

**“Globalization from below”?
Uncovering the nuances in grassroots/transnational mobilization**

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Abstract

This thesis offers a micro-level analysis of labour and women's organizing in the context of globalization through the case study of the Comité Fronterizo de Obrer@s (CFO) from 1978 to 2009. We will see how one organization's journey can give us insights into the complexities of local organizing and transnational networking in the context of globalization. This case study can be seen as a lens through which we can examine the changing context of labour and women's organizing in the distinct maquiladora environment. My work positions itself in the "globalization from above" and "globalization from below" debate, specifically around the question of transnational social movements that form the "globalization from below" category in the context of a political economy analysis. However, where my thesis differs from a more traditional analysis of the resistance to globalization, such as that found in the global justice movements or alter-globalization movements, is in its focus on the complexities of organizing at the local level and the pressures that these local organizations feel from "above" from their transnational partners. What this thesis adds to the literature are the stories from the actual members of the organization, about the structure, the decision-making process of their organization, the role of the leadership and the connections between the local organizing and the transnational civil society partners.

The complex history of an organization that has been there since the beginning of the maquiladora industry allows us a better understanding of the changing conditions and struggles these workers have faced. This journey through the history of the CFO, the richness of this empirical data encompassing more than 30 years of organizing in the maquiladora zone of

Northern Mexico also allows us to explore “globalization from below” through different lens. This thesis brings in a micro-detail analysis of a specific organization in a specific context where we can see clearly transnational civil society linkages and the impact of globalizing capitalist neoliberal economy. As such, this research can offer us new insights into the intricacies of local-global linkages and thus contribute to an area often neglected or underdeveloped in international relations (IR).

INTRODUCTION

The tension between transnational mobilization tactics and grassroots mobilization needs from 1978-2009¹

Ciudad Acuña, Coahuila, Mexico, November 4, 2006. The Comité Fronterizo de Obrer@s (Border Committee of Women Workers) or CFO,² an internationally renowned community-based grassroots organization of (women) maquiladora³ workers and the case study for this thesis, is having a two-day workshop to which I am invited as a participant observer. I show up eager to see first-hand the organizational activities described so eloquently in the literature and the over 1,700 pages of archives I have perused on the organization: consciousness-raising activities such as role-playing to learn about their rights as workers in the maquiladoras. Instead, I find myself in a downtown hotel restaurant near rowdy nightclubs, in a noisy section of a city that has been dubbed the “Vegas of Mexico,” listening to a formal presentation by Ben Davis from the AFL-CIO (Davis is currently the international affairs director of the United Steelworkers Union [USW] in the United States). He is giving the CFO members a presentation on how to establish a collective agreement for approximately 9,000 Alcoa⁴ maquiladora workers in Ciudad Acuña in the hopes that they may form their own independent union that could be an affiliate of the AFL-CIO and the USW. The CFO annual meeting, which also took place in Ciudad Acuña from November 18 to 20, 2006, was a continuation of this theme and focused on

¹ This work was carried out with the aid of a grant from the International Development Research Centre, Ottawa, Canada. Information on the Centre is available on the web at www.idrc.ca.

² The @ symbol in the name Comité Fronterizo de Obrer@s was adopted by the organization to represent both the masculine Obreros and the feminine Obreras and is also translated as Border Committee of Workers depending on the intended audience.

³ Maquiladoras are foreign-owned factories operating in Mexico which import materials in order to transform and re-export them. They are usually textile, electronics and machinery assembly factories that are located in low-wage zones and that benefit from the free trade agreements established to attract transnational corporations to locate in particular areas such as Mexico’s northern border region.

⁴ Alcoa is a large transnational company which, according to its website, “is the world’s leading producer of primary and fabricated aluminum, as well as the world’s largest miner of bauxite and refiner of alumina [...] Alcoa employs approximately 61,000 people in 30 countries across the world” (Alcoa 2013).

how the CFO members could become leaders in their maquiladoras and recruit their co-workers into forming an independent union. They were in essence training the CFO members to become union organizers. The majority of the weekend meeting was spent in presentations from representatives of unions or the Mexico-U.S. Border program director of the American Friends and Services Committee (AFSC) to the Mexican maquiladora workers. These included a union organizing workshop, a presentation on the political and social context in Mexico in 2006 by Ricardo Hernandez of the AFSC and, finally, a presentation on international solidarity between workers and the United Steelworkers Union by Jim Robinson, director of USW District 7.

These interactions bring to the forefront the tensions that exist between grassroots organizing and transnational mobilizing. The local workers mostly sit quietly listening while the transnational organizations coordinate the meeting. These tensions are representative of the larger focus of this thesis: the dynamics of local/transnational organizing and the pressures that transnational partners can impose on local organizations. This thesis seeks to offer a micro-level analysis of labour and women's organizing in the context of globalization through the case study of the Comité Fronterizo de Obrer@s (CFO) from its beginnings as the idea of organizing women maquiladora workers was formed in the AFSC offices in 1978 to the end of the relationship between the CFO and the AFSC in 2009. We will see how focusing on the specific can help us understand the more general, how one organization's journey can give us insights into the complexities of local organizing and transnational networking in the context of globalization. This will be accomplished through an in-depth case study of an organization whose objective (or at least one of its objectives) is to help women and men maquiladora workers improve their working and living conditions through the ever-changing manifestations of globalization.

Research questions

In seeking to understand the intricacies and the dynamics of local/transnational organizing, this thesis will ask the following questions: What are the connections between local and transnational organizations seeking to resist “globalization from above” with “globalization from below”? Are these equal partnerships or do the pressures and constraints imposed from the transnational organizations that provide the necessary funds for the receiving-end activists constitute another form of “globalization from above”? And, finally, how do these pressures or constraints affect the local grassroots aspect of organizing?

Significance of research

This thesis proceeds with the case study of the CFO as part of something larger: this case study can be seen as a lens through which we can examine the changing context of labour and women’s organizing in the distinct maquiladora environment. My work positions itself in the “globalization from above” and “globalization from below” debate, specifically around the question of transnational social movements that form the “globalization from below category” in the context of a political economy analysis. However, where my thesis differs from a more traditional analysis of the resistance to globalization, such as that found in the analyses of the global justice movements or alter-globalization movements, is that it focuses on the complexities of organizing at the local level and the pressures that these local organizations feel from “above” from their transnational partners. Normally, a study of “globalization from below” entails studying a network or coalition or social forum that form this civil society from below. However, not much attention has been paid to the individual organizations within these networks or coalitions to see how this mobilizing in their name affects these grassroots members, nor has

much attention been paid to how transnational partners impose a series of pressures or constraints from “above.”

Many analyses have been written about transnational networks or alliances and some analyses have even included local organizations in the transnational networks (see Williford 2009 for a recent example of trying to bridge the local and global in the study of transnational mobilizing). However, when the local organization is studied and interviews are conducted, they are usually conducted with the leaders of the organizations and therefore provide a more official story of the organization in question. What this thesis adds to the literature is the story from the actual members of the organization, about the structure, the decision-making process of their organization, the role of the leadership and the connections between the local organizing and the transnational civil society partners.

The Comité Fronterizo de Obrer@s: Empowering women from the ground up?

Among academics and social activists who concentrate on Mexico–U.S. border issues, the CFO is known as one of the first organizations that is of and for Mexican workers in the maquiladoras and that empowers women from the ground up. The CFO is also known as an organization that has participated in many transnational efforts, such as working with women in the maquiladoras in Guatemala to help them develop their own strategies; participating in the Fourth World Conference of Women in Beijing in 1995; working in conjunction with Human Rights Watch to bring attention to the issue of forced pregnancy testing in the maquiladoras; and being instrumental in the creation of the Coalition for Justice in the Maquiladoras (CJM). The CFO provided most of the preliminary information that led to the creation of the CJM in 1990 (AFSC

1990b) and CFO members sat on the CJM board of directors until it left the coalition in 2001 (Julia Quiñonez, Interview # 1). These analyses represent the dual discourse of the CFO. It is a community-based organization whose first and foremost priority is to help the workers who are its members. However, it is also an organization that with the help of the American Friends and Service Committee (AFSC) has become a voice to the outside world about the working conditions of the maquiladora workers. There is an idealized notion that views the CFO as a grassroots organization espousing direct democratic principles while at the same time playing a key role on an international scale. This is an image that is cultivated by the CFO. Competing for scarce resources internationally means that an organization has to project a marketable image for the large funding agencies. International funding is of the utmost importance if the CFO wants to continue with its work. In this thesis, I will explore the struggles the organization now faces internally because of these dual objectives of being a grassroots organization that stays true to its members and being an internationally important organization that must obtain sufficient international donor funds in order to survive.

Although there does not seem to be an agreement among academic researchers as to whether or not the CFO is more of a local grassroots organization or a transnational one, many authors do consider the CFO to be a feminist organization, or at the very least a women's organization with some feminist goals. Armbruster, for example, when explaining community-based organizations in his typologies of cross-national labour organizing, refers to the CFO as an example of community-based organizing that is closely related to feminism and the women's movement (1995: 81). Domínguez, a specialist on women's movements in Latin America and transnational actors, also sees the CFO (2002: 227) as an NGO that is part of a larger women's movement and

one that has found alternative ways to help workers claim their rights through the use of transnational networking. These include the birth of the CFO, which resulted from transnational solidarity with the American Friends Service Committee (2002: 226-227). Domínguez gives other examples of transnational activist networks (TANs) in which the CFO has participated, such as the 1996 Human Rights Watch (HRW) campaign to stop pregnancy testing in the maquiladoras, its work with U.S. unions and its work with other international campaigns such as the one to eradicate child labour (2002: 227-230). In her 2006 book, *Unexpected Power: Conflict and Change among Transnational Activist Networks*, Hertel goes into more detail regarding the CFO's role in the HRW campaign against forced pregnancy testing in the maquiladoras and is explicit about the CFO being a women's organization as well as a workers' rights organization. She states that Mexican activists such as those involved with the CFO were instrumental in the campaign. Huesca, in his in-depth fieldwork study of the CFO's daily organizing activities, a study that spanned from 1997 to 2002 in the cities of Reynosa, Rio Bravo and Matamoros, Tamaulipas, Mexico, also describes the CFO as a grassroots labour organization and a women's organization (Huesca 2006).⁵

The CFO was created as part of the American Friends Service Committee's Maquiladora Project in the late 1970s. The AFSC is a religious Quaker organization based in the United States, whose objectives are to promote peace and social justice throughout the world (AFSC 2005b). In the late 1970s and early 1980s, members of the AFSC became aware of the poor working conditions for women maquiladoras employees in Mexico's Northern Border Region and started teaching them about their rights. The AFSC's publications explain that those workers who participated in

⁵ See also Kohout (1999), Rosenberg (2006) and Petros (2007) for examples of studies of the CFO that describe it as both a women and a labour organization simultaneously.

the first consciousness-raising efforts went on to form the Comité Fronterizo de Obrer@s (Tong 1999: 74). In 1986, the CFO was established (Hernandez 2004b) and began its road to independence but still remained in large part under the tutelage of the AFSC. Finally, in 1998, the CFO became completely independent when it opened its own office in Piedras Negras, Coahuila, and acquired the status of *asociación civil* (recognized non-profit organization) in Mexico (AFSC 1999: 89).

The CFO logo of empty hands interlocking (see Figure 1.1 below) is seen as both a symbolic and actual safeguard against top-down control:

Quaker-like, it opts for the hard, slow road of consensus building and, in the CFO case, of waiting for consciousness, avoiding expedient solutions, and finding strategies that satisfy these goals. *Manos vacias* [empty hands] constitutes the unique CFO difference; this methodology indicates their purity in regard to their internal democracy, a non-negotiable condition.

In a workers' organization, democracy means that, first of all, the people lead and, second of all, power is transparent. The CFO is one of a very few groups in Mexico and perhaps the world that is struggling for this possibility. (Rosenberg 2006: 68)



Figure 1.1: CFO logo

As we can see with the logo and the description given above by Rosenberg, there is a clear goal in the choice of the interlocking hands, one of consciousness-raising, transparency of power, consensus-building and grassroots democracy. The choice of the symbol of empty hands is not

an accident; it was chosen to convey a very strong public image of the CFO as a grassroots organization that is not organized as a hierarchical organization but as one that gives a voice to the local members.

The pressures from “above” in the “globalization from below” category

The CFO has been marketed as a being part of civil society’s “globalization from below” response to the “globalization from above” of transnational corporations from its very beginnings. In fact, it was created because a “globalization from below” local organization did not exist when it came to the grassroots organizing of maquiladora workers in Northern Mexico at that time (late 1970s). How globalization was perceived by the transnational advocacy network, the American Friends and Service Committee (AFSC) that helped create the CFO and how best to respond to the negative effects of globalization for maquiladora workers greatly influenced the way the CFO would be marketed as an organization before the “grassroots” efforts were even underway. The major changes in the CFO history — its creation, its move to an independent organization and its move away from grassroots women’s organizing towards more union-like organizing — can all be linked to changes in funding opportunities by large NGOs. Funding is an ever-present influence on the organization’s development and strategies, and even on its very survival. Since the CFO does not register its members or require any dues like a union does, it is not self-sufficient when it comes to financial survival. Obtaining funds is therefore essential to the organization and greatly affects some of the choices it has had to make throughout its complex history: the very decision to market it as a women’s organization was in great part due to funding issues, as was the decision to register it as an independent organization and to build more strategic alliances with U.S. unions.

Why the CFO?

Although the CFO is often mentioned in much of the literature as one of the available options for groups wishing to organize within the maquiladora industries or in studies on cross-border organizing, it is not an organization that has been studied in depth⁶. The CFO is an interesting case-study because the complexities of organizing in the maquiladoras, especially for women who find themselves in very precarious working conditions, makes this organization's long-term success unlikely and thus all that more remarkable.

A case study of the CFO is of great interest to anyone trying to understand the complexities of organizing for local groups within this “globalization from below” category, but it is an organization that needs to be studied on its own; that is, it cannot be added into a specific analytical category already in place. The CFO has had alliances (both long- and short-term partnerships at different levels) with a variety of larger NGOs and labour unions, which include the following: the American Friends and Service Committee (AFSC), the Mexican Friends and Service Committee (MFSC), the Servicio, Desarrollo y Paz, A.C. (Civil Association for Service), Development and Peace (SEDEPAC), the Comité de Apoyo, the Coalition for Justice in the Maquiladoras (CJM), Human Rights Watch (HRW), Austin Tan Cerca de la Frontera (ATCF), North Country Fair Trade (NCFT), the American Federation of Labor-Congress of Industrial Organizations (AFL-CIO) and the United Steelworkers Union (USW). The CFO has also worked on short-term projects with transnational organizations such as Human Rights Watch. However, the CFO cannot be solely defined by any of these varying partnerships, nor can it be solely defined by its local grassroots initiatives. In order to continue to help (women) maquiladora

⁶ Although Huesca (2006) does provide an in depth case study of the CFO, his study focuses on a specific time frame (1997-2002) and a specific region (the Eastern region where the CFO is located) which does not encompass the historical and regional differences in the CFO organizing efforts which are covered in this thesis.

workers, the CFO needs transnational partners. This does not mean that the organization is dependent on any one particular transnational partner. Through constant re-evaluation of its strategies and objectives, the CFO has managed to survive the many difficulties brought on by the changing nature of globalization and by the extension of its transnational partnerships. This rich empirical case study allows us to glean a better understanding of “globalization from below” from the perspective of those who are most affected by its negative effects and from those who are finding ways to resist or work within its contexts in order to improve their daily lives.

In this thesis, I question the one thing that many authors seem to agree on: that the CFO is a great example of empowering women from the ground up. This thesis suggests that the CFO is an organization whose relationship with the AFSC and other groups is much more complex than what is usually presented, that its journey to becoming an autonomous women workers’ organization has had many roadblocks and that it eventually had to be pushed into independence. This does not mean that its achievements are any less impressive. However, as we will see through a gendered analysis of the history of the CFO, it is in fact not a perfect example of empowerment of women, but rather has a complex history strongly influenced by patriarchy and North-South dynamics. Despite its best efforts to organize in order to promote women’s rights within the maquiladoras, this thesis seems to indicate that the CFO can no longer sustain itself as a women-only organization. Globalization and transnational organizing have made it very difficult to sustain this mission as these processes also have their own gendered consequences and they reinforce gendered hierarchies. This challenge might be most acute in societies such as Mexico, where gender hierarchies are deeply imbedded in society. The feminization of the labour force in the maquiladora industry brought on by globalization encouraged a gendered type

of organizing that was more appealing to the majority of women who made up the maquiladora workforce. However, with the transformation of the gendered nature of the maquiladoras comes a transformation in the gendered composition of a maquiladora worker group such as the CFO. The process of economic globalization which transformed the gendered composition of the maquiladora workforce, and the transnational organizing of social movements brought on by globalization both played essential roles in changing the gendered composition of the CFO.

When the gendered nature of maquiladora work equalled a predominantly female workforce, women's organizing was more straightforward and more grassroots-based and arguably more effective in reaching its stated objectives of empowering women from the ground up. As the dynamics have changed and more men have joined the maquiladora women workers' organizations, these same organizations now have to adapt as they continue to face gendered power struggles outwardly (with the maquiladoras and governmental or union authorities) as well as inwardly within the context of their own organization and with their alliances with other transnational organizations. These organizations, while still fighting for worker's rights at the intersection of globalization and gender relations, now have to deal with the internal context of moving from previously women based organizations to organizations that accept both women and men on an equal footing if they want to truly represent the evolving nature of the maquiladora workforce. As we will see in this thesis, the archival information describes an organization that started off by basing its policy priorities on women's issues within the maquiladora labour force. However, partly due to many issues that affect women now being addressed by other avenues such as health centres and other government institutions, partly due to more men wanting to be part of the organization, and in large part due to a funding crisis

which led the CFO to seek funding from transnational labour coalitions, the policy priorities of the CFO have moved away from women's issues to more union organizing. In fact, the major efforts of the CFO during the field research period of 2006-2007 were focused on organizing workers in two major automotive parts maquiladora plants, Alcoa and Lear, which employ a majority of men. The CFO no longer focused on or even visited maquiladora workers from other plants which employed mostly women, thereby changing not only its membership base but also its policy priorities.

While many have studied the CFO as a women's organization, I contend that this does not adequately permit us to explore the complexities of the relationship between the global and the local levels of organizing, so while gender remains an important aspect of the analysis, it cannot be the sole prism through which to evaluate the CFO. Through a dialectical approach and by giving a voice to the CFO members themselves, I will examine this organization through a historical perspective and see how its strategies, structure and decision-making process, even its definition of itself as an organization, are constantly changing as are the influences it is experiencing at a particular point in time. This is no more evident than in the example given at the beginning of this thesis. November 2006 represents a particular point in time in the organization's history, albeit one that is rife with internal turmoil and external pressures. It cannot be taken in isolation, however, if we want to truly understand this organization and the ramifications of organizing in Mexico's maquila zones. If we did so, we would be freezing a particular point in history without understanding the complexities surrounding the particular manifestations of organizing in the maquiladoras.

Contributions to knowledge

This thesis will tell the story of what I learned from 61 different interviews and participant observations relating to the history, day-to-day activities and strategies of the CFO. We will hear the voices of the long-time members (those who have participated in the organization for more than 10 years), new members, ex-members who left the organization and sometimes even started their own competing organization, employees, volunteers, the founder, the coordinator and members of other organizations similar to the Comité Fronterizo de Obrer@s in six different cities in Northern Mexico: Piedras Negras, Ciudad Acuña, Nuevo Laredo, Matamoros, Reynosa and Rio Bravo (see Appendix A: CFO Geography). Through in-depth semi-direct interviews, living with the CFO members and participating in their daily activities as well as their organized meetings (see Chapter 2), I am seeking to provide a closer look at what “globalization from below” is for those on the ground, the grassroots members themselves. I provide a detailed analysis of labour and women workers’ strategies of organizing in the maquila region at a particular point in time that we can call a globalizing political economic order. This in-depth analysis of the CFO will help us think about labour and women’s strategies, locally and across borders. For example, it will help us understand that we need to give more of a voice to the local aspect of the “globalization from below category” experience so we can see that the perception of globalization is not necessarily or usually the same for the local members as it is for the transnational activist networks that advocate in their name. In addition, when only the leaders of the local organizations are interviewed, we are not given the complete story.

D’Costa asks an important question that pertains directly to this thesis: “What kind of insights can case studies of marginalized groups ... offer IR” (2006: 132)? The research questions asked in this thesis reflect how the daily lives of marginalized maquiladora workers, both women and

men, affect our understanding of the concept of globalization and the responses to globalization in the fields of international relations (IR) and international political economy (IPE). CFO members and other maquiladora workers are marginalized yet essential actors in the globalization of the economy and in the export-processing industry in particular. As such, they may seem to be powerless, yet they can also yield enormous power at times (such as during labour shortages). Organized workers who know their rights represent one of the biggest fears for most transnational corporations. Workers who are not afraid to organize are considered to be very important for various organizations, all of which compete for the same limited international funds and need the membership on the ground to obtain these funds. Thus, one single maquiladora worker can be of vital importance to many.

The complex history of an organization that has been in place since the beginnings of the maquiladora industry gives us a better understanding of the changing conditions and struggles the workers in these regions have faced. This journey through the history of the CFO and the richness of this empirical data encompassing more than 30 years of organizing in the maquiladora zone of Northern Mexico allows us to explore “globalization from below” through a different lens. This thesis brings into focus a micro-detailed analysis of a specific organization in a specific context that clearly links the transnational civil society to the impacts of the globalizing capitalist neoliberal economy. As such, this research offers us new insights into the intricacies of local-global linkages and contributes to an area often neglected or underdeveloped in international relations.

Methods for data collection and data types and sources

Since my goal is to make certain women's lives (the women maquiladora workers) more visible, I have distanced myself from quantitative analysis methods in favour of a more qualitative case study that relies on a more interpretative methodology. In doing so, I used a variety of research methods and started with a documentary research trip to the AFSC offices in Philadelphia to examine all of the existing archives on the CFO (August 2005). This was followed up by an analysis of the CFO's discourse as posted on its website, including analysis of links to many newspaper and journal articles that speak about the CFO. Finally, in order to further get a sense of the official discourse of the CFO, I attended an international conference at the University of Windsor at which Julia Quiñonez, the coordinator of the CFO, was presenting (February 2007). During my fieldwork, I used methods such as semi-structured interviews as well as participant observation and a snowball sampling method. I have used discourse analysis and gender analysis throughout and have relied on my fieldwork notes as evidence. By treating transcripts of interviews and field notes in the same way as archival information obtained from official sources regarding the CFO, I am giving equal weight to both the official discourse from the CFO and to the discourse from the women and men who make up the CFO.

Interviews

First Field trip: November 2006

My interviews of CFO members were conducted with two different groups. The first group consisted of the full-time and part-time employees of the CFO, the coordinadora and promotores, as well as long-time members, who were interviewed in the cities of Piedras Negras, Ciudad Acuña and Reynosa, and Matamoros. I was also given access to many CFO members at the

annual CFO meeting, which took place in Ciudad Acuña from November 18 to November 20, 2006. My second group of interviewees, then, were CFO members.

Although it has many members, the CFO only has a few full-time employees. There are two groups of employees: the *coordinadora* (coordinator), which is in essence the organization's leader, Julia Quiñonez, and the *promotores*⁷ who go to the colonias (neighbourhoods) where most of the maquiladora workers live to recruit the new members. The largest group within the CFO are its members. Since the CFO is not organized along the same lines as a union and does not register its members, it is extremely difficult to determine the number of workers that have benefited from their participation in the CFO. No one can answer with certainty the question of how many women and men have been members of the CFO at one time or another. In this way, the structure of the CFO resembles that of a social movement. One can feel they are a member of the CFO without actually participating in any CFO activities on a regular basis. A good deal of the *promotores* work is peer education; therefore many contacts are not counted. Sometimes, the *promotores* write down the names of those who participated in a meeting; however, these lists are not kept in a central location. Those who participate at meetings sometimes then form their own internal organization in the maquiladora where they work. The choice of strategy for their specific goal is left up to them. The CFO *promotores* help members learn about their rights and are a great resource for members if they need any further information or any other form of help, but members have no obligation towards the CFO and do not need to pay membership fees. The

⁷ The term *promotore* (or the feminine *promotora*) is very difficult to translate as the term promoter does not adequately explain their role, nor does the term organizer, since many CFO people and *promotores* actually use both Spanish terms *promotore* and *organizador* to explain different roles. The AFSC in its English documents, also always uses the term *promotore* or *promotora*, and never organizer. It is therefore very evident that they do not view these terms as synonyms. A further explanation of the term will be given by the *promotores* themselves in Chapter 3, section 3.2.2.

CFO never registers workers as being members of the CFO because, by definition, the CFO is the workers themselves.

The participants of the CFO were recruited by the author. The first step was through contact with the American Friends and Service Committee, a U.S. religious organization that works closely with the CFO. My contact at the AFSC, Ricardo Hernandez (the director of the AFSC's Mexico-U.S. Border Program), visited the CFO offices every year in August. On his August 2006 trip, he spoke to the leader of the CFO, Julia Quiñonez, about my proposed research. This was my first introduction to the CFO. Ms. Quiñonez and I then communicated through e-mail, by which method I clearly explained to her what my intentions were regarding my research trip of November 2006. Ms. Quiñonez indicated in these e-mails her acceptance of my participation in CFO activities and of my speaking to any of the CFO members, with the exception of participating in activities relating to the recruitment of new members since making initial contact with a potential member was found to be easier without the presence of a stranger, which could make the potential member uncomfortable. (Other organizations did not feel the same way. For example, I participated in the recruitment of new members for the organization Apoyo de Comunidades Maristas in Matamoros in October 2007, which offered a whole new insight into the difficulties associated with recruiting members and gave me a more detailed understanding of this aspect of organizing that links the very personal activity of one-on-one recruiting to the transnational and political level whereby a receiving-end activist is judged by the quantity and quality of members it can recruit and maintain.) Ms. Quiñonez also accepted my participation in the 2006 annual meeting of the CFO.

The recruitment of the two groups of interviewees — the employees and the members of the CFO in both Piedras Negras, Coahuila, and Ciudad Acuña, Coahuila — was done by sending a letter of introduction by e-mail to the CFO address and by asking Ms. Quiñonez to distribute a copy of this letter to CFO employees I might potentially interview (see Appendix F). The recruitment of the CFO members was done in person and not by letter because of the specific political culture and risks in Mexico's Northern Border Region. Before conducting my field research in Mexico, I was advised by other academics who had conducted field research in the same region and by the AFSC that many interviewees might be fearful of having anything written down with their names on it. Informal interviews with no signed consent forms seemed to be the best way to accommodate the political culture in Mexico, and was the best way to make the interviewees feel the most comfortable and to assure them that their anonymity would be ensured at all times. It must be noted that many of the interviewees also willingly stated their full names and insisted on having their real names used when quoting them (see Appendix H). An explanation for this can be found in the fact that many of the interviewees were long time members of the CFO and quite outspoken. They were also already well known to the authorities in Mexico and did not feel that speaking to me would cause them any difficulties. Newer members, especially those who still held jobs in maquiladoras, were however much more hesitant to give their real names and pseudonyms were used to ensure their anonymity.

The recruitment of the member interviewees took place at CFO activities, such as workshops and the annual meeting, and by participating in some of the activities of the promotoras who visited members' homes in their colonias. Any activity related to the recruitment of new members was excluded, as per the CFO's request. When I attended activities to recruit possible interviewees, I

made a short presentation about the research and asked for any volunteers, clearly explaining that there was no obligation to participate. I also asked for oral consent from those members present at the beginning of any meeting or group activity in which I participated and, if any of the members did not wish to be included in my study, I excluded anything they said from my research findings.

I also participated in different group activities, although not all of the participants in the interview process participated in the group activities. Some of these group activities included educational skits that the CFO organized with its members to teach them about their rights under Mexican Labour Law, and also regular meetings organized by the CFO (mostly of Alcoa workers to talk to them about forming an independent union in their maquiladora), including the general annual meeting that included members from three of the seven different cities in which the CFO is located.

Since I frequently observed the employees in their daily activities (such as visiting members' homes to give them information) and since I lived with some of the members and shared in their family activities that included other CFO members, it is difficult to determine the exact number of times I may have spoken with any given member of the CFO. I did however spend a considerable amount of time with each of the CFO employees, observing and helping out in any way I could. I lived with one of the promotoras, Norma (Interview # 6), for a approximately one and a half weeks and with another long time member, Nanci (Interview # 29), for two weeks.

The right to withdraw from the interview or any aspect of the study was identified clearly in the introductory letter as well as the consent form that was given to the participating CFO employee (see Appendixes F and G). I also reiterated this information verbally before any interview. As for the CFO members, the consent process was verbal. I clearly explained their right to withdraw from the project before participating in an interview or in any group activity. I explained to the CFO members that they could let me know at anytime that they wished to withdraw and any record of information that they had given me would be destroyed. I conducted a total of 44 interviews with members and ex-members of the CFO (see Appendix H for a list of the interviews), which lasted anywhere from 20 minutes to two hours, depending on the knowledge the person had of the CFO and how much they were willing to share with me.

Second Field Trip: September to November 2007

My second field trip was funded by the International Development Research Centre, and the objective and methodology were different. Rather than going to the cities with my contacts already established, I went intending to make contacts once there and to see if there were any differences in organizing activities in these border cities as compared to the cities I visited on my first field trip. Despite having been started in Matamoros, by 2007 the CFO had a much diminished presence there. My objective was to speak to any current or ex-members of the CFO and to find any other organizations that had similar objectives so I could compare and contrast their activities. During this field trip, I identified and established contacts with a small number of organizations that supported women maquiladora workers. Few such organizations working specifically with and for maquiladora workers in Matamoros remained. I established contact with two ex-members of the CFO, which had practically disappeared from Matamoros. I also did

some participant observation and conducted interviews with members of an organization dedicated to supporting maquiladora workers and helping women workers. This group's leader was an ex-member of the CFO. I then contacted several women's organizations to inquire about their support activities for maquiladora workers.

In the border city of Reynosa, I conducted interviews with more ex-CFO members who had started a new organization similar to the CFO in this booming maquiladora city. I observed their activities and attended their bi-annual meeting. I also conducted a multi-day interview with Ed Krueger, who is recognized as either a direct or indirect founder of most of the independent workers' organizations from the east coast to the Central Region of the northern border, from Matamoros in Tamaulipas to Piedras Negras in Coahuila, including the CFO. In total, I conducted 16 interviews during this field trip varying between 30 minutes to multi-day interviews with leaders of organizations and ex-CFO members. The total number of interviews from both field trips amounts to 61 interviews varying widely in age, although it is of note that none of the interviewees were under the age of 25, even though the starting age for maquiladora workers is much younger, usually the legal age of 16 or younger. As we will see in Chapter 1, young women were seen as the ideal maquiladora worker as they were less likely to mobilize. Many of the interviewees in fact did not mobilize until they reached their late twenties and early thirties. See table below for a more complete picture of the age range and regional locations of the interviewees that participated in this research.

The first organizational efforts of the future CFO date back to the late 1970s and Krueger was particularly important in these efforts. As a member of the Comité de Apoyo, which is based in

Edinburgh, Texas, and acting on behalf of the AFSC (and whose salary was later directly paid by the AFSC), Krueger played an important if somewhat controversial role in the formation of the CFO. He is both lauded for his initial efforts in mobilizing women and also blamed for how long it took for the CFO to become an autonomous organization.⁸ It was therefore of great benefit to this study to be able to hear his side of the story. I also interviewed other members of the Comité de Apoyo to get a sense of the history of the CFO and to see what kind of relationship the CFO still had with them. In studying the history of an organization, it is always beneficial to get first-hand accounts that can complement and enhance the written records. With this in mind, I had hoped to interview one of the CFO's founding members, Maria Guadalupe Torres, a coordinator who left the CFO when Krueger did because she did not want to work in the new organization without him. Unfortunately, she had since moved away and I was unable to contact her. I was, however, able to get first-hand accounts from other long-time members of the CFO who had known Torres and had been present when she decided to leave the organization she had helped to build. I interviewed Julia Quiñonez, who was also mentored by Krueger and had assumed the position of regional coordinator along with Torres during the pre-independent stage of the CFO. Quiñonez was then named the coordinator, a de facto leadership position, of the newly independent CFO in 1998, a position she still holds today.

⁸ This information was gathered through my preliminary research at the AFSC offices in Philadelphia in August 2005, through informal interviews and access to confidential memos.

Tables of interviews

Age Range	Men	Women
25-29	3	6
30-34	3	8
35-39	5	11
40-44	3	9
45-49	2	1
50-54	2	4
55+	1	3
Total	19	42

City	Men	Women
Piedras Negras	5	16
Ciudad Acuna	10	12
Reynosa	3	4
Matamoros	0	7
Rio Bravo	1	3
Total	19	42

Rationale for selection of research sites

During my first field trip to Mexico in November 2006, I decided to interview members from two of the seven cities where the CFO is located in order to get a better indication of the structure and strategies and reasons why these women are organizing. I chose Piedras Negras, Coahuila, since that is the location of their main office and also Ciudad Acuña, Coahuila, which is approximately 100 kilometres from Piedras Negras, because although these two cities are very close geographically and are located in the same state, their political cultures are quite different. Although many of the unions are corrupt, there is a heavy union presence in Piedras Negras and the border cities east of Piedras Negras. In contrast, starting with Ciudad Acuña and heading west, most of the border cities in Mexico's Northern Border Region are non-unionized. During my second field trip, from September to November 2007, I concentrated on the cities of Matamoros and Reynosa in the state of Tamaulipas, as those were the locations of the first efforts by the AFSC to mobilize women back in the late 1970s. I chose to look at these two different regions to see how the current political context affects mobilization efforts.

During my November 2006 field trip, I interviewed members who worked specifically for the CFO (that no longer work in the maquiladoras, but rather invest themselves full-time in the CFO efforts) and also members who had more limited exposure to the CFO because I wanted to see the different impressions they had of the CFO. Out of this last group, I interviewed members who had had different participation levels within the CFO, ranging from one meeting or activity to participation spanning many years. I had planned on only interviewing current members (according to their own self-identification as a current member of the CFO) and all of my recruiting was to be done through CFO activities or at the CFO office. This was because to

recruit past members for interviews posed a higher level of ethical risks (in getting their names and also in finding them without posing any risks regarding their jobs). However, during the course of my stay in Piedras Negras and Ciudad Acuña in November 2006, ex-members of the CFO contacted me through current members requesting to be interviewed, wanting to share their side of the CFO story. In this respect, the snowball sampling method worked beyond any of my expectations and I was able to obtain information that otherwise would have been unavailable to me.

Because I focused solely on the CFO during my first field trip, I developed an understanding of doing fieldwork in Mexico's border region and with a vulnerable group that proved to be quite useful during my next field trip to the cities of Matamoros, Reynosa and Rio Bravo in the state of Tamaulipas, from September to November 2007 (75 days). My base was Matamoros, where my institutional affiliation, the Colegio de la Frontera Norte, and my advisor, Professor Cirila Quintero Ramirez, were located. I also travelled to Reynosa, which is one of the largest booming maquiladora cities in Mexico and has a long history of maquiladorization (see Chapter 1, section 1.5 for an explanation on the different levels and types of unions in the cities covered in this research).

Qualitative approach

The goal of this thesis is to understand globalization from the perspectives of those who are “most” marginalized in a society in order to challenge the dominant IR scripts of globalization⁹ or more specifically the dominant scripts of “globalization from below”. It is by studying the local level and listening to the voices of the silenced that we are able to gain a better understanding of “globalization from below”. I have therefore adopted a qualitative approach inspired by feminist IR literature because as Stern explains:

Much feminist literature has emphasized the importance of theorizing from women’s lives, not fitting women or other marginalized groups and their experiences into the already formed moulds of IR theory. One can learn surprising things and disrupt existing theories that purport to explain “reality” from grounding an inquiry in empirical material that is otherwise silenced or excluded from the authorized subjects of research. (2006: 178-179)

By using a methodology inspired by feminism and through my field research, I focused on theorizing from the lives of those who are not usually heard in IR studies. Maquiladora workers, especially women maquiladora workers, are among the most marginalized workers and are often excluded from any analysis of politics. By listening to those marginalized by a traditional IR perspective and accepting their message and how it helps explain the relationships of power or the politics at both the micro level within their own organization and at the macro level of being part of a contestation movement in the larger globalization discourse, I was able to discover nuances that are hidden from a general analysis of the organization. Each part of my in-depth study allowed me to see the CFO from several different sides. The first side was through the AFSC interpretation of the CFO in the archived documents. The second more official side

⁹ This formulation is taken from Stern who states that her initial research aim was “to understand security from the perspectives of peoples who are “most” marginalized in a society in order to challenge the dominant IR scripts of security” (2006: 178).

was portrayed on the CFO's website, described in interviews with its coordinator Julia Quiñonez, found in different newspapers accounts and in the coordinator's presentation at an international conference. This side was also portrayed through introductory remarks presented to those who visit the organization, such as was presented to me on my first trip to Mexico in November of 2006. Finally, I saw a more informal side that came through participant observation and living with CFO members. By participating in the members' daily lives and getting to know them on a personal level, I was able to obtain information that would not have been attainable in any other way — from conversations with the CFO members who had a chance to express their opinions about their organization without fear of repercussions. As D'Costa emphasizes:

If marginalization and social marginality are to be considered seriously in IR, fieldwork with those marginalized is essential for bringing the knowledge of those marginalized into scholarly discussions. Field research is one of the most effective ways to evaluate the impact on the lives of people of policies and decisions made in the upper echelon of society. (2006: 132)

Field research involving marginalized actors always pose some ethical dilemmas. My position as a privileged educated white woman from Canada did distance me from those I interviewed and as such I can never say that my research was conducted on an equal footing. A few of the interviewees did in fact believe I had the power to change their circumstances and I found myself having to explain my lack of capability as a researcher to effect any change at all in their lives. Some of the interviewees had granted interviews in the past to transnational donors or newspapers and had some difficulty understanding the point of my research as the objective was not to describe the plight of the maquiladora workers to obtain funding for their organization which was the objective for many of their previous interviews. While trying to give a voice to those who are traditionally marginalized in IR studies, I was at all times aware of the challenge of not speaking for the maquiladora workers, both the women and men, I interviewed, but rather

letting their voices be heard through their quotes and through modifying my analytical categories to better represent the issues they considered most pressing. For example, before going into the field in 2006, I expected to find a grassroots women's organization which made every major decision through consensus and who focused on issues that mattered the most to the women maquiladora workers who constituted the base of their membership. Instead, I found union type of organizing, a top-down decision making process, and long time members frustrated with the direction their organization was taking.

Other researchers have been able to immerse themselves more fully in their field research of maquiladora workers, such as the anthropologist Fernandez Kelly (1983) who immersed herself completely in her fieldwork when she worked as a maquiladora worker in Northern Mexico or Gunawardana (2007) who did a 12-month participant observation of unskilled workers in an apparel industry in Sri Lanka's export processing zone. However because my research objective was not quite the same and my study was based in IR and not anthropology, I did not immerse myself as deeply in the field research one would find in ethnographic research. Rather, my objective was to study maquiladora workers' mobilizing through their organization, the CFO. As such, what I hoped to do was to immerse myself as much as possible in the activities of the CFO itself and thereby find out what motivated these maquiladora workers to mobilize within this organization. My on-the-ground fieldwork was limited to one month with the CFO in 2006 as that was the time frame that the organization itself allowed me to participate in its activities. Because of this time limit, my position of privilege in the interview process, my position as an outsider from another country who spoke Spanish as a third language, I was always fully aware that my access to the lives of the maquiladora workers who formed or had been part of the CFO

was only partial.¹⁰ My knowledge of the CFO could therefore never be complete. However, by constantly reflecting on the power relations and the ethical dilemmas associated with research involving marginalized groups, I constantly strived to remain faithful to their stories and to allow their perspective of their organization and of what it means to be part of “globalization from below” to come through in this thesis. I immersed myself as much as possible in the time frame allotted to me and was rewarded with as much of an insider’s view that any outsider from Canada could hope to achieve. I am very grateful that so many CFO members and ex-members accepted to participate in my research and am very aware that this was in large part due to the hospitality offered to me by the CFO coordinator, Julia Quinonez, who introduced me to the members at all of the formal and informal meetings and by two key members, Nanci (Interview # 29) and Norma (Interview # 6) who took me into their homes and treated me like family. Their acceptance of me and introduction to other key members resulted in many of the CFO members speaking to me quite extensively about the difficulties of mobilizing in the maquiladoras and the changes in this mobilizing throughout the CFO history, thus providing me with rich empirical data that allowed me to see a side of the CFO that is not available in the current literature. As well, a number of the current CFO members introduced me to members who had left the organization that allowed me to hear both sides of the story. The internal struggles of the CFO, as we will see throughout this thesis, affect both its grassroots and its transnational organizing, and the struggles are affected by its privileging the transnational over the grassroots since its independence. Without speaking directly to the CFO members and allowing them the time and opportunity to express their perspectives on their organization, none of the rich empirical data that allow us to gain new insights into the intricacies of women’s and labour organizing in the context of globalization would have been available.

¹⁰ For more on positionality, reflexivity and fieldwork dilemmas in international research, see Sultana (2007).

Ethical considerations

There are many ethical considerations to be taken into account when interviewing vulnerable groups. These considerations vary depending on who the interviewee is. For example, the leaders of the different organizations are accustomed to being interviewed and therefore the risks to them are not as high as the risks for the maquiladora workers. The leaders of the organizations covered in this study had already spoken out against the maquiladora owners and corrupt unions and Mexican authorities; therefore, their speaking with me posed minimal risks.

It is the members of the different organizations, the maquiladora workers themselves, who made up a much more vulnerable group. Speaking with me could have had some social and legal repercussions for these maquiladora workers if they were members of organizations that oppose the status quo. The biggest of these risks is the possibility of losing their jobs. Since the unemployment rate is quite high in the border region of Mexico, maquiladoras are able to hire the type of workers they want, which usually means docile workers (which for a long time equalled women workers) who do not speak out and do not organize. One of the major fears is of being blacklisted and not being able to get another job in any other maquiladora (see Chapter 1).

The biggest risk that any of these interviewees saw in speaking with me was to have anything that could identify them written down or recorded, in case it ended up in the hands of the Mexican authorities, the corrupt unions or the maquiladora owners, which could lead to the loss of their jobs. Anonymity is of the utmost importance when speaking to maquiladora workers about their working conditions. I applied and received certification for my research project from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Ethics Board and always conducted my interviews

and participant observation with their guidelines in mind. In addition, all of the interviews were conducted in Spanish, with the exception of the interview with Ed Krueger who opted to have the interview in English. In order to mitigate the risks to conserving the anonymity of the interviewees that having an interpreter could present, I had taken Spanish classes for over the two years prior to my fieldwork in Mexico. At that time, my level of Spanish was intermediate to advanced, and I was able to conduct all of the interviews myself, without the use of an interpreter.

It is important to note that formal avenues of recruiting research participants, such as those used in Canada and in the United States do not work in Mexico. Other than employees of the organizations I studied, most research participants were uncomfortable with the idea of signing anything. Informal interviews with no signed consent forms seemed to be the best way to accommodate the political culture in Mexico, which is different from that found in the United States and in Canada.

Overview of the thesis

By studying the CFO in depth, I hope to develop an understanding of the intricacies of labour and women's organizing in a specific time and place in the context of globalization. Therefore, in order to understand the complexities of the CFO, we need to look at the context in which it is organizing, that is, the gendered international division of labour, the creation of the maquiladoras, the peso devaluations and the union corruption in Mexico. We also need to understand how the context can influence the structure and strategies chosen by the CFO.

Chapter 1 contextualizes the CFO in time and place. In this chapter, I will examine the factors that led to the creation of the maquiladoras in Mexico's Northern Border Region in 1965 as well as the restructuring of the maquiladora labour force from one that mostly included young women to one in which men are now hired at increasing rates. I also look at gender relations in Northern Mexico and how capitalism has taken advantage of the gender relations in order to increase profits and promote a non-militant workforce. We will see in this chapter that the union context in Mexico is very much linked to the political process and is seen by the workers as operating in conjunction with the transnational corporations and not on behalf of their interests. Finally, we will look at the difficulties in mobilizing maquiladora workers from the point of view of the workers themselves in the context of deterrents to organizing and the fear that accompanies the process. These include the fear of losing one's house, of the maquiladoras relocating, of threats of violence and of being put on blacklists that would prevent workers from ever obtaining maquila employment again. By understanding the context of mobilizing maquiladora workers in Northern Mexico and how it relates to the changes in globalization, gender relations and union organizing (which varies according to the border city), we will better understand the enormous effort it takes to organize maquiladora workers, which in turn will lead us to a more in-depth analysis of why the CFO has shifted not only from grassroots to more union-type organizing but also from a women's organization to one that is more inclusive of men and whose priorities have shifted away from gender issues.

In Chapter 2, I provide a review of the literature on "globalization from below" and discuss which aspects of this literature can help us better understand the intricacies of labour and women's organizing in the context of globalization. The chapter begins with a quick overview of

the globalization debate in IR and IPE and explains which view of globalization is the most useful in explaining the complex relationship between globalization and grassroots mobilizing: the third wave of globalization, which argues that the perception of globalization is more important than the reality of whether or not globalization is happening or what its effects are. It is what an organization perceives the effects of globalization to be that influences its mobilization efforts. As well, many organizations believe that civil society can have a significant effect on globalization and this perception also galvanizes many of the “globalization from below” category groups into action. Neo-Gramscian theory introduces us to the categorization of “globalization from above” as the top-down or hegemonic influence and to “globalization from below” as the counter-hegemonic resistance from civil society seeking to create an alternative world order. This segues into an overview of the “globalization from below” civil society in the shape of alter-globalization, global justice movements and transborder activism where we will see that these analyses focus on groups that define themselves as part of a global civil society that views neoliberal globalization as the enemy and seeks to replace it with a better alternative. This poses a conceptual problem for our study as the CFO does not define itself as part of a global movement and does not view neoliberal globalization as its enemy. As such, this thesis will be addressing these limitations of neo-Gramscian theory as it does not allow us to fully understand the local aspect of the “globalization from below” category nor the top-down influences the local organizations can feel from the transnational organizations within this “globalization from below category.

Some aspects of neo-Gramscian analysis are however very useful to our study of the CFO. The neo-Gramscians’ dialectical approach is a definite asset in the analysis of the CFO as it helps us

understand the organization at different stages of its history and at different levels: the local and transnational as well as the different regions along the Northern Mexican border. In addition, the idea that we cannot have a fixed definition of civil society, and by extension a group within civil society such as the CFO because it is an ever-changing concept that varies with time and place, definitely helps us to explain how the CFO is a moveable concept and how we must look at the nuances of this organization over time and place when trying to define it.

The literature on transnational or cross-border labour organizing will be particularly useful in explaining the growing relationship between the USW and the CFO. This literature helps us to understand the difficulties in mobilizing maquiladora workers, especially if this mobilization is to take shape in the form of an independent union. It also helps us understand the important role the CFO plays in maquiladora worker mobilization, which cannot be done in the form of traditional union recruiting and must use more clandestine and low-profile approaches. The lines between women's organizing and labour organizing are blurred and transnational labour organizations wishing to unionize maquiladora workers need the help of a local organization such as the CFO that understands the intricacies of mobilizing in the specific context of maquiladoras in Northern Mexico in the post-NAFTA period.

Transnational advocacy networks (TANs) and transnational labour networks are useful concepts inasmuch as they help explain the role the AFSC and the USW play in relation to the CFO; however, they do not allow us to understand the local aspect of organizing. As we will see with Hertel's (2006) conceptualization, the literature on TANs looks at the norm entrepreneurs of these partnerships, not the receiving-end activists. The CFO, as a receiving-end activist, is able

to influence the message of the norm entrepreneur as we will see in Chapter 4 when looking at its relationship with TANs. The concept of receiving-end activists and the measurement of success at the local level instead of only the transnational level, which is inspired by feminist analysis, are key concepts in understanding the intricacies of labour and women's organizing in the context of globalization. Finally, the neoliberal influence on funding of NGOs and the different strategies that smaller NGOs such as the CFO utilize to obtain much-needed resources will be explored. This literature will be a great asset in explaining some of the top-down influences of norm entrepreneurs on the receiving-end activists, or of the constraints from "above" in the "globalization from below" category. In addition to the theoretical overview, Chapter 2 will also cover the limits of the "globalization from below" analyses and the need for fieldwork to discover the intricacies of women and labour organizing in the context of globalization. I will then explain how the fieldwork was conducted, the rationale for the choice of the organization, the CFO and the research locale as well as the ethical considerations related to interviewing vulnerable populations.

Chapter 3 will apply what we have learned in Chapters 1 and 2 and through a dialectical approach will look at the context and how the CFO has changed over time as we examine the local "grassroots" aspect of the CFO organizing efforts. We will see how the organization was not a grassroots endeavour after all, but rather created in a top-down manner from a few very well intentioned transnational advocacy networks that wanted to help the poor victims of globalization and how the networks' perception of globalization influenced their reaction to it. We will examine more closely the difficulties inherent in mobilizing (women) maquiladora workers in Northern Mexico's Border Region through archival documents and interview material

as well as participant observation. Interviews with maquiladora workers who were brave enough to overcome their fears and mobilize for their rights offer us rich empirical data that strengthen our understanding of the difficulties involved in being a “grassroots” organization mobilizing on a transnational level in the context of globalization. For example, we will see how regional differences and internal strife led to many long-time members of the organization leaving, which in turn affected the CFO’s recruitment efforts, internal structure and fundraising capabilities. We will also see how the increasing focus on the transnational level left some of the more active members disillusioned with the organization, to the point where some even left and started their own organizations, which resulted in competition with the CFO for limited funds. We will also see how losing some key members of the organization, such as those who played important roles in the executive committee, led to a deterioration of the organization’s structure and to decisions being imposed in a top-down manner by the director of the organization in conjunction with its major transnational partner for many years, the AFSC, which further pushed the CFO away from its grassroots base since it first registered as an independent organization in 1998. We will see through interview materials that the CFO members felt their organization was more grassroots before it became an independent organization. Finally, we will examine how the changes in the strategies of the CFO are reflected in how the organization defines itself, how the CFO has moved away from defining itself as a women’s organization at the local level in order to incorporate more men into the organization and, finally, how their major funding partners transformed into union organizations operating at the transnational level.

Chapter 4 will pick up where Chapter 3 left off and examine the transnational level of the CFO organizing and how the ever-present need to obtain funds affects the current actions and

strategies of the CFO. I will demonstrate how the top-down influence from the transnational advocacy networks and transnational labour networks is a pressure from “above” that norm entrepreneurs exert on receiving-end activists. We will see how the promotion of the CFO as first a women’s organization and later a union or labour organization is very much related to the fundraising capabilities that have been constantly changing. We will examine the conflicts between the local and the transnational objectives of the CFO and how these tensions became so strong that they nearly destroyed the organization. As well, this chapter will look at the effects of TAN tactics of information politics and pleading for the cause of others utilized by the major CFO founding partners, first AFSC and SEDEPAC, and then more recently the CJM and ATCF and finally the USW, on the local grassroots level of organizing. We will also see how globalization is perceived as being very negative by these organizations and how this perception informs the strategies utilized to fundraise for the CFO, strategies which do not always take into account the voice of the local workers they are supposed to be helping. Matching priorities to meet donor-led criteria to obtain funding is an ever-present reality for an organization such as the CFO, one that does not have any membership dues and therefore relies on donations in order to survive financially and help out its members. This chapter will bring us through the history of the major changes in the CFO’s strategies of organizing women maquiladora workers in the early years to registering as an independent organization, thus moving away from grassroots organizing towards a more independent union style of organizing, a move that changed the fundamental objectives and nature of the organization. We will see how these major decisions were not made from the grassroots base but rather imposed on them, first by their transnational partners and then by the leadership of the CFO in conjunction with some transnational partners. This loss of the grassroots base is at the same time a loss of the voice of women inside the

organization. The move from a grassroots to a more hierarchical union-type of organization resulted in women losing their position as major decision-makers in the CFO.

Finally, Chapter 5 seeks to address the questions posed at the beginning of this thesis by examining the ever-growing influence of the two major transnational partners, the AFSC and the AFL-CIO, on the leadership of Julia Quiñonez and on the decisions she made in conjunction with Ricardo Hernandez, director of the Mexico-U.S. Border Program of the AFSC. It also explores how she responded to the crisis the CFO was going through in 2006 when the structure and organizing efforts were falling apart as was the capacity to obtain much needed international funding. This chapter looks at the perfect storm of the local global nexus the CFO found itself in and how its leader tried to get them out of it by adopting new strategies and objectives in order to align themselves with the United Steelworkers Union, strategies that further distanced the organization from its grassroots base. We will also examine how the CFO's association with Julia Quiñonez affected its mobilizing efforts. Julia Quiñonez had to make some difficult decisions as the coordinator of the CFO. Without funding, her organization would cease to exist because, unlike unions, the CFO does not require its members to pay a membership due and is thus not self-sufficient when it comes to financing. The year 2006 represented a crisis point in the CFO history, or the perfect storm moment, and Julia Quiñonez had difficult choices to make to try to steer the organization out of the storm, which unfortunately resulted in the loss of some of the membership base.

