-framing the CIW's struggle as a "fight for fair food":

When we first started to organize, we focused mostly on the growers, on our immediate bosses, asking them to improve our wages, and we did a lot of different actions, including work stoppages, strikes, hunger strikes, marches across the state, to call attention to these conditions. But we didn't get the response we wanted from those bosses because they were not the only ones responsible for the conditions we were suffering . . . What we realized in this, was that there were big

corporations that were buying the tomatoes that we were picking, and we started to focus on one of the corporations, and that was Taco Bell.

Figure 7: Mural painted on the outside wall of the CIW headquarters showing tomatoes and profits flowing from Immokalee via area growers to fast food retail firms Taco Bell, Pizza Hut, KFC, and McDonald's.



Source: Author

As this quotation indicates, the strategic shift emerged as CIW members developed an understanding of power relations within the tomato commodity chain and determined that the organization would need to respond accordingly. This ultimately gave rise to the “campaign for fair food” construction and involved tacit acceptance of growers’ claims that they could not afford to pay higher wages due to rising production costs and intense (and, growers argued, unfair) post-NAFTA competition from Mexico, both of which had resulted in significant declines in Florida’s fresh-market tomato industry (Walker, 2008). This was one of two premises underlying the idea for a pass-through wage increase, whereby large corporate purchasers would volunteer (under pressure from the CIW) to pay more

for tomatoes on the condition that the extra payment be passed on by growers to the pickers who harvested the fruit.

The second premise was the realization that while Taco Bell was understood to have greater margins and economic wherewithal than tomato growers, it was simultaneously vulnerable to negative publicity in a way that growers were not. As one worker put it, despite being “on top of this whole thing [the tomato commodity chain] . . . we came to realize that the fast food chains had a brand-image that they care about very much.” Thus, the CIW endeavored to use what Naomi Klein (2002) describes as a “brand boomerang” against Taco Bell. As she argues in her book, *No Logo*, the “brand boomerang” operates against large firms for whom the creation of meanings (i.e., brand images) rather than things (e.g., well-made or clever products) is the primary basis of their profit-making and competitive strategies. As she argues, “the more ambitious a company has been in branding the cultural landscape . . . the more it leaves itself open to tactics that threaten to bring the brand’s marketing image crashing down” (Klein, 2002, 346). In order to hold Taco Bell accountable to the “public image . . . [that it] uses to its advantage to attract customers” (quoted in Sellers, 2009, 95), in 2002 the CIW issued a call for “artists and allies of all sorts to help us by creating adusting images of Taco Bell” to “create a culture of resistance” to Taco Bell while “exposing the truth behind corporations’ branding” (CIW, 2002b). In emails to its listserv and other written and graphic materials, the CIW attempted to re-brand Taco Bell as a seller of “sweatshop tacos” (CIW, 2002b).

