

Immigrant Farmworker Advocacy: The Dynamics of Organizing*

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This paper explores contemporary labor rights advocacy among Latino farmworkers and their allies in New York state, drawing on data from participant observation and field interviews conducted over nearly a decade (from 2000 to 2008). The principal finding is that power inequalities within advocacy networks constrain the actions of “weaker” members, who, in turn, respond with unconventional tactics of resistance within the networks themselves. This paper employs key mechanisms from the literature on transnational advocacy to explain these domestic-level interactions, demonstrating their portability from one level of analysis to another. Polity (2009) 41, 409–435. doi:10.1057/pol.2009.10; published online 18 May 2009

Keywords farmworkers; labor rights; mechanisms; social movements

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The past two decades have been punctuated by popular contention seeking to reforge the economy to better protect workers and the poor amid the challenges of contemporary globalization. A significant strain of this activism has taken place “across borders,”¹ and a trove of academic scholarship on transnational advocacy

*The authors thank Andrew Polsky and the anonymous reviewers of *Polity* for helpful comments on an earlier draft. We also gratefully acknowledge Betty Garcia-Mathewson for her critical insights on power.

1. Margaret Keck and Kathryn Sikkink, *Activists Beyond Borders* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1998).

explores workers' rights and global economic justice movements.² In this paper, we turn the analytical lens "homeward," focusing on contention *within* the United States over farmworkers' rights.

We do so for several reasons. First, there is a critical gap between scholarship focused on transnational advocacy and that focused more squarely on contentious politics within the United States.³ Despite a rich history of U.S. labor studies⁴ and of social movement literature comparing mobilization within the United States with that in other national settings,⁵ work on transnational advocacy has evolved largely on a separate track from studies of the U.S. labor movement (with the important exception of literature on "social movement unionism").⁶ Bridging this gap in the literature has meaningful scholarly and practical implications. It offers academics new empirical data for testing hypotheses about the factors that influence advocacy outcomes. Moreover, it provides activists themselves with new examples of organizing strategies and tactics. One practical example of such "cross-fertilization" is evident in the trend among U.S.-based human rights activists towards using international law to "shame and blame" their own government for abuses of human rights within the United States itself.⁷

Second, we focus here on advocacy among Latino farmworkers because it is emblematic of a dramatic increase in immigrant-based labor rights campaigning taking place across the United States since the late 1990s.⁸ One strain in this

2. Mark Anner, "The International Trade Union Campaign for Core Labor Standards in the WTO," *Working U.S.A.: The Journal of Labor and Society* 45 (2001): 46–63; Mark Anner and Peter Evans, "Building Bridges across a Double-Divide: Alliances between U.S. and Latin American Labor and NGOs," *Development in Practice* 14 (2004): 34–47; Joe Bandy and Jackie Smith, eds., *Coalitions across Borders: Transnational Protest and the Neoliberal Order* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2005); Clifford Bob, *The Marketing of Rebellion: Insurgents, Media, and International Activism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005); Andrew Ross, *Low Pay, High Profile: The Global Push for Fair Labor* (New York: New Press, 2004); Sidney Tarrow, *The New Transnational Activism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

3. In a further effort to bridge international, comparative, and Latin American politics with "American" politics, we opt for "U.S." as an adjective as opposed to "American" in light of the fact that the United States is just one country in the Americas.

4. Jeremy Brecher, Tim Costello, and Brendan Smith, *Globalization from Below: The Power of Solidarity* (Boston: South End Press, 2000); Rachael Kamel and Anya Hoffman, *The Maquiladora Reader: Cross-Border Organizing Since NAFTA* (Philadelphia: American Friends Service Committee, 2002); Kim Moody, *Workers in a Lean World: Unions in the International Economy* (New York: Verso, 1997).

5. Doug McAdam, John D. McCarthy, and Mayer N. Zald, eds., *Comparative Perspectives on Social Movements* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

6. Margaret Levi, "Organizing Power: Prospects for the American Labor Movement," *Perspectives on Politics* 1 (March 2003): 45–68.

7. The Ford Foundation, *Close to Home: Case Studies of Human Rights Work in the United States* (New York: Ford Foundation, 2004). Available electronically via: http://www.fordfound.org/pdfs/impact/close_to_home.pdf.

8. Kate Bronfenbrenner, Sheldon Friedman, Richard W. Hurd, Rudolph A. Oswald, and Ronald L. Seeber, eds., *Organizing to Win: New Research on Union Strategies* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1998); Ruth Milkman, ed., *Organizing Immigrants: The Challenge for Unions in Contemporary California* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2000); Victor Zúñiga and Rubén Hernández-León, eds., *New*

literature has focused on innovative new forms of worker-led advocacy, such as “worker centers” staffed by grassroots immigrants who themselves have come off the shop floor or out of the fields to lead organizing efforts and advocacy campaigns on their own behalf.⁹ We focus on one such organization, a farmworker support center in New York.

Our aim is to demonstrate how social movement actors on the *same side* of an issue often experience pervasive power imbalances within advocacy networks, regardless of whether those networks are internationally oriented or domestically focused. Such intra-network inequalities, in turn, affect decision-making and the development of campaign strategies.¹⁰ As previous work on cross-border labor rights advocacy has shown, the power dynamics between professional advocates and grassroots actors are often subtle.¹¹ Typically, these conflicts are not openly recognized or articulated. Yet the “unexpected power” of weaker actors within networks is often central to understanding how advocacy evolves—whether it spans countries and continents or is localized within a narrow swath of counties such as those in New York’s Hudson Valley. We demonstrate the portability of mechanisms¹² from literature on transnational contentious politics by employing them to explain the challenge of creating democratic organizational structures and fostering accountability within a highly localized advocacy setting.

We focus this paper on a single, in-depth case study to leverage comparisons of difference and similarity with other types of cases in the literature. First, this case takes place in the Northeast of the United States—a long distance from the U.S.—

Destinations of Mexican Immigration in the United States: Community Formation, Local Responses and Inter-Group Relations (New York: Russell Sage, 2005); Sarumathi Jayaraman and Immanuel Ness, *New Urban Immigrant Workforce: Innovative Models for Labor Organizing* (Armonk, NY: M. E. Sharpe, 2005).

9. Peter Kwong, *Forbidden Workers: Illegal Chinese Immigrants and American Labor* (New York: The New Press, 1997); Jennifer Gordon, *Suburban Sweatshops* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2005); Immanuel Ness, *Immigrants, Unions, and the New U.S. Labor Market* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2005); Janice Fine, *Worker Centers: Organizing Communities on the Edge of the Dream* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2006).

10. We adopt Keck and Sikkink’s definition of campaigns as “sets of strategically linked activities in which members of diffuse principled networks develop explicit, visible ties and mutually recognized roles toward a common goal (generally a common target).” Margaret Keck and Kathryn Sikkink, “Transnational Advocacy Networks in the Movement Society,” in *The Social Movement Society: Contentious Politics for a New Century*, ed. David S. Meyer and Sidney Tarrow (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 1998), 228.

11. Shareen Hertel, *Unexpected Power: Conflict and Change among Transnational Activists* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2006).

12. We adopt Elster’s definition of mechanisms as “frequently occurring and easily recognizable causal patterns . . . which allow us to explain, but not predict” events. Jon Elster, *Alchemies of the Mind: Rationality and Emotions* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 24, 26. For additional discussion of mechanisms in social science theory see Doug McAdam, Sidney Tarrow, and Charles Tilly, *Dynamics of Contention* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001); Tarrow, *The New Transnational Activism*; Albert S. Yee, “The Causal Effects of Ideas on Politics,” *International Organization* 50 (1996): 69–108.

Mexico border. This, in turn, makes cross-border advocacy efforts and circular migration on the part of the workers extremely difficult. As a result, the case is *distinct from* similar advocacy campaigns carried out in the Southern and/or Western United States, where circular migration takes place more routinely. Our choice of a Northeastern U.S. case study thus allows for the analysis of a truly “domestic” campaign. Second, the lack of emphasis on “identity politics” in this particular case allows for a more confined investigation of the network’s own evolution, as distinct from cases in which a longer or related history of promoting Latino interests exist. Third, the advocacy campaign targeted the New York State legislature, not a locally based government or non-governmental entity. This allows for useful comparison with transnational campaigns, which often similarly target national governments.

