Beyond the Fields: Solidarity Narratives and Coalition Building in the Fair Food Movement

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ABSTRACT

This paper extends scholarship on emerging sources of worker power in the 21st century through an examination of the solidarity activism of the Coalition of Immokalee Workers (CIW), an agricultural worker-led human rights organisation that advocates for Fair Food policies. The successes of the CIW are unexpected, since Florida's migrant workers lack the traditional sources of worker power that bolstered the labour struggles of the 20th century. Through in-depth interviews and a survey of student-farmworker activists, we extend scholarship rooted in the power resources approach to analyse the societal forms of power – both discursive and coalitional – that the CIW has developed in their efforts to harness broad social support from actors beyond the fields. We demonstrate how CIW coalitions are sustained through solidarity narratives that clarify the stakes for student allies and the discursive frames that motivate their activism.

KEYWORDS

Solidarity, farm workers, students, fair food, labour

Introduction

Labour scholars have noted a long-term decline in the power of industrial labour organisations and working-class parties vis-à-vis states and global capital since the latter decades of the 20th century. This decline has raised scholarly questions about the sources of power that are available to workers under the structural and institutional constraints of 21st century capitalism.

Building upon the early insights of scholars who analysed the role of workers in expanding social welfare policies of advanced capitalist states in the mid-20th century (Korpi 1974, 1985; Esping-Anderson and Korpi, 1984), a growing number of contemporary labour scholars advocate a power resources approach (PRA) that identifies and theorises four main types of power – structural, associational, institutional, and societal (Schmalz, Ludwig and Webster, 2018; Però and Downey, 2024; See also Refslund and Arnholtz, 2022). Identifying these distinct sources of worker power recognises the continued relevance and dynamism of organised labour in the 21st century, despite awareness of the disempowerment of traditional labour union organisations and socialist-labour parties (Atzeni, 2020; Ellem, Goods and Todd, 2020). Especially important in this regard are societal forms of power that connect the struggles of workers to social allies who can use their resources and platforms to advocate on behalf of workers (Alberti and Però, 2018). Forging these

coalitions with solidarity activists typically requires discursive narratives that frame labour struggles situated in particular workplaces as broader societal struggles for social justice (Chun, 2009; Haug, 2009; Lévesque and Murray, 2010; Schmalz, Ludwig and Webster, 2018). But what types of narrative and discourse resonate with solidarity allies who come from markedly different, and sometimes highly privileged, social backgrounds and work-life experiences?

In this article, we extend PRA scholarship on the societal sources of power through a case study of the solidarity activism of the Coalition of Immokalee Workers (CIW), a Florida-based, agricultural worker-led, human rights organisation that advocates for Fair Food policies. We argue that the experiences of Florida's migrant agricultural workers illustrate, in nearly ideal-typical form, the heightened precarity and marginalisation that arises when workers lack traditional sources of worker power. Their status as migratory agricultural workers in a US "Right to Work" state[1] and their demographic backgrounds as, predominantly, undocumented immigrants lacking citizenship rights has made it difficult for them to obtain the labour union representation and political party affiliation typically associated with workers' associational power. It also means that they lack institutional sources of power that would allow them to leverage their status as rights-bearing "workers" and claim protections granted by existing labour laws and practices. Finally, their participation in globalised agricultural supply chains dominated by corporate strategies of global food sourcing and branding means that Florida's migrant workers lack structural power vis-à-vis labour contractors, farmer employers and corporate distributors.

Yet, despite these deficiencies of associational, institutional and structural power, the CIW is internationally recognised as a highly effective social movement of workers. At the pinnacle of the CIW's successes stands its Fair Food Program, a worker-driven social responsibility model that provides "third party" monitoring of working and hiring practices to ensure compliance with a human rights-based code of conduct, guarantees a "premium price" on agricultural sales that is distributed directly into workers' wages, and provides mechanisms to solicit worker input and complaints and channel them into policy. While the Fair Food Program began modestly in 2010/2011 to improve the conditions of migrant labourers who worked in the tomato industry in the areas surrounding the town of Immokalee, Florida, the Fair Food Program has since spread to multiple other agricultural products, other agriculture-producing states and other countries, and now includes major corporate signatories. In comparison to other "multi-stakeholder initiatives", such as "Fair Trade" and "ethically sourced" labelling practices that also attempt to ameliorate labour problems in global supply chains, the CIW's Fair Food Program has been heralded as an "emerging gold standard" for its ability to effectively monitor and redress worker complaints (MSI Integrity, 2020). While scholars have demonstrated how and why the CIW's Fair Food Program is a particularly innovative form of a third-party labour monitoring certification system, less attention has been paid to the CIW's successes in building and sustaining the broad coalition of social actors that has helped them mount pressure on corporate food buyers to participate in their food justice initiatives.

This article explores the solidarity activism of the CIW through a qualitative study of the Student Farmworker Alliance (SFA), an organisation that mobilises students and community members to support the CIW and its Fair Food Program initiatives. Through the SFA, the CIW has built and sustained two societal sources of power: coalitional power and discursive power. The CIW's coalitional power is evident with the existence of the SFA itself, which mobilises students who are committed to advancing farm-worker efforts to pressure corporate buyers of tomatoes

[1] US "right to work" laws have been adopted by states that make it illegal to require union membership as a condition of employment.

and other agricultural products to participate in the Fair Food Program. As a coalitional ally organisation, the SFA provides the CIW with privileged resources, skills and social platforms that are not otherwise readily available to Florida's migrant agricultural workers. The CIW's discursive power, in turn, is evident in SFA activist discourses that reframe farm workers' struggles as a broader "societal problem" rather than a "labour dispute". SFA narratives of "fair food" and "food justice" open spaces for student-farmworker allies to identify as "primary stakeholders" and "secondary stakeholders" in the CIW's fair food struggle.