Chapter 1

Mobilizing against all odds: The difficulties in mobilizing workers in Mexico's maquiladora zones

Context is always important, but even more so in a case where there are so many factors intertwining to create a “perfect storm” of events and circumstances that led to the creation of an organization such as the CFO. If we jump into the case study without first having an idea of where these events are coming from, we may just get lost in the storm. In order to further understand the choices the CFO has had to make in regards to its strategies, overall structure and choice of transnational partners, we need to first understand how the particular manifestations of the changing nature of globalization, gender relations and union organizing have affected mobilizing of (women) maquiladora workers in Mexico's Northern Border Region. In order to explain why this organization was created in the first place, we must examine the context in which the CFO came to be. For example, what were the gender relations like at both the global and regional levels at the time of the organization's inception and throughout the ensuing years? Also, why did maquiladora workers choose to mobilize as a women's organization rather than a union? This chapter will help us understand that maquiladoras are not just another type of factory, that they were created for a very specific reason (to create jobs for Mexican men leaving the United States following the ending of the Bracero Program) and that they play an integral role in the globalization of production. They are also affected by global factors such as economic crises and economic booms, by trade agreements such as GATT and NAFTA and by specific characteristics of Mexican labour relations and gender relations. Cross-border labour mobilizing in relation to the maquiladora sector is difficult if not impossible. Mobilizing maquiladora

workers is a nearly insurmountable task. Through our appreciation of the context in which the CFO emerged and grew as an organization and which includes many obstacles and deterrents to organizing maquiladora workers, we are able to truly appreciate its remarkable accomplishments.

The CFO is one of the first if not the first organization of women maquiladora workers in Northern Mexico. Since maquiladoras are often seen as the very symbol of the export-processing zones (EPZs) and of the international division of labour brought on by the globalization of production, the CFO is in a unique position as one of the foremost sources of knowledge regarding the plight of maquiladora workers. A broader understanding of the CFO can help elucidate the links between the global and local in the specific context of maquiladora workers organizing from the beginning of the maquiladoras in Northern Mexico, even predating the idea of NAFTA.

Fernandez-Kelly who has written extensively on Mexico's maquiladora industry gives us an explanation of the relationship between export-oriented industrialization and globalization. She illustrates how the maquiladora industry in Mexico is an exemplar of economic integration on a world scale: Globalization is used to describe subprocesses such as faster communication on a global scale, diffusion of cultural norms and values across borders and escalating trade among nations in disparate regions. However, there is a deeper underlying event to these phenomena: the reconfiguration of production, more specifically manufacturing, at the national and international levels. "In 1975, maquiladoras trailed only tourism and oil production as generators of revenue. By the 1980s, they constituted the world's most successful experiment in export-oriented industrialization. In retrospect, they may also be seen as the natural antecedent of the

North American Free Trade Agreement implemented almost twenty years later — a burgeoning attempt at radical liberalization entailing the suppression of government regulation” (2007: 11).

An important aspect this thesis aims to address is the importance of context and the importance of rendering people who have often been neglected by traditional politics and analyses of politics more visible. In order to understand the lives of the members of the CFO, all of them current or ex-maquiladora workers, we must first understand the historical power struggles they have faced and continue to face in the maquiladora industry in Mexico’s Northern Border Region. The next few sections will address the importance of the maquiladora industry for Mexico’s economy, the links between the maquiladora industry and globalization and regional integration, and how the economy of other countries such as the United States as well as decisions made in the head offices of transnational corporations affect workers in Mexico.

1.1 Contextualization of the maquiladora zones: Globalization’s ground zero

The Mexico–U.S. border has been termed globalization’s ground zero (Williams 1999: 139). This is where “[o]n both sides of the border, residents understand globalization not as a theory, but as a result of living the experience” (Landau 2005: 358). For over four decades, tens of millions of Mexicans have moved from the impoverished countryside to the overcrowded cities along Mexico’s northern border to work in the maquiladoras. It is an industrial revolution reminiscent of a Charles Dickens tale set in ugly, industrial landscapes inhabited by poor country folk forced to move to the cities for jobs, and in the process losing their tradition-bound rural communities and finding themselves in the fend-for-yourself mentality of urban living (Landau

2005: 358-359). This is where the workers assemble auto parts, electronic equipment and clothing for the world's largest transnational corporations in modern factories known as maquiladoras and then travel home on old school buses to houses built of plywood and corrugated metal on the outskirts of the city.¹¹ As Heather Williams explains:

Foreign managers who relocate to the border often complain that it is charmless. They locate operations there, however, because the Mexican side of the border offers what parent corporations want: close proximity to the largest consumer market in the world as well as minimal tariffs upon entry to it. On the northern border of Mexico, investors enjoy a solid infrastructure, favourable tax policies, a business-friendly political climate, and relatively lax regulatory regimes. Most important, there is cheap and plentiful labor. (1999: 139)

The implementation of maquiladoras is clearly linked to the process of globalization. The way they were structured was very much linked to the prevailing gender relations at the time and they have been influenced by the ever-changing gender relations since then. In order to explain the CFO, we must first be familiar with the context in which it emerged and grew as an organization, the interrelation between the processes of globalization, gender relations, maquiladoras and mobilizing (union and non-union), as well as the detriments to organizing in Mexico's Northern Border Region.

1.2 The maquiladora phenomenon

The global assembly production industry, or in Mexico's case, the maquiladora industry, is a leading export-oriented enterprise for many developing countries. The rise of global assembly industries dates back to the 1960s and can be explained by a confluence of factors: technological

¹¹ Women who work in the maquiladoras of Northern Mexico are also seen to be living parallel lives to the women who worked in the factories of the U.S. South in the first half of the 20th century. For more information on the colonial nature of industrialization in the American South and how this is strikingly similar to the maquiladora industries in the Global South, see Frederickson (2007: 59-70).

advances in communication and transportation helped transnational corporations “outsource” the assembly part of production to developing countries. The decline of U.S. hegemony in the world economy and the rise of Japan and Germany encouraged the drive to reduce production costs by relocating to areas that offered cheaper labour. Finally, many developing countries facing rising levels of debt and a strong need to generate foreign exchange sought to attract transnational corporations as a way to establish labour-intensive industries in their countries by offering them incentives such as tax breaks (Tamborini 2007: 28).

The Spanish word “maquiladora,” which is often shortened to “maquila,” is not a word that can be translated easily, mostly due to the fact that the phenomenon it represents has changed since it first appeared (Kopinak 1997: 8). The quick definition is that maquiladoras are foreign-owned factories (mostly owned by the United States)¹² located along Mexico’s border with the U.S that import materials in order to transform and re-export them.¹³ These factories are usually textile, electronics and machinery assembly plants located in low-wage zones that benefit from the free trade agreements established by governments to attract investments by transnational corporations in their country. From the beginning of the establishment of maquiladoras in 1965, companies have imported component parts duty-free into Mexico for assembly. American companies were then able to export the finished products back into the U.S. for sales and distribution. They subsequently benefited from the United States Tariff Code, which stipulated that duties were only applicable to the labour value added through assembly (U.S. tariff schedules 806 and 807). These arrangements went through a series of reforms up until the North American Free Trade

¹² The term maquiladora has since expanded to other Latin American countries and the foreign-owned companies are not always from the United States; Japan has also become an important foreign investor in Mexico. For more information on Japanese manufacturing in Mexico, see Székely (1991).

¹³ See in general Kopinak (1997); Fussell (2000); Adamache, Culos and Otero (1995); and Tiano (1994).

Agreement that culminated in the liberalization process by opening up all of Mexico to the United States and Canada (this part of NAFTA was completed in 2001) (Fussell 2000: 63). Although the maquiladoras are now no longer limited to the border areas and can be set up anywhere in Mexico, this did not lead to the expected thinning out of maquiladoras in the Northern Border Region due to higher costs of urbanization in the region and the availability of cheaper labour in the interior of Mexico. The localized advantages of Northern Mexico's proximity to the U.S. and its already-existing infrastructure ensured the continuing presence of maquiladoras in the area.¹⁴

Maquiladoras date back to 1965 and to the birth of the Border Industrialization Program (BIP). The BIP was created by the Mexican government as a means of attracting foreign investment to the border zone after the United States ended the Bracero (guest worker) Program in 1964. The Bracero Program was created during the Second World War with the objective of replenishing, in a temporary manner, the U.S. labour shortages by supplying Mexican agricultural workers as contract labourers. When the U.S. ended the program unilaterally, it created an influx of unemployed men into the Mexican border cities, which threatened the economic and political stability of the region (Tiano 1994: 18-19). In Mexico, it was hoped that the BIP would create sufficient jobs in the area to absorb this growing surplus of labour. It was also advantageous for U.S. capitalists as it enabled them to take advantage of cheaper Mexican labour without having to negotiate with U.S. unions, which were lobbying against the Bracero Program because it provided non-unionized work to foreign contract labourers (Kopinak 1997: 8).

¹⁴ For more information on the continued strong maquiladora presence in the Northern Border Region, see Weiler and Zerlentes (2003: 283-297).

The stated objective of the BIP was to create an export-processing zone that would encourage U.S. companies to invest in Mexico rather than in Asia. It was supposed to create jobs for displaced bracero workers. However, the Mexican government had other reasons for promoting the BIP. First, it served as a way of underwriting economic growth along the northern border, an area that was quite underdeveloped. Second, it was a means to earn foreign exchange. Third, it helped the government ingratiate itself with members of the local bourgeoisie who wished to ally themselves with foreign capital. Therefore, when the owners of maquiladoras started showing a preference for hiring young women instead of the displaced bracero workers, they did not meet with any opposition from the Mexican state, as its other objectives were being met (Wilson 2002: 4).¹⁵

From its birth in 1965, the maquiladoras have been affected by modifications in trade regulations and economic crises. The first phase of development (1967-1974) was marked by rapid growth and the overwhelming preference for women employees, despite the intentions behind the BIP. In the early years, women constituted nearly 85% of the maquiladora workforce (Tiano 1994), and today maquiladora work is still often perceived as women's work, even though the percentage of women employed in the maquiladoras has steadily declined (an explanation of this decline will be given later on in this section). This first growth period ended in 1974 due to the recession in the U.S. and other world economies. The downward turn was also associated with a growing discomfort on the part of U.S. investors with the growing militancy of labour in Mexico and a lack of control on the exchange rates. The Mexican government responded by creating regulatory mechanisms that monitored wage growth in the maquiladoras. This time period also

¹⁵ For more information on the reasons the Mexican government strongly encouraged the BIP, even though it did not meet its official objective of creating jobs for displaced bracero workers, see Sklair (1993).

marks the beginning of the weakening of Mexican institutions advocating labour rights. While reinforcing government-sponsored labour unions, which were used as advocates for businesses, the Mexican government strongly discouraged independent labour unions (Fussell 2000: 63-64). The impact of these decisions is still felt today and strongly affects labour mobilization in the maquiladora regions. (See section 1.5 for more information on the decision to limit independent labour unions.)

The Mexican economic crisis of 1982 marks the beginning of the third phase of development, which is characterized by another boom in the expansion of maquiladora industries. The devaluation of the peso provided even more favourable exchange rates between the U.S. and Mexico and lowered the real wages (in terms of U.S. dollars) in the maquiladora even further. The 1982 economic crisis led to a growth of the maquiladora industries but it also led to growing economic desperation among the Mexican population, which changed the composition of the workforce. The increased demand for maquiladora workers led the owners to relax their definition of an ideal worker and to accept more married women, therefore changing the composition of women working in the maquiladoras. Technological advances also led employers to seek out a more skilled and masculine labour force (Fussell 2000: 65). The recomposition of the female workforce from working daughters (the ideal maquiladora worker was aged 18-25 and still under her father's authority) to working mothers (the new ideal of older, more mature women who had familial obligations and were therefore less likely to quit after a few years) did not improve the gender relations, according to Tiano. Rather, it altered them by creating a new image by which women helped to ensure their children's welfare through their economic support (1994: 96). (See the next section on maquiladoras and gender.)

The next relative boom in the maquiladora industry followed the 1982 economic crisis and the signing by the Mexican government of the General Agreement on Trades and Tarriff in 1986. The GATT further encouraged the growth of maquiladoras and led to another drop in hourly wages (relative to the previous wages in U.S. dollars). Hourly wages also dropped after the signing of NAFTA in 1994 and the further devaluation of the peso.¹⁶ Thus, maquiladora wages have continued to decline throughout Mexico's economic booms and busts and, at the turn of the millennium, were actually the lowest among developing countries with large export-processing zones (Fussell 2000: 64).

NAFTA has been hailed as stimulating exports in Mexico, especially in the maquiladora sector. After the passing of NAFTA in 1994, there was a definite boom in the maquiladora industry: employment more than doubled, from 547,000 in December 1993 to a peak of 1,339,000 in October 2000 (Larudee 2007: 539).¹⁷ However, Larudee argues that this boom is more likely due to the peso devaluation of 1994 and the economic upswing in the United States in the mid-1990s (2007: 558-559). The demand for domestic goods in Mexico was severely affected by the economic depression it was experiencing. However, the Mexican domestic market was not and never has been the predominant market that maquiladora firms serve. Since approximately 92%

¹⁶ Although NAFTA is not the only cause of the 1994 devaluation of the peso, it is a contributing factor. Other factors which can be related to the promises of NAFTA include the large influx of foreign capital into Mexico which rose tenfold from 1989 to 1993 but also ended up making Mexico increasingly vulnerable to this foreign capital. NAFTA also increased the hopes for a promising economic performance in Mexico. However, the raising of the federal fund rate by the U.S. Federal Reserve in February of 1994 affected Mexico's capacity to attract foreign capital. That was also a year of great political turmoil in Mexico, with the Chiapas uprising and the assassination of a presidential candidate in March. The management of the political situation took precedence over the economic one and the Salinas government chose not to devalue the peso before the elections in August. The new president, Zedillo, was however forced to devalue it in December of 1994 (Lustig 1998: 154-171). For more information on the impact of the peso crisis on the maquiladora industry, see Cooney (2001).

¹⁷ Larudee is citing INEGI BIE (Instituto Nacional de Estadística, Geografía e Informática. Banco de Información Económica) <http://dgcnesyp.inegi.gob.mx/bdine/bancos.htm> (accessed 2005).

of their sales went to the U.S. markets (Cooney 2001: 62),¹⁸ the downturn in Mexico did not affect their sales and the peso devaluation led to a significant and sudden drop in labour costs in U.S. dollars for U.S. firms (which experienced a significant advantage over Mexican firms whose overall operating costs were significantly increased by the peso devaluation) (Cooney 2001: 63). Delgado Wise and Cypher explain that NAFTA was not actually a trade-based policy but rather a neoliberal program created to enable U.S. firms to shift their production to Mexico and benefit from cheap Mexican labour. It was an investment/production and restructuring agreement that allowed U.S. firms to expand their production without having to contend with any constraints on the use of capital (i.e., domestic content legislation, export quotas or restrictions on the repatriation of profits or technology sharing agreements) (2007: 138). They summarize by stating, “For the United States, the potential dynamic impacts of the labor export-led model are the following: lowering production costs in Mexico and/or the United States through the insertion of cheap labor into the production process which, on a transnational basis, will increase profits” (2007: 138).

NAFTA also brings to the forefront the importance of the context in which the workers of the CFO were mobilizing. After NAFTA was signed, there was more of a just-in-time production schedule required in the maquiladoras, which in turn pressured suppliers to meet time-sensitive demands that led them to force overtime on maquiladora workers, often without any notice. Many CFO members explained that they could be forced to work nine hours more per week of overtime (usually in three-hour increments at the end of their shift) without any notice or any choice in the matter. This has made it very difficult for promotores to visit with these workers as

¹⁸ Cooney is citing CEPLAC (Comision Economica para America Latina y el Caribe) (1996), Mexico: La industria maquiladora, Santiago.

they often have no idea when they will be home. It also has made it difficult to organize meetings of workers (whether in the colonia or an annual general meeting) as Sundays and even national holidays were not respected as days off. Workers were forced to work on a day when they had family or worker mobilizing plans and were given an alternate day off when there was a downturn in demand and when it was convenient for the maquiladora to do so. For example, on November 20, 2006, at the annual general meeting of the CFO (mentioned in the introduction), which is also a statutory holiday in Mexico (Revolution Day), all the workers were supposed to make decisions together on the work plans for the year. However, most of the CFO members had to return to work as their maquiladora decided to cancel the holiday and give an alternate day off at a date to be determined later. This example shows us the importance of looking at the nuances of organizing in the context of globalization, how something like forced overtime can add to the already nearly insurmountable obstacles to organizing workers in the context of the maquiladoras of Northern Mexico.

Whether due to NAFTA or just a congruence of many factors, the maquiladora sector was definitely expanding in the last half of the 1990s and was even described as “the central nucleus of the economic export model in Mexico” (de la Garza Toledo 2007: 400) and, by 2000, they represented 47.9% of manufacture exports. However, the maquiladora industry entered a crisis in 2000: employment numbers dropped 17.7% between 2000 and 2003 and the number of maquiladora factories dropped 20.5% during the same time period (de la Garza Toledo 2007: 400).¹⁹ The three main causes attributed to the crisis are the fall in demand due to the economic crisis in the United States at the beginning of the century, the relocation of maquiladoras to countries offering lower wages than Mexico, such as China and in Central America, and the

¹⁹ The statistics are de la Garza Toledo’s calculations taken from Fox (2004).

increase in maquiladora wages that reduced the profit margin of the maquiladora sector (de la Garza Toledo 2007: 400-401).

Border cities, which represented the major areas of establishment of the maquiladoras (70% of the maquiladoras were located in the northern border cities of Mexico in 2000) especially major centres such as Tijuana, Ciudad Juarez and Matamoros, were strongly affected by both the upturns and downturns of the international economy and the productive cycles of their head offices, which the 2000 crisis clearly demonstrated. This was the year when the boom in the number of maquiladoras being set up abruptly stopped. Many maquiladora workers were laid off as dozens of plants closed up. Between October 2000 and December 2003, 207,302 jobs were lost and 357 plants closed, and although the employers have signalled that since December 2003 the maquiladora industry has restarted its growth, the reality in the major maquiladora cities begs to differ: between 2000 and 2005, even with the growth which took place in 2003, Tijuana, Ciudad Juarez and Matamoros lost a total of 82,217 maquiladora jobs (Quintero Ramirez 2007: 60). This downturn in the maquiladora industry, one of the structural conditions of globalization, has directly affected mobilizing efforts by the CFO. As we will see in section 1.6 on deterrents to organizing, the maquiladora workers may not know the exact reasons for the downturn, but they have felt its effects and are in constant fear of losing their jobs.

As Delgado Wise and Cypher explain, the maquiladoras ceased to create new jobs during the 2000 to 2005 time frame. In fact, the maquiladora employment levels in 2005 were 16% below the levels in 2000. In addition, the maquiladora sector paid 52% less than non-maquiladora manufacturing, even though the cost of living along the U.S.–Mexico border were considerably higher than in other Mexican states. In short, they state,

the maquila project was never a national development project and is even less so today. Above all, it should be emphasized that by its nature the maquila industry does not represent the exportation of Mexican manufactured products — instead it represents the export of Mexican labor power embodied in the final assembled and exported products. (2007: 126-127)

In another article, Delgado Wise underlines that one cannot understand the maquiladora without first understanding the role it plays in the international production system. As he states:

The location of assembly plants abroad complements the manufacturing industry – in this case, that of the U.S. — by integrating productive chains that globalize design, production and marketing, without the head offices losing control. The relocation of operations to plants located in countries such as Mexico is because they offer fiscal incentives, government supports, and, essentially, workers who are cheap and docile. (2007: 660)

Maquiladoras are clearly linked to the processes of globalization of production and capitalism. Capitalism takes advantage of the existing gender, regional, class and racialized relations in place in countries such as Mexico in order to obtain the most cost-effective production costs, in this case by employing cheap and docile workers. These “ideal” workers were first thought to be young, single women, and then they came to be married women with more responsibilities and, finally, the definition expanded to include docile, non-militant men, as I will discuss in the next section.

1.3 Maquiladoras and gender

Maquiladora work has been perceived as both liberating and exploiting women.²⁰ Early analyses focused on how maquiladora employment marginalized women in the economy and undervalued their work. Feminist analyses also focus on how capitalism takes advantage of the existing gender relations in order to have access to an inexpensive and docile workforce. As Melissa

²⁰ For an overview of exploitation vs liberation debate, see Fussell (2000).

Wright underlines:

The prevailing representation of the typical Mexican maquiladora Woman is of a “docile,” “submissive,” and tradition-bound worker who will only be suited to the position of least prestige and power in the workplace. This discourse of the Mexican Woman echoes the generalized discourses around women in third world contexts, who are said to be a homogenous type of female, uniformly tied to traditional roles and culturally oppressed. (1997: 279)

Tiano describes how, in the beginning, employers took advantage of a previously untapped workforce, women, who were willing to accept a lower wage than men and were considered to have less inclination for mobilization. The preference of maquiladora owners to hire women was in large part related to gender stereotypes and, since at the time unemployment was so high, they were able to hire only their “ideal type” or “maquila grade” workers: young women, between the ages of 18-25, who still lived at home (1994: 46). Women participated in the workforce, not as independent individuals but as members of patriarchal families, often handing over their wages in order to help support their families. This also helps elucidate why they remained in the assembly lines despite the unsatisfactory working conditions. As Tiano explains it: “Capitalism takes advantage of pre-existing patriarchal relations to create a gender-stratified labor force in which women occupy a subordinate position”(1994: 40). My research on the ground showed that the definition of a maquila worker extended to women younger than what was stated in the literature. Although the legal working age in Mexico without special provisions is 16 years old (Article 22 of Mexico’s Ley Federal del Trabajo 2007), Nanci from Ciudad Acuña (Interview #29) explains that it was in fact quite easy in the late 1980s and early 1990s to falsify her papers. Her sister Maria-Eugenia and another worker, Mary from Reynosa, had also done the same thing; all of them were hired at very young ages, 13 and 14 years old (Nanci, Interview #29; Maria-Eugenia, Interview #30; Mary, Interview #55). They simply provided copies of their birth

certificates on which they had changed their dates of birth by pen before recopying them. Not many questions were asked and they just started to work. Clearly, these were not professionally forged papers and represent both a desperate need by these young girls to find employment and a willingness by the employers to look the other way in a situation where they were practically guaranteed docile, submissive girls who would not dare speak up about their working conditions. In fact, none of these women started mobilizing until their twenties or early thirties.

These gendered relations also account for the lack of mobilization in the maquiladora zones. Because of the double workday (formal work and informal work in the form of housework and child-rearing duties), women have much less time to organize and press for better working conditions. Also, since they are relatively new to the workforce, they are not accustomed to mobilizing. In addition, by offering a cheaper alternative to the better paid men, women workers benefit capitalists and lower wages even further by increasing the number of people competing for the same jobs. This is exacerbated by the lack of mobilizing across gender lines because “the perceived threat of female competition creates gender-based divisions within the industrial working class that weaken its solidarity and thwart efforts to organize workers across gender lines” (Tiano 1994: 43). This literature is of extreme importance to this thesis as it informed my preparatory work going into my fieldwork and also because it is representative of the prevailing literature (see section 1.6.4, “Defending their rights,” in this chapter to see how my research on the ground shows a different scenario than the one described by Tiano).

On the other side of the coin, some development economists claim that export-oriented development has been beneficial to women because it has integrated them into the workforce.

Lim in particular felt that the majority of maquiladora workers are better off in an economic sense in the large multinationals than in local indigenous enterprises. She argued that with time “[g]reater competition for female laborers will tend to reduce the degree of exploitation found in women’s work” (1983: 83). However, quantitative in-depth research such as Fussell’s (2000) analysis of the female maquiladora force in Tijuana shows that the reality is very different from Lim’s expected results of empowerment through time. Fussell concludes that the potential for maquiladoras to improve the lives of the women who work there is undermined by the creation of a flexible labour force. Instead of increased wages due to shortage in labourers, it is instead the profile of the maquiladora worker that has changed. As we will see in the next section, the types of maquiladoras have changed significantly with time and with this change there has been a restructuring of the labour force. This does not mean that globalization does not continue to take advantage of gender relations. Quite the opposite in fact: Fussell’s research shows how globalization has affected the local labour market and diminished the earnings potential for female maquiladora workers. The competition that Lim predicted would help women workers has not materialized. Instead of companies competing for women workers, the workers are put in competition with workers from other parts of the world and, in order to keep the region competitive, labour unions and maquiladora owners’ associations have collaborated to keep the maquiladora wages low (Fussell 2000: 76). This collaboration is particularly evident in the continuing threat of relocating to lower-paying zones within or outside of Mexico or in the use of blacklists: a list of non desirable workers (i.e., militant workers who defend their rights) that is kept by the maquiladora-friendly union in conjunction with the maquiladora association to discourage any type of mobilization.

The maquiladora experience shows that contrary to the liberation thesis, in over four decades of working in the maquiladoras, the advantages for women continue to be minimal. Through her interviews of women maquiladora workers, Quintero Ramirez discovered that although women do enter the maquiladora because it pays more in comparison with other local employment opportunities, these workers also expressed the fact that there are hardly any other opportunities available to them. They are actually entering the maquiladoras out of necessity and not through hopes of emancipation or improvement of their conditions (2007: 68). Maria-Eugenia, who worked as both a domestic and a maquiladora worker, gives a first-hand account as to why women, in her case a single-woman with three children, would choose maquiladora employment over other work such as domestic work which she had previously done. When asked which work she preferred, she laughed out loud and stated: “Both are equal. It is work and you have to do it. It is the same but I was better paid for the domestic work than work in the factory” (Interview #30). When asked why she did not continue with the domestic work, she answered: “It’s that they don’t give social security and I was interested in getting social security for my children and also for me because [even] if it [domestic work] paid better, illnesses can also be very expensive and now I have social security.” As a result of the structural conditions of globalization, which created the maquiladora industry in the first place and led to an overwhelming hiring of women in a region with high unemployment, the maquiladora industry is in fact the main employment opportunity for women in the Northern Border Regions and offers social security (health insurance) that is not available in most other employment opportunities for women. Therefore, a woman’s family situation (single or married, with or without children) is a factor in determining whether or not she will seek employment in a maquiladora or elsewhere. Having had occasion while doing fieldwork in Mexico to see the appalling conditions in a hospital for those who are

not insured, it is not difficult to see why someone would choose employment that offers health insurance even if it is at a lower salary and has worse working conditions. For example, without health insurance, most low-income workers could not afford a simple visit to a doctor which cost 300 pesos²¹ and amounts to more than half a week's salary for most maquiladora workers or domestic workers.

1.4 The changes in the maquiladora industry and the restructuring of the labour force

The maquiladora industry has now been in Mexico for more than 40 years. It went from being a transitory response to the high unemployment rate in the Northern Border Region due to the influx of displaced bracero workers to becoming the cornerstone of the industrial restructuring of the country in the 1980s. It has transformed itself from simple assembly plants to complex production plants. However, it is not only the mode of production that has changed. The labour market of the maquiladoras has also undergone an extensive modification: from being an industry for women to an industry for men and women (Quintero Ramirez 2007: 57). This has had significant impact on women-centred maquiladora worker organizations, similar to what the CFO experienced at its inception. We will therefore need to delve into the reasons behind this vast variation in the labour composition of maquiladora workers.²²

Since the 1980s, the percentage of women employed in the maquiladoras has steadily declined to represent less than half of the total workforce (Adamache, Culos & Otero 1995: 199). One of the

²¹ Author's personal experience, Matamoros, 2007. Prescriptions can cost incredible amounts as well, and are also unaffordable for low-income workers.

²² For an overview of the changing gender composition of the maquiladora workforce, see Tiano (2006) and De la O Martinez (2004).

major factors explaining this change in the gender composition of the workforce is that Mexico's maquiladora industry has added to its roots as a labour-intensive, unsophisticated, feminized sector. The industry is becoming more vertically integrated as other levels of the production process are added. This "new" or "post-Fordist" form of maquiladoras is characterized by increasingly flexible, capital-intensive and high-tech operations that create a demand for more skilled and technical positions. These types of positions are more often given to men rather than to women (Adamache, Culos & Otero 1995: 200).

Different reasons are given for this increase in male maquiladora employment. As Adamache, Culos and Otero explain, the specific reason is not known, but is most likely a combination of the following factors: first, the increase can partly be explained by the gender stereotypes. In the old style maquiladoras, unskilled labour, which is generally associated with women, was required. The new maquiladoras, however, require technical ability and higher skill levels, which, according to patriarchal tradition, are male traits (1995: 203). Secondly, the increase in male employment in the maquiladoras can also be explained in part by the harsh socio-economic and political context which has led to a very long high unemployment rate of men in the areas where maquiladoras are concentrated. This has led many men to be less interested in mobilizing and more ready to accept worse working conditions than what they knew previously, making them more "docile," which equals "more acceptable" to the maquiladora owners.

Thirdly, sectoral growth is an important explanatory factor of the decline of women's employment rates. According to this argument, women's employment in the maquiladoras has not changed qualitatively. Rather, it is the sectors that have traditionally employed more male

workers, such as furniture, metal products and transport equipment that have steadily increased, thus increasing the demand for men. This argument was confirmed on the ground as many CFO members explained that the major difference between men's and women's work is that the heavier, more arduous work is given to men, as are certain jobs that are deemed male jobs such as mechanics, whereas jobs requiring dexterity and finesse are given to women. Ameriga explains that there is work for men and work for women (Interview #25). Diego elaborates on this theme when he states that there is a division in his maquiladora: "The women, they prefer them working in sewing and the men work more in heavier, more intense work... Well, yes there are a few differences because they always treat a woman... they give them less than to a man. I am referring to the fact that they discriminate more against her than a man" (Interview #9). Lupe, who works as a mechanic, explains there are a few women mechanics but the men help them out by lifting the heavy material (Interview #26). However, Humberto, who works in maquiladora that tests the quality and durability of tires and whose job is to drive a car up and down the same 70 kilometre stretch of road all day, explains, "Where I am, only men work. There are no women. Only in the offices [are there any women]. There are about three women that work there" (Interview #28). Rosa Maria explains, "They give more delicate work to the women: the fine work is for women; women pack the lamps in packages, then the men lift the heavy boxes. The heavy work is for men" (Interview #16).

Fourthly, there is a change in the nature of the traditionally feminized, labour-intensive industries, where the proportion of workers is falling in relation to the administrative and technical positions that are generally given to men, according to gender stereotypes (Adamache, Culos & Otero 1995: 203). We can also add to these reasons that women were often untrained for the more skilled employment that was in demand (Fussell 2000: 65). Another non-negligible

factor explaining the increasing masculinization of maquiladora employment is that in times of downgrading, women are always the first to be laid off and, when there is an upturn, men are hired at a higher rate than women (Quintero Ramirez 2007: 65-67). Gender changes in the maquiladoras, as a whole, have not been positive for women. Women are still overwhelmingly employed in the most labour-intensive industries, such as garments and electronics, jobs requiring the lowest skill levels. Even when they are employed in more capital-intensive industries, such as automobiles, they occupy the jobs requiring the least amount of skill. In all cases, women are found at the lower end of the job hierarchy (Adamache, Culos & Otero 1995: 205).

Finally, Sklair links the drop in women's participation in the maquiladora labour force in the 1980s to capitalism and the way capitalism used gender stereotyping to its advantage:

In the last resort it does not matter to capital whether it is employing men or women — capital is not sexist (nor racist, for that matter), though it does use sexism (and racism) to suit its purposes, which are the production of profits and the accumulation of private wealth. The maquila industry did not set out to employ women because they were docile, undemanding, nimble-fingered, nonunion and unmilitant. They employed women because it was quite naturally assumed, in terms of sexual stereotypes in both the U.S. and Mexico, that women could be constrained within the workplace to adapt themselves to the image of the “ideal” worker that the industry wished to create, better and faster than men. Once the image of the “ideal” maquila worker is institutionalized and accepted by the working class along the border, the need to employ women in preference to men diminishes, and the job opportunities for docile, undemanding, nimble-fingered, nonunion and unmilitant men open up. (Sklair 2011: 172)

The gendered stereotypes in Mexico's maquila zone are utilized by the maquiladoras: As both a product and a symbol of globalization, the maquiladoras take advantage of the existing gender relations, whatever their manifestation is at the time, to maximize their profits and minimize

worker mobilization. Maquiladoras are also assisted in their objective to keep worker mobilization to a minimum by the union structure and government regulations regarding unionism in Mexico. However, as Sklair also suggests, these images of superexploitative maquiladoras taking advantage of docile women is also one that is utilized by the anti-maquila element such as the AFL-CIO (2011: 173). The image of the women as victims is one that is used by transnational advocacy networks in order to gain support for their cause of helping out maquiladora workers.

1.5 Maquiladoras and labour unions

In order to understand unionism in Mexico, we must first give a brief overview of its political structure and the links between the major union in Mexico, the CTM (Confederacion de Trabajadores Mexicano, Confederation of Mexican Workers) and the leading political party, the PRI (Partido de la Revolucion Institucional, Institutional Revolutionary Party), which was the dominant party in Mexican politics for the most of the 20th century. Mexico's dominant party system, which derived its legitimacy from claiming to represent the values of the Mexican Revolution (democracy, land reform, social justice and national sovereignty), was an important factor in explaining Mexico's long-term political stability (Hamilton 2006: 299). In fact, as Hamilton states, "Termed the 'perfect dictatorship' by Peruvian writer Mario Vargas Llosa, Mexico's dominant party system combined authoritarian controls with flexibility in responding to its constituencies and was for the most part successful in neutralizing protests and dissident groups" (2006: 299). The corporate structure on which the PRI is based is divided into three sectors: labour, peasant and popular. The labour sector incorporates major labour confederations and unions, the first among which is the CTM (Hamilton 2006: 299 & 315). The links between

the CTM union and all levels of the Mexican government are undeniable. It is a well-known fact that the CTM is an affiliate of the PRI political party.

Most of the local unions in the maquiladoras in Northern Mexico belong to one of the three official unions, the CTM, the CROC (Confederacion Regional de Obreros y Campesinos, Regional Confederation of Workers and Peasants) and the CROM (Confederacion Regional de Obreros Mexicanos, Regional Confederation of Mexican Workers) (Quintero Ramirez 2004; Otero 1996: 12-13). Otero adds that the last two organizations, the CROC and the CROM belong to the PRI although they do not belong to the CTM — all three official unions representing maquiladora workers in Mexico are affiliates of the PRI, even if they are in competition with each other. The result of the unions' affiliation with the PRI is that their members are expected to vote in favour of the PRI. In return, their leaders are offered government positions and seats in Congress (Otero 1996: 13). Cooney explains that the degrees of militancy and corruption vary locally between these three dominant unions (2001: 66).

In order to understand the level of corruption that might exist, or at least the perception of corruption from the point of view of NGOs whose objective is to help workers obtain better working and living conditions in the maquiladoras of Northern Mexico, I must also explain the union certification process in Mexico, which is of significant importance: unions need certification from the federal authorities to set up. The state institution that was established as an arbitrator between capital and labour, the Junta de Conciliacion y Arbitracion (Board of Conciliation and Arbitration), is in reality often the worst obstacle to workers' rights (Cooney 2001: 66). Protection contracts — contracts arranged in secret between a union and the employer

without the workers' knowledge — are unfortunately very common in the maquiladora industry in Mexico. These types of contracts are used by the employers to protect themselves legally from an independent and representative union setting up. By filing this contract with the Board of Conciliation and Arbitration, the employer effectively stops any other union organization from being able to sign a union contract (Cooney 2001: 66; see also Quintero Ramirez 2007b).

Cooney continues to explain:

Given this governmental support, the domination of company unions is not surprising. The CTM, the CROM, and the CROC are able to operate with impunity, and they do their best to prevent serious worker representation. Many workers in the maquiladoras may have worked for months before they even know that these unions are “representing” them. (Cooney 2001: 69)

The level of unionization in the northern border cities of Mexico varies widely. They are in general stronger in the east and grow weaker the further west one goes. The level of official unionization in Matamoros and Nuevo Laredo is almost 100% and is quite strong in other eastern cities such as Reynosa and Agua Prieta; official unionization is lower than 30% in cities such as Ciudad Juarez, Tijuana, Mexicali and Nogales (Cooney 2001: 66, citing LaBotz 1992). There are three major maquiladora centres in the state of Tamaulipas, the easternmost northern state in Mexico — Matamoros, Reynosa and Nuevo Laredo — and it has been said that “[l]abor unions flex their muscle in Tamaulipas as they do in no other state in Mexico” (Cooney 2001: 67, citing Williams and Passe-Smith 1992: 13).

Quintero Ramirez, an expert on the study of union mobilization in the maquiladoras of Northern Mexico, believes that unionism in Mexico is much more complex than the corruption thesis would let us believe. She explains that in 2002, a little over 60% of maquiladora workers were

unionized, most of them belonging to the major unions: CTM, CROC and CROM. However, she also distinguishes between two major types of unions: the traditional unionism of the north-eastern part of the border, from Piedras Negras to Matamoros, and the subordinate unionism²³ of the north-western part of the border, from Ciudad Juarez to Tijuana. Traditional unionism is of particular interest to this thesis since it affects many of the cities included in the study, cities where the CFO has or has had an important presence, such as the city of Piedras Negras in the state of Coahuila and the cities of Rio Bravo, Matamoros and Nuevo Laredo in the state of Tamaulipas (see Appendix A: CFO Geography for a map of the cities in which the CFO is located). The exceptions to the traditional unionism on the north-eastern side of the border are Reynosa, Tamaulipas, which has few labour rights, and Ciudad Acuña, Coahuila, which has no union presence. The city of Ciudad Juarez has subordinate unions and no longer has a CFO presence.

Quintero Ramirez defines traditional unionism as “a labour organization inserted within a bureaucratic unionism which, in one phase of industrial restructuring, looked to develop its membership through the negotiation of distinct labour aspects in the new industries, provided this did not infringe upon the basic labour aspects of its unionized members and/or affect its role as a labour mediator” (2007: 72). According to Quintero Ramirez, traditional unionism has worked more diligently towards obtaining minimum salaries and benefits for its employees, and it maintains a certain labour stability inside the plants, which results in lower turnover rate in maquiladoras with traditional unions. Traditional unions have also worked to stop the mobility of maquiladoras, demanding a sum to guarantee that the workers receive compensation should the

²³ Subordinate unions “give priority to supporting their companies’ pursuit of higher profits [and] prioritize productivity and privileges to be obtained from the company over social benefits for their members” (Quintero Ramirez 2004: 289).

company just leave. The collective agreements of Piedras Negras and Matamoros contain this type of arrangement (Quintero Ramirez 2007: 72-73). Traditional unions also follow the law in regards to workers' reproductive rights, and certain unions, such as the ones in Matamoros, have obtained rights for temporary women workers who become pregnant in the period of their work contract. There has also been an effort on the part of unions in Matamoros to construct daycare facilities for the workers. However, many workers complain that there are hardly any daycare facilities (the demand far outweighs the supply), and many maquiladora workers are obligated to leave their children with their mothers, siblings or others (Quintero Ramirez 2007: 72-73). Many workers often end up leaving young children at home alone, due to the impossibility of finding any other daycare option, since many maquiladora workers have recently immigrated to the northern border and have no support system on which to rely.²⁴

Workers in cities with traditional unionism often do fare better in terms of wages and working conditions. However, they are also the first ones to lose whenever there is an economic downturn. The 2001 crisis affected certain border cities more than others. Cities with traditional unionism such as Matamoros, Nuevo Laredo and Piedras Negras lost more maquiladora jobs than cities with subordinate unionism: for example, Ciudad Juarez or Tijuana. And cities with flexible unionism or few labour rights, such as Reynosa and Ciudad Acuña, actually gained maquiladora jobs while the other cities were losing them (Carillo, Hualde & Quintero Ramirez

²⁴Information obtained through interviews of maquiladora workers who were either speaking of their own experiences or the experiences of their co-workers. One interviewee, a single mother with two children, explained that she worked nights because it was the only way she could take care of her children during the day. When I asked who watched them at night, she reluctantly admitted that there was no one. In her words, "Yes, it is difficult because I do not have family...yes, I have family, brothers, but I do not have sisters. I am the only girl. And when you have a sister, your sister supports you, but in this case, I do not have any sisters and, well, I left them alone locked in." She stated it was better to work at night "because in the day they go to school. I bring them to school in the morning. They arrive and they know I will be home and not away." (Out of deference to the very personal information shared, this part of the interview is anonymous.)

2005: 42). As I was able to observe on the ground in 2006 and 2007, it was evident that Ciudad Acuña and Reynosa were in a growth stage. This was visible through the increase in maquiladora housing being built (see section 1.6.1 in this chapter on INFONAVIT housing) to house the influx of maquiladora workers arriving in the cities. This was in contrast to Piedras Negras, which had a much older housing infrastructure and many vacant maquiladoras.

No matter the definition of unions, whether they are all deemed corrupt or are in much more complicated situations, the importance here is that, as Quintero Ramirez herself explains, many NGOs, including the CFO, view unions in Mexico as corrupt (2001). The CFO is fighting against union corruption and protection contracts and its list of objectives includes the following: “to foster union democracy and advance independent unionization” (CFO 2009c). The CFO feels that union corruption is an obstacle to organizing and the very reason it is organizing maquiladora workers, often in a clandestine manner. Another aspect of the political culture in Mexico that poses an obstacle to organizing maquiladora workers is the presence of *caciques* (bosses) in every *colonia* (poor neighbourhood). Williams summarizes the effects on organizers (such as the members of the CFO) through the presence of these *caciques*:²⁵

During this [initial] period [of organizing maquiladora workers], organizers must also become acquainted with the political environment in which they are holding meetings. Every colonia is likely to have its own political dynamic; *caciques*, or “bosses” in the colonias may report on organizing activities to company management or threaten organizers and participants in meetings with violence. In those cases, workers and organizers must determine times and places where they can meet without being seen. (Williams, 1999: 148)

This is in fact one of the reasons why the CFO had for many years adopted a low-profile approach. This description of the political dynamic in the colonias must be taken into

²⁵ For an excellent overview of the caudillismo system in Latin America, especially the presence of *caciques*, please see Rouquié (1998: 265-283).

consideration when developing strategies for organizing maquiladora workers. As I was able to observe on the ground and through interviews with CFO members, the dangers of organizing in certain neighborhoods are very real. One CFO promotore, Javier, was in fact assaulted in Nuevo Laredo (Javier, Interview #4; Norma, Interview #6; Julia Quiñonez, Interview #1). Javier explains:

I believe that, yes, it is dangerous to do the work in Laredo. I don't know to what point, I tell you, but a few weeks ago I went to do research in Laredo and things went very badly. They stole my money. They left me in an isolated area outside Laredo and they took my boots and I had to walk back bare feet. Therefore, it is very difficult and very dangerous. (Interview #4)

Caciques are, however, not the only deterrents to organizing in the maquiladoras. In the next few sections, I will describe some of the obstacles to mobilizing maquiladora workers in the Northern Border cities where the CFO has a presence, from the point of view of workers who were brave enough to overcome their fears. We can also begin to understand how the changing workforce, increased threat of relocation and unions co-operating with the maquiladoras have affected the mobilizing efforts of the CFO.

1.6 Deterrents to organizing and issues of fear when participating in the CFO

In the previous sections, I began to give an overview of the context in which the CFO members are organizing, including some of the deterrents to organizing in the specific Mexican Northern Border Region. This section will look at how the members view the context in which they are organizing. Unless otherwise specified, the information given here is a compilation of the interviews, observations and experiences with the members of the CFO while doing fieldwork in

Piedras Negras and Ciudad Acuña, Coahuila, in November 2006 (for 30 days) and in Matamoros, Rio Bravo and Reynosa, Tamaulipas, from September to November 2007 (for 75 days). The objective of this section is to give a voice to those who are marginalized in a traditional reading of politics, to give a voice to the grassroots members of the CFO and to see what these voices can teach us about the difficulties of organizing specifically in the maquiladoras of Northern Mexico (often characterized as the ground zero of globalization). This section will help us to appreciate the many obstacles that need to be overcome by organizations such as the CFO in their attempt to reach some of the workers and speak to them about their rights, let alone recruit them to participate in the organizations. The section headings were determined by an overview of field notes and of interview transcripts regarding the major issues that CFO members brought up regarding what they felt were deterrents to organizing.

1.6.1 Housing

There are many deterrents to organizing in the Northern Border Region of Mexico. One of the most basic deterrents is the fear of losing one's homes. Many people move to the border region from poorer states to find jobs in the maquiladoras. Although a significant number of newcomers to the border cities do end up living in houses built of scrap materials when they first arrive due to a housing shortage and not having any money to secure an apartment, most of those who obtain jobs in the maquiladoras are in fact put on waiting lists for government-sponsored housing through INFONAVIT²⁶ (Instituto del Fondo Nacional de la Vivienda para los Trabajadores, National Housing Fund Institute for Workers). In order to qualify for no down payment, they

²⁶ For more information on the INFONAVIT housing program, see www.infonavit.gob.mx.

have to have a steady job (such as a maquiladora job) and agree to have the mortgage deducted directly from their paycheque. These houses are mass produced in neighbourhoods that are on the outskirts of the city. All of the houses are built to the same basic standards: cement floors and walls and a small bedroom, kitchen, living room and washroom. These basic houses cost approximately \$20,000 to \$25,000 (U.S.), and this cost is removed directly from their paycheques at a rate of approximately \$30.00 (U.S.) per week. This means they will be paying for their houses for the rest of their lives. This also means that the workers cannot afford to lose their jobs in a maquiladora or to be unemployed for even a short period of time for fear of losing their homes.

Most people are put on long waiting lists for these INFONAVIT houses since the infrastructure of the border cities has not kept up with the influx of workers. This means that families who are new to the city might live either in rented apartments if they are available or in whatever else they can find (this is one of the reasons why some workers live in makeshift housing). But the truth is that most maquiladora workers do have their own homes, although they will be paying for it until they die and it will probably fall apart in about 20 years (many of the houses I had visited were already starting to have problems, especially with the plumbing). They do have running water and electricity. There is also overcrowding, since these are small, one-bedroom houses and most of the people I interviewed had at two or more children. There are some larger INFONAVIT two-storey houses with three bedrooms, but this is not something that most workers can afford since most can barely afford the one-bedroom house.

In addition to having their mortgage payments deducted directly from their paycheques through the government-sponsored INFONAVIT housing program, workers can have furniture purchases automatically deducted from their paycheques through INFONACOT²⁷ (Instituto del Fondo Nacional para el Consumo de los Trabajadores. Institute for the National Fund for Employee Consumption). For people who arrive at the border cities with nothing, this is often a very appealing choice. However, these payment programs also serve as a way to keep them attached to a specific location and ensure that at least one member of the household keeps a job in a maquiladora so that they can have the house and furniture payments deducted directly from their paycheques. Although these people have a roof over their heads, they may not have enough money left over for food, water, electricity or medicine. This debt trap of the market economy is clearly felt by Lupe's coworkers, many of whom are only working Monday to Wednesday and are getting paid for Thursday and Friday at 70% of their weekly salary of 600 to 650 pesos because of cutbacks in their maquiladora. As Lupe explains:

Many people don't have enough money to pay for gas to cook, or pay for water or lights. One gas tank costs 250 pesos and lasts one month to cook and heat water; lights [cost] about 400 pesos; [and] water [costs] 100 pesos per month. These people can't look for another job because they can't afford to go even one week without a salary because of everything that is removed from their paycheques, and also [there is] not much work right now, so people stay because having a little bit is better than nothing. (Lupe, Interview #26)

1.6.2 Forced resignation vs. being fired

One of the most common intimidation tactics used by maquiladoras is forcing maquiladora workers into resigning their jobs rather than firing them. This tactic is so widespread that it could be considered a common practice. Oftentimes, workers are asked to sign a blank page which can then be filled out by their employer with the terms the employer wants. This means that the

²⁷ For more information on the INFONACOT cash loan program, see www.fonacot.gob.mx

workers will not receive the full severance pay owed to them according to Mexico's Federal Labour Law. Some workers might not receive any severance at all for over 10-15 years of service. As this seems counter-intuitive, I was very interested to find out why these workers would sign blank pages and accept less money than they would be owed if they were fired.

It is impossible to determine how many maquiladora workers have not participated in the CFO because of their fear of being fired and/or of being blacklisted, which would mean that they could never find employment in another maquiladora. There is no way to sample such a population without adding to their fear. As such, my thesis focuses on those who have already conquered their own fears, which can include even the fear of physical retribution, and who have decided that participation in the CFO is worthwhile to them. Through my interviews with over 50 maquiladora workers in Mexico's Northern Border Region, I have learned that when maquiladora employees sign a blank page at the request of their union or employer, it is not always because they are unaware of their right to refuse. Many of them know their rights and they are intimidated into signing them away. Others described it as a strategic choice when faced with limited options. Virginia explains:

Some because of fear, others because of ignorance they do not want to start a feud with the factory and would rather look for other work. They say they want a recommendation and if they start a feud with the factory, they will not give them a recommendation. They would prefer to lose their rights, to lose what is owed to them by law because of fear.

*So that they can find another job?*²⁸

That is it.

And is there a blacklist here for the maquiladoras, because I had it mentioned to me in other cities and was wondering if it was the same here, that if people defend their rights a lot, that they can end up on the blacklist and not be able to get any other work?

²⁸ Italicized texts are the questions posed by the author/interviewer.

This, well in fact there are a few people, that is why they don't do it, because there are maquiladoras that if they hear that a worker (female) has been speaking about the Labour Law and that there are people who support this, that teach on the Federal Labour Law, they look for ways to get them to quit, they make their work life intolerable so they quit or they fire them definitely for whatever little reason so that there won't be any revolts; because they are leaders in the factory; because they open they eyes of more workers [female] and the companeras [colleagues] so that they defend themselves, that they defend their rights more than anything. (Virginia, Interview #58)

Even when maquiladora workers know that they can prove that they were fired unjustly and choose to bring the issue to the Board of Conciliation and Arbitration, they know there are no guarantees. They know that even if they do win, it might take years to have any results. The one definite guarantee is that they will be blacklisted and will therefore never be able to work in a maquiladora again. So many choose to sign away their rights and accept much lower severance packages than what they are owed by law because they need to feed their families and pay for their houses or they risk losing it all. Maquiladora workers live from paycheque to paycheque and they cannot afford the few months it might take for a claim to go through the Board of Conciliation and Arbitration and they can certainly not afford to be blacklisted and never find another job in a maquiladora. So they make a strategic choice: better to lose out now on the severance package they are owed in the hopes of being able to find another job in a maquiladora than to fight for what is owed to them and to have the certainty of never being hired in a maquiladora again.

The choice to fight for their rights or defend themselves in any way that might jeopardize their job security is even more difficult for workers who have moved to the border from other cities and do not have a family to rely on in case of extended periods of unemployment. Families, even extended families, do help each other out a lot in Mexico. Unfortunately, for many maquiladora

workers, their families are far away and oftentimes far poorer and in no condition to help them out financially.

1.6.3 Blacklists

The blacklists are lists of all of the maquiladora workers who have been fired for defending their rights and therefore they will not be rehired by any of the maquiladoras. These lists are maintained either by the union or by the maquiladora association. These blacklists are a common practice in all of the cities in this study. For example, in order to get a job in a maquiladora in Piedras Negras, a worker needs to apply directly at the CTM offices in Piedras Negras, and needs to have his/her application signed by the leader of the CTM, Localio Hernandez, himself. This makes the blacklist much easier to maintain. Many of the interviewees also mentioned that Localio Hernandez and the CTM try to get people to give press conferences against the CFO and Julia Quiñonez in particular, in exchange for being removed from the Piedras Negras blacklist (see Chapter 5 for more information on the CTM trying to slander the CFO coordinator, Julia Quiñonez).

The blacklist in Ciudad Acuña is a list that is shared between maquiladoras, through the Maquiladora Association of Acuña, since there are no unions in Ciudad Acuña. Either way, through the union or the Maquiladora Association, the blacklist is very true and omnipresent in the thoughts of maquiladora workers. It is what stops many from joining the CFO and one of the major reasons why working conditions and salaries have steadily declined. The municipal government in Ciudad Acuña advertises its city as a great place for maquiladoras to come and set up shop. It promises worker stability because there are no unions. There is also no Board of

Conciliation and Arbitration in Ciudad Acuña. Workers who want to make a complaint have to travel all the way to Piedras Negras to do so.²⁹ The city of Ciudad Acuña is built around the maquiladora industry as there is no other industry and the infrastructure is in horrible shape. There are few if any paved roads, and the dirt roads are practically impassable. Yet many new one-bedroom INFONAVIT houses were under construction when I was there, which would indicate that their marketing strategy is working and they are attracting and keeping maquiladora jobs in Acuña.³⁰ Reynosa is very similar to Ciudad Acuña: the blacklist is kept by the Maquiladora Association.

In Matamoros, there is a very strong union presence which is the main reason why independent organizing is not very successful there. The union does help out the community a lot and is so strong that workers are less inclined to mobilize. The dominance of the labour side means that workers don't even mobilize in other areas such as women's organizations. An interesting fact about Matamoros is that even after workers are fired, they remain part of the union if they pay a 5 peso union due each month in order to ensure that they will be the first workers called the next time a job is available. If they do not pay this 5 peso quota, they will not be called. This ensures that a worker is always part of the union and will not speak up against it for fear of reprisals and in fear of not finding another job.³¹ This is a new twist on the blacklist. Instead of workers being put on a blacklist if they speak up against the union, this minimal union due serves to nip any

²⁹ The distance between these two cities is approximately 90 kilometres. Although there is a highway and the trip only takes an hour for someone with a vehicle, this is often completely out of reach for maquiladora workers who cannot afford the the gas money or the cost of the bus trip.

³⁰ Data as of 2006.

³¹ Information obtained through conversations with Cirila Quintero, a specialist on union mobilizing in Matamoros (September 2007).

mobilizing tendency in the bud. Instead of creating fear, they create a sense of loyalty and obligation to a union who rewards them by putting them first on the lists for the next jobs.