This paper draws primarily on data from participant observation with farmworker advocacy organizations in New York state, carried out over nearly a decade (2000–2008). Over an eight-month period in 2003 and again over a two-month period in 2008, with one additional interview each in 2005 and 2007, Margaret Gray conducted twenty-three structured, individual-level interviews with principals of a worker center and related support organizations in the state. Interviews with the heads of organizations are attributed; other interviews were confidential and the names of those interviewees are withheld by mutual agreement. We draw empirically on her findings to explore how even the “best-intentioned” advocates can be out of touch with the deepest concerns of people only a short physical distance away—and how these “closest” of allies are often mutually constrained from changing such imbalances.

Labor Rights Advocacy: Crossing Boundaries, Creating New Forms of Inquiry

Farmworker rights advocacy in New York is, in many ways, representative of broader struggles to safeguard worker rights and labor standards over the past two decades. To be sure, activists have long interacted nationally or internationally in defense of shared principles of people in need. Certainly, the emergence of eighteenth-century anti-slavery efforts or nineteenth-century international trade unionism and women’s suffrage movements all bear witness to the roots of activism. However, since the end of the Cold War, there has been an explosion of citizen “networking” resulting from changes in communications technology (specifically, the rise of the internet) and transportation (specifically, cheaper, more plentiful travel options). Lester Salamon and others have empirically demonstrated the dramatic increase worldwide in the number of formally chartered “non-governmental organizations” from the twentieth century onward.¹³

With the recent surge of citizen activism, there has been an explosion of scholarship on contemporary transnational advocacy. On an academic level, this

work augmented a strain within political science literature that challenged the longstanding divide between international relations and comparative politics scholarship. Philip Gourevitch, for example, first sought to show how domestic policy outcomes can be affected by international policy-making in his "second image reversed" paper of 1978.¹⁴ Ten years later, Robert Putnam argued that "two-level games" in politics stem from careful calculations by policy-makers who realize that they are simultaneously negotiating at home and globally, and thus seek increased room for expanded policy options and viable solutions in both arenas.¹⁵ Margaret Keck and Kathryn Sikkink demonstrated how social movement activists could move beyond their domestic political arenas to build transnational networks of like-minded allies in an effort to combat oppression in their home country. Members of such "transnational advocacy networks" (TANs), they argued, employ a "boomerang" strategy aimed at influencing both domestic and international policy-making.¹⁶ Building upon their work, subsequent literature has added concepts to explain how the process of transnationalized contentious politics unfolds¹⁷ and its varied effects on policy outcomes and social change.¹⁸

The transnational advocacy literature also has spawned renewed interest in the nature of democratic governance and the politics of accountability at multiple levels. Some has focused on the impact of transnational networks on domestic politics.¹⁹ Other literature has explored the validity of the concept of "global civil society"²⁰ and whether transnational activism enhances the prospects for democracy beyond the nation-state, particularly in multilateral settings.²¹ Still other scholarship has focused on the nature of accountability politics within transnational networks and between them and society.²²

13. Lester M. Salamon and S. Wojciech Sokolowski, and Associates, eds., *Global Civil Society, Volume 2* (Brookfield, CT: Kumarian Press, 2004).

14. Philip Gourevitch, "The Second Image Reversed: The Domestic Sources of International Policymaking," *International Organization* 32 (Autumn 1978): 881–912.

15. Robert Putnam, "Diplomacy and Domestic Politics: The Logic of Two-Level Games," *International Organization* 42 (Summer 1988): 427–60.

16. Keck and Sikkink, *Activists Beyond Borders*, 13.

17. Tarrow, *The New Transnational Activism*; Bob, *The Marketing of Rebellion*.

18. Ethel Brooks, *Unraveling the Garment Industry: Transnational Organizing and Women's Work* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007).

19. Hans Peter Schmitz, *Transnational Mobilization and Domestic Regime Change: Africa in Comparative Perspective* (New York: Palgrave, 2006).

20. Anne Marie Clark, Elisabeth J. Friedman, and Kathryn Hochstetler, "The Sovereign Limits of Global Civil Society: A Comparison of NGO Participation in Global UN Conferences on the Environment, Human Rights, and Women," *World Politics* 51 (October 1998): 1–35.

21. Mary Kaldor, *Global Civil Society: An Answer to War* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2003); Jackie Smith, *Social Movements for Global Democracy* (Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008).

22. Lisa Jordan and Peter Van Tuijl, "Political Responsibility in Transnational NGO Advocacy," *World Development* 28 (December 2000): 2051–65; Gay Seidman, *Beyond the Boycott: Labor Rights, Human Rights, and Transnational Activism* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 2007); Sanjeev Khagram, James

This internationally oriented literature has developed in parallel with work on domestic labor rights movements and broader immigrant rights advocacy. But the cast of characters involved in these types of advocacy increasingly overlaps. Workers themselves move between “home” and “host” country, and activists involved in promoting Latino rights in the United States, in particular, are often people who have traveled to (or themselves are from) Mexico, Central and South America, or the Caribbean. Increasingly, the proponents of struggle in places like rural New York are, in a practical sense, responding to the internationalizing of key labor sectors and, in turn, are internationalizing advocacy arenas within the United States (even if that advocacy is locally based in a geographic sense).

Mechanisms of Empowerment: Backdoor Moves and Blocking

Our case study of local advocacy on farmworkers’ rights in New York involves a complex web of relationships. For reasons of space, this paper focuses solely on interactions between two groups of actors: (1) a grassroots organization representing farmworkers’ interests, El Centro Independiente Trabajadores Agrícolas/The Independent Farmworker Center (CITA, established in 1991) and (2) advocates involved in the Justice for Farmworkers Campaign (JFW, which began meeting in the mid-1990s).²³ Together, they have organized campaigns aimed at influencing state legislation on farmworkers’ behalf.

We develop a mechanism-driven approach to explain how advocacy on workers’ rights in New York agriculture has evolved since the mid-1990s, focusing on the years 2001–2005.²⁴ Our aim is to investigate the power dynamics between those who organize campaigns to support farmworkers (i.e., the “senders” of a campaign) and those on the receiving-end of their advocacy efforts (i.e., the “receivers”—in this case, New York state farmworkers themselves and their support organization, CITA).

We build our analysis around a central insight from the literature on transnational advocacy: while receiving-end activists often have fewer material or

V. Riker, and Kathryn Sikkink, *Restructuring World Politics: Transnational Social Movements, Networks, and Norms* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002).

23. When discussing the specifics of this case, the terms *advocates* and *JFW partners* are used interchangeably. For the purposes of this paper, the term “advocate” does not apply to CITA, which is a grassroots organization. However, we do consider CITA part of the advocacy network. It is worth pointing out that the terms “advocacy” and “advocate” are not unproblematic. See Elizabeth J. Reid, “Understanding the Word ‘Advocacy’: Context and Use,” in *Structuring the Inquiry into Advocacy, Volume 1*, ed. Reid (Washington, DC: Urban Institute, 2000). The nuances of defining advocacy have largely been overlooked by the international relations literature on transnational advocacy.

24. McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly, *Dynamics of Contention*; Charles Tilly, *Durable Inequality* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998).

political resources than do the senders, “receivers” nevertheless have alternative means of influencing campaign evolution. Specifically, they can employ “blocking” and “backdoor moves,” which can affect the way norms are interpreted within the campaign, along with the course of agenda-setting and action on the ground.²⁵ Akin to “weapons of the weak,”²⁶ we define these mechanisms as follows:

- *Backdoor moves*: actions that receiving-end actors take, aimed at augmenting a campaign’s normative frame and/or policy goals, without stalling the campaign entirely.²⁷

These moves are not openly conflictive, and are often made indirectly. As we will demonstrate, backdoor moves best explain the relationship between members of CITA and its JFW partners.