Our analysis of the CIW's societal sources of power extends the literature on power resources in two ways. First, it draws attention to the tensions that can arise between discursive and coalitional forms of power. Specifically, we find that SFA activists come from distinct social backgrounds and work-life experiences. Recognising this diversity of backgrounds poses certain discursive challenges to labour organisations that are seeking to broaden the framing of their struggles to appeal broadly to potential coalitional allies. Second, and related, our interviews with SFA activists highlight important differences in how they interpret their roles vis-à-vis farm workers and how they describe the overall goals of the movement. Here, we develop the concept "solidarity narratives" to distinguish four ideal-typical discourses adopted by SFA members that rationalise their solidarity activism: family/community-based narratives, worker/class-based narratives, consumer-politics-based narratives, and privilege-based narratives. Understanding these distinct solidarity narratives draws attention to the ways that discursive frames resonate with coalitional allies through binding discourses that emphasise commonalities between workers and social allies and through bridging discourses that emphasise how differentially situated actors articulate common goals.

Our argument builds from a qualitative analysis of survey data and interviews with current and former SFA activists. The survey, which was administered using the Qualtrics online program in May and June, 2021, provided us with information on the demographic backgrounds of SFA activists. These participants were selected through snowball sampling that began with a list of SFA activists provided by SFA coordinators. Of the thirty-four individuals surveyed, twenty-one agreed to participate in in-depth interviews that were conducted by videoconferencing. These interviews typically lasted between sixty and eighty minutes and were designed to solicit in-depth information about activist experiences with the SFA and CIW, including their motivations for joining and leaving the organisation, their experiences working with the CIW, and their understanding of the significance of their activism. In addition to this survey and interview data, we also conducted participant observation of various SFA and CIW activities, including the 2022 Encuentro Conference, the 5-Day March to Palm Beach, and a CIW-led tour of Immokalee. Overall, the research for this project was designed to explore how and why students became involved in the farm worker movement, how bonds of solidarity are forged between students and farm workers, and how students mobilise resources that are not readily available to farm workers themselves.

This article proceeds as follows. In the first section we discuss the PRA literature's efforts to understand the sources of worker power in the 21st century, highlighting the need to think more critically about how workers who lack traditional sources of power create and sustain bonds of solidarity across various social groups and classes. Here we discuss the particular importance of "societal forms of power" and theorise how coalitions are sustained through solidarity narratives. Second, we provide a historical overview of the sources of worker power of the Coalition of Immokalee from their early rise as a group seeking to mobilise as a labour organisation into a worker-led human rights organisation that mobilises alongside non-farmer activists for "Fair Food" and "Food Justice." Third, we draw upon our qualitative analysis of SFA activists to demonstrate the distinct "solidarity narratives" that motivate student activist allies from different political

perspectives and demographic backgrounds. Finally, we conclude with a brief discussion of the implications of our study for contemporary scholarship on labour activism.

Rethinking Societal Power: Solidarity Narratives, Coalitions and Discursive Framings

A growing group of scholars have responded to the declining power of organised labour and working-class parties by identifying and theorising distinct sources of worker power. Advocates of the power resources approach trace its origins to the work of Swedish sociologist Walter Korpi and other European scholars who analysed the role of workers in expanding the social welfare policies of advanced capitalist states in the mid-20th century (Esping-Anderson and Korpi, 1984; Korpi, 1974, 1985). Korpi's early theorisation of the power of workers was rooted in the Marxist idea that employers hold a strategic structural advantage over labour under capitalism, historically, due to their control over the means of production. This asymmetrical power distribution, however, varies over space and time, depending upon several factors that tilt the balance of power to capital or labour, including technological developments, labour market requirements, labour institutions, and social welfare practices (Esping-Anderson, 1990; Korpi, 1998).

Whereas this first wave of PRA research developed largely in response to the struggles of workers in advanced capitalist welfare states, a second wave of PRA scholarship later arose in the early 2000s in response to the weakening of organised labour and working-class parties by processes of economic globalisation and the rise of hostile neoliberal state policies. Erik Olin Wright's (2000: 962) distinction between associational and structural forms of power proved useful. According to Wright, *associational power* consists of "the various forms of power that result from the formation of collective organisations of workers", foremost among which are industrial trade unions and labourist political parties. *Structural power*, in turn, is a form of power that accrues to workers "simply from their location … in the economic system". Beverly Silver (2003:13) distinguishes two types of structural power. *Marketplace bargaining power* exists when employers cannot easily replace labour militants with more compliant pools of workers. This might arise, for example, during periods of high employment or if workers obtain special skills and education levels that make them hard to replace. *Workplace bargaining power*, in contrast, is available to workers who are employed in "key industries" that are essential to established patterns of economic growth and development and therefore particularly vulnerable to labour strikes and work stoppages. Beverly Silver's (2003) analysis of the global patterning of labour unrest since 1870 provided important empirical validation of the uneven distribution of structural and associational forms of power over time and space and urged labour scholars to be on the lookout for new upsurges in the 21st century.

