Communicating the right to food sovereignty: The voice of the Campesino in the Global Campaign for Agrarian Reform

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Abstract
Historically, the ‘campesino’ or peasant farmer has been marginalised from the public sphere. This paper explores how La Via Campesina, the world’s largest independent social movement, has employed framing techniques to legitimise the claims of a diverse membership through its Global Campaign for Agrarian Reform. It is proposed that frame strategists within the movement are effectively challenging dominant paradigms of land reform by engaging in public relations activities, including relationship management, alliance-building and strategic repositioning within a broader network or ‘counterpublic’ of social justice organisations.

Introduction
Campesinos, or peasant farmers, are frequently dismissed in mass media discourse about agriculture in the global economy, despite their direct experience of hyper-urbanisation, unsustainable agricultural systems and food shortages. They are often presented as obstacles to progress, and constructed to appear unqualified or unfit to represent themselves.

[Farmers] viewed from the towns...look like subsidised malcontents, chronic polluters and occasional rioters; they belong to an untouchable lobby, they foment disorder, they are backward looking, archaic and incapable of adapting to the world of the young. (Bove & Dufour, 2002, p. 2)

It is this perception of the peasant farmer that the Global Campaign for Agrarian Reform, initiated by La Via Campesina and the Food First Information and Action Network (FIAN), desires to subvert. The campaign is a deliberate attempt to coordinate movement activities around a specific issue or event, aiming to communicate its message beyond the informed to reach general publics. Participating groups employ strategically linked activities that work toward a common goal and against a common target, creating a network. Experienced actors within this network mobilise others, initiating structural integration and cultural negotiation. They connect groups, seek resources, propose and prepare activities, and carry out public relations. More than just news promoters, these key actors become ‘frame strategists’, considering how issues should be presented to achieve positive outcomes (Hallahan, 1999).

Communication initiatives such the Global Campaign for Agrarian Reform act as framing devices, ideally leading to the development of an “action-generating discursive community” (Pan & Kosicki, 2001, p. 36). A means of achieving political potency in influencing public deliberation and an integral part of the process of building political alignments, framing is not limited to news coverage or diffusely defined public opinion. Successful framing requires the political skills to initiate discourse that binds diverse interests and actors together. Framing is vital to strategic action, and when venues of the public sphere act as a stage for performance by elites, analysis of the frames presented provides a means of reading the relations between communication and power. The economic and social resources available to frame sponsors – those who seek to impose their frames on topics of interest to them – are central to the ability of a frame to enter and achieve prominence in news discourse and the broader public sphere.
This paper suggests that adopting a human-rights approach to development is just one of the strategic framing devices applied by La Via Campesina. As part of a broader network, the movement builds social capital through alliances and actively works towards reframing the image of the peasant within the global political economy. Offering a new model for agrarian reform, the movement practices public relations effectively to mobilise constituents and link local issues to the global context while using new media to create an alternative public sphere.

La Via Campesina within the campaign network

Representative of a proliferation of social movements characterised by polycentric groupings, La Via Campesina (‘the peasant way’) is an international alliance of peasant, family farm and landless peoples’ movements with constituents from 56 countries. It launched the Global Campaign for Agrarian Reform as a ‘bridge’ to unite local movements in promoting the right for people and nations to define their own agricultural and food policies according to the needs and priorities of their communities. The holistic concept of food ‘sovereignty’ places the interests of peasants and small-scale farmers at the centre of the debate:

Food sovereignty is the RIGHT of peoples, countries, and state unions to define their agricultural and food policy without the ‘dumping’ of agricultural commodities into foreign countries. Food sovereignty organises food production and consumption according to the needs of local communities, giving priority to production for local consumption. Food sovereignty includes the right to protect and regulate the national agricultural and livestock production and to shield the domestic market from the dumping of agricultural surpluses and low-price imports from other countries. (La Via Campesina, 2008, Par. 5)

Unlike market-led agrarian reform, food sovereignty favours national agricultural production over imports and supports sustainable development. The right to produce food and manage local markets clearly extends beyond food ‘security’, which focuses on availability. The campaign argues that genuine security equates to access to productive land and fair prices for crops to allow farmers to make a living. Priority of market access must be given to local producers, requiring supply management and regulation.