- *Blocking moves*: actions by receiving-end activists aimed at halting or at least significantly stalling a campaign’s progress to pressure senders to change the normative frame of a campaign and/or policy goals and related action.

In a blocking scenario, receiving-end activists express their alternative position openly and use a variety of contentious tactics in an effort to change the course of a campaign. In our case, blocking moves best explain the relationship between the JFW (including CITA) and its elite allies in the New York State Legislature and elsewhere.

In the pages that follow, we operationalize these mechanisms and analyze several key factors that affect their evolution (e.g., the presence/absence of shared interests, the nature of threats, and the manner in which the campaign emerges). In the process, we explore the mobility of theory on contentious politics by bridging both the domestic/international politics divide and the Latino studies/Latin American studies divide.²⁸

25. Hertel, *Unexpected Power*.

26. James C. Scott, *Weapons of the Weak: The Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1985).

27. We adopt Katzenstein’s definition of norms as “collective expectations for the proper behavior of actors with a given identity,” and note his argument that “in some situations, norms operate like rules that define the identity of an actor, thus having ‘constitutive effects’ that specify what actions will cause relevant others to recognize a particular identity.” Peter J. Katzenstein, ed., *The Culture of National Security: Norms and Identity in World Politics* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), 5. Although Hertel’s work on mechanisms has tended to focus on the legal aspects of norms and related discursive aspects of campaign evolution, we focus in this paper on the behavioral aspects of norms—specifically, their function in regulating communication and interaction among the members of the networks analyzed here.

28. Nicholas DeGenova, *Working the Boundaries: Race, Space, and “Illegality” in Mexican Chicago* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005); Juan Poblete, “Transnational Dialogues on Globalization and the Intersections of Latina/o—Chicana/o—Latin American(s) Studies,” *Latin American Studies Association Forum* 37 (2006): 9; William I. Robinson, “Why the Immigrant Rights Struggle Compels Us to

The Advocacy Landscape: New York Farmworker Activism

Farmworker advocacy in New York seeks to improve the conditions of workers who occupy bottom-rung jobs in the United States and have experienced economic, political, and social marginalization.²⁹ New York's farmworkers, like those in most U.S. states, are excluded from important labor laws, a legacy of their exclusion at the federal level from the 1935 National Labor Relations Act.³⁰ For example, New York farmworkers do not have a right to overtime pay or to a day of rest; they are not covered by collective bargaining protections.

CITA and its JFW partners have a three-pronged strategy for improving the lives of farmworkers: (1) an organizing campaign to build a base of farmworkers and identify farmworker needs; (2) a legal strategy to address worker grievances and set precedents through legal cases; and (3) a legislative campaign to gain equal rights for farmworkers under New York state law. Successful legal cases have fueled the legislative campaign and farmworker organizing. Labor organizing itself has resulted in several contracts between employers and farmworkers. JFW has successfully urged on the state legislature an agenda on farmworkers' behalf: since 1996, that body has passed three pro-farmworker laws, for which farmworker advocates take credit.³¹

CITA concentrates on organizing workers, while other members offer support to CITA and focus on the legislative campaign or on legal cases (as in the case of Farmworker Legal Services of New York). Rural and Migrant Ministry (RMM, established in 1981) has been one of the most active JFW organizational members

Reconceptualize Both Latin American and Latino/a Studies," *Latin American Studies Association Forum* 38 (2007): 21–23; Lynn Stephen, "Some Thoughts on Concepts to Cut across Latino/Latin American/Chicano Studies," *Latin American Studies Association Forum* 37 (2006): 10–12; Joanna B. Swanger, "Labor in the Americas: Surviving in a World of Shifting Boundaries," *Latin American Research Review* 38 (2003): 147–66; George Yúdice, "Linking Citizenship and Transnationalism to the Movement for an Equitable Global Economy," *Latin American Studies Association Forum* 37 (2006): 15–17.

29. Donald Barr, *Liberalism to the Test: African-American Migrant Farmworkers and the State of New York* (Albany: State University of New York, New York State African American Institute, 1988), 41; Patrick H. Mooney and Theo J. Majka, *Farmers' and Farmworkers' Movements: Social Protest in American Agriculture* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1995); Dorothy Nelkin, *On the Season: Aspects of the Migrant Labor System* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1970), 1; Oxfam America, *Like Machines in the Fields: Workers without Rights in American Agriculture* (Boston: Oxfam American, 2004).

30. The National Labor Relations Act of 1935 (NLRA), also known as the Wagner Act, was created to address unfair labor practices. This federal law gives most private sector workers the right to form unions, collectively bargain, and strike. Furthermore, it obliges employers to recognize and bargain with certified unions. Farmworkers, domestic workers, and others, however, are excluded from the protections of the act. For more information, see Michael Evan Gold, *An Introduction to Labor Law*, rev. ed. (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1998).

31. New York State Consolidated Laws, Chapter 31 Labor laws: Article 7 §212 Drinking water for farm laborers. Article 7 General Provisions §212-D Field sanitation for farm hand workers, farm field workers and farm food-processing workers. Article 19-A Minimum wage standards and protective labor practices for farm workers §673[2] Minimum wage and §674 Regulations.

in pursuing the legislative campaign and in supporting CITA. Other organizations and individuals act as allies and play a role in supporting the work of JFW.³² Moreover, farmworker service providers, union members, people of faith, students, and other individual activists volunteer their time for the legislative campaign.

Yet, despite the apparent strength of these advocacy efforts, the network central to this story is marked by significant power disparities. These stem from several overlapping and reinforcing factors including language, class, and racial/ethnic hierarchies, funding and professional resources, and political power. Participant observation and interviews with JFW members revealed widespread agreement about the inequalities among the network organizations, with most emphasizing funding differences as the principal challenge (though some referenced racism or language barriers as well). As we will illustrate, however, backdoor moves (and to a lesser extent, blocking) have provided an alternative source of power to influence decision-making within this advocacy network.

Power Hierarchies in Perspective

CITA is the only grassroots organization in this network that continually has staff members and a board of directors who have been or still are actual farmworkers. Since its inception, CITA has run on a shoestring budget, and, at times, has had to lay off workers due to financial constraints. It has not operated as a professional nonprofit, but rather as a struggling grassroots organization. CITA has been in survival mode for many years. Piven and Cloward argue that there is no mystery in the shortcomings of such organizations: "To be poor means to command none of the resources ordinarily considered requisite for organization and influence: money, skills, and professional expertise, access to the media, and personal relationships with officials."³³

32. Supporters include labor, religious, community, student, and nonprofit organizations. In 2004, more than 200 such organizations endorsed the campaign. Examples include New York State AFL-CIO, New York State United Teachers, 1199 SEIU, CSEA Capital Region, International Association of Machinists and Aerospace Workers (IAM Local 2741), United Steelworkers of America Local 1000 (Corning), New York State Catholic Conference, New York State Conference of the United Church of Christ, Capital Area Baptist Association and the Mid-Hudson Association of the American Baptists, Episcopal Diocese of New York, Roman Catholic Diocese of Albany, Buddhist Peace Fellowship, BOCES Geneseo Migrant Center (Mt. Morris), Mid-Hudson Coalition for Economic Justice, New York Civil Liberties Union (Capital Region Chapter), Bard College Migrant Labor Project, Farmworkers Advocacy Coalition (Cornell University), and Student Action With Farmworkers (Duke University).

33. Richard A. Cloward and Frances Fox Piven, "Disruptive Dissensus: People and Power in the Industrial Age," in *Reflections on Community Organization: Enduring Themes and Critical Issues*, ed. J. Rothman (Itasca, IL: FE. Peacock Publishers, Inc., 1998), 168.

