Translocal and Gender Dimensions of Frame Alignment: Explaining Community Mobilization and Community Work Among Women in Mexico.


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ABSTRACT
Working class women’s organizing and community work in Latin America have been attributed to structural and cultural factors. Yet these factors fall short in explaining how women are recruited in a NGO or a social movement and how women become involved in community work. In this paper I argue that the frame alignment is the mediating process that stands between structural and cultural factors and individual women to make community activism possible. The frame alignment is a negotiation process constituted by the life stories women bring into their activism and the NGO in which they are recruited. Further, the frame alignment is shaped by translocal actors such as states and international institutions as they put frames and financial resources in circulation throughout the third world, particularly via NGOs. I develop this argument in a case study of women community workers members of a Mexican health-oriented NGO. I rely on women’s and the NGO’s narratives to explore how the frame alignment takes place in and through the recruitment of working class women into community work with this NGO.
The rise of working class women’s collective mobilization, community work, and non governmental organizations in Latin America during the 1970s and 1980s has been attributed to structural and gender identity factors. On one hand, scholars have convincingly argued that factors such as the crisis of the liberal state, the weakening of political parties, the fall of dictatorships, and social class and race conflicts have created a structural opportunity for working class women to collectively organize and undertake community work (Alvarez 1990; Chuchryk 1994; Escobar 1992; Hellman 1994). On the other hand, normative cultural concepts of femininity have provided the basis and legitimization for women’s organizing outside the home (Abrahams 1996; Corcoran-Nantes 1993; Lind 1992; Massolo 1992; Martin 1990; Melluci 1980; Safa 1990; Stephen 1989, 1992). Working class women’s positions as wives and mothers make them identify particular grievances and use their identities as wives and mothers to justify their collective actions --what has been referred to as “activist mothering” (Naples 1992). Although structural and cultural factors have been proven to shape women’s organizing and community work, particularly that of working class women, they fall short in explaining how it is that women are recruited in an organization or a movement, how women become involved in community work, and how women identify grievances and develop an agenda. That is, structural and cultural factors do not account for what Snow and colleagues (1980) have termed the “micro processes” of collective action. Structural and cultural forces only provide the possibility for mobilization, what stands between these factors and the actual actions of individual women is a mediating micro process created through the narratives individual women bring into their community activism (McAdam 1989).

In this paper I explore the micro process of women’s involvement in community work in the context of a Mexican women’s non governmental organization (NGO). Without circumventing the effects of structural and cultural factors, I look at how this micro process of participation while taking place at the local level, is linked to and shaped by translocal processes and cultural gender scripts. I draw on the theoretical work of Snow and colleagues (Snow et al. 1986; Hunt, Benford, and Snow 1994; Snow and Philips 1980; Snow, Zurcher, and Ekland-Olson 1980) who have adopted the works of Goffman (1974) and Lofland and Stark (1965) to develop the concept of frame alignment. This concept is used to capture the micro process of collective mobilization. Frame alignment refers to the interactional process by which individuals’ worldview, grievances, and actions are linked to an organization or movement’s agenda and actions (Snow et al. 1986). I expand this theoretical view by also building on critical feminist theory (Smith 1986; Fraser 1989; Scott 1986) and on contemporary theses on the translocal and transnational nature of cultural processes (Hannerz 1996; Halliday 1988). I use these theoretical approaches in a case study of women’s community work with a health-oriented NGO in Mexico. I rely on women’s and the NGO’s narratives to explore how the frame alignment takes place in and through the recruitment of working class women into the NGO and community work. This case study sheds light on several factors that are frequently overlooked by research on women’s community work and collective mobilization. First, it shows how structural and cultural factors are translated into, and negotiated by, the concrete actions and histories of working class women to make participation possible. Second, it informs the role of NGOs in shaping women’s community work and agenda and the potential consequences it may have on generating, or containing, social change. Third, and last, this case study contributes to the understanding of women’s community activism, particularly in Latin America, by showing how translocal processes influence women’s entrance to community work, the formation of NGOs, and the creation of frames for mobilization.
The Frame Alignment and its Gender and Translocal Dimensions

Women become community activists, members of social action NGOs, or movement participants through what Snow and colleagues (1986, 1980) call the frame alignment process. This concept describes the process of becoming a community activist from the moment women are first contacted and invited to become members of an organization or movement, to the establishment of a commitment and full participation as community activists. Frame alignment is defined as the process of linking individual and organizational interpretative frames so that women’s actions, grievances, and interests are congruent with those of the organization (Snow et al. 1986; Hunt et al. 1994). Interpretative frame refers to a view of the world, a way to define and interpret the everyday life (Goffman 1974). This view of the world is used to make attributions, identify causal agents, and guide action. For women to become community activists and to join a NGO they have to share and find a voice in the organization’s frame. Thus, the frame alignment implies a negotiating process. In the process of being recruited women evaluate their roles as mothers, housewives, community activists, and workers and their world views in light of a NGO’s frame and actions and the personal and collective benefits they may obtain as members of a NGO and as community activists.