The Global Campaign for Agrarian Reform is designed to articulate the movement’s direct reaction against market-led agrarian reform (Borras, 2008). Through the campaign, movement members implement public relations strategies that work on both global and local levels. Internationally, formal alliances and collaborations are sought to secure concessions and expand invited spaces for civil society participation. La Via Campesina achieves credibility via strategic sector alliances with respected research bodies that provide vital empirical data and evidence to support the claims of members. These include the Land Research and Action Network (LRAN) and Food First Information and Action Network (FIAN).

In spearheading the Global Campaign for Agrarian Reform, La Via Campesina has become a movement ‘broker’, mobilising other actors within an international network (Anheier, Glasius, & Kaldor, 2004). Castells argues that within today’s ‘network society’, enabled by advances in telecommunications, meta-networks are constructed at a transnational level, facilitating decentralised concentration where tasks are completed simultaneously at multiple sites (Castells, 2000). Castells speaks of spaces of flows where processes of communication occur. These spaces, comprised of manifold exchanges and interactions, have overcome the territorial barriers of state and neighbourhood through their flexibility and adaptiveness.

Networks provide political spaces where the purpose and meaning of joint enterprise is negotiated (Keck & Sikkink, 1998). Routine contact between actors formalises transnational
ties and facilitates the mobilisation of resources for collective action. Coalitions, as activated networks (Fox, 2005), coordinate shared strategies to publicly influence social change, often through protest or disruptive action. In a cellular structure, sets of actors with common purposes and solidarities are linked across state boundaries, generating coordinated and sustained social mobilisation along with more focused periods of activism in more than one country. To make community-oriented issues salient across international borders, while remaining grounded in the local, campaign messages must be framed strategically to balance the autonomy of members with international cooperation and collective action.

**Framing theory**

Framing processes were recognised as a central approach to understanding social movements by the mid-1990s (McAdam, McCarthy, & Zald, 1996; Benford & Snow, 2000; Oliver & Johnston, 2005). Frames function to organise experience and guide action, whether individual or collective (Benford & Snow, 2000). Gamson, Fireman and Rytina introduced the ideas of breaking the frame and reframing as essential pre-cursors to collective action (Gamson, 1985). Snow and Benford (2000) developed further concepts including frame alignment, frame bridging, frame amplification and frame extension as ways of gaining both supporters and media attention.

Social movement organisations attempt to bring their frames on an issue into public debate to win support by identifying frame categories centred on diagnosis, prognosis and motivation:

- **Diagnosis**: identification of problem and attribution of blame or causality.
- **Prognosis**: suggests solutions to the problems and how to achieve them – strategies, tactics, and targets.
- **Frame resonance**: the mobilising potential of frames; the extent to which frames are congruent with the observations, experience and cultural understandings of target publics (Benford, 1993: see also Entman, 1993).

The members of social movement networks practice public relations in bringing issues to the public agenda through framing or presenting issues innovatively. Building cognitive frames is an essential component of the network’s political strategies. Frame alignment renders events or occurrences meaningful to target publics. Networks employ frame extension to coincide and draw on the energy of other networks (Snow, Worden, Rochford, & Benford, 1986). To create frame resonance is to develop the relationship between an organisation’s work and its ability to influence broader public understandings. According to Tarrow (1998) a suitable collective action frame becomes part of the political culture of an organisation and is an essential part of the reservoir of symbols from which future movement ‘entrepreneurs’ can choose. The development of shared practice contributes to common frame and, according to Goffman (1974), framing organises more than meaning; it organises involvement, essential to the network.