Furthermore, these types of inequalities shape communication and decision-making, and reinforce CITA's subordinate position within the coalition more broadly. As Patricia Hill Collins argues, "Oppressed groups are frequently placed in the situation of being listened to only if we frame our ideas in the language that is familiar to and comfortable for a dominant group."³⁴ One CITA staff member explained: "The leader of CITA couldn't be his own spokesperson in English, could not demand the leadership role in his voice. He could be the leader of the farmworkers because they loved him, but he could not cross the line, *the border*, and claim leadership because he could not speak in English."³⁵ Members of JFW and other professional advocates within the network communicate in the "language" of the dominant groups—that of employers, legislators, and bureaucrats. Communicating "on behalf of" the subordinate group is, in fact, the advocates' main task. And that communication style, in turn, becomes dominant within the coalition itself. Aspacio Alcántara, the former Executive Director of CITA, observed:

There has always been that conflict where the *blancos* want CITA to think the way they think . . . We are in front of people who have a good command of English, know the world of computers, where they have their white structure, where they don't risk very much. They are already on a secure path. And on the other hand, we come from countries where our whole lives, everything is at risk . . . What I have been trying to do is to learn about the North American culture, to be a bit more disciplined in the process of planning. But also I understand you guys have a lot to learn from us.³⁶

Hierarchical relationships between subordinated groups and dominant ones re-inscribe the communication practices of the dominant group, solidifying them as the normative communication practices of the movement and reinforcing power differentials. As one former CITA staff member noted, his colleagues within CITA often asked behind the scene, "'So what's wrong with Spanish? What's wrong with our own language? Why do we have to learn their language?'. . . I think there was a piece of resistance to learning English in this situation; it would be like capitulating to them."³⁷

34. Patricia Hill Collins, *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment* (New York: Routledge, 1990), xiii.

35. Former CITA staff member, interview by Margaret Gray by telephone, 1 July 2008. Some interviews were conducted in Spanish by Margaret Gray. Recordings of the interviews were translated by Margaret Gray and Diana Vazquez.

36. Aspacio Alcántara, interview by Margaret Gray, Albion, NY, 26 June 2003.

37. Former CITA staff member, interview by Margaret Gray by telephone, 1 July 2008.

Although CITA lacks funding, office equipment, and staff members with professional skills, it is nevertheless the only organization in the advocacy network with the grassroots legitimacy to represent the voice of workers. Because its staff members have daily interactions with workers and enjoy their trust, CITA can help workers to wield their labor power in negotiations with employers for such gains as a pay increase. While workers' fear often prevents them from exercising their labor power,³⁸ CITA and the workers exercise their most potent power resources in dealing directly with employers. JFW and other professional advocates also depend on farmworkers and CITA for political legitimacy. For example, CITA has played a vital role in connecting farmworkers to the legislative campaign.

Yet although the plight of the workers forms the center of the campaign and their stories may invoke sympathy from legislators, without the power resources of the JFW partners there would be little reason for policy-makers to heed workers' demands for legislative change. Workers thus take on a symbolic representational role to legitimize advocacy efforts, but that role does not determine the success of the legislative campaign.³⁹ CITA and farmworkers must rely on the advocates to act as surrogate sources of power in almost any interaction they have with authority figures. In the legislative campaign and other efforts that target authority figures who cannot be swayed by labor power, farmworkers and CITA have much less power than the JFW partners.

The resources of the JFW partners are those of a socially privileged group within the United States. They have greater access to funding—not only through social and political connections, but also through expertise in grant writing. They have professional resources in their staff members and also in their institutional structures, all of which facilitate timely design and implementation of strategy. Moreover, they have access to high-profile political allies who can help members of JFW to connect with and to pressure decision-makers.⁴⁰ These allies have opened doors for both JFW and CITA, creating political access for farmworkers who would not otherwise have had it. Furthermore, the allies have provided political authority and public awareness, and have been able to apply pressure

38. Margaret Gray, "Harvesting Expectations: Farmworker Advocacy in New York," Ph.D. Dissertation, City University of New York, 2006. See also Leo R. Chavez, *Shadowed Lives: Undocumented Immigrants in American Society* (New York: Hartcourt Brace College Publishers, 1992).

39. Steve Jenkins, "Organizing, Advocacy, and Member Power," *Working U.S.A.: The Journal of Labor and Society* 6 (2002): 62.

40. The list of JFW's powerful allies, for example, includes Denis Hughes, President of the New York State AFL-CIO; Bishop Hubbard of the Albany Catholic Diocese; Archdeacon Michael Kendall of the New York City Episcopal Diocese; Michael Aronson, Editor of the *New York Daily News* (which won a George Polk Award for its 1999 editorials on New York farmworkers); Arturo Rodriguez, President of the United Farmworker Union (UFW); Julie Chávez Rodríguez, Programs Director for the César E. Chávez Foundation, granddaughter of César Chávez; and Dolores Huerta, President of the Dolores Huerta Foundation, formerly of the UFW, and a national figure in farmworker advocacy.

on legislators in ways beyond the capability of CITA and farmworkers on their own.

Theory Meets Praxis: The Mechanisms Applied

Subordinated groups often must rely on advocates to help press their grievances. In the case analyzed here, New York farmworkers are constrained by their economic, political, and social marginalization, and by their exclusion from collective bargaining protections. Their subordination is intensified by the fact that the majority of U.S. agricultural laborers are non-citizen workers, either undocumented or guestworkers.⁴¹ Blocking and backdoor moves, however, offer a resource that subordinated groups can use to exercise their own power outside of the typically hierarchical normative practices of communication exchange, regardless of whether they operate in a domestic or transnational arena.

Although the actors in this case are involved in multiple interactions, in this paper we specifically concentrate on backdoor moves carried out by actors on the receiving end of the advocacy efforts (i.e., workers themselves and CITA) vis-à-vis those on the sending-end (i.e., their JFW partners) over the course of the network's legislative campaign. We also briefly touch on efforts by JFW to "block" its high-level allies' efforts at getting a bill passed in the New York State legislature.

The decision to invoke backdoor moves enabled CITA to challenge the dominant role of its JFW partners. These backdoor moves took place outside the structure of meetings and phone calls, and involved what was *not* said or done as opposed to what was. Receiving activists, at times, superficially agree to the terms of a campaign to appease the senders and then use backdoor moves to express their real motivation, needs, and wants.⁴² In this case, backdoor moves enabled CITA not only to dissent from the main decision-makers of the campaign, but also to challenge the ideological structure of the network communication. Though not explicitly framed as backdoor moves, an RMM staff person who worked on the legislative campaign was clearly aware that members of CITA were engaged in actions of this type:

I can definitely imagine how the dynamics would have engendered a response from CITA that was, at some level, undermining the coalition because the power imbalances were so great CITA sought to leverage power and make its voice heard in ways which were not comfortable for other

41. Daniel Carroll, Ruth M. Samardick, Scott Bernard, Susan Gabbard, and Trish Hernandez, "Findings from the National Agricultural Workers Survey" (NAWS) 2001–2002: A demographic and employment profile of United State farmworkers. Research Report No. 9. (Washington DC: U.S. Department of Labor Office of the Assistant Secretary for Policy Office of Programmatic Policy, 2005).

42. Hertel, *Unexpected Power*.

members of the coalition. Because CITA had less institutional power, its repertoire of power plays was more limited. I have no doubt that CITA felt marginalized in that coalition.⁴³

The backdoor moves employed were thus CITA's subtle form of resistance to top-down decision-making. From participant observation, three concrete examples emerge: (1) CITA's refusal to participate in organizing a fundraising event in 2002, despite an original commitment to doing so; (2) CITA's unwillingness to promote active participation in the second annual "Farmworker March for Justice" in 2004; and (3) CITA's decision to discontinue work in the Hudson Valley in 2004, after promising JFW partners that it would continue to do so even though it had opened an office in Western New York in 2001. The first example highlights both an ongoing conflict about "professionalism" that marks communications between JFW and CITA, and the interdependence of the network relationships. The second is an example of discord around strategic planning. And the third example underscores confusion over leadership, as well as ongoing interdependence among members of the network.