Indeed, the past two decades have seen new upsurges in labour militancy across various regions of the world and working contexts that have allowed scholars to identify and theorise additional sources of working-class power (Schmalz, Ludwig and Webster, 2018; Però and Downey, 2024; See also Refslund and Arnholtz 2022). Most notable amongst these additional sources of power are *institutional power* and *societal power*. Institutional power derives from organised labour's ability to leverage claims based upon the institutional gains and concessions won during previous waves of labour militancy. Collective bargaining rights, legal guarantees to strike, employment protection legislation, unemployment benefits, conciliation and arbitration systems and other institutional practices can constitute important "beneficial constraints" on employers and can be "mobilised" by workers who lack associational or structural power (Dörre, Holst and Nachtwey, 2009; Korpi, 1978). As some scholars have noted, institutional power is perhaps best understood as a power resource that can be tapped by workers who can leverage the

institutionalised labour gains from prior rounds of labour militancy under new historical circumstances (Schmalz, Ludwig and Webster, 2018). Consequently, it is described as a "secondary form of power" because its existence requires the prior exertion of structural and associational power resources (Brinkmann and Nachtwey, 2010).

Perhaps the most critical source of worker power in the 21st century is *societal power*, which describes the ability of workers to "generalise the political project of trade unions within the prevailing power constellation so that society as a whole adopts it as its own" (Schmalz, Ludwig and Webster, 2018: 122; Schmalz and Dörre, 2018). This ability of organised labour to assert a broad societal form of moral hegemony requires at least two additional sources of societal power: coalitional power and discursive power. *Coalitional power* is a power resource made available to workers who create and help activate networks and alliances with other social actors who are committed to pursuing common goals and entering mutual commitments (Frege, Heery and Turner, 2004; Tattersall, 2010). Building coalitions with other groups in civil society bolsters the associational power of labour unions by providing them with resources and privileged platforms that are not otherwise available to workers who struggle against more resourced employers. This is especially critical for precaritised and informal workers who lack access to tradition labour union representation (Atzeni, Hurtado and Sacchetto, 2023).

The ability to forge coalitional alliances typically requires organised labour to develop *discursive power*, which stems from workers' ability to appeal to the normative, moral, or cognitive beliefs of other social actors who may not share their specific working experiences but who identify with their struggles as part of a broader moral economy of social rights. Whether described as "ideational power", "symbolic leverage" or "discursive resources", PRA scholars have developed several ways to describe how labour unions frame their demands in ways that broaden the resonance of their claims and campaign demands (Carstensen and Schmidt 2016; Chun, 2009; Lévesque and Murray, 2010; Snow, 2004; Webster, Lambert and Bezuidenhout, 2008).

In practice, these two subtypes of societal power – coalitional and discursive – are often intimately related. As Haug (2009: 890) points out, "feelings of being treated unjustly amongst the workforce [often] coincide with perceptions of reality shared by broad sections of society". Thus, widening the discursive framing of labour struggles beyond the workplace to appeal to broader sectors of society does not only help transform passive "bystanders" into active "supporters" of a movement (Gamson 2004; Snow and Benford, 1998; Snow 2004). It also helps supporters identify their own stakes and interests in these struggles, thus facilitating their transformation from secondary stakeholders, who are considered external to the workplace, to primary stakeholders whose lives directly benefit from movement successes (King, 2008; Però and Downey, 2024).

But how and why do certain discourses gain resonance with specific coalitional allies and supporters? How are "worker interests" redefined as "societal interests"? And how can worker discourses resonate with populations who may have vastly different types of working experiences and social livelihoods? As the next section of this paper demonstrates, this ability to forge discourses of labour rights that foster coalitions with well-resourced solidarity allies was of critical importance to Florida's migrant agricultural workers.

Contextualising the Fair Food Program: From Labour Struggle to Fair Food Movement

The Coalition of Immokalee Workers (CIW) dates its origins to the early 1990s, when a small group of migrant workers living in the rural town of Immokalee, Florida, met weekly at a small church to discuss the exploitative working conditions they experienced while picking tomatoes on local farms.

During its first years, the CIW engaged in various efforts to establish a migrant labour worker union to pressure their employers to pay higher wages, provide more durable contracts and improve labour conditions (Marquis, 2017). To do so, they galvanised support within the local migrant worker community and engaged in numerous worker-led strikes, including community-wide protests and work stoppages in 1995, 1997 and 1999. In 2001, they engaged in a hunger strike that lasted nearly a month, and organised a 230-mile march (Rawal, 2014). Their employers, however, remained intransigent on the demands, claiming that they were also subjected to downward market pressures due to their precarious position in a monopsonistic corporate supply chain.

To be sure, grower responses to the CIW's early demands were not altogether untrue. Historically, Florida's tomato growers had maintained a profitable niche supplying the US tomato market during the winter months when farms in temperate regions of the country could no longer produce. However, corporate buyers of tomatoes, including fast food chains and big-box retailers, developed new tomato supply chain systems and new industrial growth technologies that pitted Florida's growers against Mexican and other suppliers. With the consolidation of this global tomato supply chain, local agricultural workers' ability to leverage structural sources of power was undermined. Making matters worse, most of Immokalee's tomato workers were immigrants, many of whom lacked citizenship rights. Many did not speak English or were unfamiliar with local legal institutions and many could not vote in local elections, thus contributing to their advanced marginality and vulnerability vis-à-vis labour contractors and employers. Indeed, during this time it became evident that coerced labour systems, including a slave trafficking ring, were pervasive in and around the Immokalee region, while workers feared soliciting police protection for fear of deportation (Estabrook, 2018). Clearly, Immokalee workers lacked basic labour and civic protections because they lacked access to the typical forms of associational power – labour unions and political parties who could advocate on their behalf.