This frame alignment takes place during the recruitment process. The literature on social movement participation has identified several analytical phases that shape successful recruitment of potential participants in movement organizations and NGOs (Cable 1992; Snow et al. 1980). These phases help understand why and how it is that women, and particularly working class women, are recruited into NGOs promoting community work. First, the recruitment process begins when an initial contact is established with a woman. Although a first contact can be made through a variety of avenues, social networks are the richest sources of potential members. Working class women have large and cohesive social networks which include kin, friends, and neighbors. Thus, working class women would likely obtain information about a NGO or be likely to be contacted and recruited through one member of their social networks who is already involved in a NGO. Second, once a contact has been established, differential availability is considered. Differential availability refers to the absence of alternative commitments and social networks, and countering sanctions which could inhibit or conflict with women’s involvement in a NGO (Cable 1992; Snow et al. 1980). Women might have more free or flexible time to explore and get involved in community activities and NGOs than men because of the sexual division of labor. Yet, at the same time, some women might face sanctions if they “go out of the house to the streets” because of the gendered system which defines the home as women’s only and proper place. Third, those women with no countering sanctions will likely accept an invitation to attend an event or an activity of the NGO. This invitation is offered as a means to increase interactions between the NGO members and the potential member. It is in these interactions that women are provided with reasons and motives for participation. Women and the NGO begin the process of constructing a common interpretative frame. A frame alignment then results in a successful recruitment which in turn produces another member who can be deployed to recruit other potential members. The recruitment process of women into community work, hence, is not the result of random events, or the sole effect of structural and cultural factors. It is shaped by factors such as class position, sexual division of labor, expectations based on constructed gender identities, group membership, social networks; and, more importantly, it is informed by an interactional process between the potential member and the NGO.
The factors that inform the recruitment and the frame alignment processes are further linked to organizational, national, and international forces which promote and sponsor women’s community work and collective organizing. Women’s community work and activism have been advanced not only by contemporary women’s NGOs, but also by state-sponsored programs and international development and women’s agencies (Abrahams 1996; Hellman 1992; Ramirez-Valles 1998). Yet, because of the anti-organizational bias of social movements theorists, these actors and their influences on local women’s activism have been overlooked (Hellman 1992). As the concept of frame alignment implies, an explanation of how women become members and community activists requires an analysis of the organization’s frame and actions. Organizations provide members with a vocabulary such as values, norms, and grievances for them to construct their identities as members (Hunt et al. 1994). In other words, organizations provide a frame for potential recruits to join and act. NGOs create a frame in which women are socialized as they become members and which is used to monitor actions and maintain a sense of collective identity (Smith 1997). The creation of the frame as well as the socialization of new members is an interactive and recursive process (Hunt et al. 1994).

Women’s community work and NGOs although situated at the local level are influenced by translocal actors, specially in the so-called third world countries, where women’s movements and NGOs interact with, or become part of, the state apparatus and receive financial support from international organizations (Chuchryk 1994; Hellman 1994; Morgan 1993; Ramirez-Valles, 1999). Local social processes are connected to translocal cultures and entities because people move with their meanings and meanings cross legal boundaries through discourses such as human rights, feminism, and economics and through international organizations such as United Nations, United States Agency for International Development (USAID), and the International Monetary Fund (Gupta 1995; Hannerz 1996; Ramirez and Soysal 1997). States and international organizations of the first world condition their relations to their counterparts of the third world to specific domestic practices and policies (e.g., human rights, reproductive health), hence shaping local process such as policies, group mobilization, agendas, and grievances that directly affect women (Halliday 1988). These transnational connections are not postulated as causal factors, but as forces shaping local social processes. Women’s community work and NGOs cannot be formulated as standing on their own and being autonomous. They are better conceived as spaces in which a variety of influences coincide producing a particular combination of meanings and social relations (Hannerz 1996). Thus, women’s participation in NGOs needs to be positioned in a global network of relationships constituted by translocal frames and institutions. This is specifically relevant in the analysis of women’s activism in the third world countries as they are the subjects of international mandates, and the recipients of financial and technical assistance from first world institutions for the creation of NGOs and the design of action programs (Alvarez 1997; Delpino and Pasara 1991; Talamante, Careaga, and Parada-Ampudia 1994).

The Present Study

In this paper I explore the frame alignment processes through a case study of a group of women community workers who are members of a Mexican NGO working on health and economic development issues. I do so by analyzing the origins and interpretative frame of the NGO and women’s narratives of how they joined the NGO and became community workers in health-related issues. Based on this case study, I argue that the frame alignment is the mediating
process that stands between structural and cultural factors and individual women to make community activism possible. Further, the frame alignment is shaped by translocal actors such as states and international institutions and discourses as they put frames and financial resources in circulation throughout the third world, particularly via NGOs.

**METHOD**

The study was conducted using a case study design (Hamel 1993; Mitchell 1983; Orum, Feagin, and Sjoberg 1991; Stake 1994; Stoecker 1991) and two ethnographic methods: in-depth semi-structured interviews and participant observation. Fieldwork was undertaken over a five-month period with women community workers, members of a NGO (referred here as Association of Mexican Women for Social Action, AMAS for its Spanish acronym) in a large urban center. This fieldwork was preceded by nine years of the author’s close working relationship with AMAS and some of the women community workers. The ethnographic methods and the author’s span of involvement helped attain the familiarity needed to approximate a holistic and contextualized view of the setting and the lives of the women community workers (Becker 1970; Silverman 1985).

AMAS’ general objective is to improve the quality of life of the working class and the poor. This is done through education and service programs on maternal and child health, family planning, sex education, nutrition and family gardening, HIV/AIDS, micro-businesses, and community banks. AMAS’ activities are undertaken by an alliance of professionals (e.g., psychologists and social workers), women community workers (who are unpaid), and other community members. The NGO relies on the recruiting and training of community workers to ensure the participation of the communities. Community workers participate voluntarily and are considered members of the NGO. Although community workers tend to focus their work on a specific area or project (e.g., community banks), most of them draw on resources from all the projects for their community work, and all of them do education and distribution of contraceptive methods. AMAS’ structure and areas of work closely resemble those of NGOs elsewhere in Latin America (Carroll 1992; Pasara et al. 1991; Talamante et al. 1994; Yudelman 1987).

In-depth and tape-recorded interviews were conducted with fifteen women community workers. Information from other women community workers was also collected through participant observation and non tape-recorded conversations. Women community workers were selected by means of two procedures of purposeful sampling: intensity and snowball sampling (Patton 1990). The ages of the interviewees range from 35 to 62 years old. Nine of them are married and have children; one is married but has no children; three are single mothers; one lives with her male partner and has no children; and one woman is divorced with two children. Only three of them have some education beyond high school (e.g., a year of nursing). Five of them work at home taking care of their children and household chores; six have a formal job; and four work in the informal economy such as selling Avon and clothes (three of them), and sex work (one of them). According to Mexico’s standards, eleven of these women have a working class position and four have a middle class position. Eleven of these community workers live in a large urban center and four in near-by rural areas.