First Backdoor Move: The Fundraising Dinner

In 2002, the religiously based advocacy and service organization Rural Migrant Ministry (RMM), together with the Greater New York Labor-Religion Coalition and CITA itself, began to plan a fundraising event to take place in May 2003. All three agreed to organize the event through a committee overseen by an independent event planner. They also agreed that proceeds from the fundraiser would be divided among them. CITA was expected to deliver contact information for possible invitees; to provide staff members or volunteers who would help to stuff envelopes; to follow up on prospective funding for the dinner; and to communicate the names of CITA's guests. Despite efforts to make CITA's staff accountable for these tasks, the organization did very little. The JFW partners perceived CITA's staff as neither caring about the event nor behaving professionally.

The dinner scenario represents a conflict about professionalism and accountability, and also draws attention to the interdependence between CITA and RMM, specifically in relation to fundraising. Even the independent dinner planner—herself an actor outside the network—recognized the backdoor nature of CITA's actions. "CITA did nothing and gave RMM a hard time," she observed. "They thought that they were the heart of the justice campaign and that RMM and

43. Former RMM staff member, interview by Margaret Gray by telephone, 30 June 2008.

the New York State Labor-Religion Coalition should be raising money *for them*.⁴⁴ This outsider understood that CITA was exercising its power as the “heart of the justice campaign” (i.e., the source of political legitimacy as the only organization representing the voice of farmworkers) to challenge the dominant members of the campaign. We argue that the challenge was also directed at the hierarchies intrinsic to this network.⁴⁵

To appreciate this situation, some background on the financial situations and fundraising of CITA and RMM is necessary. Since its inception, CITA has operated with an annual budget under \$220,000. Its staff has never topped four or five people, and its board of farmworkers has had few fundraising or administrative skills. By contrast, RMM is highly professional. Although not an elite non-profit and beset with its own fair share of fundraising struggles, RMM still has a budget double that of CITA. RMM has a paid staff of seven to nine people along with strong volunteer and internship programs. Its board of directors is made up of college-educated and professionally trained individuals who fundraise, strategize, and network on the organization's behalf.

The levels of professionalism of these two organizations reflect class, race, and language dynamics. One former CITA organizer, remarking on the disparity in professional skills, said that it would take three or four of CITA's staff members to do the job of one of their counterparts at RMM. Even then, he continued, CITA's staff probably would not be able to carry out the job fully. “RMM has access and connections and knows how to do things [whereas] CITA is isolated and limited.”⁴⁶

Aware of CITA's limitations, the executive director and board of RMM saw it as their organization's job to help CITA. Staff members of both CITA and RMM spoke about the two organizations' interdependence around funding. One respondent explained that the organizations' grants were written together.⁴⁷ Another said that if it were not for RMM, CITA would not have any money.⁴⁸ A former CITA staff person in charge of fundraising explained that RMM's backing went beyond joint grants: “The assistance that we got from RMM was critical . . . RMM provided a lot of resources: the van, support in equipment, networking.”⁴⁹ An RMM staff person assigned to be the liaison with CITA noted that in addition to doing programmatic work, he helped organize CITA administratively—including helping to design the organization's budget and overseeing its bank account.⁵⁰ Another RMM staff member told of bringing farmworkers to meet state senators,

44. Event planner and dinner committee member, interview by Margaret Gray by telephone, 3 August 2003.

45. Collins, *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment*.

46. Former CITA staff member, interview by Margaret Gray by telephone, 14 July 2005.

47. Former RMM staff member, interview by Margaret Gray by telephone, 26 June 2008.

48. Former CITA staff member, interview by Margaret Gray, New York City, 11 June 2008.

49. Former CITA staff member, interview by Margaret Gray by telephone, 1 July 2008.

50. Former RMM staff member, interview by Margaret Gray by telephone, 3 July 2008.

helping with media work, and conducting political education with farmworkers.⁵¹ Clearly, there was a high level of interdependence between the two organizations, with joint funding and resources central to the daily work of both.

Keeping the nature of these relationships in mind, we return to an examination of the dinner scenario. One former RMM staff member observed that the dinner “raised some of the perpetual questions about what the role of RMM should be in regard to fundraising. There was the ongoing perception held by CITA that the role of RMM should be primarily to support CITA in fundraising and capacity-building. However, RMM had its own programs and staff, and it had its own mission independent of playing a support role to CITA.”⁵² Moreover, RMM faced its own pressures in meeting donors’ expectations. As RMM Executive Director Richard Witt put it, “There are times when you are with people of affluence and they will express their expectations. If we don’t feed into it, they will tune out. To gain their support, we need to provide professional materials. Those from other backgrounds may not completely understand or may get angry.”⁵³ Witt’s comment reveals an interesting parallel: CITA is dependent on RMM and is expected to behave in certain ways, whereas RMM’s behavior, in turn, is similarly shaped by its own dependence on funders.

However, CITA has been less able (or willing) to fulfill expectations because its staff members are often focused on survival, much like the farmworkers they work with. Consequently, they have little time for careful planning and follow-through. As one CITA staff member explained, “You say whatever you need to say to get the funds to support yourself to move ahead and continue the flow of money—regardless of what you can do, because it is hard. There was a bit of dismissing the need to be consistent.”⁵⁴ Most of those interviewed agreed that this pressure made it difficult for CITA to refuse to participate in JFW’s plans. Such dependence constrained CITA’s ability to be a full decision-maker within the network. Some, including Witt of RMM, described the relationship between the two organizations as paternalistic, an apt characterization given that RMM helped to establish CITA and provided constant support.

Not surprisingly, resentment toward RMM developed within CITA. As one former staff member recalled,

We talked about this dynamic. “How can RMM have all this budget and CITA has a small budget? We are the ones doing the grassroots work. Without us, RMM has no sense of its work.” The director [of CITA] was conscious of this dynamic . . . [Witt] needs us, but he doesn’t give any of that money to us.

51. Former RMM staff member, interview by Margaret Gray by telephone, 26 June 2008.

52. Former RMM staff member, interview by Margaret Gray by telephone, 30 June 2008.

53. Richard Witt, interview by Margaret Gray, Poughkeepsie, NY, 14 September 2007.

54. Former CITA staff member, interview by Margaret Gray by telephone, 1 July 2008.

This was a general held opinion in CITA. But we need RMM. They have the links, the possibilities.⁵⁵

Another former CITA staff member explained, specifically in relation to the dinner situation,

We just don't have the people and resources to do this. Who do we know anyway? Where do we get people's names? . . . We'll get money, how can we say no?. . . Here's a relationship that is absolutely critical. What am I going to do—say I can't be a part of this? And as time goes on, it becomes a real irritant and turns into, "We're doing everything we can, what's the problem here?"⁵⁶

CITA's former Executive Director Aspacio Alcántara echoed the frustration he and other staff of CITA felt with the broader priorities of the advocacy network: "JFW should have spent more trying to shore up the organizing part of CITA and less on the legislative campaign. We could get money for a legislative campaign, but not for organizing. CITA was left to float on its own."⁵⁷ Grassroots organizing work is, indeed, difficult to fund. Certainly, a legislative campaign that adheres to mainstream political engagement can be more attractive to philanthropists than grassroots political organizing that disrupts conventional power relations.⁵⁸

Second Backdoor Move: The March for Justice

In an effort to mobilize public awareness of farmworkers' rights in New York state, members of CITA and JFW have carried out marches reminiscent of the U.S. civil rights movement. In 2003, they launched a march to Albany titled "330 Miles Toward Justice," which spanned ten days and culminated in a rally at the state capitol. This first march garnered significant public support and press attention,⁵⁹ and the marchers themselves—including farmworkers, CITA staff, and JFW advocates—reported personal empowerment, increased motivation to move forward with the legislative campaign, and improved trust among members of the network.

Building on this success, members of JFW planned a second annual "March for Justice" for the spring of 2004. CITA was asked to recruit farmworkers to

55. Former CITA staff member, interview by Margaret Gray, New York City, 11 June 2008.

56. Former CITA staff member, interview by Margaret Gray by telephone, 1 July 2008.

57. Aspacio Alcántara, interview by Margaret Gray, Albion, NY, 26 June 2003.

58. J. Craig Jenkins, "Social Movement Philanthropy and the Growth of Nonprofit Political Advocacy: Scope, Legitimacy and Impact," in *Exploring Organizations and Advocacy: Strategies and Finances*, issue 1, ed. Elizabeth J. Reid and Maria D. Montilla (Washington, DC: Urban Institute, 2001), 51–66.