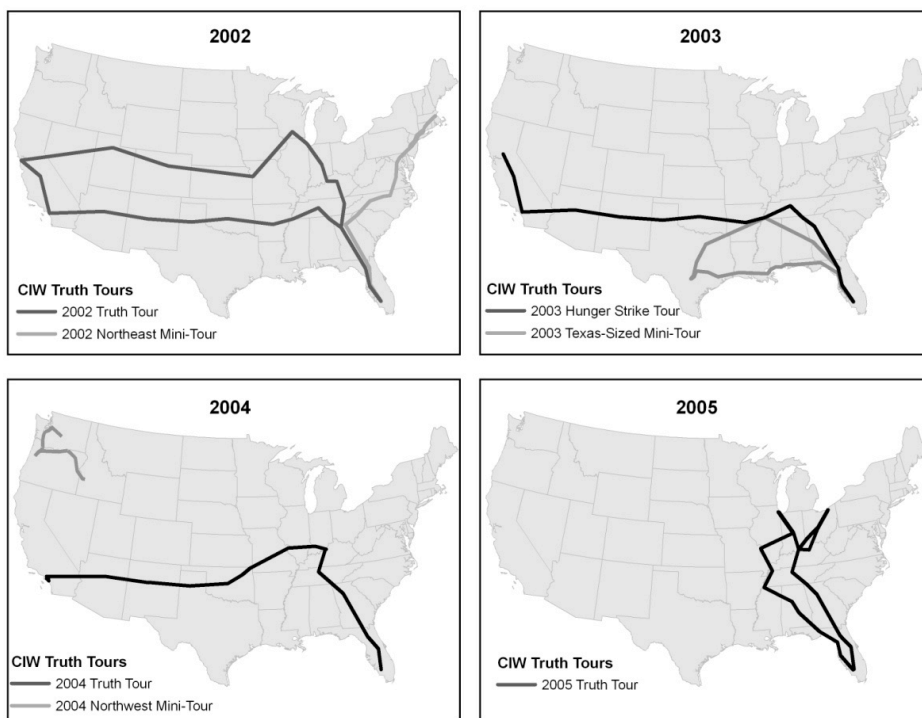
One particularly effective instance of adusting involved the “Animal Welfare” statement of Taco Bell’s parent company, Yum! Brands, to which the CIW called attention in 2003. The statement read:

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 are treated. We take that responsibility very seriously, and are working with our suppliers on an ongoing basis to make sure the most humane procedures for caring for and handling animals are in place (CIW, 2003a).

Alerting the public to this, the CIW responded to statements Taco Bell had issued that rebuffed requests to negotiate with CIW and claimed, first, “we don’t have the power and influence they think to pressure [the Immokalee growers]” (Ibid.) and, second, “We don’t believe it is our place to get involved in another company’s labor dispute involving its employees (quoted in Bowe, 2007, 58). In response, the CIW pointed to the animal welfare statement and issued the statement, “So, as a ‘major purchaser of food products,’ Taco Bell does have the RESPONSIBILITY and INFLUENCE to improve the treatment of farm animals. Yet the fast-food giant suddenly becomes impotent and bears absolutely no responsibility when it comes to the treatment of workers” (CIW, 2003a, emphasis original).

Crucially, as Sellers (2009), who was at the time a central figure in the SFA, argues, the CIW combined this discursive line of attack with an effective set of material efforts designed to “overcome its geographic and social marginalization – its “invisibility” (Sellers, 2009, 97). First, the CIW organized multiple “truth tours” to apply direct public pressure on the company while generating consumer awareness and attracting attention from the media. Truth tours consisted of strategically routed bus trips by around 100 people, mostly farmworkers, to places across the United States. During the four-year Taco Bell campaign, the CIW undertook seven of these (Figure 8) and as Figure 9 shows, they appear to have contributed to a significant amount of media coverage.

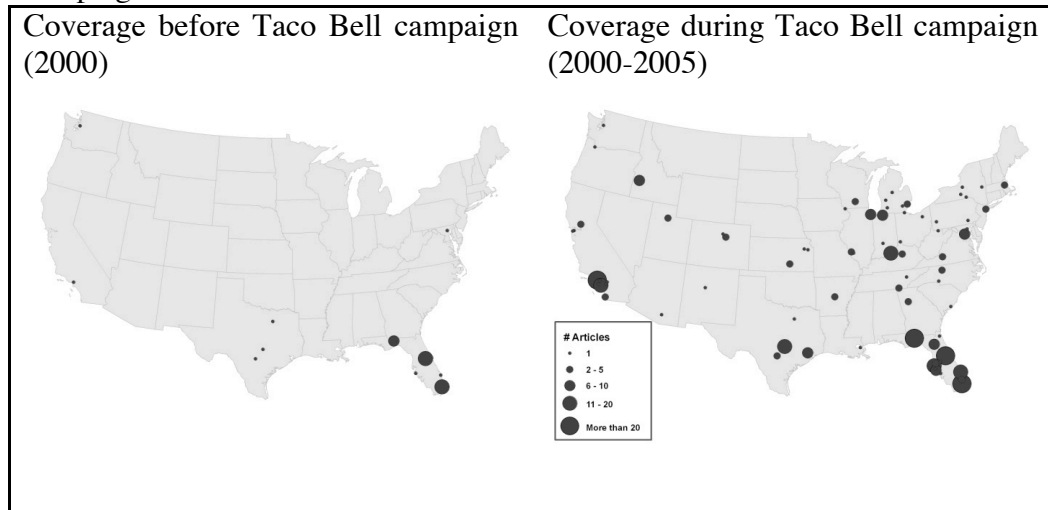
Figure 8: Truth Tours undertaken by the CIW during its Taco Bell campaign (2001-2005).