Interviews were approached using the reflexive ethnographic method (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1995) and the general interview guide (Patton 1990). All interviews were conducted in Spanish by the author at either women’s homes or workplaces, or cafeterias. The analysis of the interview data was informed by common ethnographic practices (Coffey and Atkinson 1996;
To understand the process by which women become community workers and members of AMAS it is necessary to first describe AMAS’ interpretative frame. The frame of a NGO is an important aspect because to be a member of an organization one has to share and represent its frame. AMAS constructs its frame as the result of the particular historical circumstances which gave it origin. Accordingly, in the early 1970s the city in which AMAS was founded suffered the worst flooding ever. The flooding left thousands of poor people without home and food. Among numerous volunteers who assisted the victims of the flooding there was an upper class professional woman, Mrs. Maria de Lourdes Leon de Vicario. She and a small group of upper and middle class professionals (males and females) friends volunteered to help affected people. They assisted people to find shelters, collected food and clothes for the victims, and coordinated volunteer efforts of the Red Cross. In doing so they came in contact with hundreds of women who shared with them “the desperation of having no control over their reproductive health.” As told in AMAS’ documents, the women expressed this desperation with fatalism and resignation, but with an exemplar stoicism. “The women were year after year victims of unwanted pregnancies, bringing more and more children to a culture of poverty.” The group of volunteers became aware and concerned by these problems, and created a center for maternal and child health and family planning which eventually became AMAS. Their goal was to establish a strategy of community participation for and with poor women so that health education and services could be accessible to as many women as possible.

AMAS’ narrative of this event as its point of origin is told in several AMAS’ documents and in presentations to outsiders, such as funding agencies and government officials. This narrative constructs AMAS’ interpretative frame. The flooding and women’s experiences are problematized in a particular way. This interpretation then identifies causal agents and defines the actions needed to address the problem. In AMAS’ narrative the women’s situation of “desperation” during the flooding is interpreted as a result of “unwanted pregnancies” or “lack of control over their reproductive health.” Consequently, women’s lack of information about reproductive processes and access to contraceptive methods become the cause and the problem needed to be addressed. The actions that follow this logic and which AMAS since then undertakes, hence, include reproductive health advocacy, poor women’s education on reproductive processes, distribution of contraceptive methods, and access to medical services. These actions are justified and guided by an overall motive of improving poor and working class women’s and their children’s lives. Yet AMAS’ frame and the actions derived from it are not set as social change strategies. They are set only as a way to ameliorate poor women’s problems and to help them cope with their social class and gendered conditions. In AMAS’ tale the flooding and the class position of the women are trivial factors, its focal point is that poor women have many children. Furthermore, AMAS’ tale medicalizes poor women’s lives and the means to improve them (Riessman 1983). The living conditions of working class women are reduced to a problem of “unwanted pregnancies” which women themselves need to take care of by means of contraceptive methods.
AMAS’ tale and interpretative frame reflect its upper and middle class origin. As Ostrander (1984) has argued, upper class women’s community work and organizations are framed as helping those “unfortunate” improve their lives, instead of as creating social change. Moreover, this framing reproduces class boundaries as it places women of the upper class as the helpers and working class women as in need to be helped by the altruistic actions of the upper classes.

The group of upper and middle class professionals, led by Mrs. Leon de Vicario, soon began visiting poor neighborhoods and conducting talks on reproductive health. They started meeting women from these neighborhoods who were also interested in participating in these efforts. With the help of these women the group of upper and middle class professionals further moved into neighborhoods, schools, and existing groups to spread information on reproductive health and contraceptive methods. The group made contact with other organizations in Mexico and in the United States to obtain educational materials and contraceptive methods to distribute for free among poor women. All these activities were conducted with the sole volunteer efforts of the group until USAID came across. From the interorganizational network the group had established, the group met staff from USAID which at the time was very interested in implementing family planning programs through non for profit organizations in Mexico. In this period international development organizations and first world countries had launched an intense political and monetary campaign to introduce and implement population control in the third world. This effort was constructed as the means to economic development and it was targeted to women (Ramirez-Valles 1998). Indeed, in 1973 Mexico’s government declared population growth due to high fertility rates an obstacle for development, and enacted a new policy to reduce population growth (Alba and Potter 1986; Turner 1974). The policy called for a massive distribution of contraceptives, sex education, and “enhancing” women’s position in the family and the labor market (United Nations 1989). This policy was (and still is) carried out through women’s community work. Welfare agencies since then have been recruiting and training women community workers to deliver contraceptive methods and other health care services (Ramirez-Valles, 1999). Some of AMAS’ members, as it will be seen later, have participated in those state-sponsored programs.

The encounter between Mrs. Leon de Vicario’s group and USAID led to the formation of AMAS. USAID provided ample financial support for several years for AMAS to be formally structured and extend its health programs. USAID assisted AMAS to become a formal organization using the model of not for profit organizations in the US (Cernea 1989). A board of directors was created and professional staff hired and trained to run AMAS. Mrs. Leon de Vicario became the president of AMAS. Some members of the initial group became part of the board and others part of the administrative staff. Thus women of the upper class and middle class professionals were located at the top of AMAS.

AMAS and USAID also combined their experiences to design the community-based strategy to conduct family planning and economic development programs for women. This strategy consisted in recruiting women to be community workers. These women, preferable existing working class leaders, were to be recruited from poor neighborhoods in which AMAS wanted to target its activities and trained in reproductive health and contraceptive technology. Women community workers were thought of as the ideal means to educate and recruit other women because they “knew how to talk to poor women.” Women who became experienced community workers would then be appointed as group coordinators of community workers they
had recruited. AMAS, thus, evolved into a pyramid-like structure mirroring social class relations, as other NGOs in Latin America (Young 1997).

Since becoming a NGO, AMAS has received financial support from other international agencies such as Family Planning International, MacArthur Foundation, Population Council, Ford Foundation, Kellogg Foundation, Hewlett Foundation, and the international development agencies of Japan, Canada, Sweden, and United Kingdom. AMAS has also added other programs and activities such as nutrition, family gardens, community banks, and HIV/AIDS prevention. These actions, nonetheless, are all grounded on the same interpretative frame. This frame is what members (e.g., community workers) of this NGO share. As Strong and Dingwall (1983) argue, to be a member of an organization one has to join and share a frame. Individuals are socialized in the organization’s frame in the process of becoming permanent members (Smith 1997). Is to this process that I turn next.

Women Community Workers’ Tales

Women joined AMAS and became community workers through two general paths. One group of women were community activists long before getting in contact with AMAS. Among them there is a subgroup of women who joined AMAS when it was being founded. They are working class neighborhood activists recruited by Mrs. Leon de Vicario, now president of AMAS. They helped build AMAS and were the first community workers. The second group of community workers joined AMAS without previous experience in community activities. For this group their entrance as community workers marked the beginning of a career as community activists.