As we saw earlier in this chapter (see section 1.5 on maquiladoras and unions), cities with traditional unionism, such as Piedras Negras and Matamoros, lose jobs in any economic downturn, whereas cities with few labour rights, such as Ciudad Acuña and Reynosa, actually gain maquiladora jobs in times of economic hardship (Carillo, Hualde & Quintero Ramirez 2005: 42). Many workers do not understand the reasons behind the downturn in the economy, but they do feel its effects. They know that jobs are getting scarcer, especially the better paying maquiladora jobs. As Octavio explains, in the past they did not fear being fired because there were so many jobs available that trucks would drive by the colonias with loud speakers announcing jobs at such and such a maquiladora, even specifying that the workers only needed an elementary school education (Interview #37). As I discussed previously, Mexico suffered a severe depression after the passing of NAFTA and there was a major devaluation of the peso. This, however, created an influx of maquiladora jobs since over 90% of the sales went to the U.S. market and the multinational corporations benefitted from the sudden drop in labour costs (in U.S. dollars) for American firms (since the maquiladora workers were paid in pesos) (Cooney 2001: 62).

The maquiladora sector is no longer expanding. The Northern Border Region of Mexico is severely affected by the cycles of the international economy, as the economic crisis of the early 2000s showed. The number of maquiladoras setting up in the area significantly decreased. The job market became more competitive (Quintero Ramirez 2007: 60). At the time of my

interviews, many of the maquiladora workers lived in constant fear of losing their jobs. This was especially true of those who had had jobs for many years in the same maquiladora and were therefore earning a bit more than the approximate 400 peso entry-level salary; it was also true for those who feared that they would be replaced with new workers who would accept lower salaries. This has kept many of them from mobilizing to defend their rights, even if they are aware of them. One other reason that keeps some of the workers from mobilizing is the constant threat made by the maquiladoras of moving to South America to even lower salaries, thus pitting cities and workers against each other. In 2006, the mentality of the workers had changed. The shortage of employment opportunities rendered many workers unable to mobilize or defend their rights due to the fear of not finding another job. As Octavio explains (in 2006), “Now, you find yourself doing things you wouldn’t have done [extra work that is not part of the job contract]. The mentality has changed a lot” (Interview #37). Zolia, from Piedras Negras, summarizes this change in mentality when answering a question on whether or not more people participate in the CFO (in 2006) than before:

I believe that now there are a few less because they have closed many maquiladoras and many people now have a fear of...for example, you cannot tell a person to defend themselves inside their maquiladora, because they have this fear that the maquiladora is going to close and they will find themselves without work. And on top of that, the companies use that to intimidate people [by saying] “You have to do what we say or else, the company will go, will go somewhere else and you will all find yourselves without work.”...Before it was very, very different because there were many job opportunities here, and now, no. Almost all of the maquiladoras have closed now and changed location...to Puebla, or more inside [the interior of Mexico] and others went to China, because in China they pay very little. (Interview #33)

The greater competition for female maquiladora workers that Lim (1983: 83) had predicted would lead to more bargaining power for these workers and less exploitation has not materialized. As we have seen in this section, on the issue of fear as a deterrent to participating in

an organization such as the CFO, Fussell's research on the effects of globalization on the local labour market in another Northern Border maquiladora city validates this case study. As Fussell explained, "[G]lobal conditions affecting multinational assembly plants have influenced the local labor market and diminished the earning potential of women employed in maquiladoras. In the drive to compete with other regions specializing in export-oriented manufacturing, the state, the labor unions, and the maquiladora owners' associations have collaborated to maintain low wages in the maquiladoras" (2000: 76).

1.6.4 Defending their rights and speaking about the CFO at work

Tiano explains how the lack of mobilization in the maquiladora zones is in part due to the gender relations in Mexico in which women participate in the workforce, not as independent individuals but as members of patriarchal families whose wages are handed over in order to support their families. Women are expected to mobilize less because of the double workday of their formal work in the maquiladora and their household and child-rearing duties once they return home. This does not allow them as much free time to mobilize as their male counterparts. In addition, women in general are less used to mobilizing in Mexico. Tiano also adds that there has been a lack of mobilizing across gender lines because "the perceived threat of female competition creates gender-based divisions within the industrial working class that weaken its solidarity and thwart efforts to organize workers across gender lines" (1994: 43).

My research on the ground revealed a different scenario than the one described by Tiano above. Gender relations still create the double workday and patriarchal family relationships are still evident. However, their effect on the mobilization of maquiladora workers has changed over

time. In the specific context of Northern Mexico in 2006, women were less afraid to mobilize and defend their rights than men were³² precisely because patriarchal family structures were still in place and the man continued to be seen as the primary breadwinner. One interviewee's comments on who is less afraid to mobilize to defend their rights, men or women, reveals another side of gender relations. This allows us to understand some of the intricacies of labour and women's organizing in the context of globalization. As Sklair (2011) explains, capitalism is not sexist; it does, however, use and can also be affected by gender relations already in place in the local context. Maria-Rosario's comments in regards to a question on whether or not she or anyone she knew had ever felt fear because of their participation in the CFO reveals how we need to nuance our understanding of gender relations and mobilization. In her words:

People that talk, that defend us, they put them on the blacklist. I am a woman and I defend myself. If they do not give me work, although we are poor, my husband brings in a salary. But for a man it is harder because he is the one who brings home the food for the house, I say that it is him that has to keep his head down a bit more, but me as a woman, no. I yell, I defend myself because my husband, as you wish, will bring home the food. (Interview #42)

When asked if women defend themselves more than men, she replied:

I say that we defend ourselves more, the women. The man, hardly ever. My husband is very serious also. He doesn't...yes, he defends himself but he says: "If they fire me, and then?" As things are, women have an advantage. I say, but I don't know if it is the truth. Well, it's that the man does not defend himself more because his salary is the one that pays for the food, the expenses and the woman's [salary], mine, for example, is to buy clothes, blankets, etc. (Interview #42)

Francisca, from Rio Bravo, mentioned something similar in regards to why it is harder for married men to mobilize than women:

What happened is that the man, how do I say this, he does not, he does not put himself at risk. He does not put himself at risk through a comité because he is, how do you say it, the support for the home, who maintains the house. Therefore, he cannot miss a day of work or he does not want to get involve in those problems, what looks like maquila problems. (Interview #57)

³² Some of the women interviewed did mention that they believe men are more courageous than women and that is why they are happy to have men in the CFO now.

Virginia also felt that the men as the breadwinners of the family could be more afraid to participate in worker mobilizing than women:

[B]ecause some are the base [breadwinner] of the house and have to bring in [the money] and can't go around fighting and get fired from their work because they were going around being leaders or fighting for their rights and possibly they prefer to keep their mouth shut and not get involved in this. (Interview # 58)

Gender relations may still affect single women's, especially single mothers', level of participation in organizations such as the CFO and can deter them from participating. However, it seems that in the case of married women, this is not necessarily true. They can feel much freer to voice their discontent regarding working conditions and be less afraid of the repercussions such as being fired because their salaries are not considered the main salary of the family, even when both spouses are employed in a maquiladora. The social stigma for a man to lose his job and be supported by his wife is in fact a much stronger deterrent that keeps more men from participating in the CFO than women. In addition, the lack of mobilization across gender lines that Tiano spoke of does not seem to apply to the case of the CFO. In fact, there are more and more men in the organization, which can be seen as either an improvement in gender relations or a consequence of them, depending on if one sees the men's involvement as taking over the organization or as an example of gender equality.

1.6.5 Fear as a strong deterrent to mobilizing

Pedro, a CFO member since 2003, explained how he almost lost his job once, but because he had participated in the CFO and that he knew his rights, he was able to defend himself and keep his job. He spent four hours being intimidated by his boss who asked him to sign a blank page so

that the next time a machine broke, Pedro could be thrown out without delay. But even after four hours of intimidation, he held strong because he knew his rights. Now, he refuses to sign things because of intimidation. Following this experience, the bosses tried to get everyone to sign pages that said if a machine broke they would be thrown out. He and everyone on his team at the maquiladora refused. However, since he had not been able to speak to the people from the other teams beforehand, they all signed. In his experience, there are definite dangers to participating in the CFO because now he is under constant surveillance at the workplace because the bosses are aware that he knows his rights and that he speaks to others about their rights. However, as he points out, thanks to his participation in the CFO, he still has a job (Interview #14). Many CFO members confirm this hesitancy of speaking of the CFO at work for fear of being fired. As Marcos succinctly states, “If your bosses find out you talk about the CFO, they will fire you, so you have to talk about the CFO in the lunchroom, or other areas away from the bosses, because if they know you are part of the CFO, they will watch you much more carefully” (Interview #15).

Most of the CFO members state that they are not afraid of losing their jobs. Their courage must be acknowledged considering the very real possibility of this happening. However, they all acknowledge that talking about the CFO at work is very dangerous, if not to themselves (or rather if they won't back down because of fear) then to their co-workers who might be fired for simply being seen speaking with them. Many encourage other people to participate in the CFO; however, they use a lot of discretion when talking about the CFO at work. Some do state that they are afraid, as does this long-time member who said, “It is not possible to talk about the CFO in the work area because it is like asking to be fired, inside the workplace” (Nanci, Interview #29). Many of the interviewees have in fact lost their jobs because of defending their rights or

the rights of their co-workers in the maquiladoras.³³ It is therefore not surprising that some of them chose not to mention the CFO or workers' rights at all in the workplace and limited themselves to speaking about the CFO when they were outside the maquiladoras. Norma, one of the CFO promotores, explains that the fear does not only extend to oneself being fired or being put on a blacklist and therefore not being able to ever find maquiladora employment again, the fear also extends to one's family members not being able to work in a maquiladora. In her case, because she is well known as a CFO promotore, her son is unable to find work, or if he does, they let him go after two or three days, once they have verified the information on his birth certificate, which includes the names of the parents and grandparents (Interview #6).³⁴

³³ Patty, Juany, Javier, Juan, Pilar, Margerito and Maria-Rosario are but a few examples of members who spoke about being fired for their participation in the CFO or for defending their rights in the maquiladora. This firing also led all of them to be put on blacklists.

³⁴ It must however be noted that some previous CFO promotores have left the CFO and gone back to work in the maquiladoras, for example, Tere from Matamoros (Interview #44). Norma (Interview #6) is however very visible and outspoken in her mobilizing efforts and thus it is likely that the different contexts (blacklists that vary in different cities and level of visibility of each of these promotoras) explain the different results when they have tried to look for maquiladora employment.

We now have a better understanding of the context in which the CFO emerged. Specifically, we have seen why the maquiladoras of Northern Mexico were created and how they first took advantage of the existing gendered hierarchies of Mexican society to employ docile, young women who were not used to mobilizing. We have also seen how through their evolution from simple assembly plants to complex production plants, the gendered composition of the maquiladora workforce has changed while still taking advantage of the gendered hierarchies that are prevalent in Mexico. With time, the men in the Mexico's Northern Border Region were viewed to be less militant, and thus the ideal maquiladora worker transitioned from young, docile women to docile, non-militant men. The liberation thesis, which argued that women new to the maquiladora workforce would become more valuable and their working conditions would improve over time, never materialized. Understanding the context of the gender relations in Northern Mexico throughout the history of the maquiladoras will help us to explain how and why the CFO started off as a women's organization and why it can no longer be considered to be one today.

In this chapter, we saw that the influx of men into the formerly predominantly female workforce significantly changed the dynamics surrounding the CFO. This posed a dilemma for the organization as far back as the early 1990s as more and more men became interested in joining. One of the reasons men chose the CFO was that the unions in the maquiladoras were not representative of the workers' interests or they were corrupt. Therefore, men who were fed up with their working conditions began turning to organizations such as the CFO. As we saw in the introduction, the CFO was also seen as an intermediary between international unions such as the

USW and the creation of independent unions in the maquiladoras, which also explains why more men participated in the organization.

We also saw that many deterrents to organizing maquiladora workers continue to exist, some as overt as the fear of losing jobs, some more subtle such as linking the ownership of houses and furniture and obtaining health insurance for families to workers' jobs in the maquiladoras. As we have seen throughout this chapter, CFO members continue to mobilize against all odds and their courage is quite impressive. Many do succumb to these fears and choose to remain non-militant in face of these overwhelming obstacles. We should keep this courage in mind when we examine the changes in strategies of the CFO and how the need for transnational partners influences the choices the organization has made throughout the years at its grassroots base.

Chapter 2

Globalization from below? The dynamics of transnational and local organizing in the context of globalization

This thesis seeks to explain the mobilization of (women) maquiladora workers in Northern Mexico's Border Region through the case study of the Comité Fronterizo de Obrer@s and how the local mobilization is affected by the pressures from above through its transnational partners who help the organization obtain funds. The need to secure financial resources is unavoidable for an organization that does not require any membership dues. The CFO has therefore participated in many transnational partnerships throughout its history, partnerships that have influenced its strategies and grassroots organizing level. In this chapter, we will be looking at literature that may be useful in our analysis of both the transnational and local levels of organizing of the CFO. The CFO is viewed by most scholars and activists as a grassroots women's organization with transnational ties. However, the field research reveals some of the nuances of this grassroots mobilization of (women) maquiladora workers, which is not easily defined.

My thesis is positioned within the "globalization from above" and "globalization from below" debate around the question of transnational social movements within a political economy analysis. More specifically, this thesis looks at the pressures from "above" in the "globalization from below" category, and the constraints that transnational advocacy networks or other transnational partners can and do impose on the local organization. This chapter will offer an overview of this debate, the literature in international political economy (IPE), and the literature on transnational social and labour movements, which will be useful to our analysis of the CFO. I

will also review the limits of the current literature and the advantages of supplementing the literature through in-depth on-the-ground research.

2.1. IR and IPE and the globalization debate

The concept of globalization has generated many schools of thought, too many in fact to summarize in this chapter. Some, however, are of particular interest to this thesis to explain the relationship between the processes of globalization and transnational organizing and a group such as the CFO. Conway and Heynen (2006: 5) offer a very interesting categorization of how globalization's contradictory nature leads to very different analyses³⁵ of its particular virtues, strengths and weaknesses: First, there is the school of thought that has been dubbed the *hyperglobalizers*.³⁶ This school of thought views globalization as the beginning of a new era, either of a much more efficient borderless economy or of an unwelcome triumph of supranational global capital. Both, whether they are extreme right wing or left wing ideologically, view globalization as a process driven and dominated by macroeconomic forces. *Skeptics*,³⁷ as the term implies, view globalization as a myth, that the world is still fundamentally the same, and they often point out that geographical differences and the continuation of social inequalities are tangible evidence that globalization has not changed much in the world. *Transformationalists*³⁸ view globalization as an unprecedented force causing rapid restructuring at the social, economic and political levels. They believe that globalization is diminishing the power of the state while reconfiguring national/civil power in an increasingly interconnected

³⁵ Their categorization of the different schools of thought on globalization is taken from Held et al. (1999), to which they added a fourth category — that of *global geographers*.

³⁶ See Ohmae (1995) and Greider (1997) for examples of both versions of *hyperglobalizers*.

³⁷ See Hirst and Thompson (1999) for an example of *skeptics*.

³⁸ See Giddens (2003) and Rosenau (1997) for examples of *transformationalists*.

world. The transformationalist school of thought seeks to situate globalization in socio-historical context and argues that any explanation of globalization needs to take into consideration the complex and ever-changing interrelationships between economic, technological, political and socio-cultural causal factors. It believes that given enough political will, the current configuration of globalization can be re-charted. Conway and Heynen also add an additional category: the *global geographers*.³⁹ This school theorizes about the geographical consequences of globalization as well as the time-space interconnections. *Global geographers* have also brought attention to the fact that globalization's impacts vary significantly by geographic region. The uneven diffusion of global technological advances simultaneously privileges and deprives people and divides the world geographically into "haves" and "have-nots." Globalization's contradictory impacts are felt at many different geographical scales (Conway & Heynen 2006: 6-9).

In my thesis, I will be engaging with the *transformationalist* literature, more specifically, with those who argue for "globalization from below" as a response to "globalization from above," with those who believe, in varying degrees, in the reconfiguration possibilities that can be brought on by actions within civil society, especially those in transnational networks. I will also argue in this literature review that the CFO does not fit easily into the category of "globalization from below," although it does in fact sometimes participate in activities in this category, such as participation in transnational networks that are more specifically alter globalization. Its main objectives, however, are much more specific and related to improving the working and living conditions of its members and it does not necessarily seek to offer an alternative world.

³⁹ See Peck (2002) and Swyngedouw (1997).

Bruff offers another very interesting conceptualization of the globalization debate (2005: 261-270). He divides it into three waves and explains how each wave possesses two distinct arguments. The first wave focuses on how globalization is an unprecedented phenomenon that severely restricts the state's ability to pursue its own policies.⁴⁰ This first wave would therefore include the *hyperglobalizers* and also the *transformationalists* from Held et al.'s and Conway and Heynen's categorization noted above. The second wave argues that the present era of globalization is unexceptional and that states are very capable of adapting to the changes.⁴¹ This wave would thus resemble the categorization of *skeptics* as seen above. Finally, Bruff's third wave focuses on the multi-dimensional and uneven aspects of what is called "globalization" and argues that it is not so much the reality of whether or not globalization is happening that is important, rather it is the perceived effects of globalization that are important.⁴² One of these leading perceptions (or truths) of globalization is its contradictory nature, as explained by Held, which defines globalization as follows:

The stretching and deepening of social relations and institutions across space and time, such that, on the one hand, day-to-day activities are increasingly influenced by events happening on the other side of the globe and, on the other hand, the practices and decisions of local groups can have significant global reverberations. (1995, as cited in Conway & Heynen 2006: 3)

It is this belief that the actions of local groups can have significant global influence that leads many of the groups in the "globalization from below" category to act. By "asking *how* globalization is perceived and acted upon across space and time" (Bruff 2005: 267; emphasis in original) and espousing an interdisciplinary (or post-disciplinary) approach to the question of

⁴⁰ Some notable authors that Bruff (2005) places in the first wave are Held et al. (1999), Scholte (2000), Strange (1996) and Roseneau (2000).

⁴¹ In this wave, Bruff places the edited volumes by Weiss (2003), Boyer and Drache (1996), Berger and Dore (1996) and the works by Hirst and Thompson (1999), Garret (1998) and Hall and Soskice (2001).

⁴² Bruff includes here authors such as Jessop (2003), Hay and Marsh (eds.) (2000), Hay and Rosamond (2002), Steger (2000), Cameron and Palan (2003), Dolfisma and Dannreuther (2002), Wincott (2000) and Smith (2004).

globalization, the third wave offers important theoretical underpinnings which will be adopted in my thesis. What is important is not whether or not globalization is taking place (the arguments addressed in the first and second waves), but rather whether people believe the globalization thesis or not. According to the third wave, we need to incorporate the role of discourse into the analysis and look at the real effects that the discourse of globalization has on the process of globalization itself (Bruff 2005: 268). For third wave literature, globalization is not simply an external fact that requires a response. Rather, the literature is “deeply political, contested, contingent and complex, and attention should be paid to the various processes, trends and tendencies that exist in the social world, and to how actors interpret and act upon these developments” (Bruff 2005: 270).

The discourse about what reality is — that it is not important what globalization is doing, rather what is important is what is perceived to be attributable to globalization — brings us back to critical theory and the third debate in international relations (IR), which argued that we must go beyond positivist theory. It is in fact with the third debate (see Cox & Turenne Sjolander 1994) in IR that the questions of knowledge took on more importance in our field of study. This is when we started to examine the consequences of the orthodox divorce between knowledge and values, knowledge and reality and knowledge and power. We also started to examine the ways in which certain questions were determined to be legitimate questions or “real” questions while others were considered to be illegitimate and of no importance to the discipline of international relations (Devetak 1996: 180-181). Postmodernism deconstructs familiar language and shows “how discourse constructs rather than simply reflects reality” (Der Derian 1989: 4). As Bruff mentions in his analysis of the third wave, postmodernism takes nothing for granted and allows

us to view the world outside the state and the economy and to see the “big picture,” the individual experience and everything in between (2005: 271).

Postmodern theory and third wave globalization literature offer many useful insights into the globalization debate. However, as Bruff argues, within the larger category of critical theory, neo-Gramscian theory is the only theory that is able to go beyond the limits of each of the three waves of the globalization debate, be it the first wave’s stressing the constraints on states, the second wave’s accent on state capacity or the third wave’s highlighting of the importance of the discourses of globalization (Bruff 2005: 262). One important distinction between the third wave literature (which would include a postmodernist theoretical perspective) and neo-Gramscian theory is that while both deconstruct the concept of “globalization,” neo-Gramscian theory seeks to reconstruct it as *capitalism* not as narrative (Bruff 2005: 272). I concur with Bruff’s explanation that “globalisation, if it exists, is a process of capitalist expansion” (2005: 262). For the purposes of this thesis then, what is important is the process of global capitalism and how it is perceived by civil society organizations who either try to fight against it or work within its constraints to obtain social justice for their members. How globalization is perceived is more important than whether or not this perception of globalization is the truth. The perception becomes the reality for the groups mobilizing in response to globalization’s real or perceived negative effects. It would thus be impossible to study a group such as the CFO without also understanding how the globalization of capitalism – or at least the discourse and the perception of its effects — have influenced not only the strategies this group uses to combat the (real or perceived) negative effects of globalization but also its very creation as an organization. For example, without the AFSC’s interest in globalization and its effects on Mexico’s Northern

Border Region in the late 1970s, the CFO as it is today would not have been created.

2.2 Neo-Gramscian theory: Globalization from below as counter-hegemony

The IR theory that most applies to the study of globalization from below is neo-Gramscian theory. However, this theory also has its limitations when it comes to explaining the complexities of local organizing and transnational networking in the context of globalization.

Certain aspects of neo-Gramscian theory are quite useful to a study of an organization such as the CFO and its complex history. As Gill (1993) explains, for neo-Gramscians, there is a certain intransigent “reality” to society and to nature. However, it is a “reality” that we can never fully understand because of its enormity and its complexity. Reality is, to a certain point, independent and at the same time interdependent of the process of production of knowledge and thus of the social construct. The truth of reality becomes even more difficult to grasp when we take into account that it is influenced in part by the inter-subjective thoughts and meanings that different individuals can give it. Social “reality” has different dimensions which cannot be understood fully or completely recorded, although abstractions concerning the structural components of such social reality can and must be intellectually produced for explanation to be possible” (Gill 1993: 27). Historical materialism, inspired from Marx, teaches us that we cannot arrive at an exact reality but rather, through the generation of abstractions and of concepts, we can succeed in obtaining a more consistent and comprehensive explanation of social reality, a bit like how a asymptote resembles a straight line.⁴³

⁴³ An asymptote is a curve that is drawn closer and closer to but never touches a straight line which extends to infinity (Gill 1993: 28).

Cox argues that we cannot give a precise definition of civil society since we would only be fixing a moment in history and privileging the social forces at work at that moment. We have to examine the historical variations that have modified the meaning of the concept through the ever-present dialectic of the concept and reality: the meaning of the concept is always varying with a changing reality (1999: 3-28). In order to understand the meaning of the CFO, we will also benefit from studying it from a dialectical approach such as the one used by Cox. The data studied in this thesis suggests that the definition of the CFO is evolving, and the definition depends on the circumstances and the time chosen to study it. Even the name of the organization varies depending on the intended audience — in front of donors at the transnational level or of its own members at the local level. Neo-gramscian theory's dialectical approach allows us to look at the CFO not just as it is today but at all of the elements, internal and external, that have helped define it over time.

However, where the limitations of neo-Gramscian theory start, for the purposes of this thesis, which is to study the micro-level of globalization from below, is in the particular attachment of the concepts of hegemony and counter-hegemony to the “globalization from above” and “globalization from below” categories as developed by Rober W. Cox. Cox articulates the historical evolution of the concept of civil society with two juxtaposed meanings in European and American thought: the “bottom-up” meaning and the “top-down” meaning. He thus allows an understanding of the concept of hegemony and the possibility of counter-hegemony. “In a ‘bottom-up’ sense, civil society is the realm in which those who are disadvantaged by globalization of the world economy can mount their protests and seek alternatives” (1999: 10). This “bottom-up” sense includes local community groups that represent the diversity of cultures

and social practices throughout the world. These social movements can, at the limit, form a global civil society and therefore constitute the base for an alternative world order. On the other hand, “[i]n a ‘top-down’ sense, however, states and corporate interests influence the development of this current version of civil society towards making it an agency for stabilizing the social and political status quo” (Cox 1999: 11). In this “top-down” sense, the dominant hegemonic forces penetrate and co-opt elements of popular movements. Civil society is formed by the state but can also be a transformative agent of the state. In the “bottom-up” sense, civil society is the domain where counter-hegemonies can be formed, and in a “top-down” sense, the states and the corporative interests influence the development of a civil society that mirrors their interests.

The “top-down” and “bottom-up” approach developed by Cox definitely helps elucidate our understanding of civil society organizations that are trying to form a counter-hegemony, i.e., the alter-globalization and global justice movements, the response from civil society often referred to as “globalization from below” in response to “globalization from above” of transnational capitalism. However, we are still unable to answer the questions posed at the beginning of this thesis: What are the connections between local and transnational organizations that are seeking to resist “globalization from above” with “globalization from below”? Are these equal partnerships or do the pressures and constraints imposed by the transnational organizations that provide the necessary funds for the receiving-end activists constitute another form of “globalization from above”? And, finally, how do these pressures or constraints affect the local grassroots aspect of organizing? Co-optation of grassroots organizations does happen, although not usually from state or corporate interests, but rather from within other civil society

organizations such as international donors and other transnational organizations that have their own agendas which might not coincide with the CFO's. We could argue that those other civil society organizations might be co-opted in some degree by their own state or corporate interests; however, that would be the work of another thesis. Our interest here is in the CFO and the study of grassroots organizing of (women) maquiladoras workers and transnational networking within the context of globalization of capitalism. Neo-Gramscian theory does include local community organizing; however, local organizations are only included insofar as they form part of a larger group that makes up the global civil society whose objective is to form an alternative world order.

2.3 Globalization from below: Alter-globalization, global justice movements and transborder activism

The study of civil society's responses to the effects of globalization and neoliberal trade is a topic that has garnered much interest. One major debate among scholars surrounds the best strategies for combating the ill effects, direct or indirect, of this phenomenon that cannot be contained within a state and therefore requires a new way of looking at civil society mobilization. For many scholars, the answer cannot or can no longer be found in mobilizing at the national level. The focus has therefore shifted to transnational organizing, transnational protests, transnational social movements, anti-globalization, alter-globalization and global justice movements and the possible creation of a global civil society. Reitan tracks the origins of the Alter-Globalization Movement's resistance to capitalism back to the Russian and French revolutions and demands for self-determination and democracy. She links these phenomena to Polanyi's double movement between capitalism and socialism or between the left and the right (2010: 326). The global justice movement (GJM), which has its origins in the late 1990s (the

Battle of Seattle in 1999 being its most cited starting point), is often characterized as a reaction to neoliberal globalization, a “globalization from below” and a key element of global civil society. It is comprised of various types of NGOs, social movement organizations and civil society organizations, transnational advocacy networks, unions, religious groups and individual activists opposed to neoliberalism and war which convene at the World Social Forum, regional forums and on the web (Moghadam 2012: 171-172). Moghadam, however, places the origins of the GJM a bit earlier, in the 1980s and 1990s, with the reaction to the structural adjustment policies Latin America and Africa. A cycle of anti-IMF food riots, of which Mexico experienced two such riots in 1986, were common in the Global South from the late 1970s, when the structural adjustment policies were introduced, to the 1990s. Once Mexico entered into NAFTA, activists very quickly viewed it as a plan that would serve the interests of U.S. transnational corporations rather than workers. Protests arose on the left in all three NAFTA countries. The dramatic appearance of the Zapatista movement on the day that Mexico officially adopted NAFTA captured the imagination of the left movement and globalization critics everywhere (Moghadam 2012: 173-177).

As Pianta and Marchetti state, in a volume on the global justice movement, edited by the Italian sociologist Della Porta, “Within the GJMs, in particular, a *transnational network* can be defined as a permanent coordination among different civil society organizations (and sometimes individuals such as experts), located in several countries, based on a shared frame on at least one specific global issue, and developing joint campaigns and social mobilizations against common targets at the national or supranational level” (Pianta & Marchetti 2007: 44). Della Porta explains that as far as framing is concerned, the study of GJM is “interested in those groups/individual

activists who frame their action in terms of *global identity and concerns*. They need to identify themselves as part of a ‘global movement,’ targeting ‘global enemies’ within a global enjeu/field of action” (Della Porta 2007: 7). The focus is on groups or activists that have been identified as alter-global, no global, new global, global justice, altermondialists and globalizers from below (Della Porta 2007: 7). Della Porta specifies that for GJM, the enemy is singled out as neoliberal globalization (2007: 16). As the CFO does not define itself as part of a global movement and does not specify that neoliberal globalization is their enemy, this conceptual framework would thereby exclude the CFO from their analysis of GJM.

While mapping the political ideology of the global justice movement, Steger did an analysis of 45 organizations connected with the World Social Forum (WSF), and he explains how the WSF has established an ideological alternative to the market-globalist World Economic Forum (WEF) as it proclaims that “another world is possible” (2012: 439). This study of WSF-connected organizations includes the American Federation of Labor-Congress of Industrial Organizations (AFL-CIO) which in turn places the CFO in an alliance with a global justice movement member (Steger 2012: 444). The core concepts of the GJM, such as change, democracy, equality, justice, rights, solidarity, diversity and sustainability as described by Steger (2012: 449) are values that the CFO would seem to share; however, it is hard to extrapolate from sharing some ideals to seeking to replace globalization with an alternative.

Appadurai warns against two common mistakes when trying to understand transnational civil society, which we can apply to our understanding of “globalization from below”: the first mistake is viewing transnational civil society as a simple and benign democratic counterpart of

globalization, where transnational civil society is simply an extension of international politics and economics, facilitating the negotiations between states and corporations about the rules and norms of globalization (2005: xiii). The other common mistake is viewing transnational civil society as solely driven by its opposition to market-driven globalization. As Appadurai explains, transnational civil society cannot be equated with antiglobalization movements. Transnational civil societies are rather trying to meet the challenge of shaping globalization so that it is more inclusive, more responsive, more equitable and more ethical (2005: xiii). This is an important element if we are to try to categorize the CFO as part of the globalization from below dynamic. If we view “globalization from below” as equal to anti-globalization, then it is difficult to categorize the CFO as part of that dynamic. If, however, we look at “globalization from below” as a movement in the direction of reshaping globalization in order for it to become more inclusive, more responsive, more equitable and more ethical, then we can include many more organizations, including the CFO.

2.4 Transnational or cross-border labour organizing in response to NAFTA

One of the most powerful symbols of the globalization of capitalism, the North American Free Trade Agreement, is especially pertinent when studying maquiladora workers of Northern Mexico. When mobilizing in response to the globalization of capital and markets, what better symbol exists to mobilize against than NAFTA (Coburn 2003: 119)?

Mobilizing maquiladora workers has become more difficult since NAFTA due to more difficult working conditions and a higher fear of losing jobs (see Chapter 1 in which workers state job security has been much lower since the mid-1990s). However, NAFTA has also had some

unexpected effects on worker mobilization. Dominguez explains that NAFTA is a process of regional integration and economic restructuring that was imposed from the top with very little influence from the bottom. Nevertheless, it has had some unplanned effects: “However, this process of regional integration has also provoked, and continues to provoke, a new phenomenon that was not contemplated by its designers: the reactions of a civil society affected by the process and compelled to organize in response” (2002: 218). This civil society includes women’s groups that are organizing in response to NAFTA around questions that are common across the borders. What ties these various and varied groups (which are not all feminists) together is the common search for ways to resist the effects of global restructuring in their immediate contexts. These activists are questioning the idea that global capitalism is unbeatable (Dominguez 2002: 218). Transnational solidarities among women are growing. However, as Desai (2002) stresses, they come with their own set of problems: there is an overrepresentation of women from the North and educated women from the South in international networks and NGOs in relation to grassroots women that ends up reproducing existing inequalities. These inequalities are further exacerbated by the divisions created at the national level between the women who belong to such networks and the vast majority who do not.⁴⁴ Finally, transnational solidarities lead to a continuation of the reliance of Southern NGOs on Northern donors for funds and limit their independence (Desai 2002: 31). This final point will be further examined in Chapter 4, as the CFO actually declared its independence a few years after the implementation of NAFTA due to influence from its Northern donor, the AFSC, which believed it was relying too much on the funding and guidance of another Northern donor, the Comité de Apoyo.

⁴⁴ For more information on the difficulties that women’s movements have faced when mobilizing across borders due to both their relations with their own state and differing feminist perspectives, see MacDonald (2002, 2003).

Many authors have also written about the rise of cross-border worker co-operation as direct by-products of the frustrations many unions have felt vis-à-vis NAFTA and its Labour Side Agreement, the NAALC (the North American Agreement on Labour Cooperation) (see Verge 1999). The central theme in most analyses of transnational labour movements is the possibility of forming a transnational solidarity, which has been in part facilitated by NAFTA, but must however still face many barriers (see also Compa 2001 and Armbruster-Sandoval 2005). Although labour co-operation between North American countries is not a new phenomenon, the implementation of NAFTA has encouraged the re-emergence of labour internationalism in response to regional economic integration. It must nonetheless be noted, as Carr explains, that the co-operation between American and Canadian unions and their Mexican counterparts is no longer what it used to be. Before the Second World War, the trans-border co-operative efforts were much more symmetrical than in the post-NAFTA transnational activism. The discourses of labour internationalism in the 1930s and early 1940s were shaped by the narratives of socialism, anarchism and communism. There was also a respect for the solidarity that existed in the Mexican unions. Since 1994, this symmetry has disappeared: many of the transnational union initiatives between Canada, the United States and Mexico originate in the North and are created with the stated objective of helping the weaker partner. This asymmetrical character of the cross-border organizing constructs the South as a problem or threat, which leads to “Mexico bashing” on the part of certain American and Canadian unions (for example, the Teamsters in the U.S.) (Carr 1999: 52-56).

In his analysis of the prospect of cross-border solidarity between North American auto workers, Babson demonstrates how the downward pressure on pay and working conditions in the U.S.,

whereby many U.S. companies use the threat of moving to Mexico if workers don't moderate their wage demands and amend their work rules, serves to exacerbate the negative view some American union workers have of their Mexican counterparts (2000: 17-18). Babson explains that although there are many potential allies across the borders, mobilizing that potential is very difficult, which does not signify that it is impossible. The rise of independent unions and the decline of the monopoly of what he defines as the corrupt national union in Mexico, the CTM (Confederación de Trabajadores de Mexico, Confederation of Mexican Workers), have opened up the possibilities of cross-border solidarity. Babson does however stress the fact that this co-operation between unions must be nurtured by more than the occasional summit meeting, and in order to achieve a possible future of a North American movement of auto workers, the solidarity between the workers of the different countries must also be complemented by different elements such as local-to-local meetings, worker-to-worker meetings, solidarity funds and health and safety training, as well as crisis support (2000: 22-29). This would, however, necessitate the existence of formal unions with similar structures, such as locals, in order to facilitate the easy co-operation between similar sectors that happen to be in different countries, which is not often the case in the maquiladoras where union organizing is not very pronounced. This view is shared by large unions such as the United Steelworkers union which, as I introduced at the beginning of this thesis and will develop in Chapter 4, has a vested interest in developing an independent union in the Alcoa maquiladoras in Northern Mexico with the help of the CFO. The USW is interested in working with the CFO, but not as equal partners in a cross-border collaboration; rather, as an intermediary to creating an independent union.

Carr specifies that the attempts at union organizing in the maquiladoras are extremely difficult

and the meetings are more clandestine than actual transnational union meetings (1999: 50-54). As we will see, this is very true in the CFO case, since most meetings are done in a clandestine fashion, away from the maquiladoras and without the maquiladora owners' knowledge. This literature also partly addresses, although indirectly since it does not mention women, why women maquiladora workers were choosing different forms and methods of organizing for most of the CFO history, since traditional union organizing is viewed as corrupt and independent union organizing, which is one of the objectives promoted by the CFO, has to be done in a clandestine manner. This will be further explored in Chapters 3 and 4 where I will study the growing relationship between the United Steelworkers Union (USW) in the U.S. and the CFO. The USW is providing funds to the CFO in order to foster independent union organizing in the Alcoa plants in Mexico's Northern Border Region. As we saw in Chapter 1, the context of union organizing in Northern Mexico makes it nearly impossible for a U.S. union such as the USW to form alliances with existing unions in the maquiladoras or to form independent unions there without the help of an organization such as the CFO.

In order to understand the context of the decision of the CFO to help in the creation of an independent union, it also helps to first understand how globalization has affected unions in general. Bieler's (2012) overview of the structural conditions of globalization and how these conditions create difficulties for trade unions seeking to forge transnational solidarities is of particular interest as it helps us to understand the difficulties inherent in an alliance between a U.S. union and the CFO. Bieler explains that as a result of the transnational organization of production across borders and an increase in informal work, trade unions are finding it more challenging to truly represent the interests of their members and society in general. One of the

structural conditions Bieler examines is the inner tendency of capitalism towards crisis. The relentless search for higher profits leads individual capitalists to act in a way that will destabilize capitalism itself (i.e., if all capitalists try to produce more goods at lower prices with fewer workers, the end result will be a lack of demand and overproduction).⁴⁵ One of the solutions for capitalism has been to search for new markets and locations for cheaper production costs abroad. This has led to a process of uneven development that places workers in vastly different positions within the global social relations of production. Workers from advanced industrial countries have benefitted from their higher levels of productivity and unequal exchange and this has created a major obstacle for transnational solidarity with workers in underdeveloped countries (Bieler 2012: 365-367).

As Bieler explains, the structural change undertaken by global capitalism since the early 1970s in response to the crisis of overproduction driven by neoliberalism has had serious repercussions on the structuring conditions for agency by labour (Bieler 2012: 368). The first major development was the increased transnationalisation of production which thrusts workers of different countries, both in the North and the South, in unprecedented competition with each other. Unions, when negotiating at the local or national level, are faced with the threat of relocation of jobs to locations with lower productions costs unless they make concessions. Secondly, through the processes of outsourcing, transnational production is increasingly organized in global commodity chains.⁴⁶ As difficult as it is to organize diverse and dispersed workers who all work for the same employer, this difficulty is exacerbated when they are employed by a multitude of employers through the outsourcing process. Traditional, national level organizing of labour movements is

⁴⁵ For more information on the geographical nature of capitalism and why capitalism cannot transcend its own limits, please see Harvey (2006).

⁴⁶ See Robinson (2004) for more information on global commodity chains.

clearly unable to respond to these new dynamics (Bieler 2012: 368). Thirdly, transnational outsourcing and the centralization of decision-making as part of globalization has led to an increase in casual and informal work. This is felt particularly in developing countries which were never in a position to establish large industrial sectors with secure employment, although it also has an impact on developed countries in the North where employers are demanding a flexible workforce in order to remain competitive. This lack of formal full-time employment contracts makes it even more difficult for unions to organize workers. Finally, the restructuring associated with globalization has extended into the sphere of social reproduction with financial cutbacks and privatization of traditional public sectors such as health and education. However, workers are not simply the victims of these processes, and the agency of labour does matter (Bieler 2012: 369). Trade unions have been expanding their base and forging solidarities with trade unions in other countries and with other NGOs that share similar values in their response to the globalization of production. The perception of U.S. labour organizations has changed from viewing maquiladora workers as stealing their jobs to viewing them as partners in solidarity agreements between independent unions. However, in order to have this type of partnership in Mexico's Northern Border Region, the trade unions first need to establish independent maquiladora unions they can have as allies. This is why U.S. unions are partnering with the CFO in order to help the workers establish their own unions. In order to appreciate the enormity of this undertaking, it helps to look at some of the models and strategies that look at maquiladora workers and cross-border alliances with labour organizations.

Cross-border organizing is a term that encompasses many organizational models or strategies that are utilized to overcome the process of downward harmonization due to the globalization of

the world economy. I will focus on specific models or strategies that look at cross-border labour organizing in the North American and Latin American contexts (the latter, because it offers insightful analysis into the strategies used by maquiladora workers throughout Latin America and can be applied to the Mexican context). Frundt proposes four models of “North-South” cross-border or cross-national organizing in the Latin American maquiladora industries (2000: 36). This organizing takes place between the American unions and those in Mexico, Central America and the Caribbean. In the first model, *the international campaign*, local activists are able to pressure their national government through an international campaign. The focus is to cultivate an international network; this model is weak on local leadership. The second model is the *clandestine, target approach*, which targets a specific maquiladora to organize as an example that can then be applied to other maquiladoras. The third model, *federation to federation organizing support*, may include strategies from the first two approaches; however, the primary objective is to develop a trust relationship on both sides of the border. Finally, the fourth model is one of *coalition organizing*, in which the construction of coalitions is based on previously existing networks that are not necessarily between labour unions (Frundt 2000: 39-49).

Armbruster also gives examples of cross-border organizing which can, for the most part, be related back to Frundt’s four models. The first strategy Armbruster explains, that of *codes of conduct and corporate campaigns*, joins Frundt’s first and fourth models together: a transnational coalition such as the Coalition for Justice in the Maquiladoras pressures U.S.-based transnational corporations to adopt minimal business standards or “codes of conduct” (1995: 77-78). His second approach, the *worker rights petition*, which links a nation’s trading benefits to the protection of its workers basic rights, also resembles the international campaign strategy (1995: 79-80). Finally, Armbruster briefly examines *community-based organizing*, which he

illustrates with the Comité Fronterizo de Obreras (CFO). The CFO, as an example of community-based organizing, symbolizes, according to Armbruster, “a reaction to the sexist, hierarchical, and centralized decision-making processes common to many trade unions” (1995: 81). Armbruster also explains that the CFO represents a major step forward because it recognizes the multiple identities of women (Armbruster-Sandoval 2005: 17). As we will see in the next few chapters, the CFO utilizes a few of these models depending on the situation; it most notably uses the community-based organizing model, the codes of conduct model, the corporate campaign model (the Human Rights campaign to end pregnancy testing) and the coalition organizing model (between the CFO and AFSC or the CFO and USW).

2.5 Globalization from below: Transnational advocacy networks and transnational labour networks

According to Keck and Sikkink (1998), non-state actors are becoming more important than ever in the study of international politics, and some of these non-state actors are structured in networks. They distinguish between transnational networks (such as those that involve economic actors and firms or networks of scientists and experts) and transnational advocacy networks (TANs), which are characterized by the primacy of the principles and values that motivate their creation (well-known examples would be Greenpeace and Amnesty International). These transnational advocacy networks are important at both the domestic and transnational levels. By creating new links between civil society actors, states and international institutions, they open the access to the international system. As stated by Keck and Sikkink, “By thus blurring the boundaries between a state’s relations with its own nationals and the recourse both citizens and states have to the international system, advocacy networks are helping to transform the practice

of national sovereignty” (1998: 1-2). These networks offer a new possibility for non-traditional actors to be able to raise new questions and persuade or exert pressure on powerful organizations and governments by mobilizing the information in a strategic manner (1998: 2).

The authors define transnational networks as “forms of organization characterized by voluntary, reciprocal and horizontal patterns of communication and exchange” (Keck & Sikkink 1999: 91) and distinguish them from markets and hierarchical modes of organizing. The term *advocacy networks* is used because they plead for the cause of others or defend a cause. Thus, the individuals participating in the transnational advocacy networks are advocating policy changes that cannot be tied to their “interests.” These causes are usually tied to such areas as human rights, the environment, women, infant health and indigenous people. Keck and Sikkink also explain why and how transnational networks have emerged, which usually relates to one of three major issues. The first major issue is when the domestic groups have no recourse in the national political and judicial arenas because their government refuses to recognize or even violates the rights of its citizens. This leads to what the authors define as the “boomerang pattern” of influence, which is characteristic of these networks. The strategy consists of, in cases where the government is unresponsive to a group’s claim, bypassing the national level and seeking international allies to pressure the state from the outside. The second major issue that can trigger transnational advocacy networks happens when activists feel that networking will advance their missions and campaigns and therefore actively promote transnational networks. Finally, many networks are formed or strengthened through international conferences and other forms of international contacts such as UN summits (Keck & Sikkink 1999: 91-93). As we will see in section 2.8, the CFO is the receiving-end activist and not the transnational network in the

relationships it has with transnational partners because it does not plead for the cause of others. Rather, its transnational partners, most notably the AFSC, fit this description in regards to their work surrounding the CFO. The use of this literature will therefore be limited to certain aspects of my study of the CFO's origins and continuing relationship with the AFSC as well as the role it played in the creation and first years of the transnational network Coalition for Justice in the Maquiladoras.

Keck and Sikkink (1999) also developed a typology of the tactics used by networks: information politics, symbolic politics, leverage politics and accountability politics. The first tactic, *information politics*, represents the informal exchange of information through fax, e-mail, telephone calls and the circulation of small newsletters, that is essential for network effectiveness. Non-state actors such as transnational advocacy networks gain legitimacy by providing alternative sources of information such as testimonies. The TANs then frame the issues in terms of right and wrong, since their objective is to simplify the issue in order to persuade people. This is an important tool in the process of persuasion. However, as the authors do signal, it can lead to local people losing control over their stories in the process of mediation that is involved in a transnational campaign. The role of information helps explain in part why non-state actors create transnational networks. Since most NGOs cannot afford to maintain staff in various countries, they must often forge links with local groups for routine monitoring. Local groups also need the NGOs to disseminate their information and to help protect them. The second tactic, *symbolic politics*, uses symbolic events or the juxtaposition of disparate events to advance a cause. The third tactic, *leverage politics*, can be divided into two categories: material leverage and moral leverage. In the first, issues are linked to money as in the example of human

rights issues being negotiable because other governments have linked the issue to the cut-off of military and economic aid. Moral leverage, on the other hand, uses a tactic of “mobilization of shame” by holding up the behaviour of the target actor (a state or TNC, for example) to international scrutiny. The final tactic, *accountability politics*, is used to hold governments accountable to principles they have publicly committed to, such as human rights or democracy (Keck & Sikkink 1999: 95-98). The use of the information tactic will be evident in my study of the CFO-AFSC partnership. The AFSC helped create the CFO since there were no local groups in place to monitor the situation in the maquiladoras. The AFSC not only helped disseminate the information, but also helped create the group that could gather the information.

Keck and Sikkink’s (1999) study of TANs is very useful to understand some of the transnational activities in which the CFO has participated. As Domínguez (2002) states, the CFO did participate in many transnational campaigns, the best known being the one with the Human Rights Watch, in which the tactic of information politics was used. The CFO provided testimonies and gathered evidence around the pregnancy testing issues in the maquiladoras. However, the CFO did lose control over how its stories would be presented, and it lost the local voice in this campaign, since the Human Rights Watch mediated the maquiladora workers stories in order to frame the issue to be the most persuasive for a Western/North audience. This seems to be an important lesson that was learned by the CFO. In fact, the CFO coordinator, Julia Quiñonez, is quoted in the same article stating that although transnational alliances are very important, the CFO would not allow these partners to impose their agendas on the CFO and had therefore “become very selective as to its links with foreign groups” (Domínguez 2002: 230). One possible effect of transnational organizing that Keck and Sikkink (1999) point out is

therefore very pertinent to my case study: the loss of the local voice in the process of a transnational campaign in which the larger NGO takes control of the local story. The story can then be modified in the process of a transnational campaign as part of the first tactic of information politics used by TANs.

Transnational organizing does not seem very likely as the main strategy for an organization such as the CFO because, as Staudt underlines, the leverage and accountability tactics described by Keck and Sikkink necessitate transnational institutions, of which only a few exist in the North American community at this time; they often respond to national rather than local concerns (2002: 205). The CFO does not fit into this description and, in addition, it does not, as per Keck and Sikkink's definition of a TAN's objective, seek to help out others for a greater cause. Rather, the CFO is looking to improve the lives of its own members, the women and men who work in the maquiladoras. Although, by extension, the knowledge the CFO teaches its members can also help their co-workers in the maquiladoras and their family members and friends who are also sharing in this knowledge gathering about their rights as workers. Transnational organizing is a process in which the CFO is caught up, through its relationship with the AFSC and its previous participation with the CJM, to name the two major examples. However, as this study of the CFO will detail thoroughly, the CFO is not the TAN in the relationships but rather the local group which the TANs use for monitoring and information gathering on the ground. The NGOs disseminate the CFO's information and, in a perfect world, help protect it. However, this is not always the case and the CFO is sometimes on the losing side of its "partnership" with larger NGOs.

The concept of transnational advocacy networks has also been applied to labour organizing. Kidder (2002) explains that although transnational labour organizing goes back 150 years, there have been many new transnational linkages between workers since the 1970s. This intensified in the 1980s and early 1990s by an explosion of conferences, networks, newsletters, actions and organizing campaigns. These actions have led to a blurring of the boundaries of transnational labour networks, which now overlap with other movements and networks. These new transnational labour networks (TLNs) are characterized by having connections with coalitions and funding that go beyond unions such as foundations, churches, and academic institutions. These new TLNs also place importance on nonfinancial issues such as empowerment, consciousness-raising and the promotion of changes in norms. They share beliefs and principles more closely than strategies or goals, and thus they resemble the definition of transnational networks, as developed by Keck and Sikkink (1999). They are also organized in the form of a network and not in the traditional hierarchical form usually associated with labour or, more specifically, union organizing. Kidder makes an interesting distinction between women's networks and other transnational labour networks. Women's networks focus on a longer time frame, and success is evaluated over the long run. The conceptualization of the measurement of success defined over time is an important one that will be adopted in my continued study of the CFO. As Kidder explains it, we cannot limit the measurement of success to the immediate, especially when studying a group that develops long-term strategies (2002: 269-293). In this sense, it can be argued that the CFO does share some common traits with women's networks.

Desai (2002) concurs with Kidder (2002) that success can be measured in different ways. It is not necessary to topple capitalism to be considered successful: improving the lives of women at

the local level is a definite measure of success. The potential for change over time is also a non-negligible fact when determining the success of a women's movement or organization. Desai also highlights that although some analyses may feel that the responses to the hegemonies of global capital by women have been ineffective at the transnational level, what is important is the fact that global capital is being challenged. She explains that many counter-hegemonies have been successful at the local level and have transformed the daily lives of many women and give an immense potential to women's agency (Desai 2002: 32-33). This is a valid measurement of the success of the CFO as many women's lives have been and are still changed by their participation in this organization. The impact of the CFO on the daily lives of its members is non-negligible and any analysis into this organization needs to look at both the local and transnational levels of success.

Finally, Kidder explains that TLNs are usually created around a common issue or because of a common transnational corporation employer, such as we will see in the case of Alcoa in the CFO-USW alliance. As Kidder states, the general consensus is that because of the transnational mobility of capital, the response from labour must also be transnational: since capital is global, the response must also be global (2002: 269-293). The United Steelworkers Union shares this perspective and is seeking a transnational response from Alcoa workers from around the world, which explains its interest in the CFO and its ability to organize maquiladora workers who work for Alcoa more easily than a U.S. union ever could. As we saw with third wave and neo-Gramscian theory (see Chapter 2, sections 2.1 and 2.2), it is not the reality of globalization that is important, but the perceived reality. The perception that the only possible response to the globalization of capital is a transnational one strongly influences the types of mobilization that

are promoted. For example, labour's approach to combatting globalization has definitely moved from state-centric to a global union approach as demonstrated by the following quote taken from the opening remarks made at the "Global Companies-Global Unions-Global Research-Global Campaigns" conference in New York City in 2006. The remarks were delivered by the then AFL-CIO secretary treasurer and now AFL-CIO president Richard Trumka:

Brothers and Sisters, I like the theme of this conference because it lays out the challenges before us in almost biblical terms — global companies begat global problems for workers — global problems begat the need for global unions —and if global unions want to truly match the might and power of global corporations we have to undertake global research and global campaigns. (Trumka 2006)

There is no doubt that the idea of global unions is a growing one⁴⁷ and that it has influenced how some unions react to global companies. For example, the United Steelworkers, the union that has formed an alliance with the CFO in order to help implement an independent union in Alcoa factories in Ciudad Acuña, has created the world's first global union called Workers Uniting, which joins unions from Canada, the United States, the United Kingdom and Ireland.⁴⁸

The literature on transnational social movements understandably views transnational organizing as the best option to combat the real or perceived negative effects of globalization. However, as we will see throughout this thesis, for an organization such as the CFO, the answer is not that simple; if it wants to survive as a grassroots organization, it cannot focus only on the transnational aspect of mobilizing, although it does remain a non-negligible aspect of its organizing. This is in fact one of the areas that is creating problems for the CFO, at least at the

⁴⁷ For more information on Global Unions, see the edited volumes by Harod and O'Brien (2002) and Bronfenbrenner (2007).

⁴⁸ See USW, "Workers Uniting — the Global Union," http://usw.org/our_union/?id=0001. For more information on the decision to form a Global Union go to the website of Workers Uniting at <http://www.workersuniting.org/>.

local level. By focusing too much on the transnational aspect, it is in fact losing the local voice, the very essence of its organizing efforts, because without the local level, it would cease to exist. The transnational efforts vary in level and scope over the course of its history. Although the great importance of transnational efforts of and for the CFO cannot be denied, both in order to disseminate their message and to improve fundraising opportunities, the local level is in fact what renders the CFO distinctive as an organization. As such, the literature on transnational advocacy networks and transnational labour (and women's labour) networks is limited in its capacity to give a complete analysis of the CFO, although it does help in our evaluation of its relationship with its transnational partners, in particular with the AFSC, the USW and the AFL-CIO.