**Media framing**

Framing is a process by which communication sources including news organisations, public relations professionals and politicians define and construct an issue (Nelson, Oxley, & Clawson, 1997). A specific frame’s ability to dominate news discourse depends on the sponsor’s economic and cultural resources, the sponsor’s knowledge of journalistic practices, practices themselves and a frame’s resonance with broader political values (Carragee & Roefs, 2004). Pan and Kosicki (2001) refer to the “web of subsidies” – the flow of information between source and news media, the size and depth of which determines “frame potency” (p. 36). Individual actors possess webs of varying scale that determine their own ability to mobilise the greater web through strategic targeting.

Framing contests frequently favour well-connected, and well-resourced, political elites (Gitlin, 1980; Tuchman, 1978). Gitlin (1980) demonstrated the conflicting frames of
corporate media and protest movements in a study of The New York Times' application of negative frames to coverage of the Students for a Democratic Society movement, demonstrating that negative frames can marginalise social movements. In Gitlin’s interpretation “frames are the principles of selection, emphasis, and presentation composed of tacit little theories about what exists, what happens and what matters” (Gitlin 1980, p. 6-7). They are information generating devices as well as screens, enabling journalists, as “symbol-handlers”, to “recognise… information, to assign it to cognitive categories” (p. 21).

Simplification of a social movement’s complex agenda is the price frequently paid for news coverage. When Henry Saragih was named by The Guardian as ‘One of the 50 People Who Could Save the Planet’ (Vidal, January 5, 2008) it may have been the first time many readers had heard of La Via Campesina. Described as the leader of a union of “several million agitated peasants…a global movement of increasingly militant peasant farmers” (Par. 63), Saragih’s work, and that of La Via Campesina, was neatly framed as opposition to environmental destruction.

As ‘unofficial’ sources denied media access, social movements frequently rely on the politics of spectacle. Delegitimising or shaming public institutions such as multinational corporations and institutions through systematic campaigns and direct action is a means of attracting media attention. The international online campaign ‘Combat Monsanto’ (2009), jointly sponsored by La Via Campesina, Greenpeace, Friends of the Earth, Sherpa, Attac and Foundation Sciences Citoyennes, is the latest initiative in a history of direct action including squatting, the burning of grain fields and the destruction of corporate infrastructure (Swamy, 1998). In August 1999 in Millau, France, activists opposing the importation of hormone-fed beef dismantled a McDonald’s outlet in a non-violent protest. Spokesperson Jose Bove was subsequently interviewed with Mike Moore, former Director-General of the WTO, and Venezuela’s Hugo Chavez, by international media. Bove’s trial attracted 100,000 spectators. La Via Campesina was among movements that played a role in anti-globalisation protests at the WTO Ministerial Conference in Seattle, 1999, a prime-time media event framed by newsmakers as the ‘Battle for Seattle’ (Juris, 2007). Illegitimate framing included characterisation as “phony farmers” and “disorganised anarchists on a demo-holiday” (Rogers, 2004, p. 107).

According to George (2001) delegitimisation, marginalisation and demonisation has been characteristic of media coverage of opposition to WTO talks, G8 and G20 Summits. Frames are based on dominant cultural assumptions that the governing authorities are peaceful while protestors are violent; protesters are guilty or at least suspect; it is the right of leaders to meet while protesters have no right to be there; minorities cause violence; protests are not political – only world leaders ‘do’ politics. Common media frames applied to protests include the carnival, property crime, riot, Romper Room (childish antics) and the freak show (McLeod & Hertog, 1999).