Realising these deficiencies of associational and structural power, the CIW began to re-strategize. Instead of claiming that farmers and local labour contractors were responsible for the exploitative conditions of Florida's tomato industry, they began to claim that corporate buyers in the agricultural food chain bore ultimate responsibility for the conditions of workers across their supply chains. To enforce this claim, they developed the Campaign for Fair Food, a drive to pressure corporate buyers to voluntarily agree to a code of conduct that would be verified by a Fair Food Standards Council, or third-party monitoring group composed of farm workers and community leaders. Part of this code would include a penny-per-pound system, with buyers paying a premium on produce that would pass on to farm workers in their regular pay checks in the form of a bonus. Their goal was to pressure corporate buyers into signing off on their code of conduct through brand-bashing campaigns, negative publicity actions and consumer boycotts (Marquis, 2017).

Their first campaign was launched against Taco Bell and its parent company, Yum! Brands, in 2001. By 2005, following numerous actions, Yum! Brands became the first signatory of the Fair Foods Code of Conduct. Over the next decade, the CIW won victories against other major corporate buyers of tomatoes, including McDonalds in 2007, Burger King, Subway and Whole Foods in 2008, food service providers Bon Appetit Management, Compass Group, Aramark and Sodexo by 2010, Trader Joe's and Chipotle Mexican Grill in 2012, Walmart in 2014, and The Fresh Market and Ahold Supermarkets in 2015. It was during this period of rapid CIW gains that they formally established the Fair Food Program and succeeded in obtaining support from the Florida Tomato Growers' Exchange, a lobbying organisation representing roughly 90 per cent of Florida tomato farmers. As of December 2023, signatories of the Fair Food Program include 29 major

agricultural growers and fourteen corporate buyers of produce (fast food chains, supermarkets, big-box retailers, consumer package goods companies). The CIW model of the Fair Food Program has also spread to include new agricultural products (flowers, sunflowers, sweet potatoes, squash, corn, onions, milk and other dairy, peaches and melons, lettuce, dill and fresh mint, fisheries) and has been adopted in other agriculture-producing states (California, Colorado, Maryland, Georgia, South Carolina, North Carolina, Tennessee, Virginia, New Jersey, Vermont) and countries (Bangladesh, Chile, South Africa, UK) (Fair Food Program, 2021). Indeed, a ten-year academic study of various multi-stakeholder initiatives that included "Fair Trade" and "ethically sourced" labelling practices, found the CIW's Fair Food Program to be the most effective form of worker protection within a corporate supply chain (MSI Integrity, 2020).

The Fair Foods Program is certainly the crown jewel of the CIW's struggles to reform agricultural supply chains. Its successes have drawn the attention of scholars who analyse the successes and limits of "third party certification schemes" as a modality of labour protection in global supply chains.[2] However, achieving this victory required a distinct type of mobilising strategy that went beyond simply expecting consumers to care about ethical labels indicating fairness. When faced with significant obstacles to their unionisation and local community-organising activities in the 1990s, CIW activists developed tactical alliances with non-farm-worker populations who were better situated to pressure corporate buyers to sign onto the Fair Food Program for fear of losing their customer base. Central to the CIW's efforts to build solidarity beyond the fields was their creation of the Student-Farmworker Alliance (SFA), a social movement organisation comprised of a national network of student groups, that has actively supported the CIW since its origins during the CIW's 230-mile March for Dignity, Dialogue, and a Fair Wage from Ft. Myers to Orlando, Florida, in 2000. The route of the march was specifically designed to pass through major college towns to help the CIW galvanise support from students attending various colleges in Florida. Consequently, student participation swelled during the Taco Bell campaign, with students playing central roles in planning, organising and participating in CIW marches, publicity stunts and campus demonstrations.

Since then, the SFA has come to play a critical role in subsequent CIW campaigns and actions. Organisationally, the SFA is coordinated by a fifteen-person steering committee of college and high school students that rotates yearly. It also retains a paid staff of two coordinators, along with other staff members and interns who are based in the CIW's main office in Immokalee. SFA staff are responsible for building and maintaining a network of affiliated SFA and Fair Foods-based campus organisations and regional groups that span the country, stretching from local Florida colleges to Ivy League universities in California, Chicago, Pennsylvania, Washington D.C. and New York. SFA staff also work closely with the CIW by organising marches and actions at campuses, corporate offices and retailers who have yet to sign onto the Fair Food Program, such as Wendy's and Publix. The SFA are also instrumental in organising an annual Encuentro, a multi-day conference held in Immokalee that introduces new recruits to the history, politics and practices of the CIW, brainstorms new strategies and campaigns, and plans and coordinates actions for the upcoming year.

Despite their important role in the farm-worker movement, the SFA has not yet received significant attention from scholars who have written about the CIW or the Fair Food Program.[3]

[2] See Mark Anner (2019) for an overview of these debates.

[3] Several studies of the CIW have discussed specific actions or activities organised by the SFA. For example, Barry Estabrook (2018: 110-111) discusses the role that the SFA and other allies played in some of the CIW's campaigns in the early 2000s. Susan Marquis (2017) delves more deeply into the historical evolution of the CIW as a social movement and includes some detail on actions organised by SFA activists. Melissa

We argue that the CIW's efforts to build this network of solidarity between farm workers, who are among the most marginalised segments of the population, and students, who are often privileged and quite removed from the everyday struggles of farm workers, constitutes a major source of societal power that merits further analysis. But how exactly does the CIW generate coalitional forms of solidarity with students and other social allies? On what discursive grounds do their messages of fair food and food justice resonate with their allies? Put simply, how does the CIW build bonds and bridges of worker solidarity beyond the fields?