2.6 Globalization from below: Transnational grassroots mobilization?

When seeking to explain some of the complexities between staying true to the local level while still maintaining much needed transnational alliances, feminist theories offer some important analytical tools. For instance, feminist literature warns against privileging the global at the expense of the local and stipulates that, in order to understand gender relations, we need to look at the specificities of the society and culture while at the same time looking at the dynamic interactions between the global and the local sites (Steans 2008: 117). Feminist literature does offer interesting analyses on global and local organizing that can be applied to organizations that are not necessarily feminist or even women's organizations. In the introduction to the book *Women's Activism and Globalization: Linking Local Struggles and Transnational Politics*, Nancy Naples explains how much of the feminist literature calls for a reaffirmation of the

grassroots “as a site from which more claims take on a more genuine logic” (2002: 4). However, she adds, one must also be careful when privileging the grassroots as this may lead to romanticizing the local as a site for struggle and viewing the grassroots women as “other” (2002: 4). The praiseworthy ideals of a group such as the CFO makes one want to believe in the message. Many authors, including myself, have judged the local aspect of the CFO as being a great example of grassroots democracy, with the members truly being the ones who make all the decisions. Unfortunately, as we will see in Chapter 3, on-the-ground fieldwork, including interviewing many long-time members as well as members who have left the organization, has showed that this was a romanticized vision of the CFO. The reality is much more complex and demonstrates the difficulties inherent in organizing (women) maquiladora workers in the context of Mexico’s Northern Border Region.

This following excerpt from Naples (2002) summarizes quite well the choice the CFO must constantly make between opposing objectives of local and transnational organizing, a never-ending struggle for a group that is organizing within the context of globalization:

On the one hand, resources provided by Northern or Western NGOs to women’s groups in other parts of the world that emphasize international conferencing and transnational networks can also serve to divert activist attention from local issues...On the other hand, activists have taken the vision of a “global civil society” to infuse local community organizing efforts with new strategies for linking community-based economic development and consumption practices with a sensitivity to the interdependence of the local and global dimensions of social life. (2002: 11)

As we will see in Chapter 4, the CFO does in fact struggle with this dilemma: by accepting to speak at international conferences and participate in international coalitions, the CFO does bring a lot of attention to its organization and thus sets up potential funding sources as well as creating

important networking opportunities. However, it does often lead to the members of the organization feeling like the leadership of the CFO has forgotten about their local and, in their view, more pressing issues.

Most feminist scholars prefer the term “transnational” to international or global feminism in analyses that intertwine the global and the local as these later terms often evoke universalized Western, centre/periphery and first world/Third World models of analysis. Feminist scholars within the field of international relations seem to prefer the term global or “inter-national” to the term international, which is viewed as problematic (Naples 2002: 5-6). And feminist geographers argue that the manifestations of the global should be addressed at the local level. Finally, global studies scholars such as Mahler distinguish between “globalization from above” and “globalization from below” as also being defined as transnational grassroots politics that look at the everyday practices of ordinary people and their feelings and understandings of their conditions of existence (Naples 2002: 7 citing Mahler 1998). Mahler specifies that the vision of “transnationalism from below” is very empowering and democratic with its implications of grassroots politics and counter-hegemonic resistance to the homogenizing and elitist forces of “transnationalism from above” (Mahler 1998).

Mahler (1998) is also aware of fundamental problems with this definition: who is deemed grassroots? She argues that “transnationalism from below” requires at a minimum that researchers be sensitive to the social constellation of its actors. She also warns against casting transnationalism too quickly into an above and below category as this reinforces dualistic, unidirectional paradigms of power, such as “center-periphery” (1998: 66-73). This warning is in

fact very à propos in the case of the CFO, deemed by many as grassroots and defining itself in as a grassroots organization participating in a form of transnationalism from below; however, defining this organization is a much more complex undertaking. Mahler's definition of globalization from below does allow for a more inclusive interpretation, one in which transnational grassroots mobilization is included. However, as she warns, we need to be sensitive to the nuances of the organizing efforts before casting it into an "above" and "below" category too quickly (1998: 66-73). As I have argued and as we will see throughout this thesis, there is also pressure from above from the TANs in the "globalization from below category."

Bickham Mendez's (2002) study of a network of maquiladora workers in Central America (the Network) does try to address some of complexities of negotiating between national and transnational spaces. She brings attention to an important strategy the groups in the Network use by focusing on improving the daily lives of women workers where they are. The groups propose alternatives for improving these women's lives and do not seek confrontational methods that might get them fired or have the maquiladora plants move away. The Network's campaign slogan "Jobs Yes. . .but with Dignity!" symbolizes the struggle for many of the women in the EPZ zones who are not looking to dismantle capitalism but rather just asking for the minimum in the way of improvements. They want to improve their working conditions but they also desperately need their jobs, no matter what the conditions. The Network organizes press conferences and uses the local media to spread the message of its campaign. Individual organizations within the Network then negotiate with the state and governments at the local levels. This increase in public visibility of the working conditions of maquiladora workers has led to a decrease in shop-floor violence. While Bickham Mendez acknowledges that these

negotiating strategies have proven to be successful, she also underlines that they pose some problems. One problem is that the strategies are based on business world techniques which focus on reaching an agreement at any cost between equal adversaries. It is therefore questionable whether the Network's marginal position within the negotiations can lead to any changes in the social structure. For example, because of the Network's strategy regarding maquiladoras, the organizers must be extremely careful not to put too much pressure on the maquiladoras for fear that they could easily relocate elsewhere. This limits the Network's ability to take part in political manoeuvrings such as boycotts, which have proven successful for other transnational advocacy networks (Bickham Medez 2002: 132-135).

Bickham Mendez explains that global media has also proven to be a double-edged sword for some of the Network's groups. This was experienced in one such case when the shock-value system of reporting the worst abuses in the maquiladoras led to a social outcry at the national and local level that called for the maquiladoras to leave at once. Workers then marched to try to keep the factories open, which led them to being accused of being manipulated by free trade zone corporations in order to keep their jobs. The nuanced position of wanting factories to remain open but to respect human rights and workers' rights was therefore completely lost in the binary frame of being either for or against the maquiladoras that was adopted by the public discourse (2002: 132-135). Bickham Medez explains further:

In the current context of globalization, it becomes unclear whether the most effective lobbying strategy is to focus on state or global institutions or national or global civil societies. The Network's self-limiting radicalism, which has at least opened spaces at the state and local levels, impinges upon efforts to gain material leverage within national and transnational institutions. (2002: 138)

As we have seen previously, one of the effects of transnational advocacy networks is that the local voice is often lost in the transnational campaign. This same thing can happen when the local group goes directly to the international media, because there is a power differential that may lead to the loss of control of the message once the group hands it over to the media. This can have undesirable results, as was given in the above example by Bickham Mendez, where the workers ended up having to demonstrate in favour of the maquiladoras to prevent them from relocating due to bad publicity at the international level (2002: 139). Although this has never happened in the case of the CFO, it does give us an example of the extremely difficult situations maquiladora workers have to face. They often have to walk a tightrope in the strategies they choose to adopt for fear of winning the battle (denouncing bad working conditions at a specific maquiladora and gaining international attention for their cause) yet losing the war (having the maquiladora relocate to another location with a cheaper, more docile workforce). It also helps us to further understand the complexities of the context in which maquiladora workers are organizing.

2.7 Globalization from below: Transnational advocacy networks — norm entrepreneurs and receiving-end activists

Hertel (2006) adds two new forms of how a campaign can evolve to Keck and Sikkink's (1999) analysis of the boomerang effect. Hertel's forms provide alternative explanations of the emergence of transnational advocacy campaigns and are described as an "outside-in" and a "dual-target" pattern, which in turn can be affected by the two advocacy mechanisms of "blocking" and "backdoor moves." Hertel uses the concepts of "norm entrepreneurs" to refer to those who are motivated by idealism and altruism and who have traditionally played the larger

role in transnational human rights advocacy by launching campaigns to defend the rights of others. Receiving-end activists are defined as those who receive this help, usually located in developing countries. Her study looks at how the receiving-end activists, although they have fewer material and political resources, can still respond with alternative understandings to those of the norm entrepreneurs by employing blocking and/or backdoor moves (2006: 6). This is of particular importance because, as we have seen previously, success can be measured in different ways, and local groups are finding ways to get their messages across. Therefore, participation in these types of campaigns does not imply they are the weaker partner but rather that they have made a strategic choice in how to get their messages heard.

“Blocking” is when receiving-end activists take an action to halt or at least significantly stall a campaign. This is done by expressing norms in ways that are very distinct from the norm entrepreneurs in order to stop the campaign until both “ends” of the campaign are aligned (Hertel 2006: 1-17). The example Hertel gives is of the campaign against child labour in Bangladesh that was halted by the receiving-end activists until the norm entrepreneurs came to understand that eliminating child labour without offering alternative sources of much needed income was in fact detrimental to helping the rights of children (Hertel 2006: 31-54). “Backdoor” moves are actions taken by receiving-end activists to augment the campaign’s normative framework without stalling or blocking the campaign. The normative framework from the norm entrepreneurs is accepted by the receiving-end activists. However, the receiving-end activists also add secondary reference points and/or policy proposals and use indirect methods rather than openly conflictive ones.

Hertel's case study on backdoor methods used to influence transnational advocacy campaigns is of particular interest to this thesis since it specifically deals with a campaign in which the CFO was an active and important player: the Human Rights Watch campaign to end pregnancy testing in the maquiladoras (Hertel 2006:55-85). While Domínguez mentions the HRW campaign in which the CFO participated as a great example of TAN activities (2002: 227-230), Hertel has a different analysis of this campaign. She states that "Quiñonez left intact the official message of the Human Rights Watch campaign (i.e., antidiscrimination), while working at the local level simultaneously to develop an additional human rights message, focused on economic rights" (2006: 60-61). Quiñonez, among other activists, felt that the economic situation was more important than the pregnancy testing itself, yet she participated in the campaign because this discrimination led to a violation of the right to work (2006: 63). Mexican activists used the backdoor method to introduce economic rights into the Human Rights Watch campaign. Since HRW had access to more resources and political access, the Mexican activists had little chance of influencing its agenda. Instead, they focused on influencing the grassroots level through a national campaign that came from grassroots organizations. In this way they capitalized on the publicity associated with the HRW campaign and pushed the Mexican government to adopt more gender-sensitive policy reforms (2006: 63-66). The campaign to end pregnancy testing in the maquiladoras was not an outside-in campaign according to Hertel. Rather, it was a dual-target campaign in which the U.S. and Mexican activists collaborated in order to spotlight the complicity of both governments in abuses in Mexico (Hertel 2006: 58). Hertel's analysis of the backdoor method adopted by some receiving-end activists is a great example of how looking at the nuances of organizing allows us to better understand "globalization from below" and to see

how we must incorporate the local organization's perspective if we want to get the whole picture on transnational organization between norm entrepreneurs and receiving-end activists.

2.8 Globalization from below or from above: The neoliberal influence on the funding of NGOs

Since this thesis argues that the need for transnational partners and funding play a crucial role in shaping the CFO's strategies, it is important to look at some of the literature on the funding of NGOs and the influence neoliberalism has on this funding. Townsend et al. (2008) offer a relevant distinction between NGOs and social movements specifically in the area of donor-funding. Townsend et al. explain that while NGOs are more likely "to be professionally staffed and externally controlled by donors, social movements are more radical, more locally rooted, more self-funded, more organic, more spontaneous" (2008: 87). Although there is some overlap, as NGOs can also be socially and politically active, Townsend et al. (2008) further explain that donor-funding plays a large role in the control over the decision-making process of NGOs.

Donor-funding is of great importance to an organization such as the CFO. Many NGOs, as Townsend et al. (2008) underline, have dependent origins. Many were created in response to a huge increase in funding opportunities that took place in the 1970s and 1980s when Northern institutions wanted to bypass the state and fund more efficient "third sector" organizations. Unsurprisingly, this led to many NGOs adopting Northern organizations' goals and agendas that were in line with the dominant neoliberal vision of integrating the poor and marginalized into market relations. NGOs, Townsend et al. argue, are often the community face of neoliberalism

and are actually used as instruments to implement the new world order, to legitimate foreign intervention and to delegitimize or debilitate the state by discouraging its citizens to demand better protection from humanitarian crises like famines since they rely on humanitarian NGOs for this help. While the NGOs are seen as the best chance of survival for many of the world's poor, the vast majority of NGOs are accountable to their donors and not their clients (Townsend et al. 2008: 88-89).

Townsend et al.'s research is developed on the thesis advanced by Tvedt that "NGOs have become a donor-created and donor-led system, 'a transmission belt of a powerful language and of Western concepts of development,' carrying resources and authority from the core to the periphery, and information and legitimization from periphery to core" (Tvedt 1998, as cited by Townsend et al. 2008: 90). The authors explain that most of the funding received by NGOs is provided by governments, multilateral donors and foundations that have standardized the upward accountability methods as well as the solutions to poverty. These methods often change with time and significantly affect the NGOs that are put in a position of having to change their approaches to remain as attractive investments to their donors. As we will see in Chapter 4, this applies directly to the CFO which today must cater to a larger international audience and address issues that draw more attention to itself in the never-ending competition to obtain much needed international funding. And it must do so while at the same time trying to accommodate the demands from the local level, the grassroots. The CFO has left some of its transnational partnerships over funding issues. In fact, it left the Coalition for Justice in the Maquiladoras because it felt that the organization was being used to legitimize the CJM with first-person information while not receiving its fair share of the funding.

Hertel points out some of the difficulties faced by NGOs in the South regarding funding in this succinct explanation:

Because the organizations that launch campaigns are often nonprofit entities, they must be responsive to donor preferences if they are to continue receiving operating funds. Their message must connect to the policy priorities of international donors. Southern NGOs speak wearily about the “flavour of the month” tendency among northern donors. Certain themes, countries, or populations fall in and out of “fashion” as multilateral, bilateral, and private donors vie to come up with new and creative policy priorities for giving. NGOs, networks, and individuals competing for scarce donor funds are forced to compete against one another for the same limited pool of funding. Discerning a donor’s human rights preference and shaping programs to match them are one strategy for fundraising. (2006: 28)

As we will see further in this thesis, the CFO itself has utilized this strategy since its very beginnings, shaping its programs and image to match the preferences of the specific donors, from mostly feminist donors in the 1980s to male-dominated international unions such as the Steelworkers in recent years.

2.9 Women’s movements literature

As we have seen in the introduction and we will examine in more detail throughout this thesis, the CFO self-identifies and is often defined as a women’s organization and even sometimes as a feminist organization. It is thus essential to get an overview of how women’s organizations and women’s movements are defined in the literature. As Marx Ferree and McClurg Mueller (2004) explain, women’s movements have for a long time been seen as synonymous with organized feminism, at least by most Americans or even most Westerners, where feminism is seen as

efforts to change the situations in which women are subordinated to men. However, some women are also organizing as women for other reasons other than strictly feminist ones, such as peace, social justice, anti-racism, etc. and are then acquiring more feminist goals. Still, others are starting off as feminist organizations and then expanding their goals to challenge other oppressions as well. In order to encompass these different dynamics and to not limit the research of women's movements to the particular phase in which they have focused explicitly on gender, they define women's movements as "all organizing of women explicitly as women to make any sort of social change [...] regardless of the specific targets of their change efforts at any particular time" (2004: 577).

By not limiting their definition of women's movements to those moments when they specifically address feminist goals, the authors are acknowledging the intersectionality of social movements. They do this because oppressions, and movements, are not apportioned singularly (2004: 578). According to this definition, a movement can be a women's movement and a labour movement simultaneously as the oppression can also be multiple. This analysis will be of extreme importance to this thesis since as we will see in the next chapters, the definition of the CFO as a women's organization is not a clear and precise one. Many authors do consider it without a doubt to be a women's and even a feminist organization. However, as we will see in chapter 3, the CFO itself vacillates on this definition as do its members.

Marx Ferree and McClurg Mueller also specify that all women's movements have some potential relation to feminism since they are rooted in gendered structures of oppression and of opportunity. However, this does not mean that all women's movements are feminists (2004:

579). In this regard, they distance themselves from a more generally accepted definition of women's movements that relates them more directly to feminism, such as the one developed by Maxine Molyneux (1985, as developed in Marx Ferree and McClurg Mueller, 2004: 579). Molyneux extends the concept of feminism to encompass all women's organizing. She does differ between *pragmatic gender interests* which she defines as those women's groups whose objectives "are given inductively and arise from the concrete conditions of women's positioning within the gender division of labor"(1985:233, as quoted in Marx Ferree and McClurg Mueller, 2004: 579). The objectives of the movements are formed by the women involved and not by external interventions. The contrast is then made with *strategic gender interests* which reflects an extra-local and deductively based approach to challenging gender relations. It is the second definition which most resembles the usually termed feminist movements (Molyneux, 1985: 233, as developed in Marx Ferree and McClurg Mueller, 2004: 579). As we will see in chapter 3, this is the definition that is promoted by the CFO and also the one that is found in its statutes (see chapter 4 and Annex D). However, we will also see in chapters 3 and 4 that it is impossible to not be influenced by external interventions. We will see this in particular with the influence the USW has on the objectives of the CFO (see chapter 4).

Molyneux develops her analysis of women's movements further in a later text (1998). In it, she recognizes that although many authors still tend to define women's movements in terms of those which encompass specific feminist goals such as diminishing gender subordination, most of the activism by women does not fit into this strict categorization. She explains that women's activism such as the kind we find in Latin America, although they have no central co-ordination and no agreed agenda, can nonetheless be considered to be part of a popular women's movement

(1998: 223-224). She also notes that it is important to recognize that other forms of women's mobilization, which have been excluded from the definition of women's movements because they do not pursue specific gender goals, represent the greater part of female solidarity in the modern world, and thus cannot be ignored (225).

As we will see in the following chapters, the CFO does not fit into the strict definition of a women's movement which is closely associated with organized feminism, whose goals are to challenge the situation in which women are subordinated to men. One of the difficulties associated with conceptualizing the CFO as a specifically feminist organization is that although they recognize the precarious situation in which women maquiladora workers find themselves, they are not directly challenging the gender stereotypes that are prevalent in Mexican society and thus help to reinforce women's subordination. Rather, they are working within the patriarchal context and meeting women at their homes because they realize that the double workday does not allow them time to mobilize and it is more acceptable to their husband if their meetings are conducted in their home where he can know what type of organizing they are doing. However, it could possibly be considered to be part of a women's movement if we adopt a broader view such as that developed by Marx Ferree and McClurg Mueller which includes the intersectionality of social movements, or even Molyneux's later definition which recognizes the importance of women's mobilization even if this mobilization does not pursue specific feminist goals.

According to Marx Ferree and McClurg Mueller's broad conceptualization of women's movements, we can in part explain why and how the maquiladora workers are organizing: it is

an organizing of women done in order to make some form of social change, and this change does not have to only adopt a specific feminist goal since oppressions can be multiple. However, their definition does specify that the organizing is done by women explicitly as women, which does pose a conceptual challenge, because although mostly composed of women, the CFO has been more and more inclusive of men, especially since its gaining independence in 1998. We will therefore be examining this more closely in order to determine what this means for the CFO, if the inclusion of more men is affecting their reasons for organizing and if they can still be considered to be a women's organization or part of a larger women's movement if they continue in this direction. According to Molyneux' conceptualization, the CFO could be defined as women's group that is organizing because of pragmatic gender interests whose objectives are defined inductively by the women themselves due to their shared position within the gender division of labour. This conceptualization allows the CFO to be considered as part of a popular women's movement for a large part of its history even though it does not share an agenda or a central co-ordination with a larger form of women's activism. However, in this thesis, we will also examine what happens when the CFO moves away from focusing on pragmatic gender interests and instead focuses on creating independent unions in male dominated maquiladoras such as Alcoa maquiladoras. We will see that the hierarchical structure found in large coalitions of unions does not give a voice to the local groups nor does it take into consideration the gendered relations which are a large cause of the oppression of women in the maquiladoras. Without looking at how the feminization of the workforce, a process by which maquiladoras profit from the pre-existing gender relations in Mexico in order to exploit the work of the women in the maquiladoras, the transnational mobilization efforts by traditional unions can never

represent the lived reality of these women maquiladora workers in the same way that a grassroots organization can.

2.10 Limitations of globalization from below analyses and necessity of fieldwork to uncover the intricacies of labour and women's organizing and the dynamics of local/transnational organizing

Transnational mobilization literature argues that since capitalism is global, the response from civil society must also be global. This conceptualization takes away the agency from the local level. In fact, transnational responses to globalization have become fetishized; they are now seen as the only logical answer. This is not what my case study seems to indicate. As will be demonstrated in this thesis, the CFO may have started off as an organization dedicated to helping women organize in a grassroots manner; however, it has had to adapt over time to meet the pressures from transnational advocacy networks in order to obtain much needed funds. This is the interesting problem that I have noticed. While vying for ever-dwindling funds from international donors, the organization focuses on which objectives will win the most international attention and therefore the most funds. In this way the CFO may end up helping those workers who fit into a popular category for international donors at the time. This reality requires an organization to constantly update its objectives and strategies to make it viable to donors. However, by so doing, the organization ends up ignoring or setting aside issues that might not be as popular with international donors but might be crucial to their grassroots membership, thereby silencing the opinions of the very individuals who are their reason for being and whom they profess to represent.

Transnational mobilization theory gives us examples of well-known groups such as Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch which bring together local groups within larger organizations that have international influence to bypass the national level of organizing. “Globalization from below” is therefore viewed as beneficial for the advancement of the cause of the local organizations. However, as some authors such as Bickham Mendez (2001) point out, what these analyses do not seem to notice is the cost involved for some of these local grassroots organizations: in order to benefit from the transnational organizations’ help, these groups must allow their messages to be altered if they want to reach a broader international audience at the risk of losing their own voice in the process. Success at the transnational level may very well result in failure at the local level if the maquiladora closes up shop due to negative publicity. The exploitative work conditions might disappear but so might the jobs themselves. Each group develops its own strategies in response to globalization’s negative effects, responses that are adapted to each group’s particular situation. The CFO in particular adopts approaches from different fields such as labour organizing and women’s movements, yet it does not easily qualify as a prototype of either group.

Why the CFO? Because this case study offers us a wealth of empirical data regarding the dilemmas of organizing as a grassroots organization with transnational ties in the context of neoliberal globalization. I contend that the authors of the “globalization from below” literature, be it transnational advocacy networks, transnational mobilization literature and the alter-globalization and global justice movement, would only see the CFO as part of a larger group that makes up global civil society. This conceptualization of an organization has two major flaws: first it devalues the local level of organizing and thereby misses many of the nuances of

local/transnational organizing; second, the CFO has had many different transnational partners throughout its history with varying degrees of influence in each direction (from the transnational partner towards the CFO and from the CFO towards the transnational partner), therefore analyzing the CFO as part of only one larger group, such as its alliances with the AFSC or with the USW, would explain only one aspect of the CFO and miss all of the intricacies that make this organization such a rich source of empirical data on organizing in response to neoliberal globalization. Without the fieldwork, I would not have discovered how and why the CFO changed its strategies and objectives as it moved from one transnational partner to another.

Scholars in the international relations and international political economy fields have a lot to say on globalization. However, as we have seen in this literature review, IR and IPE theories do not allow us to conceptualize the links between local grassroots mobilizing and globalization. Critical theories, including neo-Gramscian theory, do offer some valuable insights and tools that will be beneficial to my analysis of the CFO; however, there are some limitations as the focus of neo-Gramscian theory is still on the transnational organizations, on those who are able to form a counter-hegemonic force and be an important part of the “globalization from below” category and not on the local organization which is not seeking to form an alternative world order. Neo-Gramscian theory explains globalization’s processes from both the “top down” and the “bottom up” thereby offering the theoretical tools to analyze “globalization from below.” However, it is quite limited in the analysis of groups such as the CFO, one that does not easily fit into the idea of a counter-hegemonic force to globalization’s hegemonic influence.

Bruff’s (2005) third wave of the globalization debate espouses an interdisciplinary approach to the question of globalization. More importantly, it underlines the need to incorporate the role of

discourse into the analysis. As we also saw with critical theory and neo-Gramscian theory in particular, we need to look beyond what globalization is doing. What is important is the discourse of globalization and what is attributed to globalization. It does not matter if certain effects of globalization are real or not, it is their perceived reality that matters, as does the reaction to the perceived reality. How the CFO and its members and partners perceive globalization to have affected them (whether positively or negatively) is more important to their organizing and response to globalization than any other aspect of the globalization debate.

The idea that it is the discourse surrounding globalization — how globalization is perceived by those who are fighting against its perceived (or real) negative effects — that is important and not whether or not it is in fact happening provides us with a basis for analysis of women and labour organizing in the context of globalization. Also, the idea that globalization is linked to capitalist expansion, something that is put forward by neo-Gramscian theory, is essential in understanding the phenomenon of the maquiladoras and export-processing zones of Northern Mexico and the context in which the workers of these maquiladoras must organize. Perhaps the most important aspect we should take from a neo-Gramscian analysis is the dialectic approach which allows us to understand that the CFO cannot be defined once and for all, that the concept and reality are always evolving within an ever-changing reality.

As we will see in the next two chapters, the transnational mobilizing literature will be extremely useful in explaining some aspects of the history of the CFO and specifically the role the AFSC played in the development of the CFO as an organization. This will also help explain the role played by the Steelworkers Union and the CFO in building the strategy against the multinational

corporation Alcoa, which is the focal point in the introduction and one of major focuses in Chapter 4. The literature on transnational cross-border labour organizing in response to NAFTA also give us some extra insights into the relationship the CFO is developing with the Steelworkers and its efforts to build a cross-border coalition against Alcoa. It helps us to understand the reason the Steelworkers Union is interested in forming a strategic alliance with the CFO, but does not answer the question as to why the CFO is moving away from a women-centred, grassroots perspective to a more male-dominated hierarchical organization similar to an industrial labour union that employs mostly men. It fails to look at the other side of the globalization debate, how influences from above — that is, from the norm entrepreneur or transnational advocacy network — greatly affect the choices available to the receiving-end activist such as the CFO in the unequal power relationship between transnational partners. Nor does it acknowledge the role funding plays in the CFO's decision to participate in this strategic alliance with the USW.

The literature on transnational social movements or transnational advocacy networks teaches us that civil society is becoming a force to be reckoned with, and that the best way to combat the negative impacts of “globalization from above” is through concerted efforts and campaigns from the forces of “globalization from below.” Transnational mobilizing literature offers us important insights into the study of non-state actors and their role in global politics. However, it focuses on global resistance approaches and often ignores the local level of organizing. Transnational mobilization theory or transnational advocacy network literature, such as Keck and Sikkink's (1998 and 1999), try to explain how organizations can become more globalized but fail to see how the contradictions inherent in globalization affect these grassroots organizations that try to

become more globalized. Bickham Mendez (2002) explains it best: maquiladora workers do not adopt the binary frame that globalization is good or bad. Rather, they try to work within the system that exists and use a more nuanced position of wanting the factories to remain yet also wanting them to treat the workers with dignity. It is a very complex situation and one that requires more often than not for organizers to walk a tightrope in their negotiations with the local authorities and the transnational corporations because of the ever-present threat of the factories relocating to more business friendly locations (i.e., with lower wages and with workers who do not mobilize). This subtlety is lost in transnational advocacy networks that focus on the big picture and often lose sight of the effect on the local groups, which more often than not lose their voices within large-scale transnational advocacy campaigns that are supposedly done for their benefit. Hertel's (2006) analysis of how local groups can influence transnational advocacy campaigns is also an essential tool in exploring how the CFO can participate in TAN activities while still remaining true to its grassroots. Focusing on the dual target — the one the TAN wants to promote as well as the one the local group views as more important — allows for an outcome favourable to all activists involved. Finally, the feminist literature on the possibilities of transnational grassroots mobilization shows us that the measure of success does not have to be all or nothing and goes beyond the “since capitalism is global, the response must also be global” reasoning. A more nuanced measure of success — that it is not necessary to topple capitalism, that the potential for change over time is a very real measure of success — allows us to understand the complexities of organizing in the context of ever-changing processes of globalization and gender relations.

The role donor-funding plays in the control over decision making is a non-negligible part of any study of NGO organizing. As Townsend et al. (2008) explain, many NGOs were in fact created in response to an increase in funding in the 1970s and 1980s. This leads us back to the process of globalization because most of this funding led to NGOs adopting neoliberal visions of development. NGOs are accountable to their donors and not their clients. The resources and authority travel in one direction from the core to the periphery, and the information and legitimization in the opposite direction, from the periphery to the core. The “flavour of the month” tendencies as well as standardized accountability methods that change with time force NGOs to accommodate their approaches to remain attractive investments to their donors. NGOs are thus forced to compete with one another. As we will see in this thesis, shaping their programs to match their donors’ preference is one strategy to obtain funding, one adopted by the CFO which helps us to understand some of the reasons behind their decision to move away from a women-centred grassroots organization to one that includes more men and is more focused on hierarchical structure such as the one found in an independent union.

In the introduction to this thesis, I mentioned that my intention was to question the one thing all of the authors who wrote about the CFO seem to agree on: that the CFO is a great example of empowerment of women from the ground up. The next two chapters will address the CFO’s history and the complex relationship it has with the AFSC and other groups. This thesis seems to indicate that contrary to popular opinion on the CFO, it did not have an easy journey on its road to becoming an autonomous women workers’ organization, nor can it necessarily still be defined as a women’s organization. The story of the CFO is complicated, but it is also a rich source of information on the dynamics of local and transnational organizing.

Chapter 3

Globalization from below? Uncovering the ins and outs of the local (grassroots) organizing level of the Comité Fronterizo de Obrer@s

In Chapter 1, I addressed some of the difficulties and fears that maquiladora workers have to overcome in order to participate in the CFO. In this chapter, I will examine the local level of organizing and uncover why, if mobilizing is such a dangerous act, workers are still choosing to do so, and why they have chosen the CFO. Given all the obstacles discussed in Chapter 1, it is truly remarkable that a maquiladora workers' organization emerged in Mexico's Northern Border Region, let alone having accomplished anything of great significance. In this chapter, I will examine how organizing maquiladora workers in the context of globalization in Mexico's maquila zone from the late 1970s until today has changed, from the focus on women's organizing to union organizing and how this has affected the local or grassroots level of organizing. Through a dialectical approach, I will examine some of the nuances surrounding the grassroots organizing of women, such as the fact that it was not actually a grassroots' effort of empowering women from the ground up but rather a concerted effort by three larger NGOs seeking to create a "grassroots" movement where none existed. By looking at the context in which these women workers were first organized, by going beyond the fundraising proposals and official discourse, by examining how the pressures from the norm entrepreneurs or TANs affected the mobilizing efforts at the local level, I will uncover the important distinction between a grassroots movement and one that was created from the top-down. As mentioned in the introduction, the CFO's beginnings were not formed at the local grassroots level of a few women

maquiladora workers fed up with their situation and deciding to mobilize to demand change. The reality was much more complex. It was in the offices of the AFSC in Philadelphia, hundreds of miles away, that the idea of what would later become the CFO started to take root in the late 1970s. However, the seeds were already there in the bodies and lived experiences of the women maquiladora workers. Without the brave women who formed the first committees, no matter the intentions of the AFSC, they could not have created the CFO out of only their own will. Nothing would have taken root if the seeds in the soil weren't there to water.⁴⁹

3.1 What is the CFO today? Grassroots or transnational organizers? Women's movement or union organizers?

I argue that the CFO has had to continually adapt and find new ways to help (women) maquiladora workers because of the constant need to obtain funding for its organization and the struggle to remain an attractive option for the donor agencies. The CFO therefore has a different message that it promotes to current and potential transnational partners and to its own membership. This section will cover what the CFO is today through its official discourse and that of its members.

In its own words, the CFO is a “grassroots organization that supports union democracy and workers’ rights in six cities along the Mexico–U.S. border” (1999a). The CFO statutes (see Appendix C), which were written when it registered as an *asociacion civil* (non-profit organization) in 1998, also reiterate this grassroots objective in clear and precise terms when explaining the fundamental mission of the Comité Fronterizo de Obreras A.C. (CFO):

⁴⁹ I would like to thank one of the evaluators, Marie-Josée Massicotte, for pointing out this important political imagery.

The Comité Fronterizo de Obreras is an autonomous organization formed and run by maquiladora industry workers (*obreras and obreros*) whose purpose is to improve our working conditions inside the factories, to defend fundamental human rights, especially women's rights, and to protect the health, the life and the wellbeing of both ourselves and our communities.

Our primary function is to educate, train and raise the awareness (consciousness-raising) of other factory workers (*obreras and obreros*), starting with the Federal Labour Law, so that they may themselves, united with us, be the ones that confront the problems and injustices that the maquiladoras cause. We are a clearly Mexican non-governmental, not for profit organization, which is committed to social justice. We are forever seeking self-determination of the working class base and act according to grassroots democracy principles. (CFO 1998: Chapter II, Section 1)

The CFO or Comité Fronterizo de Obrer@s now translates its name to Border Committee of Workers (2009a), although its website, visited in 2005, identified them at that time as the Border Committee of **Women** Workers (CFO 2005a; author's emphasis). The main objective of the CFO is to (1). educate, (2). organize and (3). empower women who work in the maquiladoras in order to (4). achieve its overriding goal, which is (5). "to improve working conditions and the quality of life for workers in the maquiladoras, especially women and their families" (CFO 2009b).

As we can see above, the self-described *raison d'être* of the CFO is the workers themselves. Since the CFO is not organized along the same lines as a union and does not register its members, it is extremely difficult to determine the number of workers that have benefited from their participation in the CFO or who have even participated in any CFO activity. Lockwood Tooher mentions that in 1992, the CFO estimated that they had contacted approximately 10,000 women and their families since the birth of the organization (1999: 38-40). Ricardo Hernandez, the director of the Mexico–U.S. Border Program of the AFSC, explains that the CFO never registers workers as being members of the CFO because by definition the CFO is the workers

themselves. He adds that the work plan of the CFO is developed in a collective manner through direct and continuous consultations of workers in different towns and, each year in November, approximately 30 to 60 workers get together to develop the work plan at the annual meeting (2004a).

However, we will see in the section 4.7 on Alcoa in Chapter 4 that the specific objectives of the CFO, which were updated in 2009, render the previous objectives difficult to achieve. Some of the specific objectives are listed as follows on its website:

to increase knowledge, self-confidence, and empowerment among maquiladora workers; **to foster union democracy and advance independent unionization**; to help both female and male workers understand the impact of the maquiladoras on health, for themselves, their families, and their communities; **to forge links of solidarity and strategic partnerships with like-minded organizations around the world**; and **to expand rank-and-file organizing to other cities with maquiladoras.** (CFO 2009c; author's emphasis)

Any aspect related to union organizing is not to be found in their statutes (see Appendix D). Nor has union organizing ever been an objective before it registered as an independent organization in 1998. In addition, as we saw above, the CFO prides itself on not being organized in a hierarchical structure such as a union and never registers its members as would a union. It is therefore of great interest to examine why the CFO started changing the language on its website to terms like “rank-and-file organizing” and fostering union democracy instead of the grassroots democracy it declared previously as its main objective.

As we saw in the literature review in section 2.4 on cross-border organizing, the CFO was given as the example for community-based organizing. As Armbruster explains it:

Community-based organizations symbolize a reaction to the sexist, hierarchical, and centralized decision-making processes common to many trade unions. In contrast, community-based organizations such as the CFO establish participatory democracy as their goal in which community members and workers decide their own strategies and the methods for social change. (1995: 81)

Armbruster also felt that the CFO represented a major step forward in cross-border organizing because it recognized the multiple identities of women (Armbruster-Sandoval 2005: 17). As more and more men become members of the organization, the CFO's objectives have shifted. The objectives now include forming strategic partnerships with union organizations and fostering the creation of independent unions in the maquiladoras, both of which influence the CFO's stated objective of promoting grassroots democratic principles and giving a voice to the local members. This thesis argues that funding issues are non-negligible factors in the determination of the CFO objectives and strategies. As we can clearly see here, these were in fact changed significantly after the CFO obtained much needed funding from a U.S. union, the United Steelworkers Union.

In 2009, the CFO added a new section to its website: an explanation of its focus. As we can see, even though it has removed women workers from its title and uses more gender-neutral terminology, it has not removed focus from all of the women's issues, as is evident in the following quote from the website:

What is our focus? The CFO has always supported, given advice to, and accompanied maquiladora workers with whom we have established contacts. This support has consisted in first listening to the workers, gaining their confidence, and helping them to organize themselves according to their needs. The workers, **both women and men**, speak to us about all of their problems, not only in the maquiladoras, but also in their communities and their families. For this reason, we are covering such problems as labor, union, health, security and hygiene, **gender-discrimination, domestic violence**, conflicts between neighbors, family

and personal issues. **When a women worker empowers herself in order to defend her rights in front of a powerful global corporation, she also changes the world around her.** (CFO 2009a; author's emphasis)

There is also mention of a need to focus more on helping workers create their own workers' organizations or independent unions. With this goal in mind, the CFO has begun focusing on **"Grassroots and union organizing, and training of women worker leaders"** which they seek to achieve by **"Supporting workers of some of the many corporations that own maquiladoras in three of the border cities"** and **"Training women leaders from these corporations in union organizing and women's human rights workshops"** (CFO 2009a; author's emphasis). This new focus seems to be trying to incorporate both the old, women's grassroots organizing, with the new, independent union organizing, without questioning whether or not these two goals are in fact compatible. The focus does symbolize quite clearly the difficulties of merging both the needs of the grassroots base with the needs of the transnational partners who provide the funding for the grassroots organizing.

As we saw in Chapter 1, women and men maquiladora workers have had to overcome substantial fears and other difficulties in order to participate in the CFO. In this section, I will examine how the CFO is defined by its own members, especially those who were brave enough to overcome the many obstacles involved in joining the organization. Many members gave the same type of answer: It is an organization that helps workers; it teaches them about their rights. However, surprisingly, many more of the members did not even know what the CFO does other than the workshops that they have attended. They had no idea the CFO did anything or had any contacts at the international level; they asked me questions about the CFO during the interview because they wanted to learn more about the organization. A few did not even know what the acronym

CFO meant. Some associated the CFO with the person of Julia Quiñonez, not knowing much about the organization or what it does but interested in participating because of their friendship with Julia. This poses serious issues when trying to conceptualize the CFO as part of the “globalization from below” category. Many of its members are clearly not joining the organization in order to mobilize against neoliberal globalization; in fact, they are completely unaware of the CFO activities at the transnational level and are clearly focused on the immediate and local context of organizing.

Most of the new members defined the organization in terms of what they learned in the first workshops, which usually included a meeting with a promotore either individually or as part of a small group (which more often than not includes their family members) on a weekly basis for two to three months in order to learn about their rights under Mexico’s Federal Labour Law, which is actually quite progressive towards workers’ rights. The CFO is defined by new members solely at the local level. They speak of what the CFO does for them and other maquiladora workers at the level of the individual worker or the maquiladora. Not one single new member spoke of the international level when defining the CFO. Most were not even aware that the CFO operated on an international level. Since many people did not understand what I was asking when I asked them to define the CFO and the question was more often than not met with complete silence, I would then ask them what they would say to their friend or neighbour if this person asked them what the CFO was. I also asked them to compare the CFO with the union in their factory if this was applicable (some workers, especially in Ciudad Acuña, had never been part of a union because there are no unions in that city).

New members, when they were able to define the CFO, simply repeated the official discourse they were taught by the CFO promotores during their initial contact and training stages. In essence, they stated that the “CFO is a committee that defends the rights of the workers” (Diego, Interview #11); “The CFO teaches us to defend ourselves when our bosses mistreat us, to know our rights” (Bianca and Pedro, Interviews #13 and #14); “It is an organization that is at the level of the border where the maquiladoras are and that is dedicated to promote the rights of the workers” (Maria Angeles, Interview #21).

Understandably, some long-time members defined the CFO in comparison with a union, since this is the only other type of organization that they know whose role is to defend workers’ rights. The CFO is understandably considered the better of the two options since they would not be participating in the CFO if they felt the union in their maquiladora adequately represented them. For the most part, however, long-time members had more complex answers regarding the definition of the CFO, which could be summarized as an independent non-governmental organization or a committee that helps, supports, dedicates itself to and gives training to workers of the maquiladoras so that they can in turn know their rights and defend themselves in the workplace so that they are not fired unjustly. Only two of the long-time members mentioned women in their definition of the CFO, one who used the feminine version of worker (*trabajadora*) (Marisela, Interview #43) and one who mentioned that the CFO helps the workers defend themselves from sexual harassment or other labour problems (Ameriga, Interview #25).

One long-time member specified that one learns a lot from the CFO on how to not be afraid of the bosses in the maquiladoras but that it is an ongoing process. There is always more to learn but the things one learns at the CFO are very useful (Rosa Maria, Interview #16). Another long-time member's comments brought up an interesting point. In her response, she referred to the fact that the CFO is often accused of being against the maquiladoras, of wanting to shut them down:

It is an organization that supports workers, their labour rights and more than anything is not against the factories, it is against injustices that they commit against workers. We are not against the factories. That is the definition of the CFO. (Pilar, Interview #24)

The fact that this member chose to add these comments to her definition of the CFO shows the extent of the struggle between the CFO and the local unions and maquiladoras. It also reminds us of Bickam Mendez' (2002) analysis of the struggles that maquiladora workers' groups face when trying to determine the best strategies to combat the negative effects of globalization while still benefiting from some of its positive effects, such as the creation of more jobs with the establishment of the maquiladoras. It also clearly demonstrates how alter-globalization or global justice movements cannot incorporate an organization such as the CFO, which is not against the maquiladoras or by extension globalization. Even though its partner organizations such as the AFSC try to advertise it as an answer to the "globalization from above" by being a force of "globalization from below," in order to capitalize on some of the funding for alter-globalization movements, this analysis does not encapsulate all of the nuances of organizing at the local level of the CFO. The members themselves understand globalization in a way that is not available to those in more privileged positions in the globalization debate.

3.2.1 Creating the below in the globalization from below: TANs help create a grassroots organization of women maquiladora workers

The AFSC first started taking an interest in the maquiladoras and the plight of the maquiladora workers in 1978 as part of its Mexico–U.S. Border Program. As stated in its archives: “The overriding aim of the American Friends and Service Committee (AFSC) Mexico–U.S. Border Program is to help bring human-oriented change in private and public policies and practices in the United States affecting the Mexican economic and social order and the economic rights and lives of Mexican and U.S. residents along the border” (AFSC 1978b: 1). In addition to the program’s work on immigration issues and the poor working conditions of illegal Mexican immigrants in the U.S, the Mexico–U.S. Border Program also focused on educational information about the maquiladoras, called “runaway shops” at the time (AFSC 1978a: 1). This is a clear example of the use of the *information tactic* used by transnational advocacy networks or TANs (Keck & Sikkink 1998, 1999). The AFSC even described its role as seeking to “promote genuine public understanding of the nature and causes of the problems of the Mexico–U.S. border [and...] to play a strong monitoring and advocacy role on the national level in the U.S. in relation to public and private policies” (AFSC 1978b: 11).

Keck and Sikkink (1998, 1999) explain that TANs clearly frame their issues in terms of right and wrong and the AFSC were among the first groups that wanted to look at the positive or negative effect the 1965 U.S.–Mexico agreement was to have. The agreement “established a 20 kilometer duty free zone south of the border by which U.S. companies (287 in 1973) are enabled to take advantage of underpaid Mexican labor, mainly women, for labor-intensive work such as the assembly of electronic parts” (AFSC 1978b: 2). The AFSC worked in conjunction with the Mexican Friends and Service Committee that published a bi-monthly Bulletin on Migratory and

Border Affairs and that was distributed by the AFSC to different organizations and agencies in the U.S., including government offices and libraries (AFSC 1978-1979: 4-5). In one of the bulletins, the MFSC specified, “Our goal is not to promote academic investigation but information to the public on these problems [internal migration, migration to the U.S, maquiladoras and other problems related to the industrialization and commercialization of the border region], their manifestations, causes and implications” (MFSC 1979: 9). At this stage, the information the AFSC disseminated through publication of its own newsletter mostly consisted of third-party sources, such as articles from the Mexican press translated into English. It also included original research on border issues (AFSC circa 1978-1979: 8-9). This interest in original research and the burgeoning interest in the plight of women maquiladora workers reached an important point in 1979 when one of the participants at the AFSC annual meeting, Patricia Fernandez Kelly, spoke extensively on the Mexican Border Industrialization Program (BIP) and the effects on the workers (AFSC 1979a). Fernandez Kelly is a leading anthropologist on the conditions of women maquiladora workers in Northern Mexico and had already done extensive research on maquiladoras at that time. During this meeting, she described the working and living conditions of women maquiladora workers and linked these conditions to the process of globalization. We see here with the AFSC efforts a clear example of a TAN tactic in fighting “globalization from above” with “globalization from below.” As we saw in the literature review, normally a TAN would find local groups on the ground to obtain the information and to give legitimacy to its campaign against transnational corporations or other manifestations of globalization. This situation is unique inasmuch as there were no local groups of maquiladora workers mobilizing for their rights at that time, at least not to the AFSC’s knowledge. The AFSC therefore helped create one.

3.2.1 The Comité de Apoyo, the AFSC and SEDEPAC help women maquiladora workers and teach them about their rights

As we saw in the introduction, the AFSC is known as the CFO's major partner and played a primordial role in its birth as an organization. However, it did not do so alone. It worked in a coalition with SEDEPAC (Servicio, Desarrollo y Paz, A.C., Civil Association for Service Development and Peace), which was formed when the Mexican Friends and Service Committee dissolved into two smaller groups in 1983. It also had a close relationship with the Comité de Apoyo, a Texas-based bi-national non-profit ecumenical organization. The efforts to organize women maquiladora workers were done in a tripartite structure: SEDEPAC, Comité de Apoyo and AFSC. I will first give an overview of SEDEPAC and the Comité de Apoyo before looking at the relationship each has with the CFO (or its precursor projects) and with the AFSC. I will examine in further detail the interesting overlap between all four organizations, namely, in the person of Ed Krueger, who is considered by many (including many long-time members of the CFO) to be the founder of the CFO and who was employed by SEDEPAC, AFSC and Comité de Apoyo at different times and always with the same objective of helping women maquiladora workers learn about their rights through consciousness-raising efforts in different border cities in Northern Mexico (an effort he still continues to this day).⁵⁰ The North/South dynamic is definitely present at the beginnings of the organizing efforts and can be found in the paternalistic nature of the "we of the North" care enough to help teach "you of the South" — the victims — about "your" rights and to help "you" organize you. However, when I interviewed the CFO members who were present from the beginning, I got a sense that the organization was more

⁵⁰ Although semi-retired and working mostly as a volunteer (only expenses like gas for car travel were covered), Ed Krueger was still continuing his border work through the Comité de Apoyo at the local level in Reynosa and nearby Rio Bravo in Tamaulipas, Mexico in 2007. (Information obtained through participant observation and interviews with Ed Krueger in November 2007.)

theirs before an independent CFO than after. As we will see later in this chapter, replacing the Northern grassroots organizer with a Mexican one did not in fact give more empowerment to the CFO members, and the decisions are felt to be imposed in more of a top-down manner after the CFO became an independent entity.

The AFSC's National Office of the Mexico–U.S. Border Program stated that one of its main goals was to maintain a collegial relationship with its Mexican counterpart, SEDEPAC's Border Women's Program (Programa Frontera y Mujeres), through a series of categories and activities that clearly established these two organizations as transnational advocacy networks according to Keck and Sikkink's categorization of TANs (1998, 1999). The AFSC's categories and activities were as follows:

- 1) *Interpretation*: developing grant proposals and interpreting programs (i.e. explain the work that is done with maquiladora workers in terms that will be understandable to a general audience) for the funding sources (the donor organizations) and for the AFSC as a whole and the Quaker community in general;
- 2) *Participating in National Networks*: bringing to other organizations the experience and understanding of field projects in the goal of mutual education and obtaining resources from these networks for the local and regional projects;
- 3) *Communication*: constant communication with and monitoring of the field projects which can then lead to alerting the press or others of certain developments and convening conferences between several groups to address certain questions;
- 4) *Public Education and Advocacy*: developing statements for public education purposes on issues of importance for the bi-national program;
- 5) *Program Direction*: acts as a liaison with the Border Working Group of the National Community Relations Committee, which is the advisory body to the national program. (AFSC 1984b)

In its 1984 work plan for their Border Women's Program, SEDEPAC explained that although it was a new organization in the legal sense, its work with women maquiladora workers was the continuation of what SEDEPAC had begun several years previous and was based on issues that women maquiladora workers themselves had brought up. The work plan started with explaining the situation of the maquiladoras in Mexico (see Chapter 1 for more info on this topic) and concluded by noting that Mexico was (in 1984) on the way to becoming a country at the service of the transnational corporations in the same way as Taiwan, Korea or Hong Kong. The work plan included a section on how this new export-processing industry affected women maquiladora workers and focused on issues such as the fragmentation of the production process that never allowed the women workers to develop any skills that might help them advance in their careers. Other issues covered in the work plan included the instability and insecurity of the work; the abundance of the workforce in the border area, which allowed the transnational corporations to recruit only beautiful, young women; and, finally, the employer–employee relationship where the employer was portrayed as the benevolent dictator who viewed his employees as sexual objects (SEDEPAC 1984a).

The 1984 SEDEPAC Border Women's Program work plan explained that the international division of labour, sponsored by the transnational corporations, had manifested itself in Mexico, among other forms, through the installation of maquiladoras. Up until that point, this was mostly limited to the Northern Border Region. These maquiladoras chose to overwhelmingly hire women and offered them working conditions that were an affront to their dignity as human beings and damaged their physical and emotional health. This same division of labour created antagonisms at the international level between women workers who were pitted against one

another (both between different regions in the same country and between different countries in the developing world) because of the mobility of the transnational corporations that constantly threatened to close up shop. The 1984 SEDEPAC Border Women's Program therefore proposed, at the Mexican level, to "continue with the work of promoting and supporting women worker groups so that, through a process of consciousness-raising of their own values, they may organize themselves and thus obtain the necessary force to fight to change their work and living conditions" (SEDEPAC 1984a).

Globalization was clearly perceived as having negative consequences on the lives of maquiladora workers by SEDEPAC and as something they needed to fight back against. Although their work plan predates the GJM of the 1990s, we can clearly see a positioning against neoliberalism which is one of the ideological viewpoints of the GJM. It is clear from the beginning that helping develop a "grassroots" organization of maquiladora workers was part of a much larger project that encompassed finding solutions to the negative effects of globalization. For example, one of the first achievements of SEDEPAC's Border Women's Program was the First Forum of Maquiladora Workers, sponsored by SEDEPAC, which took place in December 1984 and was attended by workers from Reynosa and Matamoros, as well as from eight Mexican cities and two U.S. cities (AFSC 1985c: 4-5). This forum covered themes such as the living and working conditions of maquiladora workers, an analysis of the maquiladora export industry, the demands of the workers and the strategies used by the maquiladora workers in their struggle (AFSC 1985d).

One of SEDEPAC's goals has always been to help maquiladora workers and, although it no longer works with the CFO, it still continues to have a presence in some border towns helping women maquiladora workers.⁵¹ The annual and fundraising reports about the progress of the Comité de Obreras (the name of the CFO at the time) were first done through SEDEPAC (although in the person of Ed Krueger who was then hired by AFSC but continued with the same work). Without a doubt, SEDEPAC can be considered to be a feminist organization or women's organization. SEDEPAC's objectives fit into the category of *pragmatic gender interests*, which Molyneux defines as inductively based and arising from the "concrete conditions of women's positioning within the gender division of labor" (1985: 233). We can therefore clearly state that the first efforts aimed at organizing maquiladora workers in Mexico's Northern Border Region were done within a feminist framework by a Mexican organization, although its main grassroots organizer was an American man (Ed Krueger). Unfortunately, as we will see further in this chapter, SEDEPAC left the Northern Border Region completely in 1986 due to the danger associated with mobilizing maquiladora workers. Thus, the task of organizing women maquiladora workers at a grassroots level was left to the AFSC and the Comité de Apoyo, not necessarily feminist organizations, although they did try to encompass the feminist goals of consciousness-raising.

⁵¹ Although SEDEPAC did leave its organizing efforts in regard to the CFO, it did have a presence in Ciudad Acuña up until 2003 and its focus was still on women's organizing (Reyna, Interview #27).

3.2.2 Grassroots mobilizing of women maquiladora workers: Before and after the CFO's independence

In a description of the history and progress of the Border Project, the Comité de Apoyo explains:

The Border project is a program of the Comité de Apoyo (Support Committee), which is an ecumenical, community-based bi-national group with members from the Mexico–U.S. border area. The American Friends and Service Committee continues its support by paying the salary of the coordinator. Although neither the Mexican Friends Service Committee nor SEDEPAC are now involved, the Comité de Apoyo affirms its dedication to self-determination by joining in partnership with the Comité Fronterizo de Obreras (CFO or Border Committee for Women Workers) for directing and advising the project. The Comité de Apoyo stands firm in its commitment to networks of support and to financing the project. (Comité de Apoyo 1988: 3-4)

It must, however, be noted that the AFSC, in a fundraising proposal for the Border Project, utilizes most of the information found in the Comité de Apoyo's Border Project document with some notable exceptions (see below). In describing the organization, the AFSC document states:

As the work among the maquiladora employees developed, so did two local sustaining bodies. First, the Comité de Apoyo (Support Committee), an ecumenical, bi-national border based group, was developed by the AFSC staff to play the role of a close-at-hand advisory group for the work. (The Border Communities Project staff relates directly to the Mexico-U.S. Border Program staff and committees in the AFSC's national office in Philadelphia. Frequent travel between the Border and Philadelphia keep the links strong, but does not provide close at-hand support).⁵² Today the Comité also shares significant responsibility with the AFSC for identifying good links to church support and identifies funds for the operating costs and the work in Mexico. (AFSC 1989a: 3-4)

The description of the project's structure and organization in the Comité de Apoyo's document of the Border Project depicts the level of involvement that Ed Krueger exercised in the organizational activities of the CFO: the "direction of the project will be given by the Comité de

⁵² As we will see in more detail in Chapter 4, the AFSC often felt that the communication between Ed Krueger and/or the Comité de Apoyo in Edingburgh, Texas, with the AFSC national office in Philadelphia was lacking and that the AFSC often had no idea what Ed Krueger and the Comité de Apoyo were doing in regards to the CFO.