59. Winne Hu, "Onward to Albany in the Footsteps of Chavez," *New York Times*, 3 May 2003, B1-2.

participate. JFW was tasked with creating the infrastructure for the march, which included mapping out the march route, recruiting local volunteers along the route to coordinate speaking events, supplying meals and accommodations, printing flyers and banners, and providing additional marchers. Despite the very positive collaboration of the previous year, however, CITA brought few marchers for the 2004 event. Once again, as with the fundraising dinner, its JFW partners expressed concern about CITA's lack of follow-through on its promises.

The 2004 march provides a good example of additional friction around strategy decisions within the advocacy network. All involved agreed that grassroots farmworker organizing was the most important priority and that this could only be achieved by CITA. But CITA's efforts at organizing fell short of expectations. As members of JFW had the energy, resources, and connections to pursue other forms of farmworker justice, the legislative campaign—which the JFW advocates could spearhead and accomplish—became the main focus. “The marches were timed around the legislative session and not necessarily to coincide with time of year when farmworkers are most available to participate,” acknowledged one RMM staff member.⁶⁰ Marches provided few direct benefits for farmworker organizing; instead, they fostered the sort of public attention useful for motivating campaign allies. More than one respondent argued that it was RMM and JFW that benefited the most from the march; they were able to parlay it into fundraising and ally-building. As evidence, a former CITA staff person recalled, “As soon as we finished the most successful march for farmworkers, covered on the front page of *The New York Times* [Metro Section], two weeks later I was told that CITA didn't have enough money and I was going to be fired.”⁶¹

Staff members of CITA were thus often torn between participating in JFW-initiated efforts (such as marches) and focusing on the extremely difficult task of organizing farmworkers at the grassroots level. One CITA staff member captures the tension:

The first march was a phenomenal experience for everybody. RMM was front and center with much of the organizing of it. It went off pretty well. Of the people that participated in the march, many were RMM-inspired or JFW-inspired people. . . It was clear that RMM kept putting forward Aspacio [CITA's Executive Director] and farmworkers as being the front of the line, as in charge. At the same time, RMM and JFW were doing the work—building the relationships, making it happen. The CITA folks were having two experiences: one being in the lead and also not being in the lead—not being able to do all those things they either wanted to do or felt they would do if they could. There

60. Former RMM staff member, interview by Margaret Gray by telephone, 30 June 2008.

61. Former CITA staff member, interview by Margaret Gray, New York City, 11 June 2008.

was a lot of the media coverage, but the quotes were from RMM and JFW. Yet at the same time, it was a pretty tight community.⁶²

This quote also reveals how members of the network put considerable effort into “holding up CITA” as the leader of JFW, and CITA and the farmworkers did make some significant tactical decisions (such as designing a 2004 march route that significantly differed from the 2003 one). However, CITA was not only ill-positioned to play a leadership role, but also frequently deferred to the JFW advocates.

Every respondent interviewed for this article recognized that grassroots worker organizing was the most difficult aspect of the advocacy network’s efforts, and those who commented on CITA’s organizing recognized that Alcántara and CITA staff members worked very hard. As one JFW member acknowledged, “I wasn’t going from farm to farm to do that. The degree of effort [for organizing] was a lot. They were committed.”⁶³ Across the interviews, two main factors emerged as explanations for the lack of organizing success. The first was CITA’s lack of solid infrastructure (i.e., a lack of leadership, staff training, and organizing experience). The second was the nearly impossible nature of grassroots organizing, particularly on a shoestring budget. CITA staff members were especially attuned to this second factor:

The organizing work is very complex and difficult and there’s no way to have control over it because the population is out of the range of organizing . . . The system of undocumented workers makes them so vulnerable that it would be really hard for them even to believe that they could get something from being organized and being part of CITA . . . At the same time, other organizations told CITA, “This is not organizing.” Try to imagine how many in the nonprofit world help the undocumented workers, and how much money they receive, and how much of that money gets to the point of the worker. . . . This reality made organizing impossible.⁶⁴

These combined factors rendered backdoor moves the most logical ones for CITA to make within the network. A member of JFW offered an explanation echoed in multiple interviews:

Why did CITA commit? I think for a variety of factors. CITA really wanted to be able to do all these things. I never doubted their commitment to the vision of

62. Former CITA staff member, interview by Margaret Gray by telephone, 1 July 2008.

63. Former RMM staff member, interview by Margaret Gray by telephone, 26 June 2008.

64. Former CITA staff member, interview by Margaret Gray, New York City, 11 June 2008.

the whole campaign or the coalition. There was a genuine desire to do this work There were also really high expectations put on CITA by the rest of the coalition. The more I consider how incredibly challenging it is to do the work of organizing farmworkers, I am very sympathetic to the challenges CITA faced. I'm not sure how well positioned they were to be successful, given their resources, the lack of leadership skills, and lack of labor organizing training and experience. I think there was a real genuine intention to do this work, but maybe an unrealistic expectation of what it took—on all of our parts. . . . So I'm sure that put them in a really difficult position of not wanting to say "No, we can't do this."⁶⁵

CITA's staff and board members repeatedly raised concerns about the role of their organization within the legislative campaign and related efforts such as the marches. The campaign consumed organizational resources—primarily staff time that members of CITA felt should have been directed toward organizing workers. For example, one CITA staff person offered some insight into the difficulty of getting workers to the march: "A lot of the workers said 'We can't afford to go. We'll get fired if we go—why would we want to go out there and put ourselves at risk of being deported?' The workers can't get off. They can't ask permission; if they leave, they are done."⁶⁶ Much-needed tasks were thus postponed because of CITA's attention to the first march in 2003, making the organization's staff reluctant to invest as much effort in a second march. Backdoor moves provided a way of minimizing the cost of the second march and doing so in a way that did not involve a direct confrontation within an already unequal network.

Third Backdoor Move: CITA's Move to Western New York

The final example involves CITA's move from the Hudson Valley (in eastern New York) to Western New York (with a base between Rochester and Buffalo). CITA was founded in the Hudson Valley in 1991, with significant support from RMM. In August 2001, CITA opened an office near Rochester in a bid to organize workers on the much larger farms of Western New York. CITA promised that it was not leaving the east, but merely expanding to the west. Both CITA and the JFW partners were interested in sustaining the momentum of CITA's decade of organizing in the Hudson Valley. Furthermore, CITA's geographic position in the Hudson Valley and its contact with farmworkers provided an important link for attracting funders in New York City and its suburbs.

65. Former RMM staff member, interview by Margaret Gray by telephone, 30 June 2008.

66. Former CITA staff member, interview by Margaret Gray by telephone, 1 July 2008.

After CITA moved west, it continued to maintain a foothold in the Hudson Valley with full- and part-time organizers, depending upon its resources. Yet by 2004, attempts to maintain ties to workers in the Hudson Valley from its office near Rochester dissolved. "They withdrew without being entirely forthcoming," was how one former RMM staff member put it.⁶⁷ Once again, the advocates were concerned about CITA's lack of professionalism.

There was widespread agreement that CITA should have considered the perspective of the other JFW members before making such a major decision. RMM had its base in the Hudson Valley, and fully half of its programming was dedicated to supporting rural and migrant workers. CITA was its principal partner, and the group's decision to end its work in the Hudson Valley thus created a huge challenge for RMM:

So much of RMM's identity—the way that they framed their work at that point, the way they framed their fundraising efforts, and the way they organized allies among faith communities—was based on CITA being in eastern New York. CITA was the organization working directly with farmworkers, while RMM was primarily involved in mobilizing allies. CITA's departure threw RMM into an identity crisis When they left, we were in limbo about what we were supposed to do with farmworkers, whether charity or service work. This was a major paradigm shift for the organization and we were not well prepared.⁶⁸

It is clear from participant observation and from the interviews that RMM was highly dependent on CITA for direct connections to farmworkers. Furthermore, RMM had created a solid program to connect local supporters with farmworkers, which was also a fundraising vehicle. Remarking on CITA's move to Western New York, the RMM coordinator of that program recalled, "My reaction was: 'Boy, they are all leaving? What am I going to tell the people that I've been encouraging to support them?'"⁶⁹

We argued earlier that CITA's lack of success in grassroots worker organizing, in part, caused its JFW partners to focus on the legislative campaign. One of the JFW respondents added that CITA's departure from the Hudson Valley created a vacuum that resulted in the network channeling even *more* effort toward the legislative campaign, as RMM was left without CITA and its on-the-ground connection to farmworkers.⁷⁰ In the end, RMM responded by opening its own office in Western New York to continue supporting CITA. Yet despite CITA's best intentions, its grassroots organizing efforts were not as fruitful as they had been in the previous decade.