A. The Community Activists.

Josefa and Fatima are two working class women brought together by Mrs. Leon de Vicario in the early 1970s to join her in doing family planning education in poor neighborhoods and rural towns. They are also the most senior of AMAS’ community workers. When they met Mrs. Leon de Vicario they were working, independently and voluntarily, in neighborhoods and communities on health related and other issues. They met Mrs. Leon de Vicario as she was attempting to enter poor neighborhoods to provide education on reproductive issues to women.

Josefa has been a school teacher and a community activist almost all of her life. She traces her activism to her childhood in a small mining town. Early in her teens and while in school she joined a students’ newspaper. In the first article she wrote, she demanded that mining companies and landlords stopped using the *tienda de raya* (paying wages with companies’ stores coupons). The article was spread around the town creating some agitation. Her father was then told he had an unruly daughter who needed to be controlled. When the father questioned Josefa about the article, she replied to him, “If I’m studying is to defend the people when they are treated unjustly.” Josefa also began teaching when she was in her teens. She volunteered in the national literacy campaign to teach adults. She not only helped adult peasants and mine workers to learn how to read and write, she also taught them how to manage their legal affairs with the state, landlords, and companies owners. Josefa was particularly concerned about poor peasants been cheated and stripped of their properties because of their inability to read and write and ignorance of the law. After finishing elementary school Josefa left her hometown to become a school teacher.
Josefa has always combined her work as a school teacher and community activist. In the surrounding neighborhoods of the school in which she has worked for about twenty years, Josefa has worked on housing and access to basic services issues. These were the same neighborhoods in which Mrs. Leon de Vicario and her group wanted to initiate their work back in the early 1970s. Her encounter with Mrs. Leon de Vicario was marked by a conflict of interests.

I: And now, tell me the history, how was it that you met AMAS?
C: When I started with AMAS, as there were groups before, and there were groups and there were those groups of name only, scam artists, that do nothing but swindle the communities... When I met Mrs. Leon de Vicario who came precisely to a meeting here in this school ... Yes, at that time I didn’t have contact with the principal’s office nor was I in the hygiene or social service programs. I was assigned to materials program... So I saw that Mrs. Leon de Vicario, I saw she looked like a *gringuita* and I boycotted her in all the community.

I: What was she doing?
C: Mrs. Leon de Vicario was organizing her programs. She had about a year and a half organizing... Someone suggested that she come around here, and I boycotted her... I told the people, “here comes a few *gringas* led by that very tall *gringa* that is coming here...” (laughs).

In the introduction of her narrative, Josefa defines herself as representing and defending the interests of those poor communities she had been working with. For Josefa, Mrs. Leon de Vicario was an intruder (e.g., a *gringuita*). That is, Mrs. Leon de Vicario was entering her territory with questionable interests. Josefa, aligning herself with the people she was working with, boycotted the efforts of AMAS’ president. In Josefa’s narrative this was the initial contact and the turning point of her involvement with AMAS. Next, she describes how the conflict began to be solved.

C: [The *gringa*] was Mrs. Leon de Vicario who turned out to be more Mexican than the cactus, and she told me and... and I didn’t go... A few people went, back when here was more populated and there were meetings of up to hundred and fifty to two hundred people... Mrs. Leon de Vicario was very dynamic. After a while she realized I was boycotting her. But there was a person who knew her and called to my attention, “it’s good that you like to speak out, but I ask you to get to know Mrs. Leon de Vicario, she is not the kind of person you think, only getting people by the truckload... she is very committed to this and this and this...” And then I met her one day at the ISSSTE and later at the IMSS hospital, because I was handling the health care things of patients. I was in representation of the union, defending people who weren’t being attended... And Mrs. Leon de Vicario, who is as rebellious as I, she shoved doors. They would not let her in and she shoved...

Now, Josefa begins to change her view of Mrs. Leon de Vicario, realizing that both she and the president may have the same interests. First, she notes that Mrs. Leon de Vicario is “dynamic.” Second, she is told that Mrs. Leon de Vicario is not like the other scam groups, that she is “very committed.” Lastly, she introduces an element of further identification with AMAS’ president as she tells us that Mrs. Leon de Vicario is as “rebellious” as herself. These elements in the narrative indicate that as Josefa had more contact with AMAS’ president an alignment of interests began to emerge and she began to trust Mrs. Leon de Vicario. As she continues her narrative, Josefa encountered further conflicts with AMAS’ agenda.
C: There at the hospital she told me, “let’s go to my house...” So there at her house I started a row once again, believing that she wasn’t to be the ideal person to have as president of AMAS... Once there, as it’s said, as Mrs. Leon de Vicario says that she’s told, “keep the enemy on your side...” Well, I didn’t believe her because of the things that had happened to us that we were abandoned, that people were cheated... I went with Mrs. Leon de Vicario, we had a meeting a... There was another person, I believe a doctor [she names him], very imposing. There he was playing with condoms, making knots and balloons and everything possible, ah... I told him to stop it, and I told him I was to apply the article 27, 4 I believe of the Ministry of Interior, that he couldn’t break our traditions... Believe me, I was very shocked by condoms... That my family was very conservative and condoms were not used. There was no talk, even of pills, only of a dozen children everywhere... So there Mrs. Leon de Vicario, very shrewd, she put some condoms in my purse and about three or four o’clock in the morning I got home, they took me back...

The meeting Josefa attended symbolizes the invitation to join AMAS and its agenda. At this meeting there was, besides her and Mrs. Leon de Vicario, a doctor who at the time was working for USAID’s development programs in Latin America. He was visiting Mrs. Leon de Vicario to talk about creating and sponsoring a program for education and distribution of contraceptive methods among poor women, which eventually evolved in AMAS. For Josefa this was, literally, a foreign idea that she initially refused. The frame of Mrs. Leon de Vicario was not morally accepted by Josefa. In the long meeting, she was invited to join the activities of AMAS. Josefa was invited to align her efforts and interests with those of AMAS. An initial alignment occurred as she ended up with condoms in her purse. Her “conversion” --i.e., the actual alignment-- occurred the following day. Later in the story, Josefa says that the next day, while she was sleeping, her son took the condoms and went out to play with them. Then, in the evening,

C: ... and then, somebody knocked at my door, that instead of the boy playing with the condoms, they were my neighbors who were truck drivers. [They said] that instead, I should give the condoms to them ... Well, I didn’t know that much about condoms, so... Okay, okay I told them yes, that I would give them condoms...