Johnston and Noakes (2005) refer to the protest paradigm – “a ready-made frame template that the media apply to social movement activity that, among other things, trivialises and demonises social movement activities and beliefs” (p. 19). The protest paradigm detracts from messages in framing contests. Bartering for media attention with compelling visuals of action, social movements frequently receive hostile control messages that escalate when a movement becomes more radical, media coverage playing a key role in labelling the social construction of deviance (McLeod & Hertog, 1999). Characteristics of protest coverage include reliance on ‘official’ sources and the invocation of public opinion. Bystanders’ opinions may be offered as representative of public opinion in the style of a Greek chorus (Back, 1988). Social movements are frequently portrayed as unsuccessful groups contending for power.

Non-coverage is equally denigrating. Movements are subject to the ‘spiral of silence’.
Counterframing

Theories regarding the public sphere and civil society provide starting points for considering the relationship between social movements, public relations and the media. According to Habermas (1989) the efficacy of civil society lies in its ability to take new issues from the periphery of the public sphere to the political centre. Social movements adopt issues launched by intellectuals and other advocates. These issues reach the public via mass media, from where they progress to the public and political agenda. However this model of centre/periphery, where issues move out in concentric circles, disregards the complexity of social communication (Bardoel, 1996). Fraser (1990) identifies some of the barriers to a functioning public sphere:

\[\text{...an adequate conception of the public sphere requires not merely the bracketing, but rather the elimination, of social inequality. Second, a multiplicity of publics is preferable to a single public sphere both in stratified societies and egalitarian societies. Third, a tenable conception of the public sphere would countenance not the exclusion, but the inclusion, of interests and issues that bourgeois masculinist ideology labels ‘private’ and treats as inadmissible. Finally, a defensible conception would allow both for strong publics and for weak publics and that it would theorise the relations among them.} \] (p. 77)

Fraser refers to ‘subaltern counterpublics’ as discursive arenas where members of subordinate social groups create counter discourses that contain oppositional interpretations of their identities and needs. She refers to the example of the late 20th century feminism movement as a space of multiple contexts with its own idiom, artefacts and meeting places. In common with La Via Campesina, it is a ‘reform program’, at some level maintaining an awareness of its subordinate status. Clearly ‘marked off’ from the general, dominant public, the conflict goes beyond ideology and policy debate to speech genres and modes of address (Warner, 2005).

Alternative publics become social movements, according to Warner, when they “acquire agency in relation to the state” (2005, p. 124). Entering the political sphere they adapt themselves to rational-critical discourse. Once there, they cast doubt on uncontested frames – those frequently referred to as ‘common sense’ (Gamson, Croteau, Hoynes, & Sasson, 1992), effectively taking issues from the uncontested to contested realm (Gamson et al., 1992; Gamson & Modigliani, 1989). Described by Melucci (1989) as ‘cultural innovators’ transnational social movements can be viewed as arenas where new political meanings are produced, dissent made possible and direct action a reality (Alvarez, Dagnino & Escobar, 1998). “To the extent that we fight we begin to
occupy a geographic and political space in society” (Wittman, 2009, p. 126).

Counterpublics are social spaces created through circular, reflexive discourse, the principal act of which is projecting the field of argument through genre, range, stakes and idiom. They are constituted upon uptake, as expressions of volition on the part of their members (Warner, 2005). Formation and transformation of member identity is facilitated by active participation and common historically grounded experiences.

Political communication is characteristically punctual and abbreviated, what Warner calls “the temporality of the headline” (p. 68). Public discourse requires accessibility, forcing publics to concretise a world in which discourse circulates, providing members with direct and active engagement through language. The challenge to La Via Campesina in framing issues is that which faces every professional communicator managing an international campaign - the need to communicate to publics with vastly different belief systems, life worlds, stories and myths, while also bridging the divide between the industrialised and non-industrialised world.