67. Former RMM staff member, interview by Margaret Gray by telephone, 30 June 2008.

68. Former RMM staff member, interview by Margaret Gray by telephone, 30 June 2008.

69. Former RMM staff member, interview by Margaret Gray by telephone, 3 July 2008.

70. Former RMM staff member, interview by Margaret Gray by telephone, 26 June 2008.

These three cases speak to shifting power dynamics. On the one hand, an analysis of material resources and political power shows that the JFW partners are dominant, and CITA needs them. Yet when one takes a step back to consider the interdependence of members of this advocacy network, it becomes apparent that CITA holds significant power because of how much the JFW partners rely on it: without the workers, there is no campaign. Consequently, the advocates were anxious to figure out how to help and support CITA, but at the same time were also eager to have CITA report to them and justify its organizational decisions.

From the JFW partners' point of view, more was expected of CITA both because its work was so crucial and because of the support that CITA received from them. These expectations were at the crux of the tension that developed between CITA and the advocates. The partners recognized that it was unfair to make such demands on CITA, but simultaneously acknowledged that it was difficult for them to move away from such a pattern of expectations. For CITA, the situation was even more complicated. There were times when CITA staff members did not want to contend with the expectations they faced, yet they were keenly aware of the good intentions of their partners.

The result was often diplomacy on CITA's part that further convoluted communication, resulting in the JFW advocates' insistence upon the importance of each member of JFW (particularly CITA) following through on promises. The advocates typically referred to the diplomacy and the corresponding lack of follow-through as issues of "professional accountability," not as power issues. (Complicating this is the fact that CITA *did* have professional accountability challenges stemming from lack of resources, inadequate staff training, and a weak internal management structure.)

CITA's former Executive Director, Alcántara, described his role at JFW meetings as that of "an observer," and he often behaved passively, to the disappointment of the partner organizations that said they yearned for his leadership. One JFW member explained: "If you aren't happy and you don't tell me, how am I supposed to know? Diplomacy makes it very difficult."⁷¹ This quote can also be read as an example of the expectations created by the dominant communication style. The diplomacy, however, was characterized by others as very "Latin American" and the need for bluntness as very Anglo. Three of the respondents who were born in the United States, but had extensive experience in Latin America, spoke to the cultural differences in communication. One summed it up this way:

People there are much less likely to tell you what you *don't* want to hear versus North American Anglo culture, where people are much more assertive . . . It's

71. Richard Witt, interview by Margaret Gray, Poughkeepsie, NY, 14 September 2007.

not a matter of honesty; it's what is considered polite . . . In Anglo culture, we tend to want people to be super honest and super straightforward and in many other cultures this can be perceived as blunt, not smooth, not diplomatic.⁷²

Another respondent explained that Latin American/Latino communication is much more about relationships and trust, whereas Anglo communication is focused on goals and tasks. Jim Schmidt, the former director of Farmworker Legal Services of New York, observed Alcántara as uncomfortable at JFW meetings—like a guest in someone else's house. "He wanted people to get along, he didn't like conflict. I love conflict. That's when I think I'm right! I spoke out and pounded the table. Clearly, there's that cultural difference."⁷³ All of these observations reinforce our earlier characterization of language and communication style hierarchies within the network, reflected in the expectation that network communication will be in the dominant members' style.

Alcántara's observer status at meetings was thus a function of his effort to overcome dominance through the passive resistance of backdoor moves. While on the surface he described his "confusion" about how to communicate with the JFW partners, Alcántara's words also reveal the deeper contradictions in the nature of the JFW decision-making process:

The organizations always, always say: we are hear to listen to CITA. Is it the truth that the others want to listen to the plans of CITA, or not?. . . In the moment when CITA has tried to do something, express what we feel, or show the path we are going to follow, that's when people just start to turn around and begin to say, "No. Why did you make these decisions? Why haven't you talked to us? Why haven't you taken under consideration what we have to say?". . . They always tell us that we should make our own decisions and when we do, they say that we weren't thinking of them or taking them into consideration.⁷⁴

Backdoor moves aim precisely at avoiding such open consultation and confrontation.

Although backdoor moves were the prominent mechanism at work in this network, our case study offers one instructive example of blocking—namely, that between JFW (including CITA) and its elite allies. This brief example provides a useful point of comparison for understanding the difference between the two mechanisms.

Toward the end of the 2005 New York legislative session, well-meaning legislative allies were ready to push forward a "day of rest" bill for farmworkers.⁷⁵ JFW thought the bill was very weak. The passage of such a law not only would

72. Former RMM staff member, interview by Margaret Gray by telephone, 30 June 2008.

73. Jim Schmidt, interview by Margaret Gray by telephone, 3 July 2008.

74. Aspacio Alcántara, interview by Margaret Gray, Albion, NY, 26 June 2003.

75. New York State Legislature 2005 proposed bills A1993A (DelMonte) and S5887 (Flanagan) to amend SS161, 679 & 564, Lab L.

have been primarily symbolic (according to the advocates, it excluded guestworkers and undocumented workers), but also would have meant that the following year, legislators could turn to advocates and argue that they had already addressed farmworker concerns. Instead, JFW would have preferred an omnibus bill, which included a voluntary day of rest for farmworkers, the right to overtime pay, and collective bargaining protections. JFW thus set itself on the defensive against its allies to prevent passage of the bill.

As is classically the case with blocking, the stakes were too high and the interests too divergent to allow for backdoor moves. Nor was there the degree of proximity in relations between JFW and its legislative allies or a level of mutual interdependence comparable to that between JFW and CITA. As a result, JFW's frustration with its elite allies' strategy led to a halt in the campaign's progress on the legislative front, rather than compromise.

Understanding the Factors that Affect Mechanism Choice

We now turn to a further examination of the factors that generate blocking and backdoor moves, focusing on three in order of significance for the campaign we are analyzing: (1) the level of shared interests; (2) the nature of threats from above; and (3) the manner in which a campaign emerges.⁷⁶ All three factors influenced CITA's decision to make backdoor moves in this case—particularly shared interests, which undergird the high level of interdependence of actors in the network.

If actors on the sending and receiving ends of a campaign share interests in the overall success of a campaign, then receivers are more likely to make backdoor moves, as opposed to blocking ones, in an effort to give the public an impression of harmony within the campaign. Their goal is to maximize the likelihood of a “win-win” outcome. Shared interests may be normatively based or materially based. Identifying them involves taking stock of the financial and public relations resources and the intra- or inter-group rivalries that characterize different parts of a network.⁷⁷

For example, CITA and its JFW partners have a high level of shared interest in fundraising and media attention, and their joint campaign efforts have resulted in increases in both. Intra-group rivalry is relatively low, as all network members agree—at least overtly—on the overall purpose, goals, and targets of the campaign. The practice of shared fundraising diminishes resource competition—though not resentment on the part of CITA staff members, who have felt their organization should receive an even greater piece of the pie, as CITA is at the “heart of the justice campaign.” Nevertheless, in this case, the presence of shared

76. Hertel, *Unexpected Power*, 24–29.

77. Hertel, *Unexpected Power*, 27–28.

interests was the single most important factor that predisposed CITA to make backdoor moves, rather than blocking ones, over the course of its interactions with the advocates.