Source: www.ciw-online.org

Key destinations included the corporate headquarters of Taco Bell (Irvine, California) and its parent company, Yum! Brands (Louisville, Kentucky), where major protests were held. The second way in which the CIW sought to overcome its geographical and social “invisibility” in its struggle against Taco Bell was through the “Boot the Bell” campaign. Spearheaded by the Student/Farmworker Alliance, an organization created in 2001 to formalize the participation of student participants, Boot the Bell was initiated as a way to mobilize mainly college and university students to oppose the presence of Taco Bell restaurants on their

Figure 9: Growth in print media coverage of the CIW and its Taco Bell campaign between 2000 and 2005.



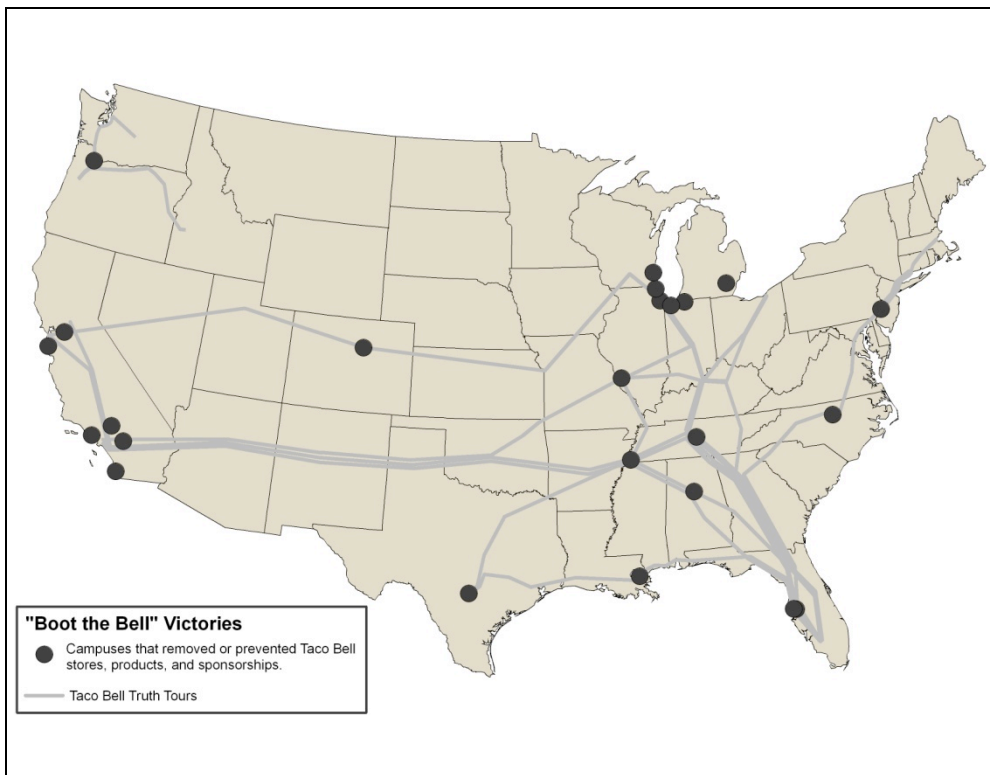
Note: Symbols are graduated according to cumulative count of articles in Lexis-Nexis database between January 1, 2000 and December 31, 2005.