Strategic framing in action

A global interpretive frame transformation such as that called for by La Via Campesina demands a shift in worldviews regarding the politics of food. New values must be “planted and nurtured, old meanings or understandings jettisoned, and erroneous beliefs...reframed in order to garner support and secure participation” (Snow et al., 1986, p. 473). To be successful, the movements’ campaign must present the case that fundamentally unjust conditions have endured for longer than acceptable. Blame is focused as major changes are sought in the status, treatment or activity of the particular constituency. Any counter-ideology must be grounded in the interpretive schemas of the dominant public, evoking existent values and attitudes and drawing on current ideas and beliefs (Swindler, 1986). Relevance is further supported by empirical credibility, experiential commensurability and narrative fidelity (Snow et al., 1986). This requires that a frame support diagnostic, prognostic and motivational claims which can be tested, that it suggests solutions appropriate to the context and, finally, that it fits with existing cultural stories.

La Via Campesina has adopted the methodology of the human rights sector in appealing to liberal ideological traditions and basic ideas of human dignity, and, frequently, the issue of bodily harm to vulnerable individuals.

Local struggles around access to productive resources and the rights of peasants are becoming increasingly conflictual and brutal. The oppression of peasant leaders, death threats, forcible evictions and assassinations happen in many countries world-wide. (La Via Campesina, 2006, p. 2)

Through the use of short and clear causal stories assigning responsibility to guilty parties, specific cultural and political contexts can be transcended. Dramatic portrayal of these stories through witnessing and personal testimony can be highly persuasive. The power relationships implied by physical violence relegate other asymmetries that might divide network actors to the background. Data, while less emotive than images and personal account, provides rational appeal, hence the focus on accuracy and thoroughness in information-gathering practiced by rights-focused NGOs such as Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch.

Historically, the criminalisation and persecution of peasants who exercise democratic rights to organise and express their views and self-determine has been ignored as a human rights issue (Desmaris, 2007). The Food First Information and Action Network (FIAN), La Via Campesina’s partner in the Global Campaign for Agrarian Reform, is an international organisation that carries out Fact Finding Missions to identify and address human rights violations (FIAN, 2009). FIAN establishes emergency networks for international intervention in cases of human rights abuses over food and/or land and uses
traditional tactics such as ‘naming and shaming’ (Strothenke, 2007). The shift from food security to ‘food sovereignty’, developed by La Via Campesina at the World Food Summit in 1996 as an alternative paradigm within which to frame issues about food and agriculture (Rosset, 2006), is contextualised in an argument over rights:

Food is a basic human right. This right can only be realised in a system where food sovereignty is guaranteed. Food sovereignty is the right of each nation to maintain and develop its own capacity to produce its basic foods respecting cultural and productive diversity. We have the right to produce our own food in our own territory. Food sovereignty is a precondition to genuine food security. (La Via Campesina, 2008)

Based on the special nature of agriculture and its ‘multifunctionality’ as preserving landscapes, protecting livelihoods and valuing rural traditions (Rosset, 2006), reform goes beyond redistribution of land. It requires the comprehensive revision of agricultural systems to favour the production and marketing of small farm produce, and requires the social ownership of land whereby families have usufruct rights. In the absence of global policy, La Via Campesina devised and adopted its own Declaration of Peasants’ Rights at a meeting of the International Coordinating Committee in Seoul, March 2009 (La Via Campesina, 2009a).

The most radical aspect of the frame transformation sought by La Via Campesina concerns economics. According to La Via Campesina, the enemy is the neo-liberal model of development and a transition is needed (Rosset, Patel, & Courville, 2006).

We call on all those responsible in governments to step out of the ‘neo-liberal model’ and to have the courage to seek an alternative path of cooperation with social justice and mutual assistance. (Rosset, 2006, p. 102)

The movement argues that market-assisted land reform is inadequate in highly unequal societies where agrarian reform processes frequently favour large landowners whose land is unused and fulfils no social and economic benefit. World Bank initiatives in rural development are based on the assumption that agriculture is the main source of economic growth; therefore productivity increase is the solution. This requires the liberalisation of markets, the inclusion of agriculture in multilateral trade agreements, the strengthening of private companies, privatisation of sectors controlled by the state, investment in biotechnology, support for diversification of export agriculture, and increased efficiency in water use (Patel, 2006).