Solidarity Narratives and the Discursive Foundations of Student-Farm-worker Coalitions

The CIW's shift to a mobilising strategy of boycotts, brand-bashing, consumer pressure on corporate buyers of agricultural products, and, ultimately, extending the Fair Food Program required building alliances with and mobilising populations beyond the fields. But what are the discourses that motivate people who are not marginalised migrant agricultural workers to become involved with migrant farm-worker campaigns? And what experiences and activities are most effective in generating feelings of solidarity and commitment from SFA members?

Answering these questions required a qualitative approach, described earlier, that analysed the experiences and motivations of a broad range of CIW coalitional allies to understand the central narratives and discourses underlying their solidarity activism. To protect the identities of our participants, we use pseudonyms.

Our survey data provides evidence of a significant degree of diversity in SFA activists' demographic backgrounds and life histories.[4] In terms of gender, the majority (68.8 per cent) identified as female, with 18.8 per cent identifying as male, and 12.5 per cent percent identifying as non-binary. In terms of race/ethnicity, 41.2 per cent identified as "White", 35.4 per cent as "Mixed/Other", 8.8 per cent as "Black/African American", 5.9 per cent as "Hispanic/Latinx", 5.9 per cent as "Native American/First Peoples" and 2.9 per cent as "Asian/Pacific Islander". The vast majority (84.4 per cent) indicated that they were born in the US, with 21.9 per cent born in Florida. Nearly 19 per cent grew up in Immokalee or an adjacent migrant worker community, 40.6 per cent grew up in Florida, and 3.1 per cent grew up outside the USA.

The SFA activists surveyed were also diverse in terms of their socio-economic backgrounds. 12.9 per cent identified as "Working-Poor", 22.6 per cent as "Stable Working Class", 38.7 per cent as "Solidly Middle-Class", and 25.8 per cent as "Upper-Middle Class." Their parents' resident status was split nearly in half: 54.8 per cent were immigrants, and 45.2 per cent were not. Most (64.5 per cent) had attained an undergraduate college or university degree while a substantial number (19.4 per cent) had a graduate degree of some sort. Moreover, roughly a third (32.3 per cent) indicated that they were students at the time of the survey. The remaining two-thirds (67.7 per cent) were no longer taking classes at any level of the educational system.

This diversity in SFA activists' backgrounds and social statuses posed certain obstacles to the

Gouge's (2016, 2018) analyses of the CIW's "creative playfulness" also discusses the SFA's role in these activities. The work of Laura-Anne Minkoff-Zern (2014; see also Minkoff-Zern and Sloan, 2017) comes closest to our own interest in understanding the role of the SFA as a solidarity organisation. However, even Minkoff-Zern's analysis of the history of consumer-based farmworker activism tends to emphasise the farmworker perspective more than the perspective of student allies.

[4] In terms of age, most were young: 75.1% were between the ages of 18 and 29, and just 6.3% were over 40 years old.

CIW in their efforts to generate a cohesive discursive message. Our interviews, however, allowed us to distinguish two types of solidarity discourses that motivated SFA activists with very different social backgrounds and relations to farm workers. The first discourse expressed variations on how SFA activists described their stakes and vested interests in the CIW's Fair Food Program. Some expressed "binding narratives" that emphasised their commonality of interests with farm workers and their vested interests as primary stakeholders in the expansion of the CIW's Fair Food Program. Others, in turn, expressed "bridging narratives" that emphasised important differences in their social positions vis-à-vis farm workers and that defined their roles as secondary stakeholders in the movement. Whereas the first discourse distinguished SFA activist stakes in the Fair Food Program, a second discourse expressed the extent to which SFA activists described the Fair Food Program as a labour struggle that primarily impacts farm workers or as a societal struggle that broadly impacts society as a whole.

Table 1 below distinguishes these two discourses in ideal-typical form. The columns distinguish expressions of binding versus bridging discourses, with the former evidenced by expressions of being a primary stakeholder in the Fair Food Program and the latter expressing a position as a secondary stakeholder. The rows distinguish how SFA activists discursively framed the CIW's struggles, with some describing it as a novel form of labour struggle and others describing it as a broader societal struggle for fair food and food justice.

Table 1: Ideal-typical forms of solidarity narratives

		Binding vs. bridging discourses	
		Binding/primary stakeholders	Bridging/secondary stakeholders
Labour vs. societal struggle discourses	Labour activism	Family/community-based solidarity narratives	Class-politics-based solidarity narratives
	Social justice activism	Consumer-politics-based solidarity narratives	Privilege-based solidarity narratives

"Family/Community-based solidarity narratives" describes SFA activists who personally identified with the struggles of farm workers because they come from farm worker families and communities, and who viewed CIW and SFA activism as expressions of farm worker labour struggles. "Class-politics-based solidarity narratives" were expressed by SFA activists who similarly described the CIW's Fair Food Program as a form of labour activism, but who expressed being secondary stakeholders in a struggle that was primarily oriented to the betterment of farm workers. In this sense, these activists expressed a class-based politics that viewed the Fair Food Program as an innovative new form of labour activism.

Whereas both family/community and class politics motivated some SFA activists, others described the politics of the CIW and the Fair Food Program as a societal struggle for fair food and social justice rather than a more narrowly defined labour struggle. Here, two types of solidarity narratives were evident. "Consumer-politics-based solidarity narratives" were expressed by SFA activists who described having their own primary stakes and vested interests in the successes of the Fair Food Program as a way to improve agricultural supply-chain practices for the betterment of society in general. Finally, "Privilege based solidarity narratives" were expressed by SFA activists who described having secondary interests in the Fair Food Program relative to farm workers, but who described their involvement as being part of a broader social justice movement rather than a labour movement. Central to their motivations was the idea that they brought privileged resources,

skills, and platforms that defined their roles as solidarity activists.