Thus, her alignment came as she realized that AMAS’ frame (e.g., distributing condoms to help people) was congruent with what the people needed. In this manner, Josefa’s initial opposition to this type of activity was eliminated. Her alignment with AMAS’ frame is presented by Josefa’s story not as a result of an imposition or manipulation. Rather, it was the product of her realizing (or “seeing”) that there was a need among working class and poor people. In this manner, she emphasizes her agency and her role as working on behalf of poor people’s needs. From that day on Josefa has worked with AMAS as a community worker.

Josefa’s narrative reconstructs, quite eloquently, the frame alignment process by which women are recruited and become participants and members of a NGO. In this particular instance Josefa’s story reconstructs the frame alignment process as a frame transformation (Snow et al. 1986). This is characteristic of recruitment processes in which there are tensions or conflicts between the potential member’s and the NGO’s frame. The potential member’s frame is changed through a negotiation process to eliminate dissonance. Josefa’s first contact with AMAS is seen with distrust and AMAS’ frame as unacceptable. This first interpretation is then transformed as Josefa has more contact with AMAS and sees that its frame does reflect people’s needs. As a result, Josefa joins AMAS’ frame. This reconstruction of the process, however, does not imply
causality or the “actual” sequence of events. The temporal order of the events in Josefa’s narrative should not be confused with a “real” temporal order. That is, it cannot be inferred from this narrative that women’s recruitment process and its frame alignment occur in a causal chain of events, as represented here. What can be inferred from the narrative is that to call oneself a member of a NGO, one has to present oneself as sharing a particular frame. Moreover, this frame alignment process is experienced not as imposed, but as a result of an interactive process between two rational agents (e.g., a woman community worker and AMAS).

Fatima, a 67 years old woman, was also doing community work before becoming a member of AMAS, and met Mrs. Leon de Vicario around the same time Josefa did. Fatima began community work when she married and moved to a small rural town. There she and her husband organized residents to bring public services. They also led a group of residents in the efforts to beautify the town. When their only son entered school, Fatima became very active in school committees and activities. Later, an illness experience led her to community activities on health issues. When Fatima got tuberculosis she needed to go every month to the city for medical treatment. She went to the medical center of the SSA, where medical services were free. Her own illness and the patients she met in those visits made her realize she could do something to help other people in a similar situation. As she recollects, “I thought that there might be many people with tuberculosis who don’t know they have it ... how many people may be prevented from an illness like this?” Then she began talking to her neighbors and offering to take them to the city for free screenings. Fatima soon became a liaison between the SSA center in the city and her town assisting the ill with transportation and collecting money for those in need.

Fatima’s encounter with Mrs. Leon Vicario was in a hospital. One day Fatima was contacted by a group of women who came to ask her help for a woman who had cancer. The woman had five children and no money for medications. Fatima right away took on the responsibility. She went on a television program requesting support for the ill woman. With the assistance of some anonymous donors that responded to her call she secured rent, food, and medicines for the woman and her children. Fatima was also able to take the woman to the best hospital in the city. One day as the she was visiting the woman in the hospital, she came across Mrs. Leon de Vicario, who happened to be one of the anonymous donors and was also visiting the ill woman. Mrs. Leon de Vicario then invited Fatima to her house and eventually to work with her in AMAS.

C: and from there I began working in family planning. I started going with her to the colonias in the city.... we did not begin doing family planning programs here in the town until later.

Unlike the other community worker, Josefa, Fatima did not have a conflict between her previous work and interests and AMAS’ frame. The frame alignment process as recreated by Fatima’s story is characterized as one of “bridging” (Snow et. al. 1986). That is, both Fatima and AMAS had a complementary frame. This particular process of bridging is the most common among the group of community workers who had previous experience in community work.

Josefa and Fatima are a significant part of AMAS’ life as they were the first women to become community workers. These two working class women helped build AMAS by becoming the model for community workers, recruiting other women, giving educational talks in poor neighborhoods, and organizing community groups. For Josefa and Fatima becoming part of AMAS signified the acquisition of a particular interpretative frame and access to resources for their already existing community work. Moreover, the contact of these two women with AMAS
was an encounter of two groups of women from two different class positions. The upper class group, led by Mrs. Leon de Vicario, provided the financial resources, fundraising skills, and professional knowledge. This group was also the link between the development discourse--and its international funding agencies--and the targets of development: poor women in the third world.

After Josefa and Fatima and once AMAS was established, other women community activists were recruited. These women were neighborhood activists, or were doing voluntary work on family planning, long before being recruited into AMAS. Some of them were first contacted by AMAS staff or other community workers, others contacted AMAS on their own initiative looking for resources for their communities. Magdalena’s story illustrates the latter case. Magdalena is a community worker in her mid forties and lives in a rural area, where she moved to take care of her ill mother.

I: You say you have been for some time working on helping people, how was it that you began...? Do you remember?
C: ... I began helping because I had knowledge as a midwife and nurse. So I began helping people who had no resources. There was no IMSS, no clinics like there are now and it was what I...
I: What did you start doing?
C: I began with... little by little. I coordinated with a [doctor] from here.
I: Private...?
C: Private, and he told me whatever case he’d help us, he facilitated medicines or provided credit... I formed a group of young women, the name was voluntary youth auxiliary club, to help those people in need of resources... We did activities... to raise money, and with the activities we paid the medicine we owed in the drug store or to the physician who helped us. We paid the electricity of the dispensary, the rent and everything...
I: And how many of there were you?
C: There were seventeen young females and males.
I: So you always did your community activities around health?
C: ... Yes, it’s a little chain because once inside, one [is asked], “well why don’t you work on this...?” Then the mayor who was about to start, who started at that time, told me, “I need someone to help me, you know very well the public farms and everything...” And so he sent me ... I started to work as a social worker also in the mayor’s office... We used to go to the public farms to give talks, right? All was on hygiene. I was not yet with AMAS, because I was working with the IMSS.
I: Doing what? What did you do with the IMSS?
C: On family planning, I was also a volunteer ... And from there then is a little chain. Later to other activity, then another, and one gets involved...