Apoyo, especially through the program director, Ed Krueger” (Comité de Apoyo 1988: 11). The AFSC document does not dispute this per say. It does state, however, that Ed Krueger is the director of the Border Project (AFSC 1989a: 4), which when taken with the previous paragraph (see quote from AFSC above) puts him in the position of AFSC staff and does not speak of his role in the Comité de Apoyo. This area of contention on the exact loyalties owed by Ed Krueger to the AFSC and/or the Comité de Apoyo will be further explored in Chapter 4 (sections 4.2 and 4.3).

The Comité de Apoyo’s work was from the start very closely interrelated with the CFO. The Comité de Apoyo is a Texas-based bi-national non-profit ecumenical organization. At its beginnings, its members where mostly white men: Anglo ministers and priests; however, with time, they changed the composition to be more bi-national and had more Hispanic and Mexican women working for them. It had been responsible for administrating all of the funds destined to the CFO and for the writing of the fundraising reports for a large part of the CFO history (AFSC 1996b: 4-5).

As director of the Comité de Apoyo, Ed Krueger played a pivotal role in the development of the CFO. He had already been working as a border field staff person for the MSFC and then SEDEPAC before working with the newly established Comité de Apoyo in the mid-1980s, although his salary was paid by the AFSC until 1998. At this time, we are seeing some elements of consciousness-raising and community-based organizing that was explained by Armbruster (1995; Ambruster-Sandoval 2005) in Chapter 1. The AFSC is already utilizing one of the principal strategies of the CFO, which is to educate workers about their rights according to

Mexico's Labour Law (Tong 1999: 74). Therefore, it is not really his role that changed much but rather the organization with whom he was affiliated. That is why when studying the role of the Comité de Apoyo in the development of the CFO, we must study the role Ed Krueger played, as it is actually quite difficult to separate the organization and the person of Ed Krueger. This analogy can also be applied to the study of the CFO in its early years — it is very difficult to separate the CFO from Ed Krueger throughout the 1980s and the first half of the 1990s. The Comité de Apoyo played a more hands-on approach while the AFSC was more a financial partner at this time.

Esmeralda, a long-time and very active member of the CFO, remembers Ed Krueger well. He was her first contact with the organization in 1986. This is her description of their first meeting:

He came to my house...for five or six visits, but I did not want to receive him, because I was afraid and then...one time he dropped off pamphlets. I wasn't in my house when he came by, I was working and he left pamphlets and I read them and I thought, who knows? And then he came back the following week and the same, he left me more pamphlets and more information and I was asking myself: what does he want? Why is a gringo going around asking for you to know your rights, one would suspect that the unions had sent him to...

*So the fact that he was a gringo was...*⁵³

I did not trust him the first time, after the third visit he made, I had an interview with him and he explained to me what they were doing and ...I asked him: You, what do you get? What do you earn? Why do you come here to give me these talks about what my rights are? Those were my questions for him and he answered me.

In what way?

He told me that because he knew many people and he worked with an organization that was the AFSC and he had a lot of information about the maquiladoras, that they were exploiting the workers and that is why he was doing this work. Therefore, I asked him in return what were they paying him or what did we have to pay him?

⁵³ The questions from the author are in italics.

Okay, for you it was like a union?

Yes, and then he told me, no you don't have to pay me anything and then he asked me if I wanted him to continue giving me talks about my rights and I told him yes, with fear, with certain fear, and well, what was this gringo going to do, and then he presented me to Elia and Julia and they gave me the talks and then...I started talking with my companeras from work and we started to visit more companeros, and in that way we kept in contact.

In that case, Beto's work was as a promotore?

He was more than a promotore, he was the coordinator also. (Esmeralda, Interview #5)

This description by Esmeralda gives us a first-hand account of Ed Krueger's methods regarding the first meetings with a worker, which was to walk in the colonias and speak to people who might want to know about their rights, to give the workers the time to become comfortable, to not impose anything on them. Below, we also can see how Ed Krueger himself describes how he first started organizing maquiladora workers:

And, you know, when I'm the dumb gringo walking around in the colonias and talking to the women who might be washing clothes or, you know, outside, or washing dishes outside or things like that, they...in the poor communities anyway, well I believe in the power [that] develops gradually and may be. It will not... you won't succeed in the immediate goal...so I just, like a dumb gringo, went out first of all to a colonia very close to where we were in Reynosa, and [I was] just wandering around in the community and talking to [people], especially the women who would be doing some kind of work outdoors. I wouldn't knock on doors because...generally you could find people outdoors in the poor communities and...strike up a conversation and...either they'll ask me why I'm there, something like that...Now there were some groups that were [made up of] two or three workers, another [had] five or six, and I began to find that there was a lot of leadership potential among these people. Julia Quiñonez, for example. I met Julia, she was in a very, very poor community called La Pedrada and she was standing at the gate with her boyfriend who is now, still, her husband. (Interview #61)

Krueger's responsibilities, as described by the Comité de Apoyo and the AFSC, were directly related to working with CFO in the following areas:

1. Facilitate home meetings of the women workers in the colonias;
2. Train workers to assume their own leadership roles among the other workers;
3. Expand the consciousness-raising work in new cities and in other colonias;
4. Plan and facilitate periodic larger convention-like meetings of workers;

5. Report progress regularly to funding sources;
6. Conduct research on the U. S. Corporations located in Mexico and on chemicals and other toxics being used in the maquiladoras. (Comité de Apoyo 1988: 13, and AFSC 1989a: 4)

In order to understand the first efforts at organizing women maquiladora workers in Mexico's Northern Border Region, we must explain the four stages of organizing that the AFSC, SEDEPAC and the Comité de Apoyo were trying to establish. The first stage of organizing women maquiladora workers was the consciousness-raising stage (note step 1 above in Krueger's responsibilities). The second stage would be to get them to move from informal workers meetings into structured groups and to develop a sense of group identity (DeCarlo 1985a: 3; also note step 2 above). The third stage would include steps 3 and 4 above to expand the meetings to new cities and organize larger conventions. And around the third or fourth stage, the hope was that they would focus on U.S. solidarity building. By 1985, they were still having problems getting the maquiladora workers to stage two and were discussing the importance of consistent follow-up (AFSC 1985f: 1).

In 1982, the AFSC explained that, under the auspices of the MFSC, its members were teaching maquiladora workers in the state of Tamaulipas their rights under Mexican Labour Law. This project was proving effective as these workers were able to successfully file claims with the Board of Arbitration and Conciliation (a Mexican state institution set up as an arbitrator between capital and labour; see Chapter 1, section 1.5, Maquiladoras and labour unions) concerning their work conditions and they were also uniting to demand safer working conditions. This education and network building project led to the development of committees made up of women workers who would "decide their own agenda and work on issues of common concern" (AFSC 1982b: 7).

The AFSC was emphasizing their grassroots nature and consensus-based decision making in order to portray the women workers' committees as independent women's organizations and not subsidiaries of the AFSC.

In 1982, there were 25 autonomous committees meeting regularly, each electing a representative to a general committee (which was formed the previous year in 1981) and discussing issues of importance to them. These committees were seen as creating a forum for mutual sharing and support, especially for the women who were feeling overwhelmed with the rapid changing nature of social values (women becoming the breadwinners of many families and men leaving for undocumented work in the U.S. since there were no jobs available for them in the border towns) (AFSC 1982b: 13). As the citation below demonstrates, in explaining the project, the AFSC placed importance on the maquiladoras workers identities as women:

As the members of the committees realize their rights as Mexican workers protected by the Constitution, they are also seeing themselves as women. Their interests in this area are visible in their agendas. They may discuss sexual harassment on the job, or their new relationships with men as brothers, fathers, friends, lovers, partners, husbands, co-parents. Being bread-winners changes the position of women in the family. As it creates new responsibilities it does not always absolve them from others. Many of them see their *companeros* leave for an undocumented existence in the United States when they cannot find jobs nor accept the women's earnings as a means of survival. The strong parental authority traditional among Mexican families of rural background is eroded when adolescent women becomes [*sic*] the chief supporters of the family. The shifting relationships are disorienting. The women worker committees offer a forum for sharing and mutual support. In an affirmation of women's dignity, they explore constructive ways of dealing with the rapid change of old values. (AFSC 1982b: 13-14)

The above description by the AFSC of the burgeoning organization of women maquiladora workers summarizes many of the issues addressed in Chapter 1 in section 1.3 where I discuss the literature on gender and the maquiladoras. We see a clear demonstration here of how women

maquiladora workers are affected by the ever-changing processes of globalization and gender relations in the specific context of the early 1980s in the Northern Border Region of Mexico. We also see how, at this stage of the organizing efforts, the maquiladora workers are being organized according to their identities as women. Thus, the first mobilizing efforts of what would later become the CFO are clearly women-only organizing efforts that are in response to the processes of globalization and gender relations specific to that time and place.

In the following SEDEPAC document, we see that the objectives of the Mexico–U.S. Border Program (a joint project of the AFSC and SEDEPAC) for Reynosa and Matamoros, Tamaulipas, from June 1982 to June 1983 try to address some of the ways women maquiladora workers can improve their situations given the particular context of gender and globalization they were living at that time:

The conviction upon which this work is based, is that the women of the border zone can achieve, through a process of consciousness-raising (auto-conciencia), their own values and dignity which will allow them:

- To have a more critical awareness of their own situation
- To develop a consciousness of solidarity with respect to the situation of other women
- To discover together solutions to their problems, both labour problems and social problems
- To become positive and dynamic members of their communities. (SEDEPAC circa 1983: 4)

These objectives for work at the grassroots base were unchanged in the 1984 work plan. At the national level, it was specified that by taking into consideration the international division of labour that has led to the installation of maquiladoras, which prefer to hire women and offer poor working conditions, the Border Women’s Program (Programa Frontera y Mujeres) of SEDEPAC proposed “to continue with the promotion and support work to women worker groups so that, in

a process of consciousness raising of their own values, they organize themselves and thereby have the necessary strength to achieve changing their work and living conditions” (SEDEPAC 1984: 4).

The methodology used to organize women maquiladora workers in the early 1980s was visits and group meetings in the workers houses (SEDEPAC circa 1983: 5). As we saw previously in this section, this was done by Ed Krueger who was employed by SEDEPAC at this stage. The method also allowed families to participate in the meetings and therefore be more accepting of the worker’s participation in the meetings. As we saw in the first part of this chapter, women’s participation in the workforce was not customary in Mexico and, when they did participate in the workforce, it was not as individuals but as members of a patriarchal family and only done in order to support their families. This is also one of the reasons why mobilization in the maquiladoras was so difficult. Their double workday and lack of any prior experience or knowledge in regards to mobilizing made organizing women workers that much more difficult (see Tiano 1994). The methodology chosen therefore reflects an understanding of the obstacles that women might face in regards to their families’ objections and a desire to not go against the accepted social norms in place in Mexico. Meeting workers in their houses also served a double purpose as it allowed them to organize away from the maquiladoras at a time when the workers were still unsure about their level of commitment and fearful of any reprisals at work if they were seen to be meeting with groups that were teaching workers about their rights.

In 2006, the grassroots organizing was done by *promotores*. As explained in the introduction to this thesis, the term *promotore* does not equal organizer or promoter. The role of the *promotore* is thus best explained using the *promotores*' own words:

The job of the *promotores* is to go principally to the colonias where the workers are more comfortable and to offer that they can learn their rights of the Mexican Federal Labour Law in their own house where they are the most comfortable and they feel the safest and we help them by covering four or five simple subjects of four or five questions, we then consult the book of the Federal Labour Law and that is how it goes to get to know their rights as workers. (Maria-Elena, Interview #3)

Well, going in the colonias and recruiting people in order to teach them about their rights. (Juany, Interview #2)

My role in the CFO is to promote of the rights of the workers, to organize the workers, to teach them... Well, the first contacts are made; they are visited in the house or in the public bus, we take advantage of whatever opportunity to talk to the workers and to see a bit what their worries are and how they can be given support. (Javier, Interview #4)

Well, I would arrive at the office, we would plan an instructive from the Federal Labour Law to go visit people that we knew were being treated inconsiderately (trampled on) or were ignorant of the rights with which they could defend themselves. We would give them a type of one-day school and another time on another week. And many people were interested in knowing this because they knew nothing about this. (Rafael, Interview #-9)

As we can see from the previous excerpts, the *promotores* find workers at their homes, on the bus or wherever they might be located outside of the maquiladoras (never at the maquiladora because of the dangers of organizing workers) and offer to teach them their rights under Mexico's Federal Labour Law. This is usually done in sessions of 30 minutes to one hour, once a week for two to three months, or whatever schedule is best for the maquiladora worker. The sessions can be individual; however, more often than not, they include family members (immediate or extended such as cousins who live nearby) and friends from the neighbourhood who might have heard about these talks and who want to join in. These first few months are considered the training stage. The new members can also participate in workshops and other

activities organized by the CFO. While some of the promotores help in the organization of workshops, and so on, their main role is the recruitment and training of new members to teach them about their rights as workers. In Javier's description of a typical day of working as a promotore, we get a glimpse at how difficult it is to recruit new members:

Well, my work schedule when I was a promotore in the CFO. My start time was at noon, and sometimes I finished at 9 pm or 9:30 pm or 8 pm, according to where you went to meet with workers and how many talks you would have...I had a group of workers in a list, I already had them in order. On a specific day, for example on Monday, I would go see four companeros of the second shift and with them I would take the necessary time to really talk with them because since they are from the second shift and we know that they have so many demands on their time and we know they do not have much time. Well, I arrived, knocked at the door, she knew I was going to come, I taught them a bit about the different articles of the law, if they had any doubts, they asked me and finally I covered the subject and I went to another house and that way consecutively. And then in the evening, I went through the same process, meeting with the workers and talking about the articles of the law, they would share what had happened inside the factories, and time would run out very quickly. Really, it seems like little is done, but what is done is done with a lot of effort. And that is a day, that is a day inside the CFO, to gather the workers. (Javier, Interview #4)

As we can see by the above quote, meeting with workers and teaching them about their rights is a time-consuming process. This process is further exacerbated by the different shifts that workers have as it makes it more difficult to organize groups of workers together. As Krueger explains: "It really, really hinders organizing because from the same family, people might be on three different shifts...It *really* is a big, big problem. Sometimes I think it really is *un complot* against the workers to develop crazy, crazy shifts" (Interview #61). In addition, as we saw in Chapter 1, one of the consequences of just-in-time production brought on by globalization forces workers to work overtime and often have last-minute changes in their days off. Promotores often cannot meet with workers at the agreed upon schedule as it may be difficult to know when they have the time to speak and if they are too exhausted to want to speak for an hour about their rights. The grassroots organizing of the CFO in 2006 was further compounded by the fact that at that time

only three promotores were actively doing grassroots organizing: one in Piedras Negras (Norma, Interview #6) on a part-time basis, and one full-time promotora (Maria-Elena, Interview #3) and one part-time promotora (Juany, Interview #2) in Ciudad Acuña. However, it must be noted that it is not only the lack of promotores that makes the organizing difficult, as there were never many paid promotores on the CFO staff list. In the pre-independence stage, when workers learned about their rights, this knowledge snowballed to others in their colonia or maquiladora. In the next section, I will discuss how some of the regional difficulties have made the grassroots organizing efforts even more difficult.

3.3 Regional and other divisions between groups and how this affects the CFO at both local and transnational levels

This thesis argues that the need for transnational partners and funding play an important role in shaping the strategies adopted by the CFO. Therefore when problems arise within the organization, such as conflicts between the regions that lead to the CFO having a diminishing presence in some of the cities it is supposed to represent, this can in turn cause difficulties in obtaining funding. The lack of funds then only further divides the different regions. This section will cover the problems of isolation between the different regions and the divisions between groups. This is not new to the independent CFO and was in fact one of the reasons given for the emergence of the new organization (in 1986 although it still kept a low profile) in order to solidify the sense of group identity. I will also address the group identity of the CFO in 2006 as defined by its members through use of the interview material and participant observation to address the lack of a CFO presence in Reynosa, Matamoros, Nuevo Laredo and Ciudad Juarez:

five cities it purports to represent (see Appendix A: CFO Geography). By contrasting and comparing the CFO in the pre-independence and post-independence periods, we will ask the question of whether or not the CFO is more grassroots after becoming a registered civil society organization in Mexico in 1997 (post-independence) than when it was under the tutelage of the AFSC (pre-independence).

3.3.1 Regional differences

In June of 1983, approximately 50 groups of workers in Matamoros and Reynosa were meeting regularly. Each varied in its functioning, some meeting once a week, some every 15 days, others once a month, according to their needs and the stage of development of the group. The composition of each group generally varied from 7 to 12 women workers. However, one exception was a group in Matamoros, which had a total of 28 women workers meeting regularly. In addition to the regular meetings, the workers also participated in three weekend workshops over the course of the year, on themes such as “The Situation of Women in Mexico,” “History of Unions in Mexico” and “Group Techniques,” which started in the evening on Saturdays when women got out of work and ran all day Sunday (SEDEPAC circa 1983: 5-6).

In Matamoros, some of the groups advanced more quickly and named representatives for each group. These representatives, or coordinators, formed a new group, the Comité de Obreras (Committee of Women Workers) which was the precursor to the CFO. Although still a new group with a flexible structure, each representative had some established functions, like helping with the coordination of the groups in the communication back and forth and within their colonia while at the same time representing their group within the Comité. This helped to stimulate the

local groups and create new ones, all without the presence of the grassroots organizer (usually a Comité de Apoyo or SEDEPAC employee, who was usually, but not always, Ed Krueger) (SEDEPAC circa 1983: 6). This was the first sign of any group making it past the consciousness-raising stage of organizing and onto the second stage, which meant having the workers themselves take leadership roles and organize their own more structured meetings (i.e., inviting a group of workers to meet on a regular basis to discuss certain topics of interest to them all such as a problem in their maquiladora) without any outside help from the Comité de Apoyo or SEDEPAC. The 1984 report reiterates the same idea that the Comité de Obreras was getting stronger and would soon no longer need the presence of the initial grassroots organizer: “The work and its orientation will stay in the hands of a wide group of women workers and they will be the ones deciding up to where they want to orient their movement” (SEDEPAC 1984b: 7).

The Comité de Obreras had reached an important stage: after months of discussing the pros and the cons, the qualities and limitations of the candidates and what this would mean financially, the Comité de Obreras decided to hire two promotoras, who were ex-maquiladora workers (SEDEPAC 1984c: 7). It is important to note that it was the representatives of each of the local groups that were part of the Comité de Obreras, who chose the two promotoras. The hiring of personnel was made by the representatives of the workers, who were then accountable to their groups for the decisions that were made. Also important to note is the use of the feminine for *obreras* and *promotoras*, indicating how at that time all CFO members and personnel were women.

In July of 1985, the work was being carried out in Matamoros and Reynosa, in the easternmost northern border state of Tamaulipas and in Ciudad Acuña and Piedras Negras in the more centrally located northern border state of Coahuila (see map of CFO locations, Appendix A). Their activities included visits to workers houses, group meetings (weekly or bi-weekly), two-day workshops, the formation of workers groups that could take over the direction of the meetings, and so on, and finally regional meetings or forums (stages one through three of organizing the maquiladora workers).

In Matamoros, the workers were organized in groups by either neighbourhood, particular plant where they are employed, or type of industry. The leaders from these groups have formed a Workers Committee which is responsible for overseeing the development and growth of emerging workers' groups; making delegations to union officials or governmental leaders, and deciding on actions needed. (AFSC 1985a: 2)

Some of the activities included participating in a health study conducted by university researchers, and subsequent collaboration in the finalizing of health booklets which they then used in workshops to discuss health issues with workers. The Matamoros Workers Committee also offered support to 500 workers from a shrimp-packing maquiladora which had closed and taken away all of the machinery while the workers were on vacation, therefore avoiding having to pay any severance pay (AFSC 1985a: 2).

In Reynosa, there was a continuing of the struggle for a democratic union in a maquiladora that had had a work stoppage the previous year (see section 3.3.2 below for more details). Since one of the objectives of the Maquiladora Project was also working on empowering the workers as women, the AFSC noted the following issue which it felt must be addressed: "During the months of struggle it became evident that there are some problems in the movement and that there is a long way to go — male workers' recognition of the female workers' equality of participation as

well as for the *obreras* (women workers) to overcome feelings of “inferiority” or inability to take on leadership roles” (AFSC 1985a: 4). We see by this quote that gender relations are clearly a factor in organizing maquiladora workers, as women have to contend with both their male counterparts recognizing them as equals and their own feelings of inadequacy due to gender conditioning. As noted in the first chapter, Tiano has pointed out that mobilizing across gender lines is difficult because men feel threatened by female competition which creates gender-based divisions in any organizing efforts (1994: 43).

According to archival information, there was a problem of isolation between the different grassroots organizational efforts along the border and contacts were often made through the AFSC. The communication between maquiladora workers from different cities along the border was practically impossible due to the focus on the immediate issues at hand and the expense of travelling between the cities. In October 1985, the AFSC felt that there was a lot of building of small groups but no consistent follow-up, which meant that the border committees were not advancing past the consciousness-raising stage (stage one). The AFSC stated that there was also a lack of any group identity (not moving on to stage two) in the early 1980s due in part to the style of organizing (at home, quietly among workers) which leads to more isolated groups that don’t realize or care if they are part of a larger struggle. The fact that the maquiladora workers would rather focus on the local level and not participate in the larger struggle was a precursor to the struggle between the local and transnational level the CFO still grapples with today.

A clear example of never moving past stage two of organizing was the group in Matamoros which was the first to organize in the early 1980s (a small group with only a few women) but that no longer existed by 1985. Most of the women who first participated lost interest once their

initial reason for participating was no longer there: the issue was either resolved or they were no longer interested in fighting for it because it took too long to resolve the issue (DeCarlo 1985b: 4-5). The workers who used to make decisions by themselves (who were at stage two) no longer did so by 1985. The AFSC viewed this as regression in the stages of organizing even if the workers chose to no longer participate because the issue was resolved. Pat Decarlo, a consultant for the AFSC, stated that workers (CFO members) who used to make decisions by themselves now waited for instructions from the leader of the Colectivo in Mexico City. As she explained: “These are the same people that originally went to the press by themselves without need of organizers, strategies or instructions. Now the strategies are devised by the organizer, the schedules and date lines are set by the organizer, the flyers are written and printed by the organizer” (DeCarlo 1985b: 4). Even the outside grassroots organizers who were there to help them move past the consciousness-raising stage (stage one) of organizing were unable to make decisions on their own and thereby waited for approval from their own organization the Colectivo, a radical feminist organization based in Mexico City before making any decisions.

This new organization in the CFO mobilizing efforts (the Colectivo) seems to have arrived on the scene of organizing women maquiladora workers in Reynosa in 1985. At that time, the only grassroots organizer in that city was from the Colectivo, due to the security measures taken regarding organizing in that city and the decision by AFSC, SEDEPAC and the Comité de Apoyo to back away from organizing in Reynosa for a while because of the danger to Ed Krueger. There was fallout to border organizing due to the 1984 strike at the Zenith plant in Reynosa and the ensuing repression and violence during which an American journalist was tortured by Mexican authorities because of his reporting in the maquiladora (see Labor Notes,

April 26, 1984). SEDEPAC was fearful for the workers but also for Krueger who could very well be accused of the same type of thing as the American journalist covering the story and therefore liable to the same type of treatment by the Mexican authorities. They believed that he could not easily go unnoticed by the Mexican authorities even if he wore a disguise (SEDEPAC 1984e). Shortly after this incident, SEDEPAC ended up pulling its workers out of the Reynosa region and asked to no longer be identified with the border work (AFSC 1984e). In 1985, all that remained from the original active worker participation that had led to the strike at the Zenith plant in 1984 was a group of five to seven women that continued to meet regularly to discuss issues and had individual lawsuits pending. The rest of the original movement had either incorporated with the union structure (and were seen to have sold out to the union by other maquiladora workers) or were dissatisfied with the movement's lack of any concrete results to improve their work situation and were tired of the struggle (DeCarlo 1985b: 5-7).

DeCarlo explains on a positive note that after five years of organizing, there was a definite sense of empowerment and there were hundreds of workers who knew about their labour rights and were asserting them on their own behalf and that of others. She added at the time: "However, the program, after five years, cannot point to any group, within or outside of the workplace, that has a sense of its own identity and life, i.e., the ability to direct its own functions" which means that none of the groups had moved past the first stage of organizing, the consciousness-raising stage (DeCarlo 1985b: 10). This posed a problem for DeCarlo and the AFSC that was trying to push the workers to the next stages of organizing in order for them to become independent.

However, after the *Collectivo* left the border area in 1985, the *Comité de Obreras* in Matamoros was described as forming the leadership of the emerging *Comité Fronterizo de Obreras* (AFSC 1986d: 2-5). In fact, most of the CFO leadership was predominantly in Matamoros at this time (AFSC 1987: 5). The *Comité de Apoyo* described its changing role after SEDEPAC left as going from a supportive, oversight committee to a hands-on working committee. It looked for ways to strengthen the movement of women workers while at the same time emphasizing that it was the women workers who were the owners of the movement. One of the ways that it did this was by meeting with workers from different places along the border and helping them in the process of forming a regional organization. It was at a mid-July 1986 joint meeting of the *Comité de Apoyo* and the workers that the workers named their emerging organization *Comité Fronterizo de Obreras* and named representatives from each town to form this body (AFSC 1986e: 10). It was at their next joint meeting that the CFO officially emerged (see section 3.6 below for more information on the structure and decision-making process of the newly emerged women-centred organization).

In Nuevo Laredo, the situation in 1985 was described as explosive due to the gross exploitation of workers there, and DeCarlo felt that a careful analysis of the political scene was needed to determine the potential for conflict. At the time, there was only one organizer in Nuevo Laredo, a member of the *Comité de Apoyo* who travelled from her home in Laredo to meet with workers for a week at a time. There were 3 to 4 groups of 4 to 6 workers (a total of 20 to 25 workers) meeting in Nuevo Laredo in 1985. They were still considered to be at the first stage of the organizing process (consciousness-raising). As we saw in Chapter 1, Nuevo Laredo was and still is a very dangerous place to organize workers, due to the political context (drug trafficking). On

a short visit to Nuevo Laredo in November 2006 with Julia Quiñonez, I experienced first-hand being stopped by a military checkpoint to search for drugs in our vehicle.⁵⁴ While talking with two of the CFO volunteers in Nuevo Laredo, I observed the three padlocks on the door and was told that it was because it was very dangerous to live or organize in Nuevo Laredo because of the drug trade. In fact, the volunteers explained that it was too dangerous to go into an unknown area and therefore they only spoke to people they already knew.⁵⁵

In Ciudad Acuña and Piedras Negras, the work was described as being slow and steady in the mid-1980s. In essence, they were not forcing the maquiladora workers to move to the next stage of organizing before they were ready, thus letting them evolve at their own pace. They also noted that the conditions faced by the workers were even more difficult there due to the isolation and the newness of the industry in the area. There were 12 groups in Piedras Negras at that time (no mention is made of the number of groups in Ciudad Acuña) (AFSC 1985a: 4-5). DeCarlo described the workers in Piedras Negras as still being at the very initial stage of organizing and had about four groups consisting of a total of approximately 25 workers participating in learning about their rights (DeCarlo 1985b: 7-9). As we will see later in this chapter, Piedras Negras is now the location of the main office of the CFO, and its central organizing coordinator, Julia Quiñonez, is located there.

Although Ciudad Acuña is not mentioned much in the archives, it is an important city for CFO organizing efforts as this is where the CFO was focusing most of its efforts in 2006 due to the alliance with the Steelworkers Union and the mobilizing Alcoa workers to set up an independent

⁵⁴ This military checkpoint was much more stringent than any at the border crossing, and it was actually quite intimidating to have machine guns pointed at you while they checked your vehicle.

⁵⁵ As this was an unplanned, informal meeting in Nuevo Laredo on November 2, 2006, the conversation was not recorded and the information is based on the author's field notes.

union in that city. That is why the factions between groups in Ciudad Acuña posed a significant problem for the CFO. Julia Quiñonez explained that she had never fired a promotora and that it was up to the groups in the cities themselves to choose and fire promotoras. When asked about the situation in Acuña where the promotoras did not seem to get along with other long-time members of the CFO, to the point where many of the long-time members were no longer participating (although they still considered themselves to be part of the CFO), Julia explained the difficulties in managing conflicting personalities types within the organization:

In Acuña for example, there is like five groups: Nanci's family is one group, Juan Tobar is the other group, he is a person that is important and brings many workers, Marcelo and Enarez are another group, although they are only two, they also bring many other people, and on the other side, Juanita [Juany] and Maria-Elena. Therefore I can't just arrive and say you are no longer promotora here, therefore how can... Another group is Angelica, that came from Monclova, she used to live in Acuña and was a promotora in Acuña, and knows many people in Acuña. Angelica does not get along with doña Reyna [Nanci's mother] nor with Maria-Elena. Doña Reyna does not get along with Angelica or Maria-Elena and Maria-Elena does not get along with doña Reyna nor Angelica. And if you go to the groups of men, Marcelo and Enarez do not get along with Juan and they were leaders in the same movement. Juan does not get along with Humberto [Nanci's brother]. All have clear ideas and objectives, but how do we unite them? Therefore it is a job that is not easy and I have to do this work, to see where in the midst of these differences, I can find common points and tell them that even though they can't be the best of friends, they need to fight for the same objective because if we continue divided like this, those who will benefit are the companies. And that is what I am trying to deal with, and it is the same as what happened to me in Piedras, there was a moment where there was a group of 10 people, very intelligent, with many talents, but it was like a group of friends and the only one who wasn't part of the group was me even though I was working from every side and since I was the only one who wasn't present, I was the person that was the most...the easiest to attack, no? Because I wasn't there. And finally everything is communicated, everything is known. (Interview #1)

These frictions were very evident during the interviews with the above mentioned CFO members in Ciudad Acuña. When I stayed with Nanci's family and spent most of my days with the CFO promotores, Juany and Maria-Elena, it became quickly evident that these two groups did not get along well and that the CFO was losing some important contributions from Nanci's family which

extended to seven very active people who still spoke to workers about their rights but no longer mentioned the CFO. For example, Maria Eugenia, Nanci's sister, mentioned that they do not talk about the CFO at work: "specifically about the CFO, no. We talk about how to defend ourselves, what we can do, how do we do it, more or less, but of the CFO, no" (Interview #30). Maria Eugenia explained that she felt that "it is simply that here, in reality, there isn't much being done therefore it is not good to talk about the CFO because one would not have any backing from the CFO because the organization comes but does not continue therefore one cannot say the CFO...because when they ask you: And where are they? One cannot answer well let's see if they come, therefore it is not...we talk about what can be done but of the CFO, no" (Interview #30). This last comment from Maria Eugenia brings up another issue in Ciudad Acuña: the office itself. The office in Ciudad Acuña is located in a colonia where many maquiladora workers live, in an INFONAVIT house similar to the ones most maquiladora workers own. The location was chosen in essence so that workers could just drop in if they had issues they wanted to talk about. However, having spent two weeks there with the promotoras, it was easy to observe that there were no drop-ins and that for the most part, the office was closed as the promotoras were out on visits and most of the workers living nearby had no idea what that office was about even though there was a CFO banner on the door.⁵⁶ Nanci offered possible solutions to the problems in Ciudad Acuña. As she explained: "They should have good promotoras and more promotoras and also a director directly in Acuña with a lot of talent" (Interview #29). She added:

The CFO is very good, is very good. The way of teaching seems very important to me, very interesting about everything for us as workers because they help us have a better quality of life at work. In that case, the person who is charge of the CFO in Acuña and Piedras Negras is very important because she does her work very well, only she needs

⁵⁶ On one occasion, when I returned very late from doing an interview, Nanci and her family (with whom I was staying) got very worried about me and drove to the CFO office to look for me. The office was locked up so they went door to door asking the neighbours if they knew the CFO promotora and none of the neighbours had any idea who lived or worked in that office/empty house.

people who are more willing to work by her side. In this case, it is Julia Quiñonez who is the person who does her work very well, only she needs better people by her side. (Nanci, Interview #29)

Marcelo also spoke of the problems in Ciudad Acuña: “They are lacking a lot of influence, they are lacking a lot, the CFO in Acuña, I do not know why, but they are lacking many activities or abilities to convince, I don’t know exactly what, but yes they are missing things, but what is good is good”⁵⁷ (Interview #17). As noted above, Marcelo was one of the leaders in a movement inside his maquiladora (he worked for Alcoa), and thus a valuable asset for the CFO. His withdrawal from the organizing efforts of the CFO was therefore a definite loss, something he himself seems to realize in his next comments:

Well, like all of a sudden, they are lacking influence themselves because the ideology that they have always brings them higher, for example, here in Acuña, the CFO is lacking a lot, I don’t know if it is because we were participating and we withdrew and the ones who were there, well they were lacking the abilities or the work of conviction, I don’t know...but there is much that is missing, but what is good is good. (Marcelo, Interview #17)

Juan (Interview #18), who was also a leader inside the Alcoa maquiladora, speaks about participating weekly for many years. However, he states that being a promotore or volunteer for the CFO no longer appeals to him.⁵⁸ As we will see in sections 4.7.2 on Alcoa in Chapter 4, these two men, especially Juan, played very important roles in the mobilizing efforts of Alcoa workers in the past. Their wish to no longer participate in CFO activities is an extreme loss to the organization.

⁵⁷ Sidenote: this was one of the interviews in which the promotore, in this case Juany (Interview # 2), was sitting in on the interview. However, at this moment, she was speaking to someone else and not really listening. It would have been very interesting to hear what Marcelo would have had to say without Juany sitting so near.

⁵⁸ Juan’s interview was also conducted with one of the promotores, Maria-Elena (Interview # 3), sitting in, which might have some bearing on the information he chose to share.

Rosenberg (2004) and Rosales Ariola (2001) both tell the story of the CFO organizational methods in Reynosa and spotlight Maria-Elena Garcia's story about her activism, which she learned at a young age from her mother, reinforcing the legacy aspect of CFO organizing methods — one person helped can influence many others and the impact of conscious-raising cannot be measured. Maria-Elena Garcia played a crucial role in helping the Delphi maquiladora workers in their struggle and helping them organize and replace their union representative (Rosales Ariola 2001; Bloom 2001). In fact, in Reynosa, many of the workers started associating the CFO with the person of Maria-Elena (Francisca, Interview #57), which caused some personal difficulties between Maria-Elena and the CFO coordinator Julia Quiñonez, and which led to Maria-Elena leaving the CFO in 2006 and starting her own organization (Maria-Elena, Interview #52).

Petros, an interpreter-translator for several ATCF delegations, offers a glimpse throughout her M.A. thesis of some of the internal struggles of the CFO in the Reynosa region. She summarizes the problems within the Reynosa sector of the CFO as “suffering from divisive internal conflicts, monetary troubles, and a serious lack of communication and coordination between CFO volunteers and Angélica Morales, the only salaried CFO staff member in the entire city” (2007: 64). As she later explains it, Angélica Morales left her position as a CFO organizer in late 2006 and returned to work for the maquiladoras. “Serious financial concerns, internal conflicts within the CFO, and a desire to earn a higher income were all factors that motivated Angélica to step down from her *promotora* position. The fact that she had not been receiving any insurance benefits while working with the Comité Fronterizo de Obreras also contributed to her decision to seek work elsewhere” (2007: 86-87). Unfortunately, the role of *promotore* is very demanding

and, although it pays more than many earn in a maquiladora, approximately 1,000 pesos per week in 2006, many of the promotoras are hired on as half-time and therefore only receive 500 pesos per week, which is less than they would earn in a maquiladora. In addition, as Petros mentioned and as I confirmed during my interviews with current and ex-promotores, they do not receive any social security benefits because they are not technically hired as employees, but rather receive a stipend for their services. For example, Javier (Interview #4) left due to money problems and found a job as a taxi driver (he had been blacklisted from the maquiladoras for trying to set up an independent union in the Alcoa maquiladora in Piedras Negras in 2002 and therefore could not return to work in the maquiladoras). Norma, who works half time as a promotora and also runs her own hair salon explains why she believes there are fewer promotores in 2006 and none in Reynosa (at the time of her interview, she was the only promotora in Piedras Negras and there were only two other promotoras for all of the CFO, both in Ciudad Acuña [Juany, Interview #2 and Maria-Elena, Interview #3]):

Well, I think that [for] the ones who worked as promotores, the problem has always been with the money. Either they don't pay them on time, or they pay them and with what they pay them, they have to pay for the bus, and phone cards, and so on and so on, and for the workers, although they want to, they can't make ends meet and when they find a job that pays better, they possibly leave the CFO and go to the other job. (Norma, Interview #6)

Tere, who also worked as a promotora for many years in Matamoros, left and returned to work in a maquiladora because she wanted to obtain a visa to go to the U.S. In order to do so, she needed to show employment and, although the CFO paid her, it was not considered a job (Interview #44). There is now no CFO presence in the city where it first started out.

As Petros mentions, Angélica Morales was the only paid CFO staff member during her fieldtrip in the summer of 2006 and had only been holding that position for a little more than six months (2007: 86). Petros also explained that the office in Reynosa was inaccessible, located a distance from the highway and popular bus routes and was thus underutilized by the CFO staff members and the maquiladora workers alike (2007: 64-65). Since Morales left the CFO, there has been no other promotora in Reynosa, and the office is no longer open (Quiñonez 2006b). Petros's analysis, although not the objective of her thesis, is in fact very useful in giving us an overview of the current situation of the CFO in Reynosa and helps to contextualize some of the comments from Maria-Elena Garcia (which are discussed further in section 4.7 on Alcoa in Chapter 4), who became so dissatisfied with the CFO that she left to start her own organization (Interview #52). This is symbolic of the larger problem we have seen throughout this section. Mobilizing maquiladora workers is difficult, time-consuming work. Transnational funding agencies or partners expect a certain level of capacity to mobilize the workers if they are going to fund the CFO. Therefore, losing key members who have the capabilities to mobilize large groups of workers is very detrimental to the fundraising efforts of the CFO, which in turn further hurts their mobilizing efforts and ability to help the maquiladora workers.

3.3.2 Lack of group identity

There were also divisions among the workers because of taking sides with different grassroots organizers, those from the *Collectivo* and those who had worked with the Border Project (DeCarlo 1985a:1). The *Collectivo* was a radical feminist collective that had a specific ideology, agenda and methodology, which differed greatly from Krueger's approach and therefore led to

many disagreements between the group and Krueger and which led the Comité de Apoyo requesting clarification from SEDEPAC on the Colectivo's role.⁵⁹ It was found that, although the Colectivo members were hired and paid by SEDEPAC, they were not reporting to SEDEPAC and instead were reporting only to the Colectivo in Mexico City, plus their strategies were often developed without any involvement from SEDEPAC (DeCarlo 1985a: 8). As Krueger explained, although the Colectivo was affiliated with SEDEPAC in Mexico City, the issue of abortion was an important part of the group's agenda. They would bring it up in workshops for the groups in Matamoros and Reynosa. Krueger felt the focus should have been on their work issues and explained that there was tension between the different organizers, some of whom accused him of being anti-feminist because he did not want to promote abortions. As he explains it, "What happened when the matter of abortion was introduced, some of the very, very good, Catholic, staunch Catholic people in the Comité de Obreras in Matamoros resigned" (Ed Krueger, Interview #61). This issue becomes one of setting priorities: solidarity with the TAN or the women's own needs and lives. The TAN, in this case the Colectivo, was trying to impose its values on women about issues on which the members had very strong, non-negotiable beliefs in the name of feminism, when in fact the gringo from the U.S. seemed to be more respectful of their values. In another instance, Krueger further elaborated why the issue of abortion was problematic:

I didn't want our organization to even be sidetracked with working on issues like talking about abortions, as I've mentioned before...I felt that we needed to maintain our focus on bringing together women and workers and I think that that kind of empowerment, giving them the ability to do things that they would have

⁵⁹ Although not explained anywhere in the archives, it can be surmised by the overall documents written by Krueger and through the conversations and interview with him in November of 2007 that his approach was to focus on teaching women workers their rights as maquiladora workers and that he did not want to disrupt the family and social structure in existence. A radical feminist group such as the Colectivo would have had different objectives and their consciousness-raising tactics would have included getting the women to become more aware of their oppression as women in a patriarchal society.

felt they were never able to do this before, to give them that kind of empowerment, is the best kind of feminism and then, they're going to develop their own issues later on, on certain issues, but I never wanted the organization to get sidetracked. (Interview #61)

DeCarlo felt that the departure of the *Collectivo* at the end of 1985 (which was based in Mexico City and lacked the resources to continue the border work) would help lessen the divisions within the field staff (DeCarlo 1985a: 1-2).

In February 1986, SEDEPAC indicated it would reorient its work to the interior of the country and would proceed with a one-year phase-out during which time work would only continue in Matamoros and Reynosa, with supervision from Mexico City. The reasons given were the difficulties in communication, supervision and support of the border work due to the distance from Mexico City. SEDEPAC decided to focus on helping the maquiladora workers who worked in and around the federal district and therefore moved away from the work with the maquiladora workers in the Northern Border Region (AFSC 1986a: 9). This was a significant loss for the CFO's women workers who could have benefited from a continuing feminist perspective in their mobilizing efforts. It is also one of the contributing factors as to why the CFO is no longer a women-centred organization.

During the transitional period of SEDEPAC phasing out from the supervision of the border work, the *Comité Fronterizo de Obreras* (CFO) started to take shape (AFSC 1986d). The CFO was still very much at its infancy stage and was not yet an independent organization. It asked that the AFSC to maintain its key staff person, namely Ed Krueger, to assist them (AFSC 1986d). The *Comité de Apoyo* was to help with the day-to-day support needed until the CFO could one

day hire its own workers and be engaged in planning and fundraising. There were already plans in place to hire two new community organizers. At that time, the Comité Fronterizo de Obreras had local groups organizing in five cities: Matamoros, Reynosa, Nuevo Laredo, Piedras Negras and Ciudad Acuña. The choice of the cities was never clearly elaborated. However, it could be deduced that since Matamoros was one of the first major maquiladora centres it was perhaps the best place to start organizing workers. Reynosa was the next major city, approximately a two-hour drive from Matamoros, so that also seemed like a logical choice.

The AFSC archives spoke of a lack of group identity before the independence of the CFO in 1998. This needs to be further explored as it is contrary to most of the analyses of the CFO that speak of a community-based or grassroots organization. I therefore turn to an examination of what the members themselves have to say about their group identity before the independence of the CFO in 1998. Although not many members have been there since the beginnings of the CFO (early 1980s), many have been there for more than 10 years and some as long as 20 years. They all felt that there was a strong sense of group identity before the independence of the organization in 1998 and that the status of *asociación civil* did not change how they felt about the CFO. For the most part, they do not remember exactly when the CFO became an *asociación civil*. What they do remember is that Ed Krueger left, although most did not really know why, that Ricardo Hernandez arrived and that Julia Quiñonez became the coordinator — again, most do not know why or how she was chosen. When questioned concerning the decision-making process and whether independence led to more decision-making power in the hands of its members, many responded that they had less say in the decisions now than before independence.

The need to work behind the scenes is a predominant theme in most reports written by Krueger. For example, in a previous 1986 report about the border work, Krueger insisted on the invisibility of the movement (Krueger circa 1986: 14). He almost always insisted on the fact that there was no paternalistic dependence (Krueger 2007b) and that the workers did everything themselves. As he explained: “This is their movement...Trying to change it into a political movement would negate the principle of self-determination and could endanger lives” (Krueger circa 1986: 4). He specified the importance of no political or religious affiliation, as he felt these affiliations would hinder the movement. However, an evangelistic spirit and charismatic leaders were needed to avoid stagnation and encourage growth in a movement that had to deal with a constant turnover and a rapidly changing population (Krueger circa 1986: 9).

The AFSC felt an independent organization would have been preferable as early as 1986 when the CFO officially emerged. Its analysis would seem to indicate there was no sense of a community-based organization and no feeling at that point of being part of a larger movement, because the consciousness-raising was done in such a way as to focus on workers’ specific rights without making them feel as though they belonged to a larger group or movement that was fighting for the same thing. The AFSC suggested that the workers “join into a Sociedad A.C. (civil organization, recognized by the government) to be able to respond to the workers’ complaints. This would move the group from just an organizing group to a legal one (incorporated, independent association) which would provide more protection from both the union and the power structure” (AFSC 1987: 3). As we will see below, Krueger disagreed and felt there was a real movement present at that time and that registering would expose them to needless danger. The members of the CFO surprisingly did not agree with the AFSC analysis.

Many long-time members actually felt that they played a larger role in the CFO before its independence, that they were more active participants and more involved in the decision-making process at that time. Although the official AFSC version of events explained that Ed Krueger and the Comité de Apoyo were standing in the way of the workers being able to claim their independence and register their organization, the workers themselves felt otherwise. It seems he was in fact respecting their wishes to keep a low-profile and continue to focus on the grassroots mobilizing. The informal organization (not registered) seemed to be what the CFO members wanted. In a 1990 fundraising proposal to the Ford Foundation, submitted by the CFO regional coordinator Maria Guadalupe Torres, she specified that the CFO did not wish to register as an independent organization. “For right now, it does not seem convenient to us to institutionalize ourselves. This is due to the fact that by doing so, we would run the risk of becoming office employees instead of *promotoras* and [grassroots] organizers and also because it is not convenient to us to lose our anonymity that helps us achieve much through pacific and non-confrontational ways” (CFO 1990: 10).

3.4 The changing structure and decision-making process of the Comité Fronterizo de Obreras and what it means for the organization’s grassroots base

This section will compare the structure of the CFO in 1988, shortly after it became a non-official organization, and its official statutes from 1998 that describe the structure and decision-making processes then in with the reality on the ground during my fieldwork in 2006, which include interviewees’ descriptions of the decision-making processes they had been or rather had not been involved with. I will be using a dialectical approach to explain in part why the CFO structure is

so very different from one period to the next, and look into the contextual factors that can explain this enormous change through source interviews. This section will demonstrate the changes in strategies and structure of the CFO throughout its history and will reference how these changes were influenced by the major transnational partner at the time, the AFSC, and the need for funding (this will be covered in much more detail in Chapter 4). For now, the focus is on the results of this influence, namely, the changing structure and decision-making process of the CFO throughout its history. We will see how the CFO went from a grassroots direct democracy women's organization that strove to give a voice to its members to a hierarchical organization that imposed its decisions in a top-down manner. By examining the source documents, speaking with the CFO members and observing action on the ground, we can compare the CFO structure from the time of its inception as an organization in 1986 (or shortly thereafter in 1988) to its independence in 1998 and finally to the culmination of major changes in its structure in 2006, which have led it to go against its own statutes and turn away from grassroots decision making. The CFO had a fairly stable internal structure when it first started in 1986, partly because of the help it received with coordination from Ed Krueger, the Comité de Apoyo and the AFSC. Understandably, the structure of the CFO has changed over time. This is normal in any organization, especially before and after its registration as an independent organization in 1998. However, rather than developing a more established structure since it became an autonomous organization, the CFO's official structure has been slowly falling apart and is now practically non-existent.

The CFO of the late 1980s was organizing at many different levels: at the homes of the workers in small groups where they felt comfortable, at the colonia (or neighbourhood) level, at a city-wide level, at a regional level and, finally, at an international and cross-organizational level. There were four regional meetings per year, two weekend evaluation sessions of the executive committee and one yearly weekend meeting of the general assembly. Most of the composition of the city-wide committees of women workers and all of the colonia groups were maquiladora workers (Comité de Apoyo circa 1988: 2). There is a real sense of grassroots democracy in this process, even though the CFO was still largely dependent on American organizations.

The dependence on the help provided by the AFSC and the Comité de Apoyo might actually have been the glue that kept the structure together. As we saw previously, a 1987 AFSC report stated that Ed Krueger, in his role as an AFSC staff person, “was the one who ensured communication between the workers and organizers and that all of the organizers referred back to him for guidance, planning and coordinating efforts” (AFSC 1987b). Partly because of this help with the coordination, the CFO had a very stable internal structure during its early stages (see Appendix B: 1988 Organizational Chart). There were also two coordinators in the CFO at that time: Maria Guadalupe Torres Martinez, the regional coordinator for the south-eastern area of the border (Matamoros, Reynosa and Rio Bravo, Tamaulipas), and Julia Quiñonez de Gonzalez, the regional coordinator for the western section of the area the CFO worked in (Piedras Negras and Ciudad Acuña, Coahuila) (Comité de Apoyo circa 1988: 6-7). Since the independence of the CFO, Julia Quiñonez has been the sole coordinator of the CFO.

The Comité Fronterizo de Obreras was formed through many regional meetings and a final election was held at a meeting of maquiladora workers in Miguel Aleman, Tamaulipas, on November 22, 1986 (Comité de Apoyo 1986: 2). In 1986 the newly formed organization included 4 coordinators, 4 secretaries, 3 treasurers, a 3-member legal committee, a 2-member health committee, a 2-member automotive industry committee, 3 counsellors and 3 legal counsellors — all of which were unpaid positions (Comité de Apoyo 1986: 22). These officers of the CFO would meet with the Comité de Apoyo at least three times a year in order to determine the program in addition to extra-official meetings a few more times a year (Comité de Apoyo 1986: 14).

The huge distances between the various border towns where the CFO had a presence as well as the fact that the maquiladora workers had to work Saturdays created an obstacle to obtaining adequate representation from all the cities in the meetings. One suggestion was to divide the meetings into two groups of cities that were closest to each other. The first group would include Matamoros, Rio Bravo and Reynosa. The second group would include Nuevo Laredo, Piedras Negras and Ciudad Acuña. In that way, no one would have to travel more than a few hours. The second suggestion was to name a coordinator who would assist in communication for the entire region covered by the CFO (Krueger 1987: 9). In 1988, the CFO adopted both options and organized the two regions mentioned above, appointing a regional coordinator for each region along with 12 promotores (AFSC 1988). The two coordinator positions were filled by Maria Guadalupe Torres Martinez and Julia Quiñonez de Gonzalez (Comité de Apoyo circa 1988: 6-7). Each region held two meetings per year and both regions would join together at the annual meeting in November where the major decisions were made: “During the annual meeting they

select their board (*mesa directiva*); review and evaluate their projects and program; make decisions about organizational matters and the direction and structure of the CFO; and share planning for the upcoming year and projects” (AFSC 1988). In addition, each region had a regional directive board which was elected by the CFO members (AFSC 1989c: 2). Krueger played a significant role at this stage of the organizing. According to an AFSC report, he coordinated the Maquiladora Project from all aspects. For example, he was responsible for communicating the time and location of the meetings which could be very time-consuming as the maquiladora workers did not have telephones. In addition, the 12 organizers at the time all relied on Krueger for guidance, planning and coordinating efforts (AFSC 1987b).

In a 1988 document detailing the history of the Comité de Apoyo and the Comité Fronterizo de Obreras, some of activities of the organizations offer us an overview of the stages in the CFO’s development:

- gather workers in the non-threatening environment of workers’ homes in the low-income communities where they live
- discuss dangers of adhesive, paints, solvents, thinners, exposure limits, hygiene, safety, environmental pollution, etc.
- learn together about Mexico’s progressive labor laws and provisions for work continuity and protections against suspension without pay
- use role-playing and group dynamics to train worker-leaders who inform and unite women and men for peaceful revolutions inside the factories
- gather colonia groups into city-wide committees of working women
- unite city-wide organizations into a regional coalition, the Border Committee of Working Women
- join forces with religious agencies and other groups for urging corporations to become responsible in wages and actions. (Comité de Apoyo circa 1988: 2)

As we can see from these points, there were different levels of organizing: at the homes of the workers in small groups where they felt comfortable, at the colonia (or neighbourhood) level, at a city-wide level, at a regional level and at an international and cross-organizational level. Most

of the composition of the city-wide committees and all of the colonia groups were maquiladora workers. There is a real sense of grassroots democracy in this process, as explained by the following quote:

All of the participants of the local colonia groups are invited to participate in city-wide meetings for the election of their representatives to the Assembly and the Executive Committee...The highest policy-making group of the CFO is the Asamblea (Assembly) which meets once each year over a weekend in November (more often, when needed). The Asamblea is made up of four women workers elected by the city-wide gatherings which bring together workers from all of the groups. The Asamblea has the major role in guiding the coordinators and promotoras. It also has the major role in the decisions regarding the organization and its work. The Executive Committee carries out the policies and plans approved by the Asamblea. (Comité de Apoyo circa 1988: 5-6)

According to the CFO and the Comité de Apoyo reports, everything seemed to be going quite well with the Comité Fronterizo de Obreras. In fact in its 1995 and 1996 report, the CFO described the structure of the organization and methods of organizing as follows:

We organize around our objectives and work methods. This has served us well. These objectives and methods have been approved by the General Assembly of the CFO. The coordinadoras and promotoras follow the instructions of the General Assembly and the Comité de Obreras of each city.

Once a week the promotoras meet with the coordinadoras to evaluate the work, to plan the week, and to study long-term strategies.

Every two months we have meetings of the Comités de Obreras of each city to guide the work of the promotoras and coordinadoras.

The General Assembly decides how many times a year they want to meet, usually three or four times a year. For 1997, the General Assembly is planning to meet in March, July, September, and November.