Family/community solidarity narratives

As described above, our interview data highlighted a family/community-based solidarity narrative expressed by SFA activists who believed they had a direct interest in the CIW's struggle for fair food and who personally identified with the community of agricultural labourers who lived in and around Immokalee, Florida. Some of these activists got involved with CIW before going to college and then joined or started SFA chapters in their colleges. Camila Torres-Sanchez, for example, grew up in Immokalee. She described how she became involved in the SFA only after her mother, a CIW activist, compelled her to join a CIW-led campaign in New York. She explained,

> My mother works with the CIW, so she's got connections there. But when I first started, I got introduced to the CIW … They had a campaign up in New York and so my mother just kind of said, "Hey, we're going to New York for your spring break. We're going to be doing this one thing about this Wendy's boycott." [She] had already gotten my sister and my brother involved. So, I did go along that way.

Ulises Gutierrez also grew up in Immokalee. While explaining his initial involvement he described stories told by his mother and other residents about the discrimination and exploitation people experienced. He told us:

> My mom has a strong connection to the movement work because in her early days of living in Immokalee. I remember she could tell very vivid stories of the working conditions, and I thought my early days were bad, but her days were just, drenched in one story after another. Like wage theft is bad, but when it's violence and this continual subjugation … Everybody in Immokalee knew what was going on in a way … I call them "porch conversations". We sat on the front porch and people would come by and have conversations. They were often intense and, like, "Whoa, like, that is real."

Interestingly, Ulises learned to associate the CIW's struggles against local agribusinesses with his own social experiences at school. He told us:

> [School] was just so steeped in this classist feeling. Like, "damn, those ranchero kids in my school, they just act so aggressive at school, you know?" And their parents were the ones that had been exploiting a lot of my family and so many other kids' parents.… People always ask me, "What was your first CIW event?" I don't have this specific date, but I feel like it was like '93 or '95 where my sister and I made our banners or made our cardboard thing, and just walked out into the streets. You know, just like, we're going to be a part of this. My dad is a part of this. And so, we just felt like, as students we had another layer to do something. And it wasn't like formal SFA at all, but I feel like we were already there, you know?

While those who grew up in Immokalee viewed the CIW's actions as a direct expression of their own community's experiences, SFA activists who grew up in agricultural worker communities outside of Immokalee learned about the CIW while in college. The solidarity they described therefore came by interpreting the CIW's activism as having a direct relation to the plight of their families and home communities. For example, Carolina Linares-Restrepo grew up in a migrant farm-worker community located about a half-hour drive from Immokalee. She told us that she felt especially drawn to the SFA because it granted her the opportunity to advocate on behalf of her family:

> My family, my parents, they came to the US, and they started off as farm workers. So just kind of being able to relate to that and just be more empathetic. In the sense of the struggles that they face as farm workers. Taking that into consideration, I guess that's where I got a little bit more connected, and I felt that it was like my right to stand in solidarity with farm workers. That's my main connection with them.

The fact that Camila, Ulises, and Carolina were born into farm-worker families and grew up in farm-worker communities facilitated their identification as primary stakeholders in the CIW's

Fair Food struggles. However, there were some SFA activists who, although not raised amongst farm workers, came to identify as primary stakeholders through their involvement with the SFA. Piedad Bernal, for example, was raised in a middle-class family of Cuban immigrants in Southwestern Florida but moved to Immokalee as an SFA staff member right after college. Shortly thereafter, she fell in love with a local and has since started a family. She explained how she now considers Immokalee to be her own community and this identification with the community now motivates her involvement:

> I think a lot of like the work of SFA [is] very much rooted in trying to open up the consumers' eyes too. These corporations are not only exploiting farm workers, but they're also exploiting us because they're not transparent with any of their buying and we are financing them in a way … So that really, I think, it just really shifted my whole entire world view, and I became really close to the people who were who are also organising here in Immokalee. It just became my community.

Overall, this type of family/community-based solidarity narrative highlights how the CIW has been able to build coalitional allies with student activists who, despite having moved to college campuses removed from the daily plight of farm workers, identified as primary stakeholders in the Fair Food Program and viewed its successes as personally rewarding.

Class-politics-based solidarity narratives

Some SFA activists did not describe having a primary stake in the CIW's struggles. Yet, they were motivated by a "class-politics-based solidarity narrative" that interpreted the Fair Food Program as an exciting new form of labour activism. These SFA activists tended to become involved with the CIW after experiencing frustration with more traditional forms of labour organising and social-political activism. For example, Paolo Oliveira, a veteran SFA activist from New York City, mentioned that he had been involved in various anti-capitalist and labour-organising activism in the city. He first got involved with the SFA in the early 2000s because he felt that they were at the forefront of a new kind of labour-based organisation that was particularly effective at challenging the corporate practices of global outsourcing and neoliberal policies. As he told us:

> I was in the New York City area when 9/11 happened, and then I got involved in a lot of the anti-war stuff [that] started happening and somewhere in there, through [being] involved in activism and learning more about it. I heard about the CIW, and the Taco Bell boycott … I remember being really inspired and I was like, "Here's something a little bit different." It's an organisation of workers, but it's not quite a union, it was like [the] Zapatistas or like the anti-globalisation stuff going down at the time. So, something around all of that kind of clicked and I was like, this is something bigger.

When Paolo moved to Immokalee as an SFA staff member, he did not consider himself a member of the community or a primary stakeholder in the farm-worker struggle, as did Piedad Bernal. He explained:

> I wasn't there to kind of be a free agent and do my own thing … It was always like, "Okay, let's first go and consult with the community or get guidance or check in with the CIW and make sure that's okay." So, all of us worked with the kind of understanding that what we're doing is responsive to the community and with a high sense of responsibility that we, at the end of the day, are doing this to bring about concrete change and actual improvements for the community.