Formal appeals for the strengthening of peasant and farmer-based food production have been made to the Food and Agriculture Organization (Saragih, 2008). La Via Campesina has called for the G8 to “clean up their own mess instead of dictating to poor countries what to do” (La Via Campesina, 2009d, Par. 1) emphasising that the solution to the global food crisis does not exist in market-led agricultural development. The agency of peoples’ movements to build development funding alternatives (La Via Campesina, 2009c) challenges the neoliberal paradigm that globalised trade is the solution to economic growth, calling into question the three pillars of market access, domestic supports and export subsidies. Getting the WTO “out of agriculture” is a recurrent theme (Rosset, 2006, p. 77).

While the global financial crisis has focused attention on corporate failures, news of an attendant ‘global food crisis’ has lead to a resurgence of interest in agrarian reform, providing political opportunities to La Via Campesina. Members of the movement argue that this situation is not the product of a sudden natural disaster but the consequence of decades of traditional liberalisation policies and of the vertical integration of production, processing and distribution by corporate agriculture (La Via Campesina, 2008).

If hunger riots in 40 countries have drawn the attention of public opinion, the food crisis is not a new
The movement has made strategic decisions to target transnational corporations (TNCs) including Monsanto, Cargill, Archer Daniels Midland and Wal-Mart, denying the imperatives of an economic model that dictates unchallenged corporate power (Carlsen, 2007). The public’s growing distrust of food systems, fired by the horror of viral outbreaks such as mad cow disease (BSE) and foot and mouth in the United Kingdom has further amplified frames around food safety. Descriptions of “food from nowhere” (Bove & Dufour, 2002, p. 55), frustration over food swapping between countries and food miles that intensify the energy impact of industrial agriculture (McMichael, 2007) resonate with advocates of environmental sustainability.

In broadening its mission to expand participation through frame extension (Snow et al., 1986), La Via Campesina situates issues in crises faced by indigenous populations in the same way the Zapatista movement in Mexico framed labour and civil rights in the context of native peoples’ struggle (Olesen, 2005). In 2002 the Global Campaign for Agrarian Reform brought attention to gender inequalities in the management of rural land reform (Desmaris, 2007). Such strategic overlapping and broadening of frames enables campaign actors to leverage internationally recognised social and economic rights and collaborate with human rights NGOs, anti-globalisation movements and environmental groups on campaigns such as ‘Our World is Not For Sale’ and ‘Another World is Possible’.

Alternative or social movement media such as Indymedia offer potential for expanded news frames emphasising these broader social and political themes. Online platforms provide communication channels that facilitate annual mobilisations on April 17, The International Day of Peasant Struggle. This anniversary commemorates the murder of 19 members of Movimento dos Trabalhadores Rurais Sem Terra (MST) in Eldorado do Carajás in Brazil in 1996 (La Via Campesina, 2009b). Internet coverage “places activists on a more equal footing with other media outlets when waging the battle over public relations” (Owens & Palmer, 2003, p. 336). For example, when activists ‘disrupted’ the UN Convention on Biodiversity in Bonn, Germany, in protest that no farmers or indigenous people were invited to participate in the event (Delforge, 2008), the World Social Forum’s ‘television’ site, www.wsf2008.net presented a 12 minute video focused on peasant viewpoints. Addressing concerns that agro-industrial multinationals as Monsanto, Dupont, Syngenta, Limagrain, Bayer and Pioneer were striving for the wider introduction of transgenics as solutions to the so-called ‘food crisis’ and climate change (Ploger, 2008) the medium permitted La Via Campesina not only broadcast the event but to control the framing of the issue.