The nature of threats from above is a second factor that determines which mechanisms emerge in a campaign. Threats may take the form of material sanctions from one government against another or of traditional boycotts, such as the consumer boycotts. Other forms of severe and immediate threat are those in which activists on the receiving-end of a campaign perceive the actions of those on the sending-end as unfair, impossible to achieve, or out of step with local normative understandings and goals. As a result, receiving-end activists will block.⁷⁸ In our case study of farmworker rights advocacy, the threat of a seriously flawed state farm labor bill passing into law and preventing legislators' support for future farm labor bills was so great that the JFW blocked the efforts of its elite legislative allies to pass such legislation.

By contrast, the threats between CITA and its JFW partners were either subtle or non-existent, as no overt contention arose either from apprehension about the overriding goals of the advocacy network or from conflicts over funding, media attention, or other resources. Rather, the underlying risk was that CITA and the JFW partners might at some point lose each other. As a result, their tendency toward cooperation rather than competition was reinforced, and therefore backdoor moves were invoked instead of blocking moves. The interdependence of the network's members is critical to explaining such cooperation.

Finally, the way a campaign evolves can influence the emergence of blocking or backdoor moves. Keck and Sikkink's seminal contribution to the literature on transnational advocacy was the "boomerang" model of campaign emergence,⁷⁹ but Shareen Hertel has since developed two alternative forms of campaign emergence: an "outside-in" form and a "dual target" form.⁸⁰ Activists involved in the former launch campaigns from "outside" the country where abuse is occurring; they do so with little to no consultation up front with those they are seeking to assist. "Dual target" campaigns, by contrast, involve the identification of targets by the senders and the receivers in each of their respective spheres of activity (i.e., in two different country settings). Rather than focusing solely on a problem "over there," a dual target campaign involves senders and receivers in jointly identifying shared sources of oppression and acting to address them simultaneously in two different national settings.

Obviously, our analysis of New York state farmworker rights advocacy does not involve such international interactions. However, for our purposes, the

78. Hertel, *Unexpected Power*, 26.

79. Keck and Sikkink, *Activists Beyond Borders*.

80. Hertel, *Unexpected Power*.

“boomerang” and the “outside-in” types of campaign do help explain, in part, how relationships evolved within this network. Rather than looking at actors on different sides of national borders, we explore how actors who are differentially positioned within class and racial hierarchies inside the United States “launch” campaigns or “receive” them. This case is particularly interesting because the network itself developed in a “boomerang” style, whereas the legislative campaign can be characterized as an “outside-in” effort. Initial interactions between farmworkers and advocates arose from farmworkers explaining their needs to those willing to help them. In the 1980s and 1990s, advocates assisted farmworkers in a variety of ways: by securing low-priced food and household provisions through a mobile food co-op; by hosting workshops to educate workers on their rights, immigration issues, and how to deal with labor problems such as underpayment of wages; and by conducting English language classes—all in response to workers’ requests.⁸¹

Although the advocacy efforts developed directly from farmworkers’ calls for help, the legislative campaign itself did not. In the mid-1990s, farmworker advocates initiated the legislative campaign, which they saw as a natural outgrowth of farmworkers’ needs. The campaign would not have emerged were it not for the advocates, and hence can be considered to have evolved from the “outside-in.” Yet while Hertel’s previous work has shown how “outside-in” campaigns generate blocking responses, the “boomerang” style that created this New York state-based network, coupled with the interdependencies of its members, led to backdoor moves.

Indeed, the “boomerang” effect centrally influenced the evolution of the campaign’s core goals. In 1999, CITA and the JFW partners, along with farmworker service providers, organized a state-wide farmworkers’ congress.⁸² The farmworkers gathered separately from the advocates to discuss their concerns and to consider, at the request of the advocates, their rights under New York state law. At the conclusion of the congress, the farmworkers listed their priorities for the legislative campaign. This process therefore allowed farmworkers (facilitated by CITA) to help shape the overall direction of the campaign. The manner in which the campaign emerged thus helps explain why CITA would invoke backdoor moves rather than blocking ones, as the campaign’s emergence led to a significant degree of normative agreement within the advocacy network on its main goals.

81. Former CITA staff member, interview by Margaret Gray by telephone, 14 July 2005; Richard Witt, interview by Margaret Gray, Poughkeepsie, NY, 10 September 2003. Also described in a paper by Aspacio Alcántara in CITA’s newsletter “CITA en la Lucha” 3(1) 1999.

82. This was not the first or last farmworkers congress, but one of the few that represented farmworkers from all over the state.

Conclusion

The case we have explored here is theoretically significant on several levels. First, it provides a vehicle for interrogating power from “below.” We are by no means the first scholars to do so.⁸³ But our exploration of the dynamics of interdependence within the advocacy network discussed here engages the literature on transnational advocacy and applies mechanisms honed in the international arena to analysis of domestic (specifically U.S.) politics. Empirically, this paper engages data from one of the few contemporary labor studies of the New York state agricultural sector.⁸⁴

Aside from theory-building, our intention in exploring this case was to offer a vehicle for self-examination among activists and scholars who take part in or analyze campaigns such as the one discussed here. A major challenge in advocacy networks is recognizing that unequal material and political resources create complex power dynamics. For the receiving-end activists, blocking and/or backdoor moves create an important power resource—but the dominant members of a network may not even recognize these moves for what they are. One caution to the “senders” of campaigns is simply to recognize the privilege that their access to resources affords them, and to anticipate the need to broker more equitable participation in goal definition, strategy choice, and daily decision-making. Furthermore, “senders” must realize that their “language” usually dominates the standard communication channels between themselves and “receivers.”

This is not an easy task. Members of networks engaged even in identifying these issues—such as the activists interviewed in this case study—have already taken an important step. The next would be to imagine that the seemingly “unprofessional” actions taken by their subordinated partners may be forms of resistance. This case reveals the effort of CITA to exercise its power within the

83. For example, David Brooks and Jonathan Fox, eds., *Cross-Border Dialogues: U.S.-Mexico Social Movement Networking* (San Diego: Center for U.S.-Mexican Studies, University of California-San Diego, 2002); Scott, *Weapons of the Weak*; Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason: Toward a History of the Vanishing Present* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999).

84. See Barr, “Liberalism to the Test: African-American Migrant Farmworkers and the State of New York,” Grant Task Force, “Final Report: Agricultural Labor Markets in New York State and Implications for Labor Policy” (Ithaca, NY: New York State College at Cornell University, 1991); Thomas R. Maloney and David C. Grusenmeyer, *Survey of Hispanic Dairy Workers in New York State. Research Bulletin 2005–02* (Ithaca, NY: Department of Applied Economics and Management, College of Agriculture and Life Sciences, Cornell University, 2005); Nelkin, *On the Season*; New York State Senate-Assembly Puerto Rican/Hispanic Task Force, “Separate & Unequal: New York’s Farmworkers” (Albany: New York State Senate-Assembly Puerto Rican/Hispanic Task Force, Joint Temporary Task Force on Farmworker Issues, 1995); Max J. Pfeffer and Pilar A. Parra, *Immigrants and the Community: Integrating the Needs of Immigrant Workers and Rural Communities* (Ithaca, NY: Rural New York Initiative Policy Brief Series, Department of Developmental Sociology, Cornell University, 2004).

network. While constrained, in some ways, from successfully participating in the professional communication of the dominant majority, CITA nonetheless promoted its organizational needs and indeed became a primary decision-maker in strategy—albeit in a manner perceived to be unproductive for group communication.

Another challenge is to recognize that perceptions of “success” differ, depending upon one’s position and endowments within a network. What does “success” look like for the materially poorer members of a network? In this case, legislative campaigns might not have remained the primary focus if all members of the network were equally involved in spending their collective resources. But the JFW partners had organizational goals apart from those specific to the campaign and their resources were mostly directed toward achieving the former. These types of structural relationships—and the personal realization of one’s place within them—are not typically addressed in literature on transnational advocacy. We have opened the discussion of them here both in the hopes of enriching scholarship and advocacy itself—in New York state and beyond.