Before contacting AMAS, Magdalena had a vast experience of working on family planning and other health issues in rural areas. She had been recruited first by the local government and then by IMSS. In this previous work she acquired the experience and the interpretative frame to work on educating and distributing contraceptive methods. Magdalena’s contact with AMAS came about through the interorganizational networks between AMAS and the state health care agencies.

C: To work with AMAS, they only wanted me to distribute condoms and give talks ... AMAS didn’t want me with all my people because there were too many...
I: How come AMAS wouldn’t accept you?
C: No, because initially I came to AMAS with all my own community workers and users. I had all the public farms coordinated already, so they told me no, that they could support me with condoms only, not with pills, because there were a lot... And so I began with AMAS only with that, distributing condoms and giving talks.

I: You gave reproductive health talks?

C: Yes, in every public farm I had to give twenty eight talks each month... I passed that of the twenty eight talks per month for a long time. Then it was when AMAS accepted me as a community worker.

I: And how did you know about AMAS?

C: The SSA... They were the ones who told me to go to AMAS. But AMAS didn’t want me because I had too many people organized, community workers and users and they did not accept that... I: How? What did they tell you?

C: That they didn’t have enough material to supply me. They only supplied me with condoms.

The involvement of Magdalena is characterized by previous work with state agencies, which was very similar to the work of community workers in AMAS. Her initial contact with AMAS was the result of the relation between state agencies and AMAS. Her account also tells that she was “a seeker.” She was not sought by AMAS, instead she was looking for an organization that would provide her with resources (e.g., contraceptive methods) for her work. Thus, her joining AMAS was almost only a matter of having a first contact with AMAS.

Likewise, other community workers grouped under this category of activists had worked with a state agency (e.g., IMSS, SSA) before joining AMAS. Some of them had received training such as first aid, contraceptive methods, and midwifery. Others had just participated as volunteers in community health related programs, including distribution of contraceptive methods. Unlike Magdalena, the other community workers were all contacted first by a staff member of AMAS. For instance, Doña Victoria, who is a midwife, was first contacted by AMAS family gardens’ staff. Doña Victoria is 62 years old now and she began practicing midwifery in her early twenties in the farm where her husband used to work. She learned midwifery on her own, taking care of the deliveries of cows in the farm. The women in the farm knew of her abilities and started requesting her assistance for their own deliveries. Doña Victoria created a system to record her work because she was afraid of potential legal problems. For each delivery she assisted, she requested the woman and her husband or father to sign a waiver that whatever went wrong with the delivery she was not to be held responsible. She went as far as to turn these records to the mayor’s office. When the mayor’s wife learned of Doña Victoria’s work, she gave her a brand new equipment and supplies to work. Later the SSA’s medical center of her native state recruited her. There she received formal training and got a license to work on behalf of the SSA for a small stipend.

When SSA implemented community-based health programs in Doña Victoria’s home state, she was invited to work as a community worker, as she remembers.

C: I started doing community work years later, after I had a lot of experience as a midwife ... my work as a midwife led me to community work because the director of the SSA center told us that it was better to have midwives working as community workers in family planning than to have women with no knowledge about deliveries.
Years later Doña Victoria’s family emigrated to the city where AMAS is located. There the family joined hundreds of other families to take over a land in the outskirts of the city and create a new colonia. There Doña Victoria met AMAS staff.

I: and how did you hear about AMAS?
C: ... through the agronomists from AMAS’ family gardens.
I: ah, they came here?
C: I asked for them because when we created this colonia there were a lot of snakes, scorpions, and lots of spiders.
C: So then... I thought, based on all my experience in my home town, and I went to one of the city’s community centers. I took samples of the snakes and the spiders in jars. I presented all of this in a meeting we had.
C: Right away they sent Mr. Garcia and Luis [both agronomists working with AMAS]. They started coming to the colonia and meeting with us [the group of women], and all the women we shipped in to buy the poison to kill all the animals and to pay for the fumigator, right? And we did that, it took us about three years...
I: and then they invited you to join AMAS?
C: They invited me, but let me tell you how. After we fumigated, the agronomists asked us if we wanted to grow small vegetable gardens... so they brought the seeds and all we needed. When we got some vegetables they invited us to make preserves...
I: Yes, I remember that they were teaching how to make preserves at that time.
C: Then I brought the people together and we began making preserves of corn and chile and of other things, later we made donuts and sausages... and then one day that we were to make preserves of pears and mayonnaise, a neighbor came looking for me, the owner of the house told me, “Doña Victoria, someone is looking for you.” I asked “who is it?” She said that it was Juan that I needed to go to Ema’s because she was feeling sick and perhaps about to deliver... then Mr. Garcia [the agronomist] told me, “please go Doña Victoria and good for you, how come you hadn’t told me you were a midwife...?” Then one of the women told him that I had already assisted a couple of deliveries here. Mr. Garcia told me to go, “go and take care of that patient and if you need transportation or whatever please let us know...” So I went to Ema’s and indeed she was sick but it was an incomplete delivery...

Ema’s condition was critical and Doña Victoria could do little to help save the pregnancy. She called an ambulance to take Ema to the hospital. The baby was born with several birth defects and still born. This event, however, made Doña Victoria’s skills noticeable to AMAS staff.

C: ... Mr. Garcia and Luis then became aware of my work. So the next day they came and asked me what had happened with Ema. I told them what happened and then they said, “look Doña Victoria, you know what...? What you need is someone to endorse you, don’t do that work just like that...” And I said, “well I only assist the delivery, they [the police] can’t come after me, what am I supposed to do? To tell the women I can’t help them...?” Mr. Garcia said, “is preferable that you have someone supporting you, what do you think about joining AMAS’ family planning program?... I told him, “look, last year Mrs. Josefa came here...”
C: And in a meeting here she proposed me for a community worker position, but the leader of the colonia said no, that I was too old... the leader knew of my work because I helped the wife of his friend, but he said I was too old to take that job... then Mrs. Josefa got very upset and yelled “no, no mister, we the old ones are the most brave ones...” (laughs).

C: You know how Mrs. Josefa is. So I asked her not to insist. They nominated someone else ... later a social worker and the doctor [from AMAS] came to talk to me.