The groups in the colonias send their representatives to the Comité de Obreras of their city. The city Comité elects four persons to be representatives at the General Assembly, including one obrera to serve on the Executive Committee of the General Assembly.

The General Assembly determines the direction of the organization. The Executive Committee follows the policy and the instructions of the General Assembly and usually meets twice a year. (CFO 1997: 5)

However, the AFSC seemed to have a completely different idea about the successes of the Comité Fronterizo de Obreras. A 1997 AFSC report emphasizes the organizational weakness of the CFO, including dependency on Ed Krueger, the loose structures and decision-making mechanisms as well as regional divisions:

Dependency of CFO workers on Ed Krueger is a weak spot of the organization in the Reynosa area, although some groups are meeting by themselves. Considering himself a grassroots organizer, Ed has reached a formal position of Director of the CFO that is not consistent with a Mexican organization of mostly women maquiladora workers. The identity of the CFO staff alternates between a role of advisors to a role of organizers...CFO meetings are irregular, and a leading role of the Executive Committee is not visible. CFO staff do not seem very accountable to the main decision-making bodies. Three different regional dynamics: Piedras Negras-Acuña; Reynosa-Rio Bravo; and Matamoros, permeate the CFO. (AFSC 1997b: 2)

This is the only document that speaks of three regions, which symbolizes a problem, especially since the CFO had been divided into two regions in 1988. The south-eastern region, which included Matamoros, Reynosa and Rio Bravo, was represented by the regional coordinator, Maria Guadalupe Torres. The central region, which included Piedras Negras and Ciudad Acuña, was represented by Julia Quiñonez. We can surmise from this document that the CFO was not working as an entity and there was not a sense of a larger group identity. Rather there were divisions between the different regions. Although there are no documents to this effect, there does seem to be at this time a lack of communication or perhaps of agreement on the steps to take to move the CFO forward as an organization, especially between the two regional coordinators. These divisions had some important consequences as the AFSC, the major fundraising partner of the CFO, held much influence on the path chosen by the CFO at this time.

Rather than having two coordinators with conflicting ideas, the AFSC pushed for independence and the establishment of one single coordinator for the whole Northern Border Region.

In 1997, the role and identity of the two regional coordinators of the CFO was unclear. They did not vote in the assemblies. They were receiving at that time a stipend that came mostly from the AFSC. While not technically being employees of the AFSC, neither were they direct or permanent representatives of the CFO. They represented the CFO when delegated to do so by the women workers (AFSC 1997: 1). Some examples of this were their participation as delegates in international events such as the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995 or the UN Social Summit and NGO Forum in Copenhagen in March 1995 (AFSC 1996c: 23). “The NGO Forum proved to be an excellent opportunity for Maria [Guadalupe Torres] and Julia [Quiñonez] to share their own experiences as organizers, and to learn from the experiences of other women organizers from around the world” (AFSC 1996c: 23). The unclear role of the regional coordinators is one of the factors that might have led to frustrations and the will to change the direction in which the organization was heading.

In 1997, an AFSC report found that although some CFO members, such as Maria Guadalupe Torres, the regional coordinator, vehemently opposed the registering of the CFO as an *asociación civil*, even threatening to leave the organization if such a step occurred (which promise she kept in 1998; see AFSC 1998), other members were favourable to the idea and wanted an office where they could go and to not be so clandestine (AFSC 1997b). Although there are no minutes in the archives of the meeting in which the CFO decided to register as an autonomous organization, this seems to have occurred at the November 1997 annual meeting

(Comité de Apoyo 1997). Comité de Apoyo documents show that Krueger expressed concern that there were more men than women at this meeting and that the women seemed to be just looking on, rather than participating actively in the conversation (with the exception of the coordinator, Julia Quiñonez) and mentioned that in the past there had never been more than 15% participation of men. He also expressed concern over the decision to group together hundreds of colonia committees stretching over more than a 650 kilometre stretch into one organization (Comité de Apoyo 1997). Ricardo Hernandez, the Mexico–U.S. Border Program director of the AFSC, replied that the presence of men in the meeting did not imply machismo and that the objective was to get the men to be more sensitive to women’s issues (AFSC 1997a: 2). This does pose a problem when trying to define the CFO as a grassroots women’s organization if the meeting which was to determine the future direction of the organization, one as important as the decision to register as civil society organization in Mexico and therefore abandon their more low-key approach, was not made by the women who made up the organization up until that point.

As we will see in the next chapter, it is in fact the men who were becoming more active participants in the CFO who pushed for independence since they had different organizational strategies, ones that more resembled independent union organizing than low-key community-based grassroots organizing. What is also unclear in the archival information is how the decision was made to have Julia Quiñonez named as the general coordinator for the CFO and why Piedras Negras was chosen as the location for the office. No AFSC or CFO document specifically addresses these questions. Interviews with long-term members revealed that Maria Guadalupe Torres was not present at this meeting as she was taking care of an ailing family member

(Rafaela, Interview #46 and Ed Krueger, Interview #61). Some felt that the meeting was called at a time when they knew that Torres who was the most vocal voice against independence, a woman who had been a member of the very first Comité de Obreras and was well respected by the other maquiladora workers, could not be present. They felt there was a plan to have Krueger and Torres ousted from the CFO and to place Julia Quiñonez in the position of overall coordinator (Rafaela, Interview #46). In 1998, the CFO relocated from its centre in Matamoros to Piedras Negras where its leader (coordinadora), Julia Quiñonez, was located. The CFO became an autonomous registered non-profit organization (*asociación civil*) and opened an office in Piedras Negras, Coahuila, on April 3, 1998, at which time it also signed a letter of agreement for an equal partnership between the AFSC and the CFO (CFO 1998: 1).

The CFO statutes give specific powers to the general assembly and the executive committee. Chapter VI, section 1 states that “The highest authority of the CFO resides in the General Assembly,” and Chapter VII, “Powers of the Coordinator and of the Executive Committee,” specifies:

The administration, coordination, representation and enforcement (legal force) of the association will remain entrusted to the Executive Committee, which will be composed of a moderator, a secretary, a treasurer and two members with their respective replacements. These persons will be elected by the General Assembly, and will last in their positions for twelve months. The same people will not be able to be re-elected in the same position in the following period except with the agreement of 50% plus one of the total of the associates. (CFO 1998a: 3-4)

However, the reality on the ground is a very different story.⁶⁰ The coordinator is the top position within the CFO. The second in command is the moderator. Neither of these positions is an

⁶⁰ Describing the recent structure of the CFO has proven to be a much more difficult task as no documentation exists (or was shared with me) regarding the current structure. This analysis is therefore based on interviews with key

elected position. The position of coordinator has been filled by Julia Quiñonez since the registration of the organization as an *asociación civil* in 1998 and there is no process in place for an eventual change of coordinator.

Quiñonez explains, “The position of coordinator is not an elected position; it’s not as if I was elected by all of the membership. To become coordinator, I left my full-time job because I did not want any other responsibilities” (Interview #1). She furthered explained that although she wasn’t elected, the position was offered to her at an annual meeting and she accepted to become the coordinator of the organization that would soon thereafter seek registration as an autonomous organization.⁶¹ However, none of the 25 interviewees who had been members since before the independence of the CFO had any recollection of electing or even choosing Julia as a leader. Most do not remember exactly how it happened and just accepted it as a *fait accompli* once she was named coordinator, which happened simultaneously with the CFO registering as an *asociación civil* in Mexico City. One long-time member thought it might have been Ed Krueger who chose Julia as the coordinator because it was not any of the workers who had chosen her (Esmerelda, Interview #5). Krueger, however, explained that this was not the case and that the decision to register the CFO as an *asociación civil* and for Julia Quiñonez to become its leader was done at a meeting organized by Ricardo Hernandez and the AFSC in which Maria Guadalupe Torres, the other regional CFO coordinator, was unable to attend because her mother was dying (Ed Krueger, Interview #61).

members of the organization as well as on the participatory observation of local CFO meetings and of the CFO’s General Assembly meeting in November 2006.

⁶¹ No archival information was available regarding how the decision was made to have Julia Quiñonez named as the general coordinator for the CFO and why Piedras Negras was chosen as the location for the office.

From her previous statements in writing to the AFSC, as well as her resigning from the CFO shortly after this decision was made in 1998 (AFSC 1998), it is clear that Torres would have been against the registration of the CFO as an *asociación civil*. Some long-time members were even more adamant in their explanation that Julia was not chosen by the members. As Maria-Elena Garcia from Reynosa expressed it when asked what happened at the meeting when Julia was elected as coordinator: “No one elected her! ...Well, I know that Julia elected herself all by herself...She appointed herself. And that is how she continued, alone, therefore when we have wanted to change, she fires us, she threatens us and...or she simply no longer sends us our pay” (Interview #52).

The second position in the organization, Julia’s second in command, is that of the moderator. This position is also not an elected position. Ana, who held the position until 2003 and who has not been replaced, explained a bit of the role of the moderator and the structure of the CFO while talking about the annual meetings:

The moderator is the person who succeeds Julia and that has...here everyone is equal and everyone makes propositions and the decisions are made by everyone in majority but yes there is a...well, they are like ranks, you could say, there is Julia, then the moderator, and then the secretary, the voting members, everyone, to say a structure. (Interview #8).

She described a typical day for a moderator as the following:

I was in the office, I also received foreign visitors and workers, I visited workers. I also travelled to represent the CFO in Canada, the U.S, all of Mexico. The promotora, her duty is to visit the colonias and visit the workers, not to travel outside. If it is necessary, she goes to classes but doesn’t always go to represent the CFO as Julia does. (Interview #8)

The coordinator, the moderator, as well as a few other members (two to three from each of the cities where the CFO is located) formed the Executive Committee which is now dissolved.⁶²

When questioned about the Executive Committee, Julia Quiñonez responded,

Right now, it isn't working, but the structure we had in the past is the *coordinadora*, the *promotores*, therefore in the cities there were local committees and then from the local committees, one or two representatives from each city, for example the ones in Reynosa would decide who would be on the council [Executive Committee] and the council would meet two or three times a year. And other decisions like approving the budget were made in the meetings of the council. (Interview #1)

She explained that there were complaints that some of the members of the Executive Committee from towns such as Reynosa were only coming to the meetings in Piedras Negras to eat and sleep at the CFO's expense. However, since they were volunteers and did not receive any pay, it was difficult for her to complain. Little by little members of the council started to leave until the structure no longer existed (Interview #1).

There are no more local committees. In fact, in November of 2006, there were only promotores in Piedras Negras and Ciudad Acuña. There was no longer any CFO presence at all in Reynosa and Matamoros in 2007 and this presence has been absent from Matamoros since 2002 (Tere, Interview #44). Julia Quiñonez also confirmed during her interview that the CFO was no longer operating in Ciudad Juarez because of the cost and danger associated with organizing there. There were a few volunteers in Nuevo Laredo in November of 2006 but no full-time organizers because of the danger due to the drug trade (Interview #1). Therefore, for various reasons, not only is the structure of the Executive Committee crumbling but also the presence of the CFO is no longer being felt in four of the six cities it purports to represent.

⁶² Data as of November 2006.

Additional problems exist with the executive committee itself. It would seem that there was at one time a decision-making process in place which did lead to some input and influence from the members. However, it appears that some of the Executive Committee members did not take their role very seriously or did not get overly involved in the decision-making process. For example, one long-time member who also belonged to the Executive Committee never questioned any decisions regarding the funding of the CFO: “And as I told you, inside the organization, I belonged to the committee, how do you say it, the executive committee and they always touched on the finances with me but I never asked where it came from, how much there was, no” (Juany, Interview #2). This was not the only long-time member who chose not to question major decisions such as budgetary ones, which seemed to be a common theme. The members of the CFO in a position to actually question any decisions chose not to for various reasons. Other long-time members who preferred to remain anonymous for this part of the interview mentioned that some of the members of the executive committee were in fact chosen because of their acquiescence and lack of questioning, and that the committee did not have any real function.

The structure has now collapsed, which means that the major decisions are now being made solely by the coordinator, Julia Quiñonez, or in consultation with Ricardo Hernandez from the AFSC, who spends approximately 20 weeks a year in Piedras Negras helping out with the CFO⁶³. This, not surprisingly, is causing rifts with some long-time members who feel that Ricardo Hernandez is more important to the organization than they are. When asked if they ever questioned why decisions are made without consulting them, one of the long-time members who preferred to remain anonymous in regards to these comments answered: “No, and do you know why we don’t do it? I think because sometimes we think that they are above us.” When I

⁶³ Information obtained from an informal conversation with Ricardo Hernandez, Piedras Negras, November 2006.

countered that CFO considers itself a grassroots organization, the same member replied: “But it isn’t that way.” In this member’s opinion, it is Julia Quiñonez and Ricardo Hernandez who are at the top making all of the decisions. Hernandez is believed to have more influence in the CFO than long-time members or any of the workers. The lack of any stable group within the CFO is the reason given by the same member to explain why none of the members ask for more influence. Although there are people who have participated for many years, there have been differences between them and for various reasons they have all separated and gone their own way.

When asked how things were different before independence, when the CFO worked with Ed Krueger and not directly with the AFSC, and after the CFO became independent and had a direct association with the AFSC, Patty, a long-time member responded:

Yes. I think that before Julia was different because she did not feel as independent, as free to make decisions. Before, it was the workers that made decisions. **Before, Julia never made a decision without consulting with the workers. The workers were the ones that decided** if they made a call, if they decided to go to such and such a city, if they decided to create a movement, the decision was up to the workers. When the CFO went directly to the AFSC, directly, things changed a lot. They changed a lot: **now, they do not consult the workers, they do not take them into account, the workers, now the decisions are made by only Julia and Ricardo**, they no longer consult the workers... (Interview #7, author’s emphasis)

Esmeralda, another long-time member echoed the feeling that the workers were no longer part of the decision-making process and feels that since Ed Krueger left (since the independence in 1998) there have been problems, that in the past the workers were the CFO; however, that statement is no longer true:

It has changed a lot, it has changed a lot. I feel that now there are more problems, that when Beto [Ed Krueger] was here, there weren't these problems...For example, well before it was better because we didn't have anything, no material, nothing, everything we achieved ourselves and that is one of the things that would please me going back because **before, the CFO was more ours, the workers, and now no, now I feel that it isn't ours. I, in fact, sometimes feel that I am not of the CFO...**Yes, sometimes I feel that I am not of the CFO. In fact, now I am not going to go to the annual meeting. In the 20 years I have been here, or 19, if I have missed 4 meetings, it was a lot, and this time I am going to miss it all and it is not, I say, because I don't want to participate, it's not that I don't desire participating there because many things have happened...they ask me are you CFO or do you consider yourself CFO? Yes I consider myself CFO but they don't let us grow as CFO or decide for ourselves, as workers. (Interview #5, author's emphasis)

For Ana, who used to be the CFO moderator (the de facto second in command in the organization, the one who replaced Julia Quiñonez when Julia was not available), the CFO has lost its grassroots base. It now focuses too much on the international level without giving the local level the importance it should. When asked to compare the role that Ed Krueger played in the CFO with the one now played by Ricardo Hernandez, Ana replied:

No, I don't think it can be compared. Beto [Ed Krueger] started with this organization from the bottom, from the grassroots and he was the one who founded everything, did... he gave...you could say he handed it over to Julia the confidence so that she could direct. Ricardo is different. For me, he is different. Ricardo is a very big support, a serious support, but he is from above. He did not start from the bottom with the CFO. He came to the CFO and knew the CFO when the CFO was already the CFO. (Interview #8)

When asked which form of the CFO was better, before or after independence, Ana offered the following explanation:

For me, I don't know. Now, the CFO is very internationalized and has a lot of strength internationally. But I see that the international strength, it does not have it nationally. You understand? That is the difference. When before, although there we lacked things, that there wasn't an office, that there wasn't a phone, that there wasn't a car, that there weren't many things, there were more people. More people and more solid, **the CFO was stronger before and I think there was more diffusion (more known) at the local level than now that it is more structured.** (Interview #8, author's emphasis)

When asked why she felt there were more people participating in the CFO in the past, Ana explained quite succinctly: “Because the CFO went so high that it internationalized itself and ceased, without giving it [the local level] the importance that it should” (Interview #8). As the moderator, the second in command, or as she described it “the one who succeeds Julia,” a position she held from 1998 until 2003, Ana was well placed to understand both the local and international level of organizing of the CFO. This comment also summarizes quite well the central argument of this thesis, that TANs place pressures or constraints on the organizing activities of the CFO. The CFO may have started out as a grassroots women’s organization (although this was also an example of some pressure from above) but due to the pressures by its transnational partners, it has had to focus on the transnational level to the detriment of the local level.

The 2006 annual meeting (as described in the introduction) was more of a presentation of workshops by TANs from the U.S. to the maquiladora workers than a forum for decisions making by consensus as was previously explained by Ricardo Hernandez of the AFSC. Interviews with many of the long-time CFO members revealed an image of an organization that can no longer be qualified as grassroots, one in which the decision-making process has gone from grassroots to top-down.⁶⁴

Norma, a promotore in Piedras Negras who had attended the November 2006 annual meeting, described previous annual meetings:

It was very different, because in the past we were workers of many years and we went the very united at the committee and we always had a report for each city that was what had

⁶⁴ See Appendix I for an explanation as to why the minutes and agendas of the previous annual meetings of the CFO were not available.

been done in each city. In this occasion, this wasn't done because there hasn't been any work done in any city, therefore no one could present a report. (Interview #6)

When asked why no work was done, she explained: "Because there aren't any promotores. And if there aren't any promotores, there isn't anyone who does the work, who is going to do it?" (Interview #6)

Patty explained that in the past the decisions were made by the workers but that in 2006, this was no longer the case:

At the annual meeting, they are supposed to present a plan of the achievements, what are the goals, what is the work plan and in a certain way, yes they do do it, the workers, BUT which workers are you talking about, of which city are you talking about, or who are the workers that participate in the annual meetings...because **it wasn't the members of the CFO that participated in this meeting, it was new people and it is always the same. It is always new people that go, a client that is only for the moment and who you will never see here again...**I participated in many annual meetings...in the ones I participated in before, yes there were workers of the CFO, there were workers that were engaged with the CFO, there were workers that they themselves did the work It is very different now. (Interview #7, author's emphasis)

Ana, the CFO moderator was asked to compare the annual meetings from the beginning with those from 10 years ago (around 1996) and over the past few years:

Yes, they changed a lot. I remember when at the beginning of the CFO when it didn't have a name yet, we had the meetings in Miguel Aleman. We were around 20 people at the most. We talked about strategies, experiences, achievements, we made future plans of how we could visit more people, how we could talk to the companeros about work, about our rights and now...you could say that 10 years later, I was in an annual meeting in Reynosa where there was close to 40 people, we debated a lot over the union leaders, to see how we could go about developing large strategies covering a whole plant to be able to change these leaders and 10 years later...which was 4 years ago (in 2002), it was in Laredo...Well, I saw it more as, more as international, how do I say it, more projecting, more the CFO internationally and **I felt that the sense of the base [the grassroots level] was a bit lost, which was how to extend itself more locally.** (Interview #8, author's emphasis)

When asked if there were guests from other countries at the annual meetings in the past:

There were never people from other countries in the annual meetings. It was always solely CFO because it is a meeting of the CFO. (Interview #8, author's emphasis)

It is very difficult to access any of the CFO annual reports. The CFO website has links to the annual reports dating back to 2001; however, when one tries to access these reports, the webpage cannot be found. The only report which is accessible is the 2006 annual report. Through a bit of searching, I was also able to uncover an email the CFO sent to those on its emailing list which is worth analyzing. In it, the CFO states:

At the end of each year, the CFO reports on the year's activities to the workers attending our Annual Meeting. This report is also released to activists, labor unions, and other groups that support us around the world. As we say in the report: "**Your financial contribution is essential to our work because individual donations ensure that the agenda of the CFO is defined by the workers themselves. We don't want to change our priorities to pursue funding. We need to maintain the CFO's independence and autonomy to ensure that it continues to reflect the priorities of our grassroots membership.**"(CFO 2005c, author's emphasis)

This seems an ironic quote when we look at the next chapter which will deal with the abrupt change in the CFO priorities precisely in order to obtain funding. It also helps explain why the annual reports prior to 2006 are no longer available on the CFO website, because the vast contrast between that statement and what happened at the 2006 annual meeting and what is included in the 2006 annual report is astounding. The 2006 annual report, which was printed by the USW printing services, is really more of a newsletter detailing some of the major accomplishments of the CFO than minutes of the annual meeting, which is of course its objective (see CFO 2006). It also highlights the International Labour Organization report about an attempt

to form an independent union in Macoelmex in Piedras Negras (see section 4.7 on Alcoa in Chapter 4 for more details on the complaint filed by the Macoelmex workers to the ILO in 2002).

In 2006, the CFO was going against its own statutes regarding where the power within the organization lies. Unfortunately, most of its long-time members were not even aware that their organization's own statutes entitled them to the right to be part of the decision-making process. Maria-Elena Garcia's response to a question about the structure of the CFO seems to sum it up best: "The only person in charge is Julia...No structure exists; there is none" (Interview #52). Unfortunately, it seems that Armbruster's definition of the CFO as a community-based organization which symbolizes "a reaction to the sexist, hierarchical, and centralized decision-making processes common to many trade unions" and establishes "participatory democracy as their goal in which community members and workers decide their own strategies and the methods for social change" (1995: 81) no longer held true for the CFO. The structure of the CFO in 2006 did in fact seem to be hierarchical with only Julia Quiñonez, with the help of Ricardo Hernandez of the AFSC, at the top. Many decisions which were crucial to the direction in which the CFO was heading were being made without the input of the members who made up the organization, thus without participatory democracy principles which were so important to women's organizations and were clearly evoked in the CFO's own statutes.

3.5 Globalization from below or pressures from above? A CFO alternative to maquiladoras — the worker-owned and operated maquiladora: Dignidad y Justicia

What better way to mount an alternative to the “globalization from above,” which is represented by the maquiladoras, than by forming an alternative style maquiladora, one in which the workers themselves are part owners? This is in fact what happened in 2004 with the Maquiladora Dignidad y Justicia (Maquiladora Dignity and Justice), in which ex-maquiladora workers who were put on blacklists for organizing formed part of a cooperative maquiladora. Unfortunately, ideals and reality collided in this CFO joint project with transnational partners who were donors to whom the workers need to be accountable. The working conditions (garage with no air conditioner and excessive heat in the summer and cold in the winter) and lack of insurance or any guaranteed income were but some of the many issues that plagued from this project, ending with some of the workers/owners denouncing Julia Quiñonez on YouTube. What appears at first glance to be a great alternative to the maquiladoras actually ends up failing miserably and leaving the workers they are supposed to be helping feeling used and having long-time members of the CFO (more than 20 years of active involvement in the organization) denouncing the leader of their organization on the most public space they could find.

A 2004 AFSC article gives an overview of the reasons this independent maquiladora was created in the first place. The article starts with Amparo’s story of being fired for a second time for organizing workers. “Amparo was a volunteer organizer for the Border Committee of Women Workers, or CFO, a grassroots border organization that has worked for 24 years to improve the maquiladora system and promote worker and human rights” (AFSC 2004). The article then explains how the CFO had been wanting for a long time to help out workers like Amparo, activists who were labelled as problem people by the maquiladoras and placed on blacklists

which ensured they would never find a job again. The solution came in the form of a project between the CFO and North Country Fair Trade (NCFT) to open a maquiladora called Dignity and Justice Maquiladora Company. NCFT and CFO each owned 30% and a group of workers owned the remaining 40% (AFSC 2004). NCTF's mission was "to improve wages and labor conditions for production workers in Latin America by expanding the market in the United States for basic goods produced by fair trade production groups in Latin America" (CFO 2009j). They accomplished this mission by seeking out fair trade manufacturers of basic consumer goods to provide these goods as an alternative to the ones produced in sweat shops (CFO 2009j). NCTF provided on-site technical support in establishing the Maquiladora Dignidad y Justicia, financed the purchase of equipment and initial start-up costs and helped in matching the production of apparel products with customer demand (CFO 2009j).

In a 2005 AFSC publication, Rosenberg promotes the Dignity and Justice maquiladora. In her article, she explains that "Tere, Juanita, Rosalia and Matilda are active members of the Comité Fronterizo de Obrer@s (CFO), a Mexican nonprofit organization that has organized and advocated for workers' rights for 24 years. The CFO is sponsor and part-owner of the Dignity and Justice Maquiladora (D&J). The CFO strives to achieve a living wage for the thousands of workers in assembly plants and respect for worker's rights" (Rosenberg 2005). Similarly, Susan Mika, the past president of CJM and a Benedictine sister, wrote an article praising the Maquiladora Dignidad y Justicia, stating that it is a "witness to the fact that workers can make a sustainable wage, can work under conditions that are not oppressive, and can produce a product that consumers will pay extra money to purchase" (2007). However, it is not described as such by the actual workers in the CFO part-owned maquiladora. Three of the four workers of the

Maquiladora Dignidad y Justicia interviewed did in fact mention that they were paid by the piece and not a fixed salary (Esmerelda, Interview #5, Patty, Interview #7 and Alma, Interview #34). Therefore, when there was no work one week, they did not receive any pay. This was a definite sore spot for many who felt that they were in fact receiving better wages and health benefits when they worked for the multinational maquiladoras than by working for the CFO maquiladora.

As director of the Mexico–U.S. Border Program of the American Friends Service Committee, Ricardo Hernandez is often sought out for information on maquiladora organizing, with or without mention of the CFO. For example, in a 2006 article about the Maquiladora Dignity and Justice, Colon Reyes quotes Ricardo Hernandez who says that one of the difficulties is that the workers have a hard time accepting that they are their own bosses, that they need to have after-hours meetings to discuss import/export issues, and so on. Some other difficulties they are having is that the owners/operators do run a risk because the company's bottom line is tight and there was not enough money made in the first year of operations for it to stay afloat and they needed help from donations to cover some operational expenses. Colon Reyes explains that "Dignidad y Justicia was launched in March 2004 with help from the Comité Fronterizo de Obrer@s (CFO, or Border Committee of Women Workers), a long-time AFSC partner organization. The CFO organizes and educates workers on their human and labor rights. It's a part-owner of Dignidad y Justicia and shares office space with the company" (Colon Reyes 2006a). However, the article does not mention that the office space for the independent maquiladora was in fact a semi-converted garage attached to the CFO offices and, as described above, did not have any air conditioning in the summer or heat in the winter, which the office space of the CFO did have.

In an article about an AFSC delegation visit to Piedras Negras and Ciudad Acuña, Zlotrg (2008) blatantly promotes the Maquiladora Dignidad y Justicia with an insert to her article stating “Ordering a T-shirt this year? Justicia the Ethical Clothing Label.” The article then goes on to explain that “[t]he Maquiladora Dignidad y Justicia (Dignity & Justice Maquiladora Co.) is a worker-owned ethical clothing manufacturer and wholesaler created and sponsored by the Comité Fronterizo de Obrer@s (CFO), a Mexican workers’ center.” The insert also states that “Dignidad y Justicia produces T-shirts, tote bags, and sweatshirts in organic and conventional cotton. The women, working in two workshops, **have been able to pay themselves double the standard wages of the large maquiladoras and determine the terms of their employment**” (author’s emphasis). This last part is worth emphasizing because it is very much in opposition to the actual situation of the workers from the CFO-sponsored Maquiladora Dignidad y Justicia who would very much dispute this last statement. The workers of the maquiladora stated that they had tried to approach Julia Quiñonez and Ricardo Hernandez about the possibility of having a minimum wage for times when there was not enough work. They were told they needed to manage their own company; that this was their maquiladora to manage as best they could (Esmeralda, Interview #4 and Patty, Interview #7). Julia Quiñonez explained that in fact the money decisions were left to the workers. However, they had signed contracts with foundations in the United States for donations for specific things such as training and therefore some of the money was indeed tied up for specific purposes (Interview #1).

In 2006 while doing my field work in Piedras Negras, I was able to observe clear feelings of discontent on the part of some of the workers of the Maquiladora Dignidad y Justicia. They were in fact quite vocal about it. These feelings did not seem to go away because on December 30, 2008, at the same time that the article above mentioned all the great advantages of the Maquiladora Dignidad y Justicia, its members were in fact recording YouTube videos denouncing Julia Quiñonez and the CFO. Although I cannot verify whether or not the videos of ex-promotoras of the CFO found on YouTube are coerced in any way, I can acknowledge that these are in fact CFO members on the videos, most of whom I met while doing fieldwork in Piedras Negras, Coahuila, in November of 2006. All of these women were in fact long-time members of the organization and some, like Teresita Polo Ramos, in addition to being workers of the Maquiladora Dignidad y Justicia, were participating actively in the CFO since the 1980s and had very strong personalities. It is therefore this author's belief that the videos were accurate portrayals of their feelings of disenfranchisement within the CFO and their way of telling their story to the outside world.⁶⁵ These workers also denounced Julia Quiñonez to the Board of Conciliation and Arbitration for unjust firing and being in violation of Mexico's Federal Labour Law for not giving them a severance package in line with their years of service (Aguilar 2009). This does seem at odds with them being part owners of the Maquiladora Dignidad y Justicia and shows a grave misunderstanding on their part as to their role within the maquiladora and on the CFO's part for assuming that it had the right to fire workers who were part owners of the maquiladora in question. It is also clear that this CFO maquiladora, which was publicized as empowering women maquiladora workers, did not in fact reach this goal for the women who worked there and who were part owners of it.

⁶⁵ See <http://www.youtube.com/user/expromotorascfo#g/u> or type in [expromotorascfo](http://www.youtube.com/expromotorascfo) in the search engine at www.youtube.com

3.6 Comité Fronterizo de Obreras, Comité Fronterizo de Obreros or both, the Comité Fronterizo de Obrer@s

The final and most intuitive part of the analysis into whether or not the CFO is still a women-centred organization can be gleaned through reviewing the ever-evolving name of the organization. The official name of the CFO as it was registered in 1998 was the Comité Fronterizo de Obrer@s. The @ symbol is utilized to be more inclusive of the masculine “o” and the feminine “a” for obreros and obreras. Before 1998, it was referred to as the Comité Fronterizo de Obreras and many still call it by that name. The @ symbol also leads to confusion because although fine in the written form, many are uncertain how to refer to the organization when saying the name out loud or when translating it into English. One must necessarily choose the feminine or the masculine (or inclusive terminology for the noun worker). Until recently, the CFO went from describing itself on its website as the Comité Fronterizo de Obrer@s, the more inclusive terminology in Spanish, but continued using the English translation of Border Committee of Women Workers. Around 2006, it removed the qualifier women from its English translation and became simply the Border Committee of Workers. Most academics and the media continue to describe the CFO as a women’s organization. This poses an interesting question: Why does everyone else continue to describe the CFO as a women’s organization if it no longer does so? More interesting, however, is how the CFO is defined by the members themselves. As we will see below, the @ symbol was utilized to appease certain male members who did not feel included in a committee of women workers (obreras). We will also see in more detail in Chapter 4 how funding issues have influenced the function and objectives of the organization which have changed over time, from being an organization that was at one time espousing women’s issues as

its core values to becoming more mainstream in its objectives. A quick survey of media articles⁶⁶ about the CFO throughout the years uncovered the progression of the name of the CFO and allows us to observe that more often than not, the CFO is referred to as a women's organization, either with its Spanish name, Comité Fronterizo de Obreras, or the English version, the Border Committee of Women Workers. The @ symbol does, however, seem to be getting more and more use in the last few years (see Appendix I: Comité Fronterizo de Obreras or Comité Fronterizo de Obreros? The evolution of the name of the CFO throughout the years).

As we can see in the following quotes, there is no consensus among the members as to what the organization is called, Comité Fronterizo de Obreras or Comité Fronterizo de Obreros. Some did not even know the actual name. Men mostly say obreros and only some of the women who have been members for many years continue to call it obreras. Most do not feel that having more men in the organization has changed anything. Most cannot really explain why there were more women than men before and many never felt it was solely a women's organization, which begs the question as to why it was advertised in this way on its website and why it continues to be portrayed as a women's organization by academics and the media alike.

Most men felt that the @ symbol was appropriate because it was more inclusive, since it was not only a women's organization after all:

Yes, when the CFO was only in Piedras Negras, it was mostly women, but now that they invited us in Acuña to join, we are almost only men in Acuña, so now I think it is equal. (Diego, Interview #11)

It has always been distinguished equally. That is why they now use the @ symbol to signify obreros and obreras. It was always mixed; equal. There was a good balance; although sometimes, yes, there were a few more women participating. (Juan, Interview #18)

⁶⁶ These articles are available on the CFO website (CFO 2009g).

Well, I don't know all of the history of the organization but in one occasion when I was looking at papers I commented to the coordinator [Julia Quiñonez]: Why is it that it only says trabajadoras, in the documents throughout it says trabajadoras, [always] trabajadoras? — and we felt like they were discriminating against us. Therefore, why don't we look for something we can identify with, both men and women and in the end I believe that the organization, yes there are more women than men, but at that time...well I think that they looked for a solution. (Javier, Interview #4)

Many women also felt the CFO was not only a women's organization but also was dedicated to helping all maquiladora workers, men and women alike:

Look, the CFO dedicates itself to defending rights and defends them equally, as much for men as for women because occasionally I went to visit them and I saw companeros, men from the factories that were there and yes, they support them...there is no distinction in any way. (Josefina, Interview #32)

One long-time member offered explanations as to why more men participate now:

Before those that participated most were women, regularly it was women, men hardly ever liked it...Some didn't like taking the time for talks, or they preferred to go to a soccer game or drinking. [Why are there more men now?] Because I think that they have now seen the problems that are in the maquiladoras and if they don't know, well then they don't know how to defend themselves, therefore I think that on that side, men are realizing also little by little. (Norma, Interview #6)

Another long-time member gave a more detailed explanation as to why the Obreras in the name went from Obreras to Obrer@s:

I am going to tell you why...because of the change. When the CFO registered legally, the ones who wanted all of this, the ones who wanted the paperwork to register were almost only men...to register as a civil association in Mexico, you need to go through a lot of phases to do this, you have to have your statutes, your rules, to do all of these statutes and rules, three or four men from the CFO were participating and that is why we never had just obreras, we had obreros and obreras, thus [two of the men who were participating], the two of them were up front, they were men and they argued with Julia and asked why obreras if I am a man and there are many men, so why not use obreros? She said because we have always said obreras. But saying obreros means men and women but saying obreras means obreras nothing more, only women. And that was the reason it changed, that they used obrer@s but before it wasn't that way, it was only obreras, but here there were many problems because of that, because the CFO never had only obreras, there were always obreros, many obreros. (Patty, Interview #7)

Some long-time members, including promotoras, felt that the CFO never diverted from its original mandate to help women workers. When asked if the decision to go from Comité Fronterizo de Obreras to Comité Fronterizo de Obrer@s represented a change in the objectives and strategies of the CFO, these long-time members replied:

No, it is not a change in the objectives nor in the strategies because they have continued to be the same: to improve the conditions of the workers, especially of the women and their families but the fact that men have integrated to the group, this is like a bit stronger because it is not a claim from women that are looking to improve their conditions but it is on occasion, the couple, the husband and the wife or the son and the mother. But the goals and the objectives of the CFO have not changed. (Maria-Elena, Interview #2)

No, there wasn't any change due to the fact of using the @. What happened is that it was at the beginning an organization especially for women but we realized that we could include men if there were men interested in learning, in learning their rights and wanting to make changes, therefore, we accepted and many people have asked why the @, well it is for no other reason than to not have to add an "a" after or an "o" after, but no I don't think it serves any special role...Now it is men and women. What I want to tell you is that at the beginning, the organization was only women. [This changed] in 1998. And we were only women before. After that, men started being included...The objectives of the CFO have always been the same. (Ana, Interview #8)

Well, the objectives of the CFO aren't that changed, what happened is that the objectives didn't change but achieving that everyone participated, [men and] not only women, [that changed]. (Norma, Interview #6)

One long-time member, a CFO promotora, differed from the standard opinion and felt that the decision to go from Comité Fronterizo de Obreras to Comité Fronterizo de Obrer@s represented a change in the objectives and strategies of the CFO:

Well, yes...Well, it's like I told you, the participation of more men, well equal numbers of men and women...In the past when there were more women participating, they gave workshops on family planning...They talked almost only about that at the beginning but then they were looking for, well they weren't workshops but more like talks, they were giving more talks...or when there was a meeting and there were more women, well we had to talk about the article 176 which talks about pregnancy, that it was more for women...how things could affect one as a woman. (Juany, Interview #2)

This promotora felt that there were significant changes over time in the CFO and cites the example of no longer having workshops for women only. The reasons for this are quite interesting as they include a perception of improving women's conditions in the union, were there seemed to be more of an equal participation of men and women, and promoting discussions about family planning which seemed to have been more of a taboo subject in the past but were now being discussed openly in locations like workers health centres. One could imply that the CFO felt it could move on to issues that were commonly shared between men and women because the issues that primarily affected women had either been resolved or the services were available elsewhere and the women maquiladora workers no longer needed the CFO's help with these particular issues. As Juany explains when asked if there were still workshops aimed at women:

No, no, as I said, it has changed, it has changed because they talk about rights, about the workers, there are workshops given on the Federal Labour Law, on the social security, it is more, it is more what is being looked for... of union organizing...and before, they didn't accept women very much in the unions and that is why there weren't as many workshop on the labour law and union organizing...And now it is equal the participation of women and men...Well, it's that also in the annual meetings, we make work plans and that is when we decide what we need in the cities and now family planning finished a lot because now there is a lot of information on that and before there wasn't as much. Now, in whatever location, they talk to you about family planning, and before there wasn't. I am telling you that before there wasn't as much talk, there wasn't as much talk about family planning...Now, all of the people say to me "If I want to know something, I go to the seguro [worker health centre] and they tell me." [In the past,] no, and it wasn't very open [openly discussed]. (Juany, Interview #2)

In regards to whether or not the CFO focuses more on women's rights, Patty specified that it was only when the situation applied specifically to women, but that yes, there was a focus on women's rights.:

When they give us the questionnaires that teach their rights, as promotoras yes we focused a lot on women's rights because women have to be mothers and many women ignore the rights they have at work as a woman, as a mother, and one of the problems that women ignore their rights is that they cannot force you to do a pregnancy test and for that reason they focus a lot on [women]. (Patty, Interview #7)

So there were workshops so that women would know that they don't have to do pregnancy tests?

Yes. That is what they were taught, so that women would know that it is not compulsory when you are at a job that you have to do a pregnancy test. Another part of the ignorance of women was that when you have a newborn, you have the right to leave to go feed your baby [but] many maquiladoras do not give you this time, they do not give you a space to go and feed your baby, you are supposed to be able to go and feed your baby and come back. It is twice in the day that you should be able to do that. And there were many rights that women were ignorant of, and for that reason, the focus was more on women's rights, [and] everything else was equal [for] men and women. (Patty, Interview #-7)

Again, there is no consensus among the CFO members. However, these responses do shed some light as to why the CFO used to be considered a women's organization and why the decision was made to use a more gender-neutral symbol to represent a more inclusive membership: the possibility for women to obtain family planning information elsewhere; the growing number of men in the maquiladoras and consequently their wanting to learn more about their rights as workers; and the insistence by men in the organization to change the name of the organization to one that included them. Domínguez and Quintero (2007) explain that the CFO or Comité Fronterizo de Obreras, according to an interview with their leader, Julia Quiñonez, did start off as a women's movement. The inclusion of men is explained by the fact that the percentage of women workers in the maquiladoras has been diminishing. The organization seeks to increase the percentage of women participating in the male-dominated unions, in order to make them more responsible towards women's issues. Domínguez and Quintero explain that the CFO focuses more on women's practical demands (concrete material demands) than on strategic gender issues such as changing the public and private domain of women:

CFO, in the same way as other feminist organizations, went from a women's support project to a more general one, in which women's rights were contemplated as part of more general demands, which took away from their priority in the struggle. In other words, in CFO's struggle — and its defence of women — the priority was placed on other identities such as worker, spouse or mother, relegating their condition as women to the background. (2007: n.p.)

This is in stark contrast to the CFO's main objective to educate, organize and empower women who work in the maquiladoras in order to achieve its overriding goal "to improve working conditions and the quality of life for workers in the maquiladoras, especially women and their families" (CFO 2009b). It is also in contrast to the way the CFO is perceived in the literature, especially in the academic literature. For example, in Huesca's in-depth analysis of the CFO from 1997 to 2002, covering the regions of Reynosa, Rio Bravo and Matamoros, Tamaulipas, he states that the CFO "promotoras deliberately incorporated a gendered strategy into their efforts both to establish initial contact and to maintain interest in participating in CFO meetings" (2006: 145-146)⁶⁷. In other sources, the CFO is defined in many different ways: as a community-based organization that is closely related to feminism and to the women's movement (Armbruster 1995: 81); as a community organization in which "women are more than half of the membership, and they occupy positions of great esteem and power" (Bandy & Bickham Mendez: 2003: 177); as workers as well as a women's organization (Hertel 2006); as a transnational feminist organization (Frederickson 2007: 65-66); and as an organization that is part of the larger women's movement that utilizes transnational networking strategies (Dominguez 2002: 226-227). Feminist literature teaches us that we must not forget the local level of analysis and that we need to give a voice to those who are usually excluded from analysis. The irony is that only through giving a voice to the marginalized and through a gendered analysis of the context in

⁶⁷ Unfortunately, the CFO promotoras Huesca references in his analysis were no longer members of the CFO in 2007 (this information was obtained by the author being introduced to and interviewing these ex-members of the CFO by Huesca himself during the 2007 field research).

which the CFO was created (see Chapter 1) are we able to understand that the CFO cannot be defined as a women's organization.

The objective of this chapter was to examine the CFO's local and grassroots level of organizing before examining its transnational level of organizing in the next chapter. This chapter underlines the importance of a dialectical approach and the use of field research in order to uncover the nuances of the CFO's organizing of maquiladora workers. For instance, the fact that the CFO was not a grassroots movement at all, but was rather created in a top-down manner is significant when trying to evaluate its current grassroots (or not) status as an organization. The role played by the AFSC, SEDEPAC and the Comité de Apoyo is key to understanding how the CFO was in fact created from the top-down in order to create a "globalization from below" movement where none existed and to understanding that its objectives and strategies were greatly influenced by these three organizations throughout its history. We also saw that when the CFO members themselves wanted to remain low profile due to contextual factors such as fear of reprisals and even of violence towards them if they openly organized workers, the AFSC felt otherwise and pushed for a more visible presence and transnational partnership. Funding issues were essential to this push for independence, as we will see in further detail in Chapter 4.

In Chapter 1, we saw the context of organizing maquiladora workers in the context of Northern Mexico's Border Region in relation to the structural conditions of globalization, the gender relations and how they affect mobilizing efforts and the specific relationship unions have with the maquiladoras and their workers. This chapter takes these contextual factors into account and applies them to the specific case of the CFO, as we cannot study the organization in a void. As

we saw, issues of fear, including fear of violence, are very real and strongly affect mobilization efforts. In the description of how new members are recruited, we saw how this was an enormous task requiring a lot of time, effort and patience as well as a cultural understanding of the fears that the new members have to overcome before they will even listen to a promotore. It is therefore not a task that is taken lightly. That is why losing key members in the organization, those who are well known and liked by their co-workers and able to gain their confidence, is detrimental to the survival of the organization. Internal conflicts and divisions between the regions have led to a deterioration of the structure of the CFO and to key decisions being made without consultation of the members of the CFO and imposed in a top-down manner. The irony is that when the AFSC felt the CFO was being subservient to the Comité de Apoyo and not being independent and able to make decisions on its own (right before its independence in 1998), the members themselves felt otherwise and felt they were much more of a grassroots organization from the time they emerged as an organization in 1986 to their independence in 1998. Decisions were then made by consensus, meetings were held on a regular basis and members felt their voices were heard. On-the-ground research shows us that the charisma and leadership style of Ed Krueger might actually have been beneficial to smoothing the internal conflicts within the organization and promoted a more grassroots type of organizing of women than when the leader was a Mexican woman who started from the ground up as a maquiladora worker herself. The relationship between the CFO members and their leader, Julia Quiñonez, will be explored in more detail in Chapter 5. First, we need to examine the transnational aspects of the CFO organizing efforts and how these efforts have led to the CFO becoming more of a union organizer than a grassroots organizer.

Chapter 4

Globalization from above: The CFO as a product of a TAN

This chapter will be especially pertinent in demonstrating that the top-down influence TANs have on the receiving-end activists is a form of globalization from above, and that TANs were part of the equation before the CFO was established. This top-down influence has, however, changed over time with new partnerships developed with other TANs or transnational labour movements. With these changes comes a substantial shift in the strategies and objectives of the CFO, from a women's organization to a labour organization or at the very least one that strongly promotes the implementation of independent unions versus a more grassroots low-profile approach. In this chapter, I will explore in more detail the conflicts between the transnational and local objectives of the CFO, and how they have caused such a rift as to nearly destroy the organization. This chapter will bring us back to the focus of the thesis: the tensions between grassroots organizing and transnational mobilizing, and how the pressures from "globalization from above" also come from the TANs, who form part of the "globalization from below" category of civil society's counter-hegemonic movements against globalization.

4.1 Advocating for the weaker partner: TANs vs low-profile approach

Since the objective when creating the CFO was to offer a response to "globalization from above," it is not surprising that the AFSC started advocating a transnational response early on. The AFSC views the maquiladora workers as being alone in facing an alliance of powerful enterprises, foreign capital, the Mexican government and corrupt unions, and thus need the help of transnational alliances. We will see how this is a clear TAN tactic of advocating for the cause

of others in a North–South dynamic in which the stronger partner helps the weaker partner. We will also see the first conflicts between the AFSC and the Comité de Apoyo, with the former wanting to focus on transnational alliances, and the latter wanting to focus on local organizing. This is one of the first examples of the issues that the CFO is still facing: of needing resources in order to help the workers, of having to participate in transnational alliances in order to be able to continue local, grassroots work, and of the conflicts that arise when different people involved in the organization have vastly different opinions on what is best for the organization. This section will also briefly introduce the recent struggles the CFO has had between transnational solidarity and keeping a low-profile approach through some of the interviews, a topic that will be further developed in the following sections.

The AFSC saw the importance of networking early on. It also saw the links with globalization and, as we can see, are clearly advocating a form of “globalization from below” to counter the powerful forces of “globalization from above.” As is the case of other TANs, the AFSC felt that mobilizing at the local level was insufficient in combating the powerful forces of globalization, and therefore advocated a more transnational response, as symbolized in a 1982 AFSC discussion paper:

The experience of the last few years shows the limitations of isolated work. It often brings frustration and bitterness to those engaged in the work. The context of the struggle is complex. There are many forces at work, and only a broad base of workers groups will succeed ultimately. The maquiladora workers are alone, facing an alliance of powerful enterprises, foreign capital, the Mexican government and corrupt unions. They are often led to perceive other workers as competitors or adversaries. (AFSC 1982c: 17)

This perception of the maquiladora workers as victims needing help clearly informed the tactics and objectives of the AFSC and the director of the Mexican Border Program who started to undertake the first stages of transnational solidarity as early as 1982. Local efforts were deemed essential but not sufficient. Contact with women workers in the U.S. was seen as a benefit to the Mexican workers who could receive information and support from them. More importantly though, this transnational effort could reach public opinion in the United States regarding the “global assembly line” and its negative effect on the women who work in it (AFSC 1982c: 18).

SEDEPAC obviously agreed with the AFSC’s transnational networking objectives. The 1984 work plan of SEDEPAC’S Border Women Program went beyond the grassroots organizing objectives. It had distinct objectives for both the national (Mexico) level and the international level. The objective at the international level is of great interest inasmuch as it marks the first clear indication that transnational solidarities are an objective that SEDEPAC wished to pursue in regard to organizing maquiladora workers. Taking into account the divisions and antagonisms between workers who compete against each other in the same country or between developing countries, SEDEPAC thus proposed:

The creation of a “transnational” support and exchange network between all of those institutions and groups that are involved in the work with women maquiladora workers. The objective that is pursued is to break down the “borders” of exacerbated nationalisms and to be creating bonds of unity and solidarity between women workers. The intent is to implement this objective mostly at a Latin American level, although contacts have already been established in some Asian countries. (SEDEPAC 1984a: 4)

The perspectives in 1984 were quite ambitious. Among others, some of the things SEDEPAC envisioned were the hiring of four additional promotoras (two for Reynosa and two for Matamoros) and visiting other cities that had maquiladoras, along the border as well as in the interior, to see about the possibilities of starting work there. SEDEPAC had also initiated an informal exchange with different feminist, religious and humanitarian groups about the situation of women maquiladora workers (SEDEPAC 1984d: 7-8), which became the First Forum of Maquiladora Workers, attended by the workers from Reynosa and Matamoros as well as workers from eight Mexican cities and two U.S. cities (AFSC 1985c: 4-5).

This is when the idea of transnational alliances, or TAN tactics, such as defined by Keck and Sikkink, started to be discussed by SEDEPAC and the AFSC in regard to women border workers. As Keck and Sikkink explain, in transnational advocacy networks there is a necessary element of pleading for the cause of others, for “interests” that are not their own. At this time, the AFSC was playing an advocacy role in relation to the CFO. For example, in one of their Mexico–U.S. Border Program staff meetings (May 1986), an AFSC member said that there is “danger for workers defending their rights against the most powerful companies in the world and with a government that desperately needs the maquilas” (AFSC 1986b: 10). The AFSC also mentioned that “The problems of the workers are as much related to the CTM and Mexican government as they are to US corporations” (AFSC 1986c: 5), and that the role of the AFSC is to aid in this latter part by helping workers who are harmed by U.S. corporations; to this end, the AFSC often wrote letters to U.S. corporations on behalf of Mexican workers in order to shame the corporation into action (AFSC 1986c: 5).

There is definitely an understanding here on the part of the AFSC of the context in which these women maquiladora workers are organizing. As we saw in the literature in the first half of this chapter, the maquiladora workers face many problems in relation to organizing in Mexico: union corruption, blacklists by unions and maquiladora organizations, and government authorities who are on the maquiladora's side (i.e., the Board of Conciliation and Arbitration which allows maquiladoras to file protection contracts which ultimately sabotage any chance of independent unions setting up — see section 4.7. on Alcoa in this chapter for an example of this). For the AFSC, the solution to these problems, as for most TANs, is to bypass the state level.⁶⁸ The AFSC therefore focused the next few years on building alliances with groups from the U.S. and on a transnational level. Major examples are the CFO participating in the UN Women's Conference in Beijing, involvement in the creation of Coalition for Justice in the Maquiladoras, helping Sony workers fired for union organizing put forth a claim at NAO (NAFTA office) in San Antonio, Texas, and finally, bringing organizers from the CFO to meet with workers, activists, women and donors from various locations in the U.S.

While the AFSC was focusing on transnational strategies to advance the cause of women maquiladora workers, the Comité de Apoyo was focusing on the local level, the consciousness-raising. The CFO wanted to foster solidarity among workers not just at the local level, however, but also at the regional level. For example, the women from the groups in Matamoros would spend their Sundays in Reynosa and Rio Bravo, helping the women workers there in their house meetings (AFSC 1990a: 2; Comité de Apoyo 1990: 7). The AFSC agreed with the importance of

⁶⁸ Although SEDEPAC does seem to share the AFSC's objectives of transnational networking, we cannot state that they are trying to bypass the national level. As a Mexican organization based in Mexico City, they often work within the national context. Through their work plans in relation to organizing women maquiladora workers, we can also see that they believe that networking between women workers is of great importance at all levels: local, regional, national and transnational.

the CFO projects at the local and regional levels, and acknowledged the significance of the role they played at the international level as well — the CFO was instrumental in planning a conference on maquiladoras (the bi-national conference of the Interfaith Coalition for Corporate Responsibility), which was held in Brownsville, Texas, on June 4–6, 1989. As we will see below, this conference was the precursor to the Coalition for Justice in the Maquiladoras, and thus a key element in the transnational networking strategy that the AFSC was advocating.

It is important to note that all of these projects are being entered into for the sole purpose of improving the conditions experienced by the women workers in the maquiladora industries. Additionally, it must be noted that without the constant organizing efforts which are being carried on in the border cities, no information would be available to any other organization nor would any contacts with women workers exist or be capable of creation. (AFSC 1990a: 3)

The above quote, from the final report that the AFSC submitted for a grant for the Maquiladora Women Workers' Project, demonstrates almost word for word the thesis advanced by Tvedt that “NGOs have become a donor-created and donor-led system, ‘a transmission belt of a powerful language and of Western concepts of development,’ carrying resources and authority from the core to the periphery, and information and legitimization from periphery to core” (1998, as cited by Townsend et al. 2008: 90). Although they spoke of the transnational efforts as being entered into solely for the benefit of the maquiladora workers, the AFSC then explained what the value added was of funding an organization such as the CFO for the benefit of the donor agency. As they so aptly argued, without the local grassroots level, there would be no other source of information on the ground or any opportunities for contact with local maquiladora workers. This links back to the main argument of this thesis, that although the CFO may have started off as a “grassroots” women’s organization, there is still a need for the CFO to obtain resources to help out the maquiladora workers, as well as a need for a reciprocal relationship between the donor

NGO who provides the resources, and the CFO workers who provide the first-hand accounts on the effects of globalization on the maquiladora workers.