The symbolic power of events has been manifested most effectively through one tragic incident. During a WTO ministerial in Cancun, Mexico, in 2003 Korean farmer Lee Kyung Hae committed suicide while carrying a sign “the WTO kills farmers”. La Via Campesina uses Lee’s story as a mobilising event or ‘condensation symbol’ - a “shorthand means by which large numbers of beliefs, feelings, values, and perhaps worldviews are telegraphed to others sharing a similar culture” (Johnson-Cartee, 2004, p. 166). Lee’s sacrifice is used purposefully to create international solidarity. Adopted by many national campaigns, his story projects the movement as “a political imaginary” (Patel, 2006, p. 85), a political culture characterised by persistent engagement and commitment deepening existing tropes of social justice, democracy and rights. Stories of individual effort, such as those of Bolivian and Chilean women hiding seeds to maintain biodiversity (Rodri, 2003) add a mythological power or ‘mistica’ – that of one in harmony with nature – to the image of the peasant.

Seen through the lens of capital/labour relations, peasants are redundant in capitalist modernity (McMichael, 2007). By reasserting the politics of peasants, drawing on substantive conceptions of rights, economies and ecological relations (Otero, 2003), La Via Campesina...
reframes the traditional view of the peasantry, building new concepts of modernity. In reframing agrarian citizenship, the movement is proposing new forms of political participation, situating peasants in the global political economy.

[This] does not entail a rejection of modernity, technology and trade accompanied by a romanticised return to an archaic past steeped in rustic traditions [but is based on] ethics and values where culture and social justice count for something and concrete mechanisms are put in place to ensure a future without hunger. (Desmarais, 2007, p. 38)

Conclusion

La Via Campesina has coalesced North and South around common objectives presented in the language of laymen, explicitly rejecting neoliberal model of rural development, and refusing to be excluded from agricultural policy development, determined to empower peasant voices and establish an alternative model of agriculture. Amplifying frames through the identification, idealisation, and elevation of values such as social justice, La Via Campesina is credited with setting an international agenda.

Members of the movement practice strategic public relations in presenting an alternative model of agriculture. Appealing to human rights norms, presenting compelling symbolic packages and offering empirical evidence to support claims, the movement has developed counterframes that resonate with global stakeholders. The concept of food sovereignty implies a diversity of solutions, not a monoculture, inviting consumers to embrace a food ideology sensitive to history, ecology, culture and human rights (Patel, 2007). The Internet has given the movement more power to shape a public image, altering “the landscape of protest” (Owens & Palmer, 2003, p. 336) by permitting new media spaces.

According to Thorn’s 2007 study of the anti-apartheid movement, ‘dramaturgical’ approaches to public communication are a vital element in the repertoire of strategies available to social movements. Through direct action, that movement mobilised creative energies, “embarking on public performances that would move beyond the boundaries between art and politics” (p. 908). In addition, producing and distributing news and information about events through self-controlled channels, the anti-apartheid movement created an alternative public sphere, supported by archives of well-researched data and compelling images that would, and eventually did, attract established media. While global support took decades to evolve, it did so through the work of thousands of activists in many countries, many actively courting sympathetic journalists and systematically engaging them in informational networks, effectively practicing strategic public relations.

To been seen as rational political actors, social movements need to manage perception and proactively engage stakeholders. This requires acute awareness of the conditions and criteria of news values, credible spokespeople and the development of mutual, trusting relationships with sympathetic journalists. While the newsgathering source standardisation process is biased against them, politically marginalised groups such as La Via Campesina must strive to avoid functional invisibility through realistic perception of their target publics. For these audiences they must concretise their issues in specifics and demystify the ‘mistica’ that so effectively binds the movement internally.

In short, members of organisations must develop public relations skills as ‘news promoters’ (Johnson-Cartee, 2004) who can frame arguments in the dominant ideology of different cultures, using existing belief systems. Assisted by knowledge of the media, credible empirical data and an effective framing tool kit, movements such as La Via Campesina can continue to position themselves as credible political players and legitimate sources in ongoing debates regarding the politics of the global food crisis.

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