C: They visited me and asked me to go to AMAS for a meeting. I told them I was afraid the other community worker and the people would get suspicious of me ... so in that meeting the administrator told me I was to be the community worker for the colonia and perhaps later become a coordinator. He said, “because you have done a great job with the vegetable gardens...” So I told him, “but we have a community worker there already.” And he said, “yes, but that community worker has been there three years and done nothing, she has no groups to work with... as a matter of fact, Mr. Garcia has asked her to get a group of people together to work in the vegetable gardens, but every time they go either the group is not there or she doesn’t show up.”

A side of the problems encountered with the leader of the colonia, Doña Victoria’s recruitment was relatively easy. She, as some other women community workers who have worked with the state health agencies, had experience in this type of work and had a complementary frame to work on distributing contraceptive methods and other health related activities in the community. Doña Victoria, like some of her comrades, already had an established reputation as informal leader and as knowledgeable on health issues in her neighborhood. Thus, the alignment process in cases such as this one is characterized by a bridging between two (e.g., women’s and AMAS’) complementary frames. For women like Doña Victoria health work becomes part of their history of community activism, and AMAS the means to continue and broaden their work.

B. The Newcomers.

This final group of women had no experience in community activism when they joined AMAS. Many of them did not have a formal job either. They were recruited by AMAS staff or other community workers. A common pattern among this group of women is that their first contact with AMAS was either through social networks, as patients in AMAS’ clinic, or as users of contraceptive methods. The story of Juana illustrates the first case. Juana is 37 years old, married with three children, and has been with AMAS for almost five years.

I: How did you begin to get involved and participate in community activities?

C: Look, I used to live in the town across the road so ah... I started as a community, well, I was a [contraceptive method] user with Luz [a woman community worker] but I didn’t know her as friends but through another community worker who then told me... I got pregnant of my boy who is now five years, and financially I was doing very bad. Well, even now, but I was worse. I didn’t have for to pay the delivery. So this community worker did me the favor of talking with Luz and to give me passes to go for free to the clinic for the treatment I needed every month... Then she told me that she would give me the passes and
Juana’s first contact with AMAS came through her social network. One member of her social network was a community worker. Juana was not initially interested in joining AMAS, but on getting assistance for her pregnancy and delivery. The community worker, however, took this opportunity to recruit her. Next Juana narrates how she became committed to continue as a community worker.

C: So I asked her to tell me how I could do it, see? Frankly, I got interested the first time because they were to help me with my delivery, see? I didn’t get interested because I was to help people but because they were to help me... But from there on I... When I moved to this part of town, I was to give up the program, by then I had left bed. So I said to myself, “but if I give this up...” It was like I had liked it... At first I did it let’s say for my own benefit, because they were to help me and because she was giving me a hand and also AMAS, see? But later it wasn’t that, I liked it, see? And to this date I like it...

Juana’s initial work as a community worker, according to her narrative, was what created an alignment with AMAS’ frame, which then translated into a commitment to continue as a community worker.

This case illustrates one of the dominant patterns of recruitment among the newcomers. The first step of their involvement with AMAS is an initial contact through social networks. As the literature on social movements indicates, social networks, particularly among women, are the richest sources of recruitment (Cable, 1992). Women tend to recruit friends, acquaintances, and relatives through their social networks. However, according to this account, the social network is not enough, an alignment process needs to occur. Juana’s narrative indicates that the frame alignment did not occur until later, as she did some work as a community worker. This sequence of events in the narrative highlights this woman’s agency. She was not “manipulated” to join AMAS, but she made the decision to join it by herself.

The second most common recruitment process among the newcomers is through semi-public spaces such as work places, streets, and bars. This is usually the case of all women community workers recruited in the HIV/AIDS prevention program for female sex workers and for factory workers. Women factory workers are recruited directly by AMAS staff members at their work places. In this specific case, AMAS has an agreement with the factory management to conduct health education programs among its workers. These programs are frequently conducted in the factory facilities but after work. In rare instances, such as in production breaks, management allows workers to participate in the programs during their paid time. Hence, the initial contact between women factory workers and AMAS is mediated by the factory plant. Once the contact is made, AMAS staff invites groups of workers to attend educational talks once a week. In these talks, workers are invited to become part of AMAS.

The first contact among women sex workers is illustrated in Rosario’s account.

I: Now let’s talk about the program...

C: ... I had, I believe, some two years I believe with my man, or three... when I met Antonieta [the program director]... who... was in company of... of two social workers who were working at that time... They were field workers... So Antonieta proposed me, right?, if I wanted to... participate in a health program, if I wanted to come to some talks and...
Rosario is in her late thirties, she works as a sex worker and lives with her male partner of three years in a one-room home they recently built in the skirts of the city. Rosario has lived most of her adult life in red light districts, and has no previous experience in community work aside of the informal and daily exchanges of support and resources in her social network. Rosario has been a community worker for about five years, almost since AMAS began its HIV/AIDS prevention programs. During these five years Rosario has become a leader of a group of female sex workers doing prevention work in the red districts of the city. However, Rosario’s first contact with AMAS, as told in her narrative, was characterized as an encounter between strangers with little in common and distrust.

C: Well, we back then ah, distrusted people a lot and I actually didn’t want. I told her no. Then they ... invited us to some meetings about health that we held right there in the bar, because I work in [one of the red districts]... So we started having the talks there, and so some of us were very suspicious. We even left saying, “hum, they don’t teach a thing, they know nothing...” (laughs).

The next step in Rosario’s recruitment after her first contact is not an invitation to join AMAS or to become a community worker, but an invitation to an activity. As Snow and colleagues (1980) show, this invitation is very common in recruitment processes among social movements and religious organizations. People are not initially invited to join a NGO, but to participate in an activity. However, the first contact and invitation are sometimes encountered with distrust. The reluctance to accept right away an invitation by AMAS is constructed in Rosario’s narrative as a distrust of strangers, as questioning the real interests of AMAS. This reluctance is overcome later through an increased contact with AMAS staff.

C: You see? But back then no, in reality we didn’t understand... (laughs). Later I saw, right?, that these persons came, you know, with good intentions. That’s why one distrusts people, because all the people one meets most of the time, the people that approach you is to get something out of you...
I: To use you...?
C: Right, right? Let’s say that they make a friendship with you so that later, “can I borrow an x amount of money”, or “give me x amount.” And no, well, in reality we didn’t trust people... But we saw later, right?, that these persons had good thoughts. They started telling us what was it about. They even started telling me, right?, that it was a program in which we were taught, we were trained to teach other people what we learned... So I saw that there were good things... At that time they formed a little school.