Similarly, Ash Griffen, a student who was interested in labour history, got involved with the SFA after making intellectual connections between fair food systems and working-class struggles. When asked about her initial interest in the SFA, she explained:

> I was originally a history researcher at [a] vegetable farm. And doing history work about what the actual legacy of that farm had been. I got really interested in the Watson Canning Strike, for whatever reason. I was really interested in labour and then also found as I was doing this other history projects at the farm that there was this really big connection between food supply and obviously American labour … And I got more curious about globalisation and the effect that it had on changing our

> different food systems. And I also got interested personally in what the supply chain was that allowed for things to be present in my grocery store … Working with [the] CIW completely changed the game for me too because it made me start asking more about my role. I think getting involved with the CIW, the solidarity model just really is … a mutually beneficial relationship.

Narratives like those expressed by Paolo Oliveira and Ash Griffen draw attention to the ways that the CIW's campaign for Fair Food resonated with activists who were motivated by working-class politics but who described their roles as "distinct" from those of farm workers. Unlike SFA activists who identified with farm workers and used binding narratives that expressed their commonalities, these activists expressed bridging narratives that viewed students as secondary stakeholders in the broader struggle for labour rights.

Consumer-politics-based solidarity narratives

Whereas some SFA activists described the CIW and Fair Food Program as a novel form of labour activism, others emphasised that farm-worker struggles were part of a broader social justice campaign for fair food and food justice. Perhaps the most predominant expression of this type of solidarity was through students who believed that the Fair Food Program expressed their interests as consumers who had their own distinct stakes in a more just food system. This "consumer-politics-based narrative" figured prominently for SFA activists who drew attention to the distinct politics of students as consumers of agricultural products.

One clear expression of this form of consumer-politics-based solidarity activism came from Camila Torres-Sanchez:

> [The SFA] connects campuses to broader awareness [of] sustainability for the earth. I definitely think that food and young people are very connected. I feel like all young people love food. Also, a lot of students are living on college campuses. That brings a lot of young students to the movement. And that's how we contribute because we want the food we eat to be sustainable for both the earth and the way that it is picked.

She went on to describe how students are specifically targeted by fast food corporations and therefore have a particular role to play:

> Fast food is typically targeted towards the younger people because it's a cheap, fast, easy way to eat right? Companies do not care about you, they only care about the money you can give them, so if you want to hurt them, you've got to cut out their money. So, cutting the ties with the company on campuses really cuts a lot of their money and if you do this continuously across multiple campuses, they will start to get you because they're losing so much profit.

This recognition of one's own interests in the Fair Food Program played a critical role in generating student support for the CIW. Veteran activist Paolo Oliveira, who expressed a class-politics-based solidarity narrative (in the previous section), was also motivated by this consumer-politics-based solidarity narrative. He explained how corporate food practices were exploitative of students as well as farm workers:

> I remember when I was just on staff with CIW for the first good chunk of years, and … we kind of approached this like, "These corporations are also exploiting us as students, or as young people." That was a moment in time where people could understand that they have these certain anti-corporate and anti-sweatshop sort of leanings, where it's like, "Yeah, I understand that this corporation is studying me, marketing to me, and selling me junk and exploiting people in the process and how I'm also being affected by that."

Our qualitative interviews provided evidence that many SFA activists articulated this form of consumer-politics-based solidarity narrative, which identified students as consumers and therefore stakeholders in a corporate food system that exploited the vulnerabilities of its distinctly situated participants.

Privilege-based solidarity narratives

Whereas the CIW's discourse of Food Justice appealed to students who described themselves as consumers with vested interests in the expanded success of the Fair Food Program, many SFA activists articulated a solidarity narrative that expressed their privileged social positions and resources relative to farm workers as their primary motivation buttressing their involvement in the SFA. Recognising the specific sets of resources and public platforms that students could bring to the fair food movement appealed to their desires to engage in social justice work that would be beneficial to society at large, but which also acknowledged their roles as secondary stakeholders.

Chloe Gilbert, a student activist from New Jersey who described her family background as "upper middle class", explained how the career trajectories of students were themselves a potential source of leverage for the farm-worker movement:

> I mean, I think students are one of the biggest consumers of fast food and stuff like that. Students have ties with local governments. They have a large voice. They are a diverse population that of thousands of students that will go into all these different occupations. So, if you arm all of these students with the knowledge that this is the issue that's going on and they go on to be an artist, they go to be a filmmaker, they go to be a lawyer and they care about this issue, it strengthens on all sides. And I think that's really, really cool. Also, farm workers are typically not given a voice. It's important for students to give them a platform and listen to them and not speak for them but help spread the message.

When asked about what students bring to the fair food movement, Maria Alejandra Henao also described how students bring certain privileges and sources of power to the movement:

> I think the obvious, like the privilege of being in school right? And being able to mobilise other students to take action, but also pressure schools. For example, with the Wendy's campaign, you can concretely have a campaign on your campus saying we don't want Wendy's. That is definitely something concrete that students bring, that power of consumers, but also the power of being students, and like, and the power to demand something better on their campus. If there are human rights violators there, why do we have contracts with them? I think that is another thing SFA does, it brings consciousness and awareness about your power as a consumer, but also your power as a student.