While the Comité de Apoyo was in agreement with the importance of fostering international relationships to support women workers through meeting other women working in the maquiladora industries and experiencing similar types of situations (through examples such as the Interfaith Coalition for Corporate Responsibility conference), they also specified that the emphasis should have remained on the workers themselves: “We remain clear that our primary emphasis is the empowerment and self-determination of the workers themselves; we seek to make clear to all that only the workers, especially those having had the continuing experience of the group process of the cottage meetings, have the capability of providing the guidance and direction needed for any external initiatives to be productive” (Comité de Apoyo 1990: 6). It does seem like the Comité de Apoyo was seeking to keep the control over the decision-making process in the hands of the workers themselves, and not lose control to the interests of donor funding. As we have just seen, there is a clear tension between transnational and grassroots mobilizing from the very beginnings of the CFO, due in large part to the response of the TANs to the perceived negative effects of globalization, and how they felt they could best help the women maquiladora workers on the grassroots level — of giving a voice to the workers they are supposed to help. As we will see throughout this chapter, this tension did not go away, and in fact worsened, as the CFO was pressured to match its strategies to those of the donor agencies, having to adapt continually to satisfy the criteria of the “flavour of the month” of NGO funding.

4.2 Donor-led objectives: Matching priorities to meet donor criteria

This section will cover how the need for fundraising influences the objectives of the CFO. It will be the first part in the explanation of the important role fundraising played in the creation of the CFO, and its changing priorities over time, to match the donors' criteria, from its start as a women-centred organization established to obtain funds from feminist donors in the late 1970s and early 1980s, to its emergence as an independent organization in 1998. A lot can be gleaned in the reasons behind the creation of the CFO by looking at the fundraising efforts surrounding organizing maquiladora workers in Northern Mexico. Many NGOs have dependent origins, and many were created in response to an influx of funding opportunities in the 1970s and 1980s by Northern institutions wanting to bypass the state and fund third sector organizations. One of the consequences, however, is that the NGOs are accountable to their donors and not their clients (Townsend et al. 2008: 88-89).

The beginning of the CFO does fit this time frame. The program behind the creation of an organization of women maquiladora workers, the Mexico–U.S. Border Program, was a bi-national effort between the AFSC and the MSFC. The program started analyzing the issues relating to the Mexico–U.S. border in 1972, through field research and intensive consultation with those in centres of research in both the U.S. and Mexico (AFSC 1982a: 1). It is in a 1981 letter to the Funding Exchange, in which the AFSC Mexico–U.S. Border Program was seeking funds for a project entitled *Obreras Maquiladoras Unidas* (Women Workers Together), that we first have a name for the future organization that would become the CFO. The focus of the proposal for the *Obreras Maquiladoras Unidas* project was to address the worker and human rights violations of women maquiladora workers along the border, by organizing solidarity and

support groups in a clear example of pleading for the cause of others in areas such as human rights violations as described by Keck and Sikkink (1998, 1999) when defining transnational advocacy networks (in Chapter 2, section 2.5). In this letter, the AFSC states it was advised of the “real possibility that donors of the Funding Exchange, particularly feminist, would be interested in this project.”⁶⁹ The letter focuses on the fact that maquiladora plants mostly employ young women between 16 and 25 years old who have a tendency to be timid and fearful of organizing and are unaware of their legal rights. It then speaks to their harsh working conditions and the sexual harassment and discrimination to which they are subjected regularly. Finally, the AFSC specifies that “Our program, which is experiencing considerable success, is organizing workers’ solidarity or support groups. In their weekly sessions they learn about their rights as workers, develop their leadership abilities, and learn that by banding together they can protect each other and bring about fundamental changes at the work sites” (AFSC 1981a).

Funding is always an important issue for any NGO. As we can see through this letter, even though the idea of what would later become the CFO is still at the proposal stage, financial support played a major role into what type of organization the CFO would become. A specific choice was made here to approach feminist donors for funding. As such, this informed the type of description of the project that would become the CFO, which had a clear feminist focus of helping women workers, utilizing feminist strategies of consciousness-raising which were very popular in the second wave of feminism in the United States in particular. As we have mentioned earlier, funding opportunities had increased in the 1980s, and the clear choice was made at an early stage to market the burgeoning organizational effort as a feminist organization. As Hertel

⁶⁹ AFSC (1981a). Unfortunately, the specific proposal of the AFSC’s Mexico–U.S. Border Program’s project *Obreras Maquiladoras Unidas* is no longer in the archives. This letter summarizing the proposal is the only document available explaining this precursor to the CFO organization.

explained (see Chapter 2, section 2.7), one of the strategies NGOs can adopt to receive more funding is to find out the goals and objectives of the donor agency and align their own strategies with them (2006: 60).

Funding for the CFO became an issue as early as 1989, when it went through a funding crisis and the AFSC had to help out the Comité de Apoyo with a short-term loan of \$12,000, until it could receive more grants for the work on the border (AFSC 1989d: 1). By 1992, the AFSC felt that its role had been reduced to simply providing funds and, occasionally, other forms of direct support (AFSC 1992d: 1-2). There was discussion on whether or not to relocate the National Education and Action Project from the AFSC's Philadelphia office to the border (closer to where the CFO was operating). The Comité de Apoyo felt that there was no need for that position to be relocated on the border, and that the weekly phone conversations and regular visits from AFSC staff members were sufficient to enhance fundraising (Comité de Apoyo 1992a: 2-3). One AFSC member stated that the relationship between the Comité de Apoyo and the AFSC was broken, that Ed Krueger was willing to depend on the AFSC, but that there was no mutually respecting relationship (AFSC 1992e: 2), since he often failed to communicate with them on a regular basis about the work he was doing on the border. In the end the AFSC decided not to relocate at the border. The AFSC was pushing more and more "towards helping the CFO increase its capacity to function independently. The AFSC and the Comité de Apoyo have always shared the joint goal of working with and encouraging the CFO to move towards greater organizational and financial self-determination and independence, which includes developing the CFO's capacity to plan, administer and raise funds for their organizing work" (AFSC 1994: 5). Krueger was,

however, still advocating a low profile approach to ensure the workers' safety (Comité de Apoyo 1995: 6).

The role of AFSC for the next few years seemed to be to pay Krueger's salary and to build alliances with groups from the U.S., and on an international level. It must also be noted that when the AFSC wanted to address the CFO, it did so mostly through Krueger and was therefore never certain if the views were those of Krueger or of the CFO members themselves. In a 1993 letter from one AFSC staff member to another, the question is raised of how to best address Krueger in asking him to send some CFO members to Copenhagen, for a meeting of NGOs in preparation for the Fourth World Conference of Women in Beijing (AFSC 1995: 1). The AFSC staff member is concerned that Krueger will refuse, as he usually argued that the CFO members' time is best suited to focusing on local efforts. This indicates a clear rift between the objectives the AFSC wanted to focus on at the transnational level, and Krueger's prioritization of work on the local level. It also signifies a much larger problem with the role that Krueger seemed to have in determining the role and strategies of the CFO, at a time when the CFO had been operating for many years and should have been making decisions on its own. However, although clearly not happy with Krueger's role, the AFSC did nothing about it for a few years, when fundraising issues reached a crisis point.

4.3 Registering as an independent organization as a way to attract funds

This section will cover how in the mid-1990s there was a decrease in funding being obtained by the CFO. This was due to many factors, such as the lack of accountability in the narrative-style CFO activity reports written by the Comité de Apoyo's Ed Krueger, as well as dwindling church

attendance that consequently decreased the funding that the Comité de Apoyo relied on. An explanation can also be found in the specific globalization context in which the CFO found itself, namely the NAFTA agreement and the emergence of an influx of organizations around the Mexico–U.S. border also fighting this specific manifestation of globalization. This created unprecedented competition in the CFO fundraising efforts and led to the AFSC push for independence in order to distinguish the CFO from other organizations wanting to help maquiladora workers.

The push for the CFO to become independent became more pronounced when problems with funding started re-appearing in force in 1995. It is at this time that most of the funding of the Comité de Apoyo was no longer being renewed (Comité de Apoyo 1995b: 1). Since the Comité de Apoyo was managing the CFO funds, this created a major problem for the CFO. The funding crisis was due in part to the fact that much of the Comité de Apoyo's funding came from churches that were seeing their own funds dwindle due to lower attendance, among other reasons (AFSC 1995b: 9). In addition, the Comité de Apoyo and the CFO achievements were indistinguishable from each other in funding applications, which created accountability issues (AFSC 1995b: 11). This led to some European donors refusing to fund a Mexican organization through a U.S. one (the Comité de Apoyo). The lack of communication between the AFSC and the Comité de Apoyo was also a source of friction when both applied to the same foundation to fund the CFO (AFSC 1996b: 1). Finally, many donors started taking issue with the fact that the yearly reports were very similar from year to year, that there did not seem to be much progression. The anecdotal nature of Krueger's reporting, focusing on descriptions of project activities rather than concrete objectives and expected outcomes (such as the donor foundations

required) created some problems with the fundraising efforts (AFSC 1995b: 9). This resonates with what we saw in Chapter 2 about NGOs having to contend with standardized accountability methods that were always changing, in order to remain attractive investments for their donors. Krueger's style of reporting and seemingly similar results from year to year led to donors being less interested in funding an organization that did not have clear, measurable results. Feminist theory teaches us that a women's organization does not have to topple capitalism to be considered successful; that improving the daily lives of the women maquiladora workers and the potential for change over time are both very real measures of success (see Desai 2002 and Kidder 2002). Unfortunately, the funding agencies wanted more concrete demonstrations of the success of the CFO.

All of these funding issues were compounded by timing. The North American Free Trade Agreement had just come into effect on January 1, 1994. NAFTA was used by many organizations in the labour and women's movements as a symbol of the negative effects of globalization. As such, NAFTA played an important role at this time by being a rallying point for organizing around issues that affected maquiladora workers. As Domínguez underlined, NAFTA was a symbol of "globalization from above," a process of regional integration and economic restructuring that was imposed from the top down. It also provoked an unanticipated reaction from civil society, who felt compelled to organize in response and find ways of resisting the effects of global restructuring in their immediate contexts (Domínguez 2002: 218). This was especially pronounced in the Mexico–U.S. border region, which was very encouraging for maquiladora workers overall, but not necessarily for the CFO as an organization. The result of the visibility gained around the issues of inequality and injustices faced by maquiladora workers

led to the creation of many other cross-border alliances. Up until this time, the CFO had been one of the only organizations working to defend maquiladora workers' rights. This increased competition from other NGOs working on the same issues greatly contributed to the difficulties that the CFO faced in obtaining financing at this particular time (AFSC 1995b: 9; AFSC 1995c: 4).

In 1995, the AFSC had two major suggestions to address the fundraising issue. The first suggestion was to implement new programmatic initiatives, including the organizational development of the CFO, which would lead to registering the CFO as an independent organization in Mexico. Second, the AFSC felt that "Given the economic situation in Mexico [following the major peso devaluation in 1994], the single focus on enforcement of the maquiladora worker's labor rights could not be a more inflammatory issue" (AFSC 1996b: 1). They therefore encouraged the CFO to shift the focus away from "workers' rights," a controversial focus at that time, to other aspects that were of interest to the workers and which might allow for a wider variety of fundraising opportunities through more conservative organizations. These new programs would include themes such as women's health, occupational health, safety, environmental health and environmental justice (AFSC 1995c: 4). Again, we can clearly see the strategy being developed as one that would promote objectives that would be more marketable to donor organizations, and that would have a transnational NGO shape "local priorities." We can also clearly see the links between the implementation of NAFTA, a symbol of globalization, and the fundraising issues: many more groups trying to market on the anti-NAFTA sentiment of donor organizations created a lot more competition for the CFO, which used to be in a strategic position as the only women-centred maquiladora worker organization in

the area. In addition, one of the consequences of NAFTA, the 1994 peso devaluation (see Chapter 1 for more information on the effect of the peso devaluation on the maquiladora workforce), created a more hostile environment for organizing and led the AFSC to change the focus away from hot-button issues such as labour mobilizing.

In the years between 1995 and 1997, most of the funding of the CFO was being directly provided by the AFSC. The AFSC felt that the lack of independence of the CFO was a major issue which was affecting its opportunities to receive much-needed funds from international donors. This is when the AFSC started focusing even more energy on the devolution of the CFO (AFSC 1995b: 9). Some of the reasons, according to AFSC documents, seemed to focus mostly on the influence the Comité de Apoyo had over the directions of the CFO. The AFSC lamented the fact that although they provided most of the funding from 1995 onwards, they had no say in how the money that the Comité de Apoyo received for the CFO was spent. As a separate non-profit corporation, the Comité de Apoyo was outside the AFSC structures, and thus incapable of overseeing its finances. Since the CFO workers were not AFSC employees and were paid by the Comité de Apoyo, the AFSC had no standing to intervene in questions of salaries, etc. (AFSC 1996b: 4-5). In sum, the AFSC pushed for the independence of the CFO because it felt that there existed an “excessive structural and psychological dependency of the CFO on AFSC staff support. AFSC staff [Ed Krueger] control CFO finances, administration, and external relations, determine CFO strategies, and have de facto veto power over virtually every area of organizational decision-making” (AFSC 1996b: 3).

The AFSC had had difficulties in the past in dealing with Ed Krueger. When its director of the Mexico–U.S. Border Program left in 1997, it hired Ricardo Hernandez who did a complete overhaul of the program and (almost forcefully) encouraged the independence of the CFO. This was done against Krueger’s wishes. Krueger had always adamantly argued against independence of the organization and had wanted to retain his role in the CFO efforts. Once the decision to become a registered non-profit organization was made in 1998, Krueger resigned, as did some of the CFO members who were the most loyal to him (see section 3.4). The relationship between the Comité de Apoyo and the AFSC was severed completely, as was any working relationship between the Comité de Apoyo and the CFO, although Krueger continues to speak highly of the CFO members, and the feelings of the long-time members towards him are still quite warm, as we saw in Chapter 3.⁷⁰

According to an AFSC document, after he severed all links with the CFO in 1999, Krueger actively worked against the CFO efforts by hiring his own promotoras and applying for funding that would directly compete with the funds of the CFO through the Comité de Apoyo (AFSC 1999c: 2-3). Krueger does not deny this. In fact, he has continued to organize maquiladora workers in the same way he always has, teaching them about their rights through a low-profile approach. He has stated that the only thing that has changed is his affiliation with the AFSC and the fact that he no longer needs to justify why the focus should be on the local level. He sees his role as being part of the first stage of organizing, the consciousness-raising stage that allows

⁷⁰ Overall comments during interviews with Ed Krueger in Reynosa, Tamaulipas in November 2007, and with long-time members of the CFO, including their coordinadora Julia Quiñonez, in Piedras Negras and Ciudad Acuña, Coahuila, November 2006.

workers to develop direction themselves. As such, he did not develop an independent organization that would compete directly with the CFO.⁷¹

Funding issues are crucial to the strategies and objectives of the CFO as we have just seen. These were compounded by timing. The recent implementation of NAFTA greatly affected the number of responses from a “globalization from below” position, thereby limiting the possibilities of obtaining funding for the CFO. The AFSC pushed its priorities on the CFO members who, as we saw in Chapter 3, were not all in agreement with the idea of changing their status from a low-profile to a highly visible registered organization. Funding issues also caused major rifts between the AFSC and the Comité de Apoyo, as the former viewed the latter as competing for funds both before the independence of the CFO (competing with the AFSC) and after the independence of the CFO (by continuing with local organizing and applying for funds to hire promotoras). As we saw in Chapter 3, recruiting new members is extremely difficult in the Northern Border Region and thus any organization doing the same work is seen as direct competition for obtaining funds, since many donors look at the recruitment potential of the organization as a measure of success.

4.4 Transnational advocacy networks and the tactics of information politics

This section will cover how the AFSC is using the tactic described by Keck and Sikkink (1998, 1999) as information politics when TANs gain legitimacy by providing alternative sources of information, which is the very important role played by the CFO. We will examine some

⁷¹ Information gathered through participant observation of Ed Krueger’s organizational methods and through many personal conversations with Krueger in November 2007 in Reynosa, Tamaulipas.

examples of this tactic before we look at two major transnational partners of the CFO, the Coalition for Justice in the Maquiladoras (CJM) and Austin Tan Cerca de la Frontera (ATCF).

The CFO is often viewed as an important reference regarding maquiladora workers' living conditions and organizing methods. Some authors only mention the CFO in passing, as an expert opinion on a matter that helps to reinforce an argument, such as the case for a proposed reform in Mexico that would have further restricted the workers' rights to strike and to bargain collectively. For example, Broughton, when speaking about masculinity and migration to the Northern Border Region of Mexico from the southern rural states, references the Comité Fronterizo de Obreras when explaining the rising cost of living at the Northern border (2008: 571 referencing CFO 1999). As we saw in the literature review, TANs, or transnational advocacy networks, need access to local information through NGOs that are already on the ground. In this respect, the CFO, as one of the first organizations to mobilize maquiladora workers in the Northern Border Region, is a propitious choice for anyone seeking an expert opinion on the working and living conditions of maquiladora workers.

Other authors utilize the CFO as a more explicit source. When speaking of the failure of the proposal to protect the rights of women workers, Brickner cites the CFO as an authoritative source on this issue:

The Comité Fronterizo de Obreras (Border Committee of Women Workers — CFO) has charged that proposed changes to allow employment based on “special abilities” will perpetuate discrimination against women in hiring, since they are already disadvantaged when it comes to education and training. It has also criticized the proposal for failing to enhance the protections of women workers that are laid out in Title V of the current law, which details maternity-leave policy and other protections for women workers. (Brickner 2006: 66 citing De la Rosa Hickerson 2004)

The AFSC/CFO report “Six Years of NAFTA: A View from Inside the Maquiladoras” (CFO 1999), has been reprinted in its entirety in an edited volume on the reality of the lives of poor women who have been affected by globalization (Aguilar & Lacsamana 2004). This publication has also helped establish the CFO as one of the leading organizations to consult when seeking to understand the reality of women maquiladora workers. Petros also often utilizes the CFO documents as expert opinions to address the concerns of maquiladora workers in living in Mexico’s Northern Border Region and quotes the CFO’s “Six Years of NAFTA” report (CFO 1999) directly (Petros 2007: 26). Other information, taken from CFO’s website, is cited indirectly, such as statistical information regarding the number of existing maquiladora jobs (Petros 2007: 25 citing CFO 2005b), the fact that the CFO dubbed Mexico’s Northern border as “one of the world’s first laboratories for free trade” (Petros 2007: 25 citing CFO 2005b) or that they “dubbed Reynosa as ‘una especie de China en la frontera,’ a sort of China of the borderlands, attracting new hires at record speed” (Petros 2007: 53 citing CFO 2005b). Further in her MA thesis, Petros cites the CFO report to explain the difficulties that working mothers face in enrolling their children in daycare, and the necessity of children contributing to the family income, resulting in the falsifying of papers to work in the maquiladoras as young as 13 years old⁷² (Petros 2007: 116 citing CFO 1999).

The AFSC’s 1999 publication of *The Maquiladora Reader: Cross-Border Organizing Since NAFTA* reprinted Ricardo Hernandez’s 1998 article “Taking Flight” which offers us a romantic, idealized version of the CFO. Ricardo Hernandez has been the director of the Mexico–U.S. Border Program of the American Friends Service Committee since 1997 and, as we saw in

⁷² This information was also corroborated during interviews with members of the CFO in November 2006 in Piedras Negras, Coahuila and Ciudad Acuña, Coahuila.

section 4.3, could even be said to be the instigator of the CFO's decision to register as an autonomous non-profit Mexican civil society organization. He plays an integral part in the transnational aspects of the CFO, and it can be argued that promoting the CFO at an international level would be part of his job description. In this article, Hernandez defines the CFO as a grassroots organization that had been working (at that time of publication) for more than 17 years, with hundreds and thousands of workers: "Members of the CFO voice a constant refrain: to stick with what the workers say. As a result, demagoguery is absent, and even oratory is scarce. They're not seeking political power and don't pay much attention to elections. Their decency, and the way they make everyone feel included, win them respect" (1998: 91). Hernandez could be said to be waxing poetic when he tells us that the desire for justice, the distance from political games and the "otherworldly, almost virginal silence in public (just like angels)" (1998: 91-92) made the CFO stand apart in Mexican social movements.

By contrast, Hernandez's overview in 2001 of the situation in one specific maquiladora through a summary of the working conditions and organizing efforts of two CFO members, Juany Cazares and Paty Leyva, is much more subdued. In it, Hernandez sheds light on both the local organizing efforts in the specific maquiladora and the transnational cooperation the CFO has with the AFSC, which helped them organize a meeting between Juany Cazares and Paty Leyva and the executives of the multinational that owned this maquiladora in New York City. Hernandez illustrates how the workers at the maquiladora were able to figure out the amount that was owed to them when the factory closed:

[T]hey had participated in study groups organized by the Border Committee of Women Workers (Comité Fronterizo de Obreras or CFO), a grassroots organization of maquiladora workers. The CFO is a partner of the Mexico-U.S. Border Program of the American Friends Service Committee. AFSC helped

initiate the CFO 20 years ago, becoming a pioneer in seeking concrete solutions to the problems associated with the integration of two countries' economies, a process which has had a considerable negative impact on the lives of women workers and their communities. (2001: n.p.)

Hernandez makes mention of the process of globalization and how it has negatively impacted women maquiladora workers and their communities. It is in fact a theme we see often with the AFSC publications in relation to the CFO, where they link globalization to gender relations and portray the CFO as an answer to the problems generated by these processes. It is a strong image of a women's organization that is fighting "globalization from above" with "globalization from below" and one that is recurrent in the AFSC publications, including the *Maquiladora Reader*.

Hernandez's 2005 article on foundations for cross-border solidarity actively promotes the AFSC and the CFO and alludes to the need for more solidarity with U.S. labour unions that have a difficulty understanding how a big international union can work with a small NGO with a staff of four. This article is clearly intended for an audience such as the United Steel Workers union (USW) which, at the time, was just starting its talks with the CFO about a possible partnership in fostering an independent union in Alcoa (see section 4.7 on Alcoa in this chapter). The USW was seeking to forge a transnational union of Alcoa workers and the AFSC was actively promoting the CFO as a great resource in Mexico's Northern Border Region. The article goes on to extol the victories of the CFO in "challenging not only the corporations they work for, but local labor authorities and their unresponsive union leaders. They have succeeded in organizing under those repressive conditions" (Hernandez 2005: n.p.). However, while applauding the activist role of the CFO, Hernandez also seems to relegate the role of the CFO to the local level and actively promotes the role of the AFSC as a link between the U.S. groups and the local group in Mexico,

as his next statement reveals:

For more than two decades, AFSC has stood at the forefront of maquiladora activism...For hundreds of people, AFSC has served as a natural gateway to border realities. Journalists, union members, academics, faith-based groups, company shareholders, and students have had the opportunity to make home visits and meet working families because the latter trust their local organization, the Comité Fronterizo de Obreras, which in turn has built a relationship of trust with AFSC. (2005: n.p.)

The relationship between the AFSC and the CFO is clearly one of transnational advocacy networking (see Keck & Sikkink 1998, 1999). The AFSC is using the tactic described as *information politics*, where non-state actors such as transnational advocacy networks gain legitimacy by providing alternative sources of information, such as testimonies. The TANs then frame the issues in terms of right and wrong, since their objective is to simplify the issue in order to persuade people. The TAN usually forges links with local groups for routine monitoring, or in this case, continues the relationship with the group it helped create. In the next two sections, we will explore the relationship the CFO has (or had) with the Coalition for Justice in the Maquiladoras (CJM) and the AFSC-sponsored organization Austin Tan Cerca de la Frontera (ATCF) to see if these relationships are also transnational advocacy networks, and how the receiving-end activist (the CFO) fares in relation to the norm entrepreneurs.

4.5 The Coalition for Justice in the Maquiladoras and the CFO: Do TANs really benefit the receiving-end activists?

The AFSC vigorously encouraged transnational networking as a way to help the maquiladora workers, which led to the CFO being an essential member in the formation and early years of the CJM. Through the use of archival materials, academic articles on the CJM and interviews by CFO members, we will examine the role of the CFO in this TAN, as a source of both information

and legitimization of the work of the CJM. We will also look at why the CFO, which was such an important member, decided to leave this organization suddenly in 2001, due to conflicts between the CFO and the CJM executive council and due to the CFO feeling that the CJM was taking credit for their work. This section will look at some of the issues of being part of a TAN for a grassroots organization, which includes the loss of a local voice and the investment outweighing the results for a grassroots organization.

The CFO is often mentioned in writings about the Coalition for Justice in the Maquiladoras if for no other reason than that it was one of the founding members, and as one study mentions, the source of most of the ground-level information that the CJM received. The CFO is also described as an AFSC-sponsored organization, mostly because the source of the information on the CFO often comes from either the AFSC or an AFSC publication. For example, Frundt, in his development of models of cross-border organizing in maquiladora industries, mentions the CFO in half a page of his analysis and bases his definition of the CFO on Tong's text in the *Maquiladora Reader*, as an affiliate of the Coalition for Justice in the Maquiladoras. As he defines them: "One CJM affiliate, the Comité Fronterizo de Obreras (CFO) women maquiladora workers, formed a special alliance with the American Friends Service Committee's Maquiladora Project in the mid-1980s" (Frundt 2000: 47). Another example is Williams, who in explaining this information-providing role, describes the CFO as "the American Friends Service-sponsored Border Committee of Women Workers (in Spanish, the Comité Fronterizo de Obreras or CFO)" (1999: 145). Williams later briefly mentions the CFO, along with other local grassroots groups along the border, while describing the local grassroots work going on in the colonias (1999: 147-148). When it is mentioned, the only distinction made between the CFO and other groups is that

the CFO community organizers receive money for salaries from the AFSC, which other groups do not always get. Nonetheless, as Williams explains, there is an ongoing disparity between the Mexican member groups and the American member groups in the CJM, which leaves the community organizers in such groups as the CFO feeling overwhelmed by the lack of resources and the amount of work (1999: 156). In Bandy's analysis of the CJM, the CFO is only referred to in one specific instance and without any contextualizing of the organization. However, this single mention of the CFO in passing is an important one, as it refers to the complaint the CFO made to the CJM in 2000 when the CFO decided to leave the group; this example is then used by Bandy to demonstrate the organizational tensions within the CJM, regarding its inauthentic representation of workers and the resource inequalities within the organization (Bandy 2004: 420-421), a point also raised by Williams above. These two analyses of the resource disparities are further collaborated by comments from the CFO members themselves.

An AFSC paper exploring some of the challenges of the maquiladora work summarized the AFSC view on the need to focus on different ways of helping the maquiladora workers, such as transnational networking:

The Maquiladora Program best exemplifies for me the uniqueness of AFSC in that it touches all aspects of the issue, from workers in the plants to global economic considerations, and touches others concerned from a variety of angles (morality of corporations, toxic poisoning, exploitation of women, etc.). It is to AFSC's credit that it has "held out" for so long in its support of the maquiladora workers, even through times when we had to minimize our involvement and downplay our role. Today, however, a whole different "style" is called for in this Program — a style that no longer focuses so much on the daily activities of the workers but rather begins to build strategies and alliances with groups in the United States who can build on the realities of conditions in the maquiladoras (realities they will learn directly from the workers) to develop avenues to make changes that will be of benefit to workers in both countries. (AFSC 1990c: 3)

It is around this time that the CFO vigorously participated in the formation of the Coalition for Justice in the Maquiladoras and was considered one of the most respected members of the emerging coalition, “the member which is listened to most carefully and fully by the others” (AFSC 1990b: 3). The women workers (of the CFO), in conjunction with the Coalition for Justice in the Maquiladoras (CJM),⁷³ were also instrumental in developing a “‘Maquiladora Standards of Conduct’ which provides guidelines for the maquiladoras on issues such as environmental and health and safety standards, fair employment practices and community impact considerations” (AFSC 1991: 5). The AFSC report also stated the important role it played in the development of the CJM: “Our perspective, based on over 12 years of engagement with the women workers, was invaluable in the development this past year of the Coalition for Justice in the Maquiladoras” (AFSC 1991: 5). The Comité de Apoyo report, however, gave a slightly different take on who played the prominent role in the development of the CJM:

The Comité de Apoyo and Border Committee of Women Workers (CFO) have played a prominent role in the formation of the Coalition for Justice in the Maquiladoras. More than ten years before the Coalition was started, we were involved in the process of empowerment of women workers. Many of the members of the Coalition first looked to the Border Project and CFO as a source of information about the maquiladoras. The Standards of Conduct for the Maquiladora Industry of the CJM came out of our experience with maquiladora workers. The impact of the Coalition would not have been so impressive without the work of the Border Project. Both the Comité Fronterizo de Obreras and the Border Project are represented on the Board of Directors of the Coalition. (Comité de Apoyo 1991: 5)

Although both the AFSC and the Comité de Apoyo argue over who gets the credit for the work of the CFO, they both agree that the CJM could not have come to be without the CFO, as a source of both information on and legitimization of their work. It is the women maquiladora

⁷³ For more information on the Coalition for Justice in the Maquiladoras, see Bandy (2004).

workers, however, who are the reason behind the success of such an enterprise and their greatest source of information.

This participation in the CJM, however, did not come without consequences for the women maquiladora workers. One of the effects from such active participation in the CJM was that “the organizing work at the border (including Border Communities Project Director Ed Krueger’s role), had been catapulted from being low-profile in both Mexico and the U.S. to being quite well known and highly visible to regional and national networks of U.S. labor, church and environmental groups, researchers, policy makers and the media” (AFSC 1992a: 2). This shift in profile meant that such groups were bypassing the Philadelphia office of the AFSC to set up meetings with maquiladora women workers and going directly to the border to deal with border staff, since “AFSC-related work at the border is the only source of this direct information” (AFSC 1992a: 2). Krueger’s role was therefore significantly changed, as he became the contact person and liaison between U.S. (including the CJM) and maquiladora workers. The AFSC viewed this development as a very positive one in “that national policy makers and those who work for change can now go directly to the source of insights into the human consequences of the accelerated globalization of production — the women workers themselves — and ask them to speak directly about their experiences” (AFSC 1992a: 2).

However, the workers themselves had a different opinion than did the AFSC regarding all of this sudden attention. In a 1992 AFSC maquiladora project meeting, Maria Guadalupe Torres, the regional coordinator for the CFO, stated that the CFO was maintaining a low profile and would need to become a registered non-profit organization (*asociación civil*) if it wanted to be more

public. The CFO members had already discussed this option and would continue to do so, but had not decided on becoming independent at that time due to fears of reprisals from the maquiladoras towards workers who were known to be mobilizing other workers. In this same meeting, Krueger warned that the colonias in Matamoros were getting tired of all the visitors and were starting to react negatively to the constant attention from the media and other U.S. groups. Finally, Maria Guadalupe Torres explained that she had thought the CJM would have positive effects, but that instead things had actually gotten worse: “She thought that the CJM was going to deal face to face with managers on specific situations. She’s beginning to think that the CJM has its own agenda, and doesn’t want to deal with specific situations — the CJM seems not to have room for a particular grievance or concern” (AFSC 1992b: 3). There was also mention about the perplexing nature of the CJM, which saw itself as supportive of community organizing, while at the same time sustaining itself as an organization. There were already questions at this stage as to how participating in the CJM would affect CFO organizing (AFSC 1992b: 4). The relationship between the CFO and the CJM continued to deteriorate and ended in 2001.

The CFO was one of the founding members of the Coalition for Justice in the Maquiladoras (CJM), and was considered to be one of their most respected members (AFSC 1990b: 3). It is also often associated with the CJM in the literature. This is why it seemed at odds with the CFO objectives of improving the working conditions of women maquiladora workers to back down from its association with such a large coalition (of more than one hundred member organizations, including, for a long time, the AFSC and the Comité de Apoyo) (CJM 2010). In May of 2000, Julia Quiñonez, read a message on behalf of the CFO to the general assembly of the CJM, severing all ties between the two organizations (CFO 2000b). Since this was a major decision on

the part of the CFO, I included it in my interview questions. To my surprise, most members of the CFO were not even aware of the existence of the CJM. It had never been mentioned in any annual meeting as far as any of them remembered. Of the long-time members who knew of the CJM, many did not know why the CFO had decided to leave the coalition.

According to Julia Quiñonez, the decision to leave the Coalition for Justice in the Maquiladora was actually not made at an annual meeting of the workers but rather at an executive council meeting (Interview #1). However, members of the executive council at that time said they were never consulted on the decision-making process. One long-time member of the organization, and a member of the executive council, does remember the CFO leaving the CJM, but does not recall why (Ana, Interview #8). Another long-time member who was also on the executive council said the decision was made to leave the CJM because there were groups inside the CJM that were attacking the CFO (Maria-Elena, Interview #3). This long-term member did not, however, clarify who it was that made this decision. Another long-term member did not know why the CFO stopped participating in the CJM, and explained that there was no talk of international organizations in annual meetings, that these were not decisions that were made in annual meetings, but rather by Julia — this included the decision to join the CJM in the beginning in 1993 (Patty, Interview #7). Finally, two other long-time members mentioned that they were never consulted on the decision to leave the coalition, that Julia either made the decision alone or in consultation with Ricardo (anonymous for this section of interview).

Maria-Elena, a CFO promotora from Ciudad Acuña, explained that Marta Ojeda, the director of the CJM, would send delegations for the CFO to host and then ask these delegations for financial help. However, Marta Ojeda would then send these financial contributions to other organizations that she had formed in Reynosa or Nuevo Laredo, rather than the CFO. She also explained there was a rivalry between these groups and the CFO, and these groups (formed by Marta Ojeda) had attacked the CFO in one of the CJM meetings (one-on-one verbal attacks, not in the official transcripts); this was the last straw, the reason the CFO left the Coalition for Justice in the Maquiladoras (Interview #2). Patty added:

What the CFO did not like was that the Coalition always, always presented the work of the CFO as their work (of the Coalition). In reality, the work that the Coalition presented, the achievements they presented were achievements of the CFO and not achievements of the Coalition, for that reason, there started to be differences that Marta would say she did it, it was her work and it wasn't her work. She had not done it; the CFO had done it. (Interview #7)

Another long-time member who has since left the CFO explained a bit more about the work of Marta Ojeda and the CJM, and suggested that rather than encouraging workers to form independent unions, the CJM should stroke the flames of the fire (the volatile situation in which the workers find themselves), take pictures and then fill out reports for donor organizations in order to receive more funds:

They [the CJM] go and take the fire in a maquiladora [the volatile situation which might lead to a strike or walkout which they encourage to become even more volatile, like feeding the flames of the fire], they take advantage and then they themselves save them and then the report, the film, photo and all of that, so that it looks like they are doing work for the benefit of the workers and in reality they are not doing it. And then far from helping, they prejudice them very much and therefore they do not let them move forward. (Maria-Elena Garcia, Interview #52)

In regards to the relationship with the Coalition for Justice in the Maquiladoras (CJM), a feud between the two leaders, Marta Ojeda of the CJM and Julia Quiñonez of the CFO, seems to be at the root of the decision to leave. As Rafaela, who was one of the first members of the CFO in Matamoros, explains that the CJM would pass off CFO work as their own, and that the people visiting would give funds to the CJM and not the CFO who would never receive the funds. And the CJM would bring people over almost every week. Rafaela explains that the CFO promotoras would end up spending most of their time acting as a tour guide and would lose contact with the people. This would greatly affect their ability to do grassroots work. As she explains, the CFO and CJM were fighting over work (and the acknowledgement of the work) and money:

They [the CJM] said they had done the work that Julia had done and then they say the reverse, that Julia does not do anything and then they go and report to Marta Ojeda at the Coalition, that she did all of this work and she presents it as if it was all from her when they did it here and that is the feud that they constantly have. (Interview #46)

Julia Quiñonez goes into quite a bit of detail about the reasons they left the CJM:

Look, with the Coalition we were, we participated, we were founders, the CFO was a founder of the Coalition and we participated about 8 years, no I think up to 10 because when the Coalition celebrated 10 years, we were there. And the objective of the Coalition was to impel, drive campaigns, support the workers, especially the ones from Mexico, also from the United States and Canada, but the objective of the Coalition was to connect the groups, but to connect them directly. Therefore, until Marta arrived, the executive director of the Coalition, Marta Ojeda - She is someone from Nuevo Laredo – when she arrived, I was part of, I had been many years in the executive council because inside the Coalition, there were like 100 groups but there was a governing board that was composed of about 30 groups from the different countries but still in this governing board, there was an executive council and on the executive council there were only 5 people, and I was always, for a long time, part of the Coalition's executive council.

But when Marta arrived, the criteria, it was very good, we all voted for her, we all wanted her to be there because she was Mexican, she had been a maquiladora worker, we thought that she give a lot of support to the groups especially. But, that's how it was in the beginning because she has a lot of character, very strong, she has a lot of aptitude, a lot of knowledge and I believe that she has a lot of qualities, but what happened a little while after she became the executive director of the coalition is that she started to not exercise

her position correctly because in the beginning the groups from Mexico, the groups, really there are very few groups in Mexico, the few groups there are here are groups that don't have stability, there are not very solid groups. They are groups that sometimes spouted from a struggle and when the struggle ends, the group also falls apart. And I believe that that is a virtue, a quality that the CFO has, that it has gone through struggles in different cities and we continue, we look for ways and that has given a lot of credibility to the group. But therefore, what Marta did is that when she had visits because there were a lot of people who wanted to come to the border and we who lived here in Piedras Negras are only a few hours from San Antonio. Therefore, she started...we lived here, but her acquaintances, her contacts are from Laredo.

Therefore...well, at the beginning we had a lot of trust in her and up until now, I am still in contact with her but I believe that we were honest when we said that we did not want this type of relationship because we felt that the Coalition started to use the work of the groups, started to get up on top without work, started to say that it had work in the border with the groups, and it wasn't wrong because we were part of the Coalition, but it didn't have to be said this way, we have members, we have associates, we have groups who are affiliated to us who are in the border area, that is not to say that they are our groups. It is our work. Therefore, she started to promote all of the work in the border like it was the work of the Coalition and then groups came to visit the border and, well at the beginning, she would call and say: "Julia, there is a group coming and we are going there, to Piedras." Ah, and when are you arriving? "Well, at such and such an hour." Are you staying a few days? "No, no we are going and returning, we are going one day and returning the next." Therefore, it started to the point where sometimes in one week, we had 2 or 3 visits and that returned there. But after, we prepared, we would go through things, prepare a folder because they spoke English and us no and Marta was the translator, and I started to see that when they arrived at the houses, I would arrive and say: Marta, I present you to Cindy and Marta without knowing her would say: "This is my Cindy." She would do things like that, as if it were people that she had already known for a long time and she did not know them. Therefore, when the group left they asked how they could support and we would say to talk with Marta. Therefore, when people would come and know the work and after when they wanted to give support, well it was Marta that coordinated it. And she would say, look, the CFO already has, the CFO is supported by the AFSC, they are already supported by many groups, it is better to support this group there. (Interview #1)

This is one situation in which a backdoor move could not work for the CFO in getting its message across. Instead, they blocked the CJM from using the CFO's work to legitimize their organization. Sometimes, there is no other option for the receiving-end activist whose voice is not being heard by the norm entrepreneur or a TAN such as the CJM. These interviews, along with the overview of the CJM given throughout this chapter, also clearly indicate the nuances of

organizing maquiladora workers in Northern Mexico; we need to do more than study the TAN in the partnership, we need to also get the point of view of the local group or receiving-end activists.

The fact that the CFO decided to leave the CJM does not imply that it was a bad decision. However, the fact that the decision-making process did not involve the grassroots base of the organization was not mentioned at any annual meeting, and was clearly imposed from the top down in a hierarchical manner (although it is difficult to state if the decision was imposed, since many of the CFO members did not in fact know about the existence of the CJM nor about the fact that their organization was one of the founding members), is clearly a problem. In addition, this lack of knowledge about the CJM is indicative of a larger problem: there is a clear disconnect between the local and the international level of organizing within the CFO. The local members are not kept apprised of the transnational activities that the CFO participates in, and therefore their voice is lost in the decision-making process — not necessarily because of the usual repercussions for a grassroots organization participating in a large TAN (see Keck & Sikkink 1998, 1999), but due to the leadership of their own organization's keeping them out of these processes.

4.6 The CFO and its “sister organization” Austin Tan Cerca de la Frontera (ATCF): Equal partnership or more big sister, little sister?

To a lesser extent, this section will also look at some of the issues faced by grassroots organizations when part of a TAN. The ATCF is part of the AFSC and often brings delegates from the U.S. to the border area to meet up with the CFO, which organizes visits to the homes of maquiladora workers so that the U.S. tourists can learn about their working and living

conditions. These visitors often make donations which do help the CFO, and it seems that up until this point, the results are outweighing the investment for the CFO, as they have maintained this relationship with the ATCF.

Austin Tan Cerca de la Frontera (Austin So Close to the Border, or ATCF) is a non-profit organization based in Austin, Texas, “whose members maintain solidarity relationships with maquiladora workers and labor organizers on the Mexican side of the border” (Petros 2007: 2). ATCF has been working in collaboration with the CFO since 1999, and provides both moral and financial support to the CFO. Petros, an ATCF volunteer who worked closely with the CFO, explains that “As co-leaders of the ATCF delegations, members of the CFO receive delegates upon their arrival to the border and lead tours through popular colonias and on the outskirts of the cities’ industrial parks” (2007: 5).

Norman describes the relationship between the ATCF and the CFO, which he summarizes in the following way: “Throughout the six-year history of Austin Tan Cerca de la Frontera (ATCF), defining solidarity has been an evolving challenge. In our work with the Comité Fronterizo de Obrer@s (CFO) in Mexican border towns, we have learned that solidarity does not equal charity, even though our solidarity does include financial support.” (2004, n.p.) He also uses the more gender neutral term *obrer@s* in the name of the CFO, although he does later qualify it as a women’s organization when he explains “that the CFO developed a solidarity model based on women-led, non-hierarchical, mutual empowerment” (Norman 2004: n.p.). Although Norman speaks of solidarity and not charity, much of the work of the ATCF with the CFO does not seem to be part of an equal partnership, but rather resembles the core-periphery relationship as

described by Tvedt (1998). It does seem that the CFO is the source of information and legitimization of the ATCF, which would not exist without access to visits with maquiladora workers and their families to find out first hand their working and living conditions, which the CFO facilitates. On the other hand, the ATCF funds and promotes CFO activities that could lead to other important funding opportunities. The ever-constant struggle to obtain funds does put the CFO on an unequal footing in this relationship. Guadalupe summarizes the work that needs to be done by the promotores, as well as some of the strategies used by the CFO to obtain funds from the delegations that the ATCF brings to the border area:

And who does the work, who brings you people, who gets people together for you for the workshops? Because when there are delegations, someone has to get people together from all the colonias. Julia was the one that came, for example when someone came from the AFSC... the one from Austin.

Austin Tan Cerca?

Yes. They came. Do you know what they did? They went to the most humble colonias, the ones here in Piedras and they took pictures of the cardboard houses, of the children without shoes and I say that they did that so they would get donations, I don't know. Many times we did not know the people and we would knock at the door and say: "Senora, look..." and the senora, thinking that we would possibly help her economically or with food expenses, would let us enter and take pictures of the children, of the patio, of the little house, yes, she would let us take pictures. It always happened the same way: the delegations that came, delegations that we brought to the most humble colonias, but never did she bring them to her house, to Julia's house, nor to the house...because here there is of everything. I think, on the one side there are poor people, there are people who are poorer than poor and people...all of the levels and she *always*...

But those who live in cardboard houses, do they work in maquilas or no?

She said that yes. Look, it's that there were groups coming here and she told them they were the families of workers but that were working...

I thought at first that people were much poorer than they are. But when I did interviews, all of the people had houses like yours, some very small houses, but not poor houses.

No, no, I have a poor house?

No, no, I saw poor houses, but not from the members of the CFO.

No, not the members of the CFO. Julia was able to profit, she always, always brought them to these colonias and I asked, “Why, Julia, there is not that much misery here, nor are we dying of hunger?” Look, we live here. Humbly, yes, but not that poor. These people come more from the centre than from the South, and come here to find work and they don’t have anywhere so they build their little cardboard houses and with time, through INFONAVIT, as you wish, they build a bit more decent house to live in. (Guadalupe, Interview #10)

As we can see by the quote above, Guadalupe is clearly unhappy about the strategies that Julia Quiñonez was using to obtain funds from the delegations that the ATCF was bringing to the border. None of the CFO members I encountered during my fieldwork lived in cardboard houses and I sensed a certain pride that workers felt because they have worked hard and managed to house their families in either a house they built themselves or an INFONAVIT house. Being portrayed as victims is clearly not something Guadalupe or other members of the CFO did or would want.⁷⁴ Unfortunately, the sad reality is that it is easier to obtain funds for poor victims of globalization than for proud workers who have managed to build lives for themselves on limited incomes. Working with the perceived negative effects of globalization, and the creation of this perception for international donors, is one strategy that the CFO uses; however, it is also one that has clear consequences on the local level, taking away the pride of those who have worked hard for what they have, and leading to a dissatisfaction with the organization for representing workers in such a negative light.

Juany, one of the CFO promotoras, also explained that the promotoras played the role of tour guide for the delegations, which could lead to more support for the CFO:

⁷⁴ I was also able to observe this strategy of portraying the maquiladora workers as very poor victims needing help at the Building Bridges: A Labour Studies Conference I attended on February 2–3, 2007 at the University of Windsor, Ontario, in which Julia Quiñonez was one of the presenters.

And here, close by, when delegations come here, I go with everyone. I am, so they say, the tour guide. I have always participated, bringing the tourist when they come by here or when they go to Reynosa.

And how would you evaluate the advantages of such experiences for the CFO and for yourself, and the community?

Well, yes there are advantages, for one, because one learns more and learns from the people that come here, like they learn from us, it isn't the only learning that is done.

So the learning is on both sides?

Yes.

And for the CFO in general, what is the advantage?

Well, for the CFO also, because, how can I explain this to you, well it's more support, more support for the CFO. (Juany, Interview #2)

This relationship of support is even more important to the CFO today, since the AFSC was “[h]ard hit by the international financial crisis, [and] the national organization was obliged to cut its budgets by almost 50 percent” (AFSC 2010: 1), which meant no longer sponsoring the ATCF. Although no mention is made of the AFSC’s support for the CFO, the fact that there is no longer any mention or links to the Mexico–U.S. Border Program on the AFSC website, and that Ricardo Hernandez is now affiliated with the Human Migration and Mobility sector of the AFSC, might lead us to believe that the CFO funding was also cut. In fact, this would explain why the CFO website, which used to be updated by Ricardo Hernandez, has not been updated since 2009. When the ATCF registered as an independent non-profit organization in early 2011, it stated that they would continue with their quarterly delegations to the border in solidarity with the CFO, and assist the CFO with a \$6,000 donation per year to cover its tours to the border area (ATCF 2013). These delegations have now taken on even more importance for the CFO, as it has lost its major transnational partner in the AFSC.

4.7 The confrontation of pressures from above and grassroots organizing in the “globalization from below” category

This section will bring us back to the dark-and-stormy-night moment of the introduction to this thesis, where instead of finding a grassroots organization whose meetings were about the consciousness-raising approach of second wave feminism, I found a group of workers in a formal conference setting at a downtown hotel, being taught (step by step) how to become union organizers. This section marks the final part in the discussion of funding issues, and the choices the CFO has made in order to obtain funding in the context of globalization. I will cover the shift in the CFO’s priorities, from a grassroots women’s labour organization to a labour organization focused on fostering independent unions. I will also give a brief history of union organizing in the Alcoa maquiladora plants in Piedras Negras and Ciudad Acuña, and of the role the CFO has played in the two efforts to set up independent unions in these plants. I will explore the focus on Alcoa workers for recruitment (as we have seen previously in Chapter 3, and the changing local strategies of the CFO), and consider how this is intrinsically related to pressures from above; specifically, I will do so in the context of the 2006 involvement of the United Steel Workers Union (as a possible donor and transnational partner), and in reference to the already existing relationship between the AFL-CIO and the CFO, with the former providing 40% of the CFO’s operating budget, and thus greatly influencing the CFO on both the transnational and local levels. This large section is the culminating point that brings all else together. In it, we will see how the changes in funding opportunities in the context of globalization have had a ripple effect, which directly and indirectly affects organizations such as the CFO. The changing gender composition in the maquiladoras, as well, has affected the CFO’s base membership. This in turn has affected the preferred organizing strategies, moving away from grassroots consciousness-raising activities, to more formal, structured ones. In addition, the TAN argument that “if capitalism is

transnational, the response must also be transnational” has been adopted by large unions in the North, including the USW, which has moved away from accusing Mexicans of stealing jobs to wanting to form a global labour movement and work with unions from the Global South. Realizing that the Confederation of Mexican Workers (CTM) union does not share its values, the USW has looked to partner with independent unions; since these don’t exist in the Alcoa maquiladoras in Mexico, the USW has decided to help create them, and is willing to pay for these union organizing efforts. The CFO, which is desperate for funds, is willing to oblige, even if it means losing the original focus of the organization. In the same way that the AFSC decided to form the “globalization from below” organization that became the CFO (because none existed that could meet the needs of the TAN project), the USW is looking for the CFO’s help to form an independent union in the Alcoa maquiladoras, to have its own version of the “globalization from below” partner, one that matches its values and organizational structure.

4.7.1 Loss of the local and of the voices of women: Alcoa and the CFO’s new priorities

The role that the CFO has played in the maquiladora workers’ long battle with Alcoa is representative of many of the issues we have already seen throughout this chapter, and in the previous two chapters. This is also where we started noticing the CFO shying away from the feminine version of its name, or clarifying a new reality as we saw in Chapter 3. The CFO started referring to itself as the Comité Fronterizo de Obrer@s or, even, the Comité Fronterizo de Obreros on occasion. We observed that its partner organizations, the AFSC and ATCF, also started to switch to more gender-neutral terminology when referring to the CFO’s involvement in the Alcoa struggle. In addition, the decision to focus on Alcoa was not made by consensus and did not involve a decision at the general assembly meetings. This switch, then, also represents

the strategy of aligning objectives and goals with a possible international donor, in this case the United Steelworkers Union.

An article Rosenberg wrote for the AFSC speaks about international solidarity with allies of the CFO in the U.S., who sent hundreds of letters, faxes and e-mails, and even took to the streets in front of local Alcoa offices in the U.S. in solidarity with the unjust firings of Alcoa workers in Piedras Negras in their attempts to organize an independent union. As Rosenberg explains it, the “fired workers joined with the Comité Fronterizo de Obreras (CFO or Border Committee of Women Workers) in sending out a bi-national call for solidarity in support of three demands: reinstatement of all fired workers; recognition of the independent union; and replacement of Paulino Vargas and José Juan Ortiz, the general and human resources managers of the Alcoa plants” (2002: n.p.). The struggle in the Alcoa plants was a long process in which the CFO played an integral role. Through her narrative style, Rosenberg helps place us in the midst of this struggle. Her article in *La Voz de la Esperanza*, a narrative of her trip to the border and her experiences with the CFO through her volunteer work with ATCF, depicts the way Alcoa workers found each other and their voices through their struggle. In it, she explains: “Austin Tan Cerca began working with a Mexican group called the Comité Fronterizo de Obrera/os (CFO), which organizes workers to advocate for themselves. The CFO is active in six border cities and centred in Piedras Negras, across from Eagle Pass, three and a half hours from Austin by car, closer to San Antonio. Through the CFO, we hear the workers’ voice” (2002b: n.p.). One noteworthy omission in this narrative is the absence of the qualifier of “women’s organization” when describing the CFO, a qualifier that we can find in most other articles by Rosenberg. This timing is significant because the Alcoa struggle marks the moment when male members of the

CFO started asking for more inclusive terminology, stating they did not feel included in an organization that used the word obreras as it signified women workers only (see section 4.8 of this chapter for more details on the viewpoint of the male members of the CFO). Many of the maquiladora workers at Alcoa were men, and many of the CFO members Rosenberg mentions in the article are men, although women still figure prominently, especially in a touching story of one pregnant worker's struggle. It is, however, in a later article by Rosenberg, in April 2009 (a publicity article for both the CFO and ATCF), that we clearly see a shift in the public image of the CFO. Here is an author who has very much advocated for the CFO as a women's organization that was fighting for women's rights, now adding men very clearly in the name of the organization, which she defined as "the Border Committee of Working Women and Men, a Mexican NGO." (Rosenberg 2009: n.p.)

In a 2002 *Quaker Service Bulletin* article that speaks about the victory of the CFO-supported union in an Alcoa plant in Piedras Negras, we see one of the first transitions by the AFSC to mentioning explicitly that the CFO membership is made up of both women and men: "The workers' gains have been made possible, in part, with support from the AFSC and its partner organization, the CFO, a Mexican grassroots organization of maquiladora workers, both women and men, that promotes union democracy and worker's rights in six cities along the Mexico-U.S. border."⁷⁵

The CFO has long been involved in the Alcoa workers' fight to get an independent union in the plants in Ciudad Acuña and Piedras Negras. The CFO has been involved in this struggle since the beginning, and it would be safe to say that it has consumed most of its organizational efforts

⁷⁵ __ (2002), "Persistence Pays Off in Victories for Maquiladora Workers," *Quaker Service Bulletin*, Spring.

for many years. The CFO even devotes an entire section of its website to the workers' struggle with Alcoa (CFO 2009e). The CFO involvement in Alcoa began with the Workers Committee in Ciudad Acuña 2000–2001, which they explain succinctly on their website: “In a city where unionization is prohibited, a group of more than 20 workers organized [*sic*] themselves to make a list of the problems their co-workers have and take it to the management office. Management recognized there were problems and started meetings to talk about them. That group is known as The Workers Committee in Dialogue with Alcoa” (CFO 2009f). The leader of this Workers Committee was Juan Tovar, a CFO member who was subsequently fired for his mobilizing efforts and now has his own mechanic's shop (Juan, Interview #18). It is therefore not surprising that the first article to mention Alcoa on the CFO's website concerns the company's plans for global expansion, and refers to Juan Tovar by name, although the article only describes him as an Alcoa worker in Piedras Negras. There is no acknowledgement of the CFO. Rather, it is Ricardo Hernandez of the AFSC who is quoted in the article (Yeomans 2000). This scenario is repeated in Amsdem's article, which features an Alcoa worker and CFO member, Rafael Salinas (Interview #9), who was fired for union activism in the Piedras Negras maquiladora and now works as a truck driver (Rafael, Interview #9). Amsdem calls attention to the role of the AFSC, without any recognition of the CFO's own role (2002). This is one of the repercussions of the role of spokesperson of the CFO, which is often played by the AFSC to an American audience

Transnational cooperation between the United Steelworkers Union and the CFO is illustrated in an article about USW members giving a course on Safety and Health for Alcoa workers in Piedras Negras. Although the article does refer to “Julia Quiñonez, an organizer helping border

women gain work-place rights,”⁷⁶ it does not mention the CFO by name. The same volume of the *Steelabor* journal also calls attention to the USW’s show of solidarity with Mexican workers at the Alcoa stockholder’s meeting in Pittsburgh. Again, no mention is made of the CFO, although Amparo Reyes, who is a CFO member, is interviewed in the article.⁷⁷ Finally, a third article in the same journal explains the horrible living conditions and lack of rights for Alcoa workers in Mexico, without, once again, any mention of the CFO.⁷⁸ These articles demonstrate the beginnings of the growing relationship between the CFO and the Steelworkers Union. This will be important as we explore in more detail how this affiliation with the Steelworkers Union has affected the objectives, and by extension the gender composition, of the CFO.