C: They formed a little school and I, I was a... student of the school, of the elementary class they formed. Back then we were let’s say about seventeen persons who went to the school. [A social worker] taught one group, Antonieta other, and [a social worker] another group of women... Then they started doing dance contests in the bar. So I saw, right?, that there were good things what they taught us. To make a long story short... now, right? I am a community worker of the program.

The recruitment process of Rosario is described by a frame alignment similar to the one found in Josefa’s case, that is, a frame transformation. AMAS’ programs and activities did not initially resonate with Rosario. The narrative describes that as Rosario participated in more activities organized by AMAS staff, she acquired motives and reasons to join AMAS. Thus, the activities
provided the social interactions through which initial doubts were cleared, and reasons to become a community worker emerged. For the newcomers having been contacted by AMAS staff represents their initiation into community work, and the acquisition of a frame to work in the community.

**DISCUSSION**

Research on women’s community activism while focusing on the cultural and structural factors that shape collective mobilization, has overlooked the question of how women actually become activists and members of a NGO or a social movement and how they construct an agenda for mobilization. In other words, past research has emphasized the macro processes of collective action, ignoring its micro processes. In this paper I have attempted to address this question by presenting a case study of a recruitment process among Mexican women community workers members of a NGO. I analyzed both the NGO and women’s stories of how they became community workers. Based on this case study, I argue that women join a movement or NGO by means of a frame alignment process and that this process has three features. 1) It mediates between structural and cultural factors and the individual women to make community activism possible. 2) It is a negotiation process constituted by the life stories women bring into their activism and the NGO in which they are recruited. 3) It is shaped by translocal actors, such as local states and international institutions as they promote agendas for women’s mobilization throughout the third world.

The recruitment of women into NGOs and community work is not the result of random events. The women’s narratives presented here tell of a recruitment process and a frame alignment which are necessary conditions for women to join an organization or movement. Although it is difficult to develop from these women’s narratives a pattern of recruitment, there are some common themes, which explain how working class women enter community work. First, some women are community activists before becoming members of a NGO. These women have experience and leadership positions among their neighborhood groups. Thus, because of their work women who are already activists will either be recruited by the NGO, which needs to build a base or reach a group, or they will approach the NGO seeking resources for their community work. Second, interpersonal and interorganizational networks facilitate first contacts and recruitment. As Snow and colleagues (1980) argue, non-members who are linked to one or more NGO members through social networks are likely to, at least, be invited to join the NGO. Similarly, if an organization has an open network with other organizations it can have access to a larger pool of potential recruits. Third, for women to join a NGO and community work a frame alignment has to occur. The frame alignment process takes place during the interactions between women potential recruits and NGO members and staff. In this process potential recruits learn about the NGO’s interpretative frame (e.g., worldview) and align it with their own interpretative frames. Through the alignment process women become to share the NGO’s frame and create a collective identity. This collective identity is produced as the women community workers, as a group, define a common frame or orientation for their actions (Strong and Dingwall 1983; Larana, Hank, and Gusfield 1994). Finally, the creation of a common frame and a collective identity is experienced not as an imposition or manipulation, but as the product of an interactive process, a negotiation. Women potential recruits exercise their agency as they make decisions to contact or join the organization.
Women came into contact with the NGO and eventually become community workers in the area of health within a broader context constituted by: a) international agencies and the Mexican state’s frame of population control through community participation; and b) the women’s own life stories. This NGO started, at least in part, because of the financial support of international agencies for population control programs targeting women. Some of the women in this NGO were first trained and worked as community workers with the state agencies IMSS and SSA. Thus, international development institutions and the Mexican state created a space and a frame for women to participate as community activists and for NGOs to serve as the means of community activism. They created a structural availability and a frame for action. As Naples (1991) has argued in the case of women in the United States, these translocal factors work as socializing agents for women’s activism. On one hand, they help create the spaces, resources, and channels for women to act in their communities. On the other hand, these actors create a (macro) frame (e.g., agenda and content of community work) for women to act. Through these means of socializing, translocal actors also promote, and invite women to act with, a particular social identity (e.g., community workers, caregivers) and a view of the world. Thus, the role of translocal actors in women’s local community activism has two potential and paradoxical consequences. It provides women a legitimatization to organize and act in their communities, churches, political parties and other organizations outside the home. It also provides women specific skills and training which women could employ to develop political and organizational spaces beyond the limits of the frame of a particular NGO or movement. Yet, the spaces opened for women and the macro frame promoted by translocal actors such as international agencies redefine and contain working class women’s actions. In the case presented here, women’s motives, grievances, and actions are re-framed within a medical discourse and the identity of community worker. This frame as deployed by NGOs and state-sponsored programs also works to monitor members’ (e.g., community workers) actions (Smith 1997). Finally, as women’s activism is channeled through organizations such as NGOs, it becomes a professional or technical task and service (Chuchryk 1994). Its political and cultural features are dissipated.

Working class women’s community work, however, is not a direct and sole outcome of international and national political forces. While international development agencies, local states, and NGOs create an space and an agenda for women to participate as community workers they do not and can not dictate women’s participation and agenda. These forces constitute only a factor in women’s community work. What stands between these forces and the concrete actions of individual women is a mediating process that takes place at the local level. This process is constituted by the life histories, meanings, social context, and narratives women bring into their activism. It is in this process that women’s grievances and motives for participation are produced and articulated through negotiation. In the process of becoming community workers and joining a NGO, working class women negotiate their individual narratives with that of the local NGO and the macro narratives of international development institutions and the state. Women evaluate their roles as mothers, housewives, community activists, and workers and their world views in light of the potential responsibilities as members of a NGO, the personal and collective benefits they may obtain, and the NGO’s world view.
NOTES
1. Throughout this paper the following letters are used to identify the participants in the interview excerpts: I for the interviewer, C for woman community worker.
2. Institute of Social Security and Services for State Workers, the health welfare agency for the federal bureaucracy.
3. Mexican Institute of Social Security, the largest health and welfare agency for employees in the private sector.
4. She is referring to a former version of the current 33rd Constitutional article. This article refers to foreigners in the country. In one section it reads: “Foreigners could not, in any way, interfere in the political affairs of the country.” (Constitución Política de los Estados Unidos Mexicanos, 1990: 38-39.)

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