Alessandra Mazzillo, a graduate student activist at a prestigious university in New York, also articulated this idea that students can use their privileged positions to build bridges with farm workers. She explained:

> The whole point of the [SFA] is for students to use their platform and use their access to resources and use their distinct position in society to be amplifying voices for farm workers. So, farm workers are asking for a boycott of Wendy's, which is the last major fast-food company that hasn't joined the Fair Food Program. A student with a Wendy's on campus can say, "Hey, we're going to boycott the Wendy's on campus and we're going to start this campaign to have our university cut its contracts." We all have our sphere of influence of people that we can talk to. So yeah, there's a lot of room for students to pick up the slack and be in all the communities that farm workers can't necessarily be. From our distinct positions, from our differences, we can build bridges to make us all stronger and, in this case, bring a corporation to the negotiating table with the Coalition.

Overall, these SFA activists described their motivations being driven by having access to privileged skills and resources that could be used to build a fairer food system.

The Discursive Foundations of Societal Forms of Power Beyond the Fields

Our qualitative analysis of the motivations of activists affiliated with the Student Farmworker Alliance provides insights into the discursive foundations of the CIW's societal power. Our survey

data clarified that SFA activists came from a wide range of family and social class backgrounds, nationalities, and regions, which posed certain obstacles in the CIW's efforts to build a discursive framing of their struggles that could appeal to broad segments of society and potential coalitional allies. The CIW's ability to reframe their campaign, from a labour struggle aimed at improving working conditions for migrant farm workers in Immokalee to a broader society-wide fair-food struggle, opened opportunities to forge and sustain alliances with student activists affiliated with the SFA. The CIW's success in appealing to the diverse backgrounds, work-life experiences and political orientations of SFA students stemmed from a discursive frame that contained distinct solidarity narratives, including family/community-based, class-politics-based, consumer-politics-based and privilege-based narratives. These discourses appealed to activists who articulated both binding and bridging narratives, and who defined the CIW's Fair Food Program as both a labour struggle and a broader societal struggle. The ability to bring these varied forms of solidarity to the farm worker struggle constituted a major shift in the organisational strategies of the CIW and paved the way for its success in building societal forms of power in the absence of access to traditional associational, structural and institutions power resources.

Our analysis of the solidarity narratives of SFA activists extends the scholarly literature on the power resources approach for labour studies. By highlighting how SFA activists expressed their motivations and rationales for becoming involved with the CIW, our study underscores the tension between discursive and coalitional sources of worker power. While labour organisations may recognise a need to build public pressure and support for their efforts to improve the working conditions they experience in their jobs, building solidarity coalitions with allied partners requires the formulation of a discursive frame that resonates with social actors with distinct backgrounds, work-life experiences, and political orientations. Moreover, as in the case of the CIW, building these frames may require the construction of forms of solidarity that are rooted in binding processes that emphasise commonality between workers and allies as well as bridging processes that note significantly different positionalities that can be interpreted as mutually beneficial.

Conclusion: From the Labour Question to the Social Question in the 21st Century

Our interest in the solidarity politics of the CIW stemmed from their effectiveness as a labour-based movement despite their lack of traditional sources of worker power. As migrant farm workers in an agricultural supply chain driven by corporate buyers of produce who could readily source products from multiple and competing agricultural producers, Florida's Immokalee workers lacked structural power. As mostly undocumented immigrants, many lacked citizenship rights. And as migrant farm workers living in a "Right to Work" state, they also lacked associational power resources such as labour union representation, political party affiliation and institutional resources that would grant them access to existing labour protections. Given these deficiencies, the successes of the CIW's Fair Food Program poses the question of how they were able to mobilise so effectively. Their effectiveness stems in part from their ability to forge and sustain bonds of solidarity with non-farm-worker populations who are able to advocate on behalf of, as well as alongside, farm workers for a more just food system.

Our analysis of the solidarity politics of the CIW and SFA raises some important questions about the viability of similar types of solidarity activism beyond the case of Florida and agricultural workers. As noted, labour scholars have lamented the precarity of work and working-class livelihoods, which has been associated with a long-term decline in labour union strength and working-class party politics. And while there have certainly been some novel and noteworthy

labour victories for certain segments of the working class over the past few decades, traditional labour organisations have long struggled to represent the full range of working-class experiences. Scholarly recognition of the racialised, gendered, citizenship-based or other forms of social exclusion of traditional working-class organisations provides one useful step towards recognising the varied historical expressions of labour and class politics. This task of recognising expressions of worker power beyond the workplace or the ballot box becomes even more pressing when considering tendencies of 21st century capitalist development that replace workers with robots and new productive technologies, financialise modes of capital accumulation and otherwise transform entire segments of the world's population into so-called "surplus populations". (Atzeni, 2020; Barchiesi, 2011; Davis, 2006; Denning, 2010; Ferguson, 2015; Harris and Hough, 2022; Hough, 2022).

Our analysis of the CIW's solidarity politics provides some insights into what this new labour politics might look like by drawing attention to the discursive foundations of workers' societal sources of power. On the one hand, the CIW's Fair Food Program shifts the movement target from employers to corporate buyers within a larger supply chain, since these buyers have greater power than employers to shape conditions for workers and consumers all along the chain. That is, the Fair Food Program redefines the conflict as both a labour problem as well as a broader social problem affecting non-workers and workers alike. On the other hand, by redefining their issue as a broadly applicable social problem of Fair Food, the CIW and SFA help disrupt the discursive mechanisms of social exclusion that would view farm worker struggles as *merely* farm worker struggles, that is, an experience that is distinct from anyone else who is not a farm worker. By redefining their struggle as a social struggle, the CIW and SFA generate a new discourse of connectivity that promotes solidarity between workers and non-workers and that provides a space for non-farm workers to view their own stakes in a fairer and more socially just food system.

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