campuses until the company engaged in meaningful dialogue with the farmworkers. Boot the Bell allowed the CIW to expand the Taco Bell campaign beyond the fields and corporate offices in Florida and tap into already-organized, growing, and energized “anti-globalization” and “anti-sweatshop” movements among Taco Bell’s coveted “demographic” of 18 to 24 year olds (CIW, 2002a; Critzon, 2002). To this end, truth tours were routed through numerous college towns in order to inspire and bolster Boot the Bell efforts on particular campuses. Boot the Bell resulted in disrupting in various ways Taco Bell’s location on 24 different educational campuses across the country (Figure 10) (SFA, 2006).

The role of the Student/Farmworker Alliance in this highlights the third way in which the CIW sought to move beyond the geographical and social “margins”. Vitaly important to the CIW’s Taco Bell campaign was a national network of allies, including labor and non-labor organizations, student groups, such as the Student/Farmworker Alliance and United Students Against Sweatshops, as well as faith-based, human rights, and immigrant-rights groups. These groups offered substantial symbolic and material support. Importantly, according to one of my informants, most of the CIW’s financial resources are generated non-locally through these alliances. Other types of support were those necessary for truth tours, for which allies provided crucial logistical support, such as places to stay and food to eat, and mediated contact with other local activist groups as well as police and local government (e.g., for permits, etc.). In turn, truth tours helped in the formation of new alliances: “[W]e stopped and visited with students and people of faith in communities. Those people joined our struggle and helped to make our victory possible”. Faith-based groups and churches played an especially important

political role during the Taco Bell campaign. In addition to raising money and publicizing the CIW's struggle and the issue of farmworker exploitation, they became materially involved in other ways, such as at shareholder meetings, where they initiated and lobbied on behalf of resolutions in support of justice for farmworkers. They also symbolically connected the CIW's struggles with the religious values of both allies and adversaries, including, reportedly, the CEO of Yum! Brands (Leary, 2005).

Figure 10: Map of “Boot the Bell” victories showing campuses that removed or prevented Taco Bell stores and products and the routes of the seven Taco Bell Truth Tours.



Source: SFA (2006)

The Taco Bell Campaign as a Relational Politics of Space

According to Massey (2005), space and place exist as a sphere of social interactions involving multiplicity and heterogeneity or what she calls “contemporaneous processual existence” (p. 61) and “radical contemporaneity” (p. 99). In this relational understanding, space and place “pose this question of our living together” and raise, therefore, the “central question of the political” (p. 151)—that is, the engagements, negotiations and contests that arise from the coexistence of “chaotic” heterogeneity, the openness of possibility, and competing

desires for order and regulation. Politics in this account are intrinsically spatial and necessarily occur, therefore, through an engagement with space and the ways in which it is both placed and scaled. In this section of the paper, I interpret the CIW's Taco Bell campaign from this conceptual point of view. I argue that in the Taco Bell campaign and those that have followed, the CIW's praxis incorporated a relational understanding of space and sought, therefore, to explicitly engage with the entwined geometries of power shaping work and life for farmworkers in Immokalee. In other words, I interpret the geographical change in the CIW's politics as a commitment to a relational sense of space that involved, but went beyond, the jump in scale observed in the academic literature on the CIW. In this section I support this claim by highlighting three relationally spatial elements in the CIW's praxis. Each reveals a praxis informed by an understanding, first, of the mutual conditionality of geographic scales (i.e., the local and global) and the implication of this that no scale (or scalar configuration) or place is essentially and permanently powerful or powerless; and, second, that it is through networks of social relations that actors and processes at one scale relate to those operating at another, a view that locates "global" forces within the places and scales that configure these social networks.

The first element has to do with the conceptualization of place incorporated by the CIW's praxis. It is evident that the organization as a whole, as well as specific members, came to understand (and probably always did) Immokalee not as internally-defined and neatly bounded but as a product of spatially extensive (i.e., non-local) social relations and flows. This "global sense" of Immokalee was revealed by the CIW's rejection of Taco Bell's initial representations of the CIW's claims as local and private matters and, thus, beyond its (spatial) scope of responsibility (Massey, 2004)—an attempt to spatially confine the CIW and farmworkers' situations to local place and deny its own relationship to the flows producing conditions in Immokalee. Another clear example of this is provided by a series of emails sent by the CIW to its listserv during 2003. In those emails, the construction of, and conditions in, Immokalee are explicitly connected to the wider, globalizing profit-making systems organized by large food retail firms such as Taco Bell. In one email Immokalee is characterized as "more of a labor pool than a town" (CIW, 2003c), a place that exists as such to meet demands created by "the corporate food industry (grocery and fast food conglomerates) . . . for an enormous supply of produce at the cheapest possible price" (CIW, 2003b). These emails also point out that the immigrants making up the Immokalee labor pool are farmers and farmworkers displaced from their home-places in Mexico and Central America by policies of free trade and agricultural deregulation and privatization pushed for, and contributing to the growth in the economic power of, these same retail firms. As one of the CIW's founding members, Lucas Benitez, put it in a short speech at the announcement of the organization's agreement with Taco Bell, "The food industry in this country is rooted in communities like mine, Immokalee" (Benitez, 2005). A CIW member offered a stark rendition of this same point in an interview with me, saying "Immokalee would not exist without fast food." On this basis, the CIW's

“local” struggle can be interpreted as endeavoring to achieve autonomy and position within the Immokalee political economy (Drainville, 2007) but also, in so doing, to affect the “the very mechanisms of the global itself” (Massey, 2005, 102).

The development of, and the CIW's commitment to, this understanding of place connects to the second relationally spatial element in the CIW's Taco Bell campaign. It is expressed in the redefinition of the struggle as a “fight for fair food”, a slogan that served to extend the spatial scope of responsibility for “local” to Taco Bell's customers and ultimately its corporate ownership, and led to the second way in which the organization confronted the geometries of power shaping their lives. This was a politics of scale involving not jumping between already-existing geographic scales but an attempt to re-construct new ones. Indeed, I contend that by successfully engaging Taco Bell the CIW reconfigured, if tentatively, the scale of labor regulation within the tomato commodity chain. In its agreement with the CIW, Taco Bell committed to becoming materially involved in what the firm had earlier dismissed as a private, local issue involving workers and their Immokalee-based employers (Bowe, 2007; CIW, 2003a). The press release jointly published by Taco Bell and the CIW announcing the agreement reflected a vision of a cross-scale system underlying workers' wages and their rights. It quotes the president of Taco Bell as saying, “We are pleased to lend our support to and work with the CIW to improve working and pay conditions for farmworkers in the Florida tomato fields” (CIW, 2005) before spelling out the specific material ways in which this would occur, including the firm's willingness to participate in a one-penny-more-per-pound pass-through arrangement, as well as commitments to buy tomatoes only from suppliers who also agreed to participate, work in partnership with the CIW to monitor suppliers' compliance, issue a more robust supplier code of conduct, and assist in local-scale (i.e., in-state) efforts to achieve legal protections for farmworkers. Several of my informants noted the empowering effects of this—not only the increased pay rate, “which workers earned twice” through daily sweat and political struggle, but also the role in monitoring Taco Bell's Immokalee area suppliers' compliance with the code of conduct. “Growers are being watched from above and below now, and that is a major change in how things have gone” (interview). In other words, as a result of Taco Bell's agreement with the CIW, workers' wages and rights were no longer the sole province of local area growers and their labor contractors. One of my informants contemplated the impact of “all big buyers . . . including grocery chains” entering into similar arrangements, and concluded that “[the growers] wouldn't really have a choice then.” In 2007 the FFVA announced that tomato growers would refuse to participate in this or other agreements like it that, as a spokesperson put it, “get people outside your business to dictate your business to you” (Greenhouse, 2007). In other words, although Florida tomato growers eventually signed on to the agreements in 2010 (CIW, 2010), growers initially resisted the scalar reconstruction of Immokalee labor relations so that they would operate over a wider field encompassing a larger, more heterogeneous constellation of social relations compared to the more “local” one in which they occupy a position of

substantial power. It was a resistance, moreover, to the legitimization of the CIW at that larger scale as a bargaining agent for whom growers were able to deny any role within the “local” political economy.

The third relationally spatial aspect is reflected in the maps of the truth tours and Boot the Bell campaign. As others have observed, jumping scale in order to act beyond Immokalee and Florida was vital to the success of the Taco Bell campaign, allowing the CIW to access human and financial resources, operate in a sphere less controlled and managed by growers, and to connect its specific struggle to broader movements (e.g., global human rights) (Drainville, 2007; Leary, 2005; Rodrigues, 2006; Sellers, 2009). Nevertheless, a fuller explanation of the spatiality of the CIW’s praxis must also include the actual geographical routes by which this up-scaling occurred. These maps in Figures 8 and 10, in other words, reveal the geography of the CIW’s engagements with the “place[s] beyond place” that are essential to the processes and relations constructing Immokalee as an exploitative context for farmworkers’ lives and work. These places, namely the college campuses, as sites of consumption and invaluable image creation and reproduction, and corporate headquarters, as sites of crucial strategic decision-making, as well as anywhere else a Taco Bell restaurant successfully operates, enable Taco Bell’s accumulation of capital. The CIW’s scale jumping, in other words, involved a “guerilla cartography” (Herod, 2001a, 262) that mapped and targeted the “local” places necessary in the making of “global” forces (Taco Bell). In this, the CIW expressed a spatial imagination that incorporated the way in which the local and global are mutually implicated in each other’s existence and the sense, therefore, that “there is potentially some purchase through ‘local’ politics on wider global mechanisms” (Massey, 2005, 102). The truth tours and Boot the Bell campaign reveal the key insight that those “local places” and “local politics” are not limited to Immokalee. The CIW, working with the SFA, sought therefore to make these places visible and thereby map the geography of responsibility for workers’ exploitation in Immokalee. In his analysis, Drainville (2007, 316) makes the compelling point that the CIW’s “Global campaigning has not taken the CIW beyond Immokalee.” Nevertheless, while the CIW continues its struggle to play an effective role in Immokalee politics that should not obscure the ways in which the CIW’s strategically mapped “local” campaigning has taken the CIW beyond Immokalee but not out of the social processes constructing that place and those politics.

Conclusion

For workers, figuring out which [spatial strategy] is most appropriate relies upon knowing something about the spatial organization of a corporation's investments, how its production process operates, from where it secures components and raw materials, and the like. . . [I]t is obvious that the response of workers will . . . have to be geographically informed (Herod, 2000, 1789).

As Andy Herod has argued, there is much to be gained for labor organizations that approach their struggles as “cartographic projects” (Herod, 2001a, 262). The CIW’s campaign against Taco Bell provides a good example of the political possibilities opened up when workers undertake that project with a relational understanding of space. Thinking relationally, the CIW developed a political subjectivity geographically informed by an understanding of the mutually-conditional spatiality of their local situation(s) as workers in Immokalee and the profit system operating through the tomato commodity chain. The resultant spatial praxis, which the CIW has maintained and further developed in other, often successful, campaigns against large food retailers, including McDonald’s, Burger King, Subway, and Publix, takes for granted that “global” forces and structures are accessible to, and subject to change by, “local” actors.

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