A series of three *Daily Texan* articles written by Brian Chasnoff covers many of the themes that are important to the CFO, and allows us to see the links between their different objectives and how these have culminated in the largest struggle the CFO has been involved in: the fight for an independent union in the Alcoa maquiladoras in Piedras Negras and Ciudad Acuña. Chasnoff’s articles look at themes such as poverty in Mexico’s maquiladoras, the effects of NAFTA (although no mention of the CFO or any of its members appears in this particular article) (Chasnoff 2004a) and the harsh conditions that maquiladora workers must face. The first article of the series is very much based on the CFO. It starts with interviews with one of its promoters, who was fired for organizing workers. He is referred to as “a member of a grassroots organization called the Comité Fronterizo de Obreros, or the Border Committee of Women

⁷⁶ ____ (2002), “Combating Exploitation: Safety Training Helps Identify Worker’s Needs in Maquiladoras,” *Steelabor*, Vol. 67, no. 2, Spring.

⁷⁷ ____ (2002), “Return Us to Work: Alcoa’s Exploitation of Mexican Workers Challenged,” *Steelabor*, Vol. 67, no. 2, Spring.

⁷⁸ ____ (2002), “Aluminum Sweatshops: Alcoa’s Mexican Plants Deny Basic Human Rights,” *Steelabor*, Vol. 67, no. 2, Spring.

Workers” (2004b: n.p.). Chasnoff refers to a CFO report (without naming the report) to admonish NAFTA and explains that “The CFO consists of workers and ex-workers from towns all along the border. As a whole, they are angry, calm and persistent, criticizing what they see as the lies of those who negotiated the North American Free Trade Agreement and condemning the favored positions and exploitative practices of the U.S. corporations that have moved to Mexico to take advantage of NAFTA’s neoliberal allowances” (2004b: n.p.). The article also covers many of the CFO’s activities, such as its partnership with ATCF and the delegations to the border organized by them.

Of interest in his series of articles is that Chasnoff mentions the attempt to get an independent union in the Alcoa plant in Piedras Negras, as well as other such involvements in large scale activism that involved the CFO (2004b). In his final article, Chasnoff refers to the CFO to explain some of the harsh working conditions in an Alcoa plant, and also gives the example of an Alcoa worker who is too afraid to lose his medical insurance, and therefore will not speak with the CFO when they come around to talk to him:

The Comité Fronterizo de Obreros, or the Border Committee of Women Workers, describes one of Alcoa’s policies that prohibits workers from going to the bathroom more than twice in one day. They say many workers are afraid to ask for permission; sometimes they must wear humiliating signs around their necks that indicate whether they have gone “number one” or “number two.” Other times, said the CFO, they are allowed to go only if they agree to provide sexual favors to supervisors. (2004c: n.p.)

In an article regarding Alcoa and its treatment of workers in different countries, Gardner relies on the CFO to explain the situation in Mexico: “The Comité Fronterizo de Obreros (CFO), a non-governmental organization committed to protecting the rights of maquiladora workers in Mexico, reports that in February this year more than 1,500 Alcoa workers held spontaneous work

stoppages at Macoelmex, an Alcoa facility in Piedras Negras” (Gardner 2005). The article goes on to explain the low salaries and working conditions at Alcoa.

The vote for a democratic union and the subsequent firing of workers in Alcoa plants in Piedras Negras is also covered in a short article by the Maquiladora Solidarity Network, in which the CFO is mentioned briefly: “In Mexico, the worker’s efforts to win an independent union are being supported by the Border Workers Committee (CFO), and in the U.S. and Canada by a number of labor and solidarity groups, including MSN, AFL-CIO, Campaign for Labor Rights and Students Against Sweatshops” (Maquiladora Solidarity Network 2002). An earlier newspaper article that also speaks about the firing of Alcoa workers mentions the role the CFO played in organizing workers very briefly: “In early October, as organizers – with the help of the Comité Fronterizo de Obreras, a border group that works for economic and social justice – continued a registration drive in Plant 1” (Sorg 2002). The CFO earns a quick mention in a United Electrical Workers’ publication describing one of their member’s trip to the Mexico–U.S. border. The CFO is presented as one of the organizers of the trip and is qualified as the “Border Committee of Women (CFO)” (Capano 2002).

Javier explains that the Alcoa independent union movement did bring with it some international attention:

When our movement in Alcoa was strong, we had a lot of solidarity as much at the international as at the national level. Therefore, we were invited to participate in various organizations, as much union as independent ones. (Interview #4)

Many long-time members have explained that through Ricardo Hernandez and Susan Mika, two Alcoa shareholders, they were able to meet with other shareholders and explain to their reality in

the Alcoa maquiladoras. One long-time member explained that his wish was for the shareholders from Alcoa and other companies to know what was going on in Mexico, because he truly believed that educating the shareholders would go a long way in addressing the problems they face in the maquiladoras:

That is what would make me happy, that the shareholders would find out more about [what is going on in the maquiladoras], that they would focus more on their factories here in Mexico so they would see all the types of anomalies there are. That, yes, I think it would be the best, because many problems would be corrected. (Humberto, Interview #28)

Excerpts from the Q&A session at the 2006 Alcoa Annual Shareholders meeting demonstrate the CFO involvement in the Mexican Alcoa workers' struggle for union representation. Julia Quiñonez, referred to as "Coordinator, Comité Fronterizo de Obreras (CFO)" addressed the Alcoa shareholders on the issue of threats to move to Honduras or China, which Alcoa would use whenever workers would bring up the topic of a raise, as well as the issue of 8,500 Alcoa workers in Ciudad Acuña who have not been allowed to form their own union.⁷⁹

In 2008, The USW notes in the Summer volume of its publication USW@Work that Alcoa workers in eight countries met in the second annual meeting of the Alcoa Global Union Network "as part of an ongoing commitment to achieve justice for workers at Alcoa worldwide" (USW 2008: 20). The meeting was led by District 7 Director Jim Robinson, the USW's lead negotiator with Alcoa, who stated that the reason behind the meeting was to make sure "Alcoa understands that as they are globalizing, we as representatives of Alcoa's workers are also developing ties around the world" (USW 2008: 20). In a picture which shows a representative from each of the

⁷⁹ ____ (2006), "Julia Quiñonez speaks out before Alcoa's shareholders and Alain Belda responded," Alcoa Annual Shareholders Meeting, Pittsburg, PA, April 21 [excerpts from Q&A session].

eight countries represented at the meeting, Julia Quiñonez is the chosen representative for Mexico (USW 2008: 21). In addition, on the section on Mexico, the short paragraph states that “Workers are earning \$45 to \$70 for a 48 hour week producing wiring harnesses and feel threatened by cheaper labor in Honduras, according to the Comité Fronterizo de Obreras, a grassroots organization that supports union democracy and workers’ rights in cities along the Mexico–U.S. border” (USW 2008: 21). The CFO is viewed as an expert opinion on the conditions of workers in Alcoa in Mexico, and Julia Quiñonez is viewed as their representative at this transnational meeting that clearly takes to heart the message that “globalization from above” (in this case, Alcoa, which keeps threatening its workers with cheaper labour in other countries) can be fought with “globalization from below” (a strong united front of Alcoa workers around the world who support each other rather than fight against each other). This article symbolizes the growing relationship between the USW and the CFO. This relationship, in turn, affects the possibility of sustaining a women-centred organization, given the fact that most of the Alcoa employees are men.

One of the promotoras (Norma, Interview #6) explained that the focus of the CFO in 2006–2007 was Alcoa, and, to a lesser extent, LEAR⁸⁰ workers. They would go door to door in certain colonias in Piedras Negras and Ciudad Acuña where many Alcoa or Lear workers lived and talk to them about their rights, about the CFO and about the possibility of forming an independent union in Alcoa. In fact, if the worker they visited was not an employee of either of these two transnational companies, they would write down the names and tell them that would return at a later, undetermined date. They were told to space out visits to non-Alcoa or non-Lear workers.

⁸⁰ Lear, a Fortune 500 company, “was founded in 1917 in Detroit, Michigan as American Metal Products, a manufacturer of tubular, welded and stamped assemblies for the automotive and aircraft industries [... They] provide complete seating and electrical power management systems worldwide [...and] continues to operate facilities in 36 countries around the globe” (LEAR 2013).

The following excerpts from my interview with Norma give us a good overview of the focus of the CFO membership recruitment campaign:⁸¹

And why is it that the CFO seems to focus more on Macoelmex (an Alcoa-owned maquiladora) now? Do you know why Macoelmex and not another maquila?

Well, I think because of the support that they, Jim [the director of the Steelworkers Union] are going to give because they are going to give support if the work is done directly with Macoelmex, if it is done with others, no, if the work is done with other maquiladoras. That is what I understood, and possibly I am confused, but that is what I understood, if the work is not done with Macoelmex, they were not going to give money.

Ah, ok. And you don't visit people from other maquilas?

Well, no I couldn't because I went on occasions where there was going to be the meeting with them, and they wanted those workers exclusively, no one else. Well, they tell us that they have to be workers exclusively from Lear and Macoelmex.

But if the person is not from Lear or Macoelmex, you will not return another time or yes?

No, no! They asked me to write down the names and later we will visit these workers again.

When later? Like in January when they are done with the meeting with the Steelworkers?

No, not until there is a movement in that factory. If there is a union change or something like that, then we will go and visit that worker. To me, that is not good. To me, that isn't good because all of the workers need that we give them talks.

In that case, they only put the focus on the independent unions?

No, no! Only those that belong to the same one as Jim's. And I think it is because of that, because the support they are going to give is going to be precisely for that.

In that case, they are going to forget about all of the other workers?

We can go visit them, but very spaced out, so that they don't think that you forgot about them. Or you can tell them to go to the office. But the workers usually don't go to the office. (Norma, Interview #6)

One newer member who had been participating for a few years had a particular insight in the preferential treatment Alcoa workers seemed to receive from the CFO:

⁸¹ The italicized portions represent the author (and interviewer) asking questions. These are followed by the answers by the CFO members.

I imagine that my participation in the CFO is similar to that of other members. When [one of the promotores] asks us to go to workshops, we go. I think that it is equal because the CFO helps everyone, but the CFO has more communication with the workers of Arnesses [Alcoa] because this is apart, but we are equal. (Maria Angeles, Interview #21)

As is inferred in the above quote, although all members of the CFO are technically equal, even new members are aware that Alcoa workers get more attention from the CFO.

One long-time member mentioned that when the CFO first opened its office in 1998, there used to be a line-up of people at the door. Many maquiladora workers who had heard about the CFO came to the office to find out about their rights as workers. This large number of new members can be partly attributed to the opening of the office and the increased visibility of the CFO compared to its pre-independence time. It was also, according to this long-time member, in part due to the closure of two maquiladoras in a row which employed around 2500 people between the two of them. This was also a time when the CFO started to focus on Alcoa. There were still over 20 maquiladoras in Piedras Negras; however, Alcoa was by far the largest maquiladora after the other two left (Guadalupe, Interview #10).

As we see from the above interviews, the focus of the CFO was on Alcoa workers and on trying to recruit specific workers to satisfy international partners. The focus was mostly on Alcoa maquiladoras, but LEAR as well, because they also make auto parts and are part of the companies that the Steelworkers Union in the United States represent. In Reynosa, they have focused on Motores Reynosa, which makes auto parts for General Motors. Due to the gendered aspects of maquiladora work in Mexico, the worker composition at Alcoa and other auto-parts maquiladoras such as LEAR and General Motors would be a majority of men. This focus on

Alcoa in order to obtain funds from the Steelworkers Union might explain why there are more men in the CFO now. Many of the Alcoa workers became involved in the CFO because of the 1999 Alcoa movement (see section 4.7.2 below). One therefore wonders why the CFO as a women's organization would make the decision to focus on a male-dominated industry like automotive parts. The next sections will look at some of the factors that made the CFO decide to change its focus, and how this change of focus from women's organizing to worker organizing (for specific male-dominated industries) has affected the local grassroots base of the organization.

4.7.2 History of the CFO involvement in the Alcoa struggle

The efforts to organize workers in Alcoa maquiladoras did not start with the influence of the Steelworkers Union. Alcoa workers, with the help of the CFO, were already starting to mobilize for their rights before they ever heard of the Steelworkers. One long-time member, also an Alcoa worker in Ciudad Acuña, states that one of the most significant changes at his work at Alcoa is that workers are more respected now by their employer:

Much more respect for the workers now, because before there wasn't much respect, since with the CFO in 2000 we did a work stoppage in the plant #5 [Alcoa plant], now we are respected more, because they knew there was a group that was supported by the CFO and knew how to defend themselves better and since that time, it is known in the maquiladora (empresa) that plant #5 defends itself more in the maquiladora (empresa), when one says something, one defends oneself from them and for that reason plant #5 is like a pilot for all of Acuña because they see that we defend ourselves from the maquiladoras (empresas), before no one said anything, now we can do a work stoppage, people know how to join together more. (Diego, Interview #11)

One long-time member speaks of the gains they obtained for the worker in Alcoa through their participation in the CFO. This long-time member was part of a committee for salary revisions in

Alcoa, one that included nine men and two women, and he also credits many of their accomplishments to their participation in the CFO:

Things automatically changed at work when I started participating in the CFO, when we found out about the CFO in 1995 until 2001. We took maximum advantage of the CFO; well, not precisely took advantage, but with the participation of the CFO and thanks to them, we were in contact with Alcoa shareholders. (Juan, Interview #18)

However, organizing workers in Alcoa plants (or any other maquiladora in Northern Mexico) is not easy. As Juan explains, he and the rest of the committee for salary revisions were all fired after they organized a work stoppage to protest the horrible work conditions which caused one of their co-workers to miscarry due to the excessive amount of work she had to do. He had wanted them to try to negotiate with the managers because of the training he had gotten in the CFO workshops. However, since the rest of the workers were riled up because of their co-worker's miscarriage, which was caused by the inhumane working conditions, the 11-person organizing committee was fired. As the long-time member explains it,

[A]nd the next day they [the managers from Alcoa] started speaking to the federal public minister in order to fire us, only the 11 of the committee, they used all of the force of the public authorities, of the city of Acuña, they brought in security guards from Monterrey to force us out of inside the parking lot of the maquiladora...The pay cheques are now lower in Alcoa, they also lost the buses to go on vacation and also the bonuses for attendance and punctuality are lower. The situation at Alcoa is much worse now. (Juan, Interview #18)

Another promotore, Javier, who had participated in the first movement within the Alcoa plant in Piedras Negras was also subsequently fired and blacklisted along with all of the other organizers of that movement. Javier was also the representative of the independent union in Macoelmex (Alcoa plant) in Piedras Negras. In Javier's own words, this is how the Alcoa workers in Piedras Negras, Coahuila, got together with the CFO:

Around six years ago [in 1999], we, the workers from Alcoa, created a movement inside the plant. At that time, we were not organized. We started to organize ourselves as we could, but I believe that someone there, in a factory where I had worked, that he already knew about the CFO, in the factory Carisma, but we did not have communications with the organization. We were filled with worries because we saw that the company, Macoelmex, was very powerful and we contacted a promotora that is no longer with the organization and she is the one who got us together and started working to organize us in Alcoa. (Javier, Interview #4)

It is significant to note here that the Macoelmex employees, with the help of the CFO, did form an independent union in 2002 in Piedras Negras (see CFO 2009g for a summary and links covering the nine-month struggle for an independent union in one of the Alcoa plants in Piedras Negras). During his interview, Javier, described the struggle in the Alcoa plant:

Could you speak a bit more about this problem with Macoelmex?

Yes, ok, we were trying to create an independent union because we were disgusted with the CTM union because they were solely exploiting the workers, they were taking away their guarantees that were in the law and that is why we were trying to create this union. Therefore, the union that is in Macoelmex is from the CTM, it is a section and it is pure corruption, they are allied with the municipal authorities from here and do not let one progress or know his or her rights, respected as they should be by law.

What happened with the CFO at that time, with Macoelmex and the independent union? You mentioned you found out about the CFO at that time, did the CFO help the independent union?

Yes, it helped sufficiently, giving support with interviews and workshops so that one would know about the individual guarantees that came in the collective agreement that many people did not know about. (Javier, Interview #4)

Unfortunately, the Board of Conciliation and Arbitration denied them the right to register as a union even though they had met all of the legal obligations. The independent union, with the help of the CFO, filed a complaint against the Government of Mexico to the International Labour Organization (ILO 2006: 332-339), in which the ILO did recognize some irregularities and strongly urged the Government of Mexico to investigate further into the allegations of anti-union

discrimination and to make repairs where necessary (338). As Javier explains, however, there was no change for the workers who were forced to settle due to increased financial need:

We had to do testimonies for the complaint, all that process with the lawyer that was there and the government of Coahuila [state level], we reached an agreement in the end because we were starting to have debts and couldn't pay our houses, the water, the lights and we had to go to a conciliator. (Interview #4)

Unfortunately, this is one of the major reasons people accept less than they are owed when they are fired, because they cannot afford to go without pay for very long. And also one of the reasons many choose not to organize in the first place, because of other serious repercussions like being put on the blacklist. When asked if he had any problems finding work after this experience, Javier answered:

Yes, because the senior that was the highest in the union, Localio Hernandez, he had this mania that the people who defended their rights, for them they are problematic therefore to all of the factories, here at the local level, he sent the name of each person so that they would not enter, a vengeance mania. (Interview #4)

As we saw in Chapter 1, union corruption is a major problem in Mexico and the CTM union, which is presided by Localio Hernandez, whom Javier names above, manages the blacklists and controls who gets to work in a maquiladora. These unions also work in conjunction with the companies to set up protection contracts which is what happened in this very situation.⁸²

4.8 The USW's influence on the CFO strategies: From grassroots to union organizers

The major reason for the focus on Alcoa is because the Steelworkers Union is an important union and could potentially become a major funding partner for the CFO, in order to build an Alcoa union that would be part of a large international union of workers. At the time of the annual meeting, Jim Robinson had not decided if the Steelworkers would invest in the CFO or not, and

⁸² See ILO complaint for more information on the charge of the CTM setting up a protection contract with Alcoa in Piedras Negras (ILO 2006)

wanted to see the results from previous CFO organizing efforts of Alcoa workers. He took a particular interest in speaking with these new CFO members and asked me to translate for him while he asked them about their organizing efforts in their plant in Piedras Negras. Julia Quiñonez commented once that they needed serious people within the plant that could become important leaders in the movement to create an independent union in the Alcoa plant. It seemed that was partly what Jim Robinson was doing in speaking to these new members after the annual meeting: asking them many questions to judge their leadership capabilities within their plant. Jim Robinson was particularly interested in the fact that although there were approximately 9000 workers in Alcoa in Ciudad Acuña, the CFO had not managed to get any of them to the meeting. The Alcoa workers present at the annual meeting were from Piedras Negras. Julia Quiñonez did explain later that they were having some difficulties getting the organizing work done, as the promotores in Ciudad Acuña were unable to organize the maquiladora workers, particularly the Alcoa workers, or help in organizing the annual meeting (which is the reason most of the work was done by Julia herself in conjunction with Ricardo Hernandez).

One of the negative consequences of this growing alliance with the Steelworkers Union is that it represented a change in the priorities of the CFO for Guadalupe, and made her feel left out of her own organization. This long-time member felt so disenfranchised within the CFO that she finally left the organization. She explained that the Steelworkers Union was interested in seeing whether or not the CFO volunteers were able to assemble enough workers to form an independent union. This was very difficult due to the fears many of the workers had, that by participating in the CFO they would get fired from their jobs or that the factory would simply leave as they had done in the case of the other large maquiladoras in Piedras Negras. Although Alcoa did not leave, it did

downsize significantly from over 2000 workers in 1999, to just over 900 workers in 2006. This long-time member was quite upset, because the Steelworkers had been judging their skills in assembling workers, and they had apparently failed. In her own words:

And one day, I got really upset because there was a meeting here in the hotel, in the Express, the Casablanca, yes, and for that meeting people came from...from the Steelworkers or something like that, yes. They came and they were going to judge or see if we were qualified as volunteers, because we were volunteers to see if we were trained to give presentations. Therefore, I got very upset because they asked us questions and we had to do this: What is your name? Interview this way! How to interview; How to knock at the door; How to speak to people face to face; How to do this strategy that we wanted because Macoelmex, Alcoa, is very, very strong...That is what bothered me a lot because those people that came [from the Steelworkers Union] in the end, they did like a summary of how we had behaved and how they had seen us work. And I got upset with Julia because Julia said to me that we had failed (laughs sarcastically) that is to say, that we were not trained...I remember it quite well, they laughed a lot at [another long-time member] who was a promotora, at me, I was also a promotora, at [names three other long-time members], many that had been working for a long time that had never had this happen...how could these people come to judge us, we were workers, I was a worker and they are going to be able to come and teach me how I should convince a companero? (Guadalupe, Interview #10)

This idea that the CFO volunteers or promotores had failed in the past to impress the Steelworkers union that they would be able to manage recruiting enough workers to form an independent union is further corroborated with an interview with another ex-CFO promotora in Reynosa who now works on projects with the IMF (FITIM by its Spanish acronym) and through her newly formed organization Esfuerzas Tamaulipecas. Maria-Elena Garcia Sierra (whose personal narrative was covered in in Chapter 3)⁸³ explained that organizing Alcoa workers in Acuña was not very difficult at all, given the large numbers living in the same colonias and the dissatisfaction with the working conditions there. While working on a project with the IMF to organize workers to form a union, she explained how in 2007, she and one other person went to

⁸³ Maria-Elena has since left the CFO due to personal conflict with Julia Quiñonez and continues to organize workers through her new organization Esfuerzas Tamaulipecas, in which she works with her common-law partner Eleuterio Torres.

Ciudad Acuña for four days to organize Alcoa workers. In those four days, they were able to meet with more than 100 workers of the different shifts in the Alcoa plant even though they were not from that city and did not know anyone there. The two promotores of the CFO at the time in Ciudad Acuña were barely able to gather a few workers to meet with the Steelworkers Union and most of the Alcoa workers present at the annual meeting in 2006 were in fact from Piedras Negras, Coahuila, which seemed to have better recruitment efforts than in Ciudad Acuña. In her own words:

In July of 2007, we went from Reynosa, without knowing Acuña, without knowing anyone. We arrived and they were waiting for us in a small hotel that we could afford to pay economically...And we could do that in four days and meet with about 100 workers from Alcoa. Therefore, here is the difference...or I don't know, how is it that Julia that lives there in Piedras Negras...And there are two promotores in Acuña. (Maria Elena Garcia, Interview #52)

Julia Quiñonez explained that it was very difficult because they had to rebuild the structure; she described it as being at “the bottom of the barrel: many requests from the workers, from the other cities, many requests from people from the United States that want to help, that want... and there isn't many people on whom you can count” (Interview #1). What is clear is that the CFO is at a crisis. Without adequate representation in six border cities as stated on their website, it will have an even harder time competing for resources from international donors. One example is a large scale three-year project from the International Metalworkers Federation (IMF) that was offered to the CFO in 2004. The IMF first approached the CFO to set up large-scale union organizing. They were ready to fund 10 organizers in each region where the CFO was located. The CFO was

unable to meet this requirement or even come close and therefore did not receive this funding and the project was given to another group (Eleuterio Torres Ibarra, Interview #51).⁸⁴

Maria-Elena explains this IMF project in her own words. She states that when she was a promotora for the CFO in Reynosa in 2004 they were approached by the IMF to organize a union in the maquiladoras. They wanted 10 promotores in each city and the CFO was unable to meet their requirements because of the lack of structure and personnel or volunteers:

I was a promotora for the CFO and the FITIM proposed to the CFO to work in coordination on this project in the regions and the CFO, which is simply Julia, did not want to and said no. Therefore, there was a conflict where if I wanted to do what the FITIM told me to go with the FITIM, “but if no, then you have to do what I tell you to” and I said ‘well, where is the necessity of the workers because here in all of the border region, here in Reynosa, is where the unions are the most corrupt, the most corrupted and abuse the rights of the workers in conjunction with the government, with the labour authorities, the factory and the workers are completely unprotected. They need a direct attention that Julia is not able to give them because she does not have a project of this size, of this nature, to form unions and apart from the fact that she lives in Piedras Negras which is at a distance of 9 hours, 9 or 10 hours. Therefore, no, she did not want this project, also the CJM which is the Coalition for Justice in the Maquiladoras directed by Marta Ojeda did not want it either and she bawled us out. Therefore, they scorned this union project that the FITIM brought. (Maria-Elena Garcia, Interview #52)

It seems by this example that the lack of structure and of organized personnel did cost the CFO some important funding in the past. It also cost them one of their promotoras who seemed capable of organizing workers more efficiently than other promotoras.⁸⁵ This could in part explain why the focus was to only meet with Alcoa workers in 2006, due to not wanting to lose another large project that could potentially bring important funds to the organization. In fact, the recruitment of Alcoa workers as members of the CFO had already started in Piedras Negras and

⁸⁴ Torres Ibarra, the assistant coordinator for the IMF project in question, when asked by his supervisor who they should work with suggested the CFO and when asked if they had a structure in place and people who were prepared, answered in the affirmative. He later realized the structure was simply not there.

⁸⁵ Data as of 2006 and 2007.

seemed to be working fairly well. From one person (a leader) who would participate in the CFO, the promotore would ask him/her the names of the people that worked near him/her in the same section. The CFO promotore would then create an information page for each of them. Then, the promotore would ask which of these people defended their rights and which were close to the company in order to determine which would be the best people to contact. Later, they would ask the leader the addresses of a few of these people and it would be up to the promotore to go and visit these people at their homes and speak to them about the CFO. This snowball technique was used a lot to recruit Alcoa workers. In fact, in 2006 (data up until October), they had obtained 103 names of Alcoa workers from 7 leaders in Piedras Negras, of which 58 were men and 45 were women.⁸⁶

The need or desire to impress the Steelworkers Union that the CFO is a worthy investment as while at the same time convincing the CFO membership of the importance of this alliance with the Steelworkers was the focus of the 2006 annual meeting I attended. Ricardo Hernandez explained that the work plan of the CFO was developed in a collective manner through direct and continuous consultations of workers in different towns and each year in November approximately thirty to sixty workers get together to develop the work plan at the annual meeting (Hernandez 2004a). However, this particular annual meeting of the grassroots base ended up being more of a workshop with experts and union leaders from the United States teaching workers about their rights than a meeting. It was difficult to determine who the intended audience was, since it was on the one hand a presentation of all that the CFO has accomplished since its beginnings for the international audience which included the president of the

⁸⁶ Data obtained from conversations with Julia Quiñonez in Piedras Negras in November 2006 and from reviewing the contact sheets in question.

Steelworkers from the United States, Jim Robinson. On the other hand, since most of the members present at the annual meeting were new members, it was also a presentation aimed at giving them an overview of the CFO and also the future project that it hoped to establish with the USW.

The majority of the weekend meeting was spent in presentations from Americans to the Mexican workers. These included union organizing workshop (the subject of the Saturday evening meeting), a presentation on the political and social context in Mexico in 2006 by Ricardo Hernandez and finally a presentation on international solidarity between workers and the USW by Jim Robinson. The meeting organizers had also put up large posters explaining the chronology of the Alcoa struggle in Ciudad Acuña as well as the history of the CFO which included many links to the Alcoa struggle. The focus was very much union organizing and specifically, organizing ALCOA workers (in partnership with USW). Over two-thirds of the members present had been participating in the CFO for less than a year. Of those who had been members for a longer time period, most were promotores, employees of the CFO and therefore obligated to participate in the annual meeting. Furthermore, on the day when the decisions should have been made, Monday, November 20, 2006, most of the members had returned to work and there were very few people actually present — less than half than on previous days (approximately 15 to 20 people) and the two promotores from Piedras Negras (some of the only long-time members present at the annual meeting) were also absent. The meeting on Monday was therefore shortened from four to one and a half hours and there were no decisions made at that time. Later conversations with Julia Quiñonez revealed that this was not common practice and that the decisions would be made in each city individually.

Not all CFO members see the new direction of the CFO as bad. In fact, the CFO had accomplished many things for Alcoa workers in Piedras Negras and Ciudad Acuña. Alcoa was the largest maquiladora in Ciudad Acuña with nine plants in 2006.

In our case, when I worked for ALCOA, in plant #5, there was a moment when we started defending our rights. Through the CFO, we were able to communicate with the shareholders, and we told them what our salaries were, what our benefits were. We told them many things, thanks to the CFO. That helped us a lot...The CFO helps a lot of workers, because here in the Frontera, they come from outside [from the U.S.] they can fire you for no reason at all. However, the worker cannot let anyone know that he participates in the CFO because if they [the maquiladora] know, they will fire him, because they know that the CFO knows how to defend workers' rights. (Marcos, Interview #15)

Marcos also saw the Steelworkers Union as being a great help to the Alcoa workers in Ciudad Acuña. He was very happy that others had come to help and this had qualified the USW as a very large union that was helping them form their own union. Marcos wanted to create an international union of workers, so that the maquiladora could not threaten to move to Honduras or Puerto Rico because the workers would be able to defend themselves globally. They told them that in the United States workers are paid by the hour, whereas in Mexico people were not used to being paid by hour. He remembered that thanks to CFO he met with the shareholders of ALCOA (in 1999 or 2000) and presented them with a petition of approximately 25 problems that they had in the maquiladora. Of these, they resolved approximately 15 of the problems, one of which was a 30% raise in wages. Marcos credits this to the CFO, "and especially to the senora Julia, because she invited us and made the contacts" (Marcos, Interview #15).

Marcos's comments are reminiscent of the message that is being taught to the CFO members through workshops such as the "Union Organizing Workshop," which this author attended on

November 4^h and 5^h, 2006, held by the CFO in Ciudad Acuña. Ben Davis from the AFL-CIO explained links between migration and the lack of opportunities in the Northern Border Region and that the only way to change things was through representative unionism. He explained that the maquiladoras were often the only possibility of work for women in the border area. Men could also work in the mines; however, the salaries were not much higher and the mines were very dangerous.

During his presentation on union organizing, Ben Davis focused on Alcoa. He compared the salaries of Alcoa workers in Macoelmex (the Alcoa plant in Piedras Negras) (\$49 per week) with those in Auburn, TX (\$484) who worked in the same auto parts division and did practically the same work. He explained that the difference in salary was because of the different laws in both countries: \$4.50 minimum daily salary in Coahuila compared to \$5.15 per hour minimum salary in the U.S. He emphasized the fact that the objective for any company is to produce more and pay less and that the companies are globalized but the workers are not.

The objective of the workshop was to establish a collective agreement for the workers in Alcoa in order for them to form their own union. Ben Davis explained the procedures for registering a union to the workshop attendees: the union must first be registered at the Board of Conciliation and Arbitration in order negotiate the contract. This however posed a difficulty because the Junta was formed by one representative of the government (PRI), one representative of the companies, and one representative of the workers (CTM). Therefore, the Board of Conciliation and Arbitration would not give the registration and will fire those who have signed and put them on a black list. In addition, in Piedras Negras, the problem was that even if they could form an

independent union, there was already a collective agreement with the CTM union. They must therefore change the ownership of the contract. In order to do so, there must be a meeting and an election between the old union and the new one. The difficulty lay in the fact that the Board was in charge of this meeting and the each worker had to come into the Board office and state their vote in front of the three board representatives on one side and their independent union representative on the other. They then wrote down the name of the person and how they voted. It was therefore necessary to get a qualified majority of 80% + 1 because a simple majority of 50% + 1 would not suffice due to the possibility of intimidation.

We can see even before the annual meeting in 2006 that forming an independent union in Alcoa was going to be the major theme presented to the members. As we saw previously, the annual meeting was a continuation of this workshop, one in which they focused on how the CFO members could become leaders in their maquiladora and recruit their co-workers into forming an independent union. They were in essence training the CFO members to become union organizers, because as one long-time member mentioned above, they promoters of the CFO had failed in their recruiting efforts. It was therefore of vital importance to find people from within the Alcoa maquiladoras both in Piedras Negras and in Ciudad Acuña where the maquiladora was the largest and did not have any union representation, CTM or otherwise, to recruit from within.

The relationship between the USW and the CFO, which was developing during the 2006 annual CFO meeting, continued to grow. According to Ben Davis, the relationship between the CFO and the USW continues to this day. Ben Davis, who is now the International Affairs Director of the United Steelworkers, stated:

The USW also helped the workers and CFO on health and safety and conducted several training sessions for the committee leadership. In 2007 a delegation of local leaders from Alcoa plants in the U.S. visited Ciudad Acuña...In 2007, the CFO evaluated its organizing campaign and concluded that even with international solidarity, it would be difficult to advance beyond dialogue to collective bargaining unless the Arneses workers were represented by a democratic union with the legal right to engage in collective bargaining. The CFO approached the SNTMMSSRM (Los Mineros), which began meeting with the Arneses workers. In July 2009, the Arneses workers formed Section 309 of Los Mineros.⁸⁷ (Davis 2012: n.p.)

It seems that the strategy to focus on Alcoa workers did in fact pay off for the CFO and was a success in the formation of an independent union in the Alcoa maquiladora (Arneses) in Ciudad Acuña. However, as we saw with feminist theory, the measure of success must be nuanced. In this particular instance, we must mitigate the fact of receiving much needed international funds to continue organizing efforts and also to open up new avenues for organizing with the loss of the women's voice in an organization that was supposedly built to give them a voice in the first place, to allow them to establish their own priorities through consciousness-raising and through consensus building in the decision-making process rather than imposing from the top-down in a hierarchical manner such as in union organizing.

No member of the CFO interviewed during the course of the fieldwork mentioned any desire to be part of a transnational or global union. For those who wanted to form an independent union, their wish was for it to be built from the grassroots base. They certainly appreciated the help from the USW and AFL-CIO, but none ever mentioned it as being part of a larger union and rather spoke of creating their own independent union with the financial help as well as advice from the USW and AFL-CIO.

⁸⁷ It must also be noted that the SNTMMSSRM (Los Mineros) signed a solidarity alliance with the USW in 2011 (see USW 2011), which by extension would mean that the CFO members who work for Alcoa are in a solidarity alliance with the Steelworkers Union.

Maria-Elena Garcia had criticized the CFO for not wanting to form independent unions because then they would no longer be needed and wouldn't receive funds for these workers anymore (i.e., work stoppages). Although levelled as a criticism, it is worth noting that union organizing is quite dangerous to the workers who are taking all the risks, and past strategies such as being cautious about pushing workers when there is no one to back them can be considered a sound strategy that is in line with CFO objectives. Recent events demonstrate this danger as the Alcoa plants in Ciudad Acuña were sold off to a Finish transnational corporation, the PKC Group, which refused to negotiate with the independent union and instead signed a protection contract with the CTM union (AFL-CIO 2012b), firing more than 100 workers who were part of the independent union movement (AFL-CIO 2013).

Chapter 5

The local global nexus: The perfect storm

This chapter will cover how the CFO's coordinator, Julia Quiñonez, got caught up in the pressures from above (from the transnational partners) and the pressures from below (from the grassroots base) and how she handled the intricacies and the dynamics of local/transnational organizing. Julia Quiñonez is the figure that is in a sense at the centre of the perfect storm: she embodies the contradictions and the moment. This chapter will also seek to address the questions posed at the beginning of this thesis. My first question — What are the connections between local and transnational organizations seeking to resist “globalization from above” with “globalization from below”?— relates to the leadership of Julia Quiñonez. I have already offered some of the answers in Chapter 3 about how she was not chosen by the grassroots membership but rather how her leadership was imposed on them from the top-down by their major transnational partner, the AFSC. She was not elected and she cannot be replaced. In this chapter, we will examine her interactions with these TANs and how this affects her leadership of the CFO.

In order to answer the second thesis question — Are these equal partnerships or do the pressures and constraints imposed from the transnational organizations that provide the necessary funds for the receiving-end activists constitute another form of “globalization from above”? — I will look at the influence the transnational partners have on her decision making, as the AFSC and AFL-CIO are often consulted by Julia Quiñonez before any decisions are made.

This brings us to the final question posed: How do these pressures or constraints affect the local grassroots aspect of organizing? Again, I have covered this in detail in Chapter 3 when I looked at the internal strife and divisions between the regions. Here, I will look at how Julia Quiñonez ended up being the blame for any bad decisions made by the CFO (often associated in the person of Julia Quiñonez). She is the face of the CFO and since most of the members are not aware of the decision-making process and the constraints from above related to the ever-present need to secure funds for their organization, she is also the one who is blamed when things go wrong or are simply different from how things used to be done. Julia Quiñonez, as a leader who started from humble beginnings as a maquiladora worker herself, embodies the image of grassroots organizing. Her charismatic personality and humble beginnings make her well liked by the workers; however, now that she is the leader of the organization and no longer a promotora who can visit each worker, some feel she considers herself above them and react negatively to this perceived lack of interest in their personal issues. This association of the CFO with the person of Julia Quiñonez is also visible when the unions lead the members to slander her with the objective of further discouraging maquiladora workers from participating in the CFO, which has direct consequences on the grassroots base of the organization.

5.1 The pressures of globalization from above

5.1.1 Partnerships in TANs

At the transnational level, Julia Quiñonez is viewed as both an expert on the situation in the maquiladoras and as a strong advocate who fights for women's and/or workers' rights in the maquiladoras. This will be addressed through newspaper articles, academic literature and participant observation at a labour conference in Windsor, ON, in which Julia Quiñonez was one

of the presenters. However, she also has pressures from above in the sense that throughout her participation in TANs, she is the receiving-end activist. As Hertel explains, receiving-end activists are sometimes able to respond to norm entrepreneurs with alternative messages.

For many, the CFO is indistinguishable from Julia Quiñonez. She is in fact the face of the CFO to the rest of the world, and for many of its members, Julia Quiñonez *is* the CFO. Therefore, no study of the CFO would be complete without looking at the quintessential role she has played. She is portrayed as an expert on the working conditions in the maquiladoras, an advocate for women's rights, a fearless leader and an angel who thirsts for justice.

She is put in the spotlight in a 1998 article entitled "Making Life Bearable in the Maquiladoras" (Dallas 1998). The article follows Quiñonez around and describes a typical day and the work she does and, by extension, gives us an overview of some of the work done by the CFO:

Quiñonez is one of a handful of labor activists, many of them fearless women who have come off the factory floor, now helping to improve conditions in the duty-free assembly plants called maquiladoras along the U.S. border. She runs the Comité Fronterizo de Obreras or Border Committee of Women Workers, which include men as well as women. Although women workers face special problems, such as sexual harassment and discrimination against expectant mothers, the CFO does not focus exclusively on women's issues. Instead, the group's overarching aim is to educate workers about their rights and encourage them to demand change for themselves. Until badly needed labor law reforms are passed and enforced, groups such as the CFO, which operates in seven border towns, are often the only resource for workers with grievances. (Dallas 1998: n.p.)

Julia Quiñonez also plays a starring role in a Hernandez article called "Taking Flight." She is compared to angels "who come down to earth and get themselves mixed up with humans," and the CFO is said to "wear their own wings of desire: the desire for justice." Hernandez calls the

CFO “The Zapatistas of the Maquiladoras” and later compares Julia Quiñonez to Subcomandante Marcos of the Zapatista movement since neither

likes to be identified as the leader of the organizations they belong to. Although both have a voice in important decisions, they are more interested in trying to interpret and serve what comes from the grassroots...Among her [Julia Quiñonez’s] many virtues she has cultivated a genuine modesty and an unstoppable way of doing things that place her in the ranks of those who really make a difference. (1998: 92)

A 1999 Spanish-language article exploring the other face of the maquiladora industry, the social problems that it generates, refers to Julia Quiñonez de Gonzalez as the director of the “Comité Fronterizo de Obreras,” who, the article points out, was arguing that one of the principal social problems in the maquiladoras is the fear that women have of losing their jobs if they become pregnant.⁸⁸ This article brings us back to the the campaign the CFO worked on in coalition with the Human Rights Watch, a campaign in which the CFO did lose final control over how its story would be told, and because of this, the CFO learned to be more strategic in its choice of transnational partners (Domínguez 2002). Hertel uses this example to show that rather than losing its local voice, the CFO used a backdoor move to introduce the economic rights of the workers (which was the more important message from a CFO perspective) to the HRW campaign, as HRW had the resources to reach a much larger audience than the CFO (Hertel 2006). In addition, being part of a well-known campaign could have brought a lot of exposure to the CFO and more donors or transnational partners. We see through these examples that the receiving-end activist is not necessarily being imposed on by the norm entrepreneur, that they may very well be utilizing specific strategies such as backdoor moves (e.g., introducing economic rights in a campaign against pregnancy testing) to get their message across.

⁸⁸ ____ (1999), “Los problemas sociales que genera describen ‘la otra cara’ de la industria maquiladora,” *Diario de Yucatan*, March 3.

An *L.A. Times* article about garment workers and manufacturing companies moving overseas avails itself of Julia Quiñonez's expert opinion to call attention to the situation in Mexico: "This year's economic downturn in the United States has hurt the Mexican apparel industry, but most jobs were lost because companies moved to countries with lower wages, says Julia Quiñonez, head of CFO (Border Committee of Women Workers) in Piedras Negras."⁸⁹ An article written for the Danish Confederation of Trade Unions clearly views Julia Quiñonez as an expert on the situation of working conditions for maquiladora workers and views her as a strong advocate who fights for women's causes. "It's the coordinator of the Mexican organization 'Border Committee of Women Workers,' Julia Quiñonez, who reports on the miserable working conditions and broken dreams. And she does not hide that it often is unbearable to witness the darker sides of globalization."⁹⁰ The article then utilizes Julia Quiñonez's expertise on issues such as worker mobilization to determine whether or not European consumers should boycott certain products, and the article also states that "Julia Quiñonez' organization also spearheads solving the mystery of the brutal murders of almost 300 young women in the State of Chihuahua in the last year." Because many of the victims were maquiladora workers, the article implies a link (not verified) between Julia Quiñonez's organization and the 2006 movie *Bordertown* starring Jennifer Lopez and Antonio Banderas, which describes the murders of young women in Ciudad Juarez.⁹¹ Through these examples, we see the utilization of the perception of maquiladora workers as

⁸⁹ Fred Dickey (2003), "Workers Hang on by a Thread: When Manufacturers such as Levi Strauss Move Overseas, They Leave U.S. Labourers Out to Dry and Press the Life Out of Their New Employees — all so People Pay \$20, Not \$25, for a Shirt," *L.A. Times*, January 12

⁹⁰ ____ (2005), "Woman's Fight for Women's Cause," Ugebrevet A4/Danish Confederation of Trade Unions, November 14.

⁹¹ ____ (2005), "Woman's Fight for Women's Cause," Ugebrevet A4/Danish Confederation of Trade Unions, November 14.

victims of globalization. Quiñonez utilizes this perception when she speaks at a transnational level to secure funds and support for the CFO.

A *New York Times* book review of *Opening Mexico: The Making of a Democracy* mentions the different intellectuals “who took on a system decaying from within...On the border, the labor leader Julia Quiñonez fought for the rights of workers in American-owned factories.”⁹² In this book, Quiñonez is described as a “young working mother with a mane of dark hair and a tireless energy for organizing” who leads the Comité Fronterizo de Obreras, the Border Workers Committee, which is in turn described as the “group working hardest to challenge the status quo” in Ciudad Acuña. While promoting the CFO as the best organization to help the victims of globalization, the book also credits Julia Quiñonez with organizing on behalf of the CFO: “Quiñonez visited workers in their homes in the slums of Acuña and other border settlements, inviting them to learn their legal rights and to demand fair treatment of their employers. By the mid-1990s she had organized scores of Acuña workers into weekly home study groups” (Preston & Dillon 2004: 473).

In an article by the Maquiladora Health and Safety Support Network, we see the important role Julia Quiñonez plays at the transnational level as the leader of the CFO. In a summary of a “Grassroots Social Hour,” attended by over 100 participants from all over the world, special mention was made that one of the speakers was “Julia Quiñonez of the Comité Fronterizo de Obreros on the US–Mexico border.” This activity at the World Safety Congress was “designed to present the work of two Network partners — COVERCO in Guatemala and CFO in Mexico —

⁹² Michele Wucker (2004), “Opening Mexico’: Distant Neighbor,” *The New York Times*, March 28.

so that occupational health professionals attending the conference could consider possible collaborations with grassroots organizations of workers in the developing world.”⁹³

Julia Quiñonez was also invited to a radio broadcast by David Bacon. This is particularly interesting because of his first two questions, which addressed what the CFO was and what it did. This interview deserves to be cited in its entirety as it shows how Julia Quiñonez portrayed the CFO as a women’s organization for a U.S. audience.

[David]: We are speaking this morning with Julia Quiñonez, who is the coordinator of the Border Committee of Women Workers, the Comité Fronterizo de Obreras, and translating for us this morning is Eric Myers.

David: Julia, perhaps you can start by telling us what the Comité Fronterizo de Obreras is. Why is it actually called, in Spanish, “obreras,” [which] means women workers? So why specifically is the name of the committee in the feminine? Why is it talking about women workers in particular? And what is it?

Julia: The Comité Fronterizo de Obreras (CFO) is an organization of the base of the rank and file that’s led by women and men who work in the maquiladoras. So when the organization was born, it was born out of a need, and it was born out of a need particularly amongst the young women who work in the industry. In the beginning the industry was particularly interested in employing women workers, and even though this situation has changed over time we continue to maintain a focus on the experience of women. So we look for a greater level of participation, particularly for women, inside their unions and at levels of leadership.

David: What does the Comité actually do?

Julia: The CFO is an organization of workers that is working in three Mexican states: Tamaulipas, Coahuila and Chihuahua . The purpose of the organization is to educate and organize workers around their labour rights. Apart from educating workers about their labour rights, we also have a focus on dialoguing about the impact of free trade. And we also have a focus on gender, a focus particularly on the violence against women. Finally, we have a program based on economic self-sufficiency and fair trade and in this we’ve created our own maquiladora, making products and giving employment for women.⁹⁴

⁹³ ____ (2005), “Network Makes a Splash at the World Safety Congress,” *Maquiladora Health and Safety Support Network Newsletter*, October 30.

⁹⁴ ____ (2005), “David Bacon Speaks with Julia Quiñonez,” *KPFA, The Morning Show*, Berkeley, CA, May 4 (Broadcasted June 8).

This section is important to establishing why, even though the CFO's objectives and decision-making process may no longer be feminist (if they ever were), the CFO continues to be described as a women's or feminist organization.⁹⁵ Having such a strong woman as the leader of their organization portrays a certain image to the rest of the world, one which the CFO capitalizes on in the never-ending search for international donor funds. As we will see in section 5.2, she is also viewed as a strong leader at the local level by the members themselves.

5.1.2 The AFSC and AFL-CIO

At the time of the fieldwork in 2006 and 2007, the CFO had two major transnational partners, the AFSC and the AFL-CIO. Ricardo Hernandez of the AFSC spent 23 weeks in 2006 in Northern Mexico helping out with the CFO's organizing efforts, giving workshops, organizing meetings with Alcoa shareholders and preparing and translating fundraising proposals for the CFO. Julia Quiñonez's salary was also paid directly by the AFSC. Ben Davis, of the AFL-CIO, was also coming up from Mexico City to present workshops and to help out with the CFO four times a year, and he also provided some help with the fundraising submissions and with translating documents. In addition, the AFL-CIO was providing 40% of the operating budget of the CFO in 2006 (Julia Quiñonez, Interview #1). This section will look at the influence, or at least how the members of the CFO perceive the influence these organizations through their representatives, that these other organizations have on the CFO and on Julia Quiñonez.

⁹⁵ Although the CFO website was updated last in 2009, the last article that speaks of Julia Quiñonez as an expert was from 2005.

Through interviews and participant observation, it was evident that both of the men mentioned above had a significant influence on the CFO's strategies. When explaining her role in the CFO, Julia Quiñonez alluded to some of the roles played by Ricardo Hernandez and Ben Davis. As she explained:

My role has been to facilitate communications between the cities, to do a bit of everything: lead the groups, give training to the promotores, do reports, search for funds, which is a very important task in which we have the least amount of experience. We have a small committee to help look for funds because many of the organizations we approach for funds require proposals in English; therefore, this small committee has like three people other than me: Ricardo's office, Eric Meyers and Ben Davis, when we need to do proposals in English. When the proposals are in Spanish, I am practically the only one responsible.

Do these three people only translate or write the proposal themselves?

Sometimes, when there is no need for a proposal in Spanish, with the information they already have and the information available on our website, they write the proposal themselves. We give them permission as long as it is for proposals or projects that do not differ from the objectives and work plan of the CFO.

Time constraints, fundraising proposals needing to be written in English and an executive committee that no longer functions (see Chapter 3) all lead to a dependence on external help in applying for funding and disseminating the CFO image at a transnational level. This undoubtedly leads to some influence on the final message and strategies of the CFO. For example, Ricardo Hernandez was also responsible for updating the CFO website and writing many of the articles on the website and translating them into English. I was able to observe this first-hand as one of my duties during my field trip to Piedras Negras and Ciudad Acuña in 2006, in exchange for participating in CFO activities, was to translate some of the articles he had originally written in Spanish into English. These quotes from Julia Quiñonez also demonstrate a clear top-down decision-making process and the links between the need for funds and the

influence of transnational partners. Since obtaining funds are crucial to the organization's survival, Julia Quiñonez was forced by circumstances (crumbling structure and lack of executive council members with whom to consult — see Chapter 3) to effectively give carte blanche to three of her transnational partners to write the fundraising proposals. The decision of where to apply for funds and of how to portray the organization to the potential donors was done without consultation with the grassroots membership.

We also saw in Chapter 4 that Ricardo Hernandez came weeks before the Annual General Meeting of the CFO in 2006 to help Julia Quiñonez coordinate the meeting, as she felt there was no one within the CFO that could help her organize such a large endeavour. Ben Davis was also influential in the direction the CFO was taking in 2006; he strongly advocated for an independent union movement in the Alcoa plant in Ciudad Acuña and presented a workshop on union organizing to Alcoa workers just weeks before the AGM. The fact that the CFO annual meeting in 2006 was focused on selling the CFO to the United Steelworkers Union and on beginning to teach workers on how to form an independent union was not a coincidence. Ben Davis certainly had a vested interest in the creation of a strategic alliance between the CFO and the USW and, as mentioned in Chapter 4, he is now the international affairs director for the USW.

Ricardo Hernandez of the AFSC, as we saw in Chapter 3, has been very influential in some of the major decisions of the CFO. In fact, he is perceived to be the one who pushed the CFO into independence against the wishes of some of the long-time members, including Ed Krueger of the Comité de Apoyo, who is considered by most of the long-time members to be the founder of the CFO. The AFSC also provides Julia Quiñonez's salary, although she is not an employee of the

AFSC.⁹⁶ According to Julia Quiñonez, the AFSC provides the funds for her salary and she finds the funds for the CFO:

I, in principle, when I started the work of coordinadora, I said that if I have to find funds for myself, I don't want to do this work — I don't want to do this work because it is almost doing this work and finding your own salary, finding support. Because this work — I didn't start to do it for money, therefore that is when the AFSC said that I am not an employee of the AFSC. The AFSC said they saw everything that I do and that they wanted to guarantee me a certain stability, and thus they did guarantee me...and I said that it was fine if they helped to find me funds and I will find funds for the organization.

When asked about the influence of the AFSC on the decisions of the CFO, Patty offered this interesting analysis linking the AFSC with the person of Ricardo Hernandez:

I can't say the AFSC, because the project of the CFO, it is Ricardo who directs it. Ricardo is the director of the project, thus he only presents the work to his boss, who is Joyce [Joyce Miller of AFSC]. I know her and Mary and Ricardo and I was in meetings of the AFSC, but as I saw it, the way of doing things has changed a lot since Ricardo has been directing, because before him I don't think it was the ideas of the CFO to do things this way and now it is — the way of working is not an idea of the CFO, do you understand?

Yes, you are saying that the way of organizing things changed with Ricardo, that Ricardo changed the way things are organized in the CFO.

That is what I saw, in my way of seeing, of thinking. And I don't know if it is good for the organization because the organization did not know how to organize itself — did not know how to do a project. How you are going to work — how to find your own people that are going to donate money so that oneself. Possibly the intention has been to help more than anything. But it is very different helping and doing the work yourself; you doing it. I understand that you can come and tell me: "You can do it such and such a way." That is very different than: "Do it for me." You are doing it for me. I don't know if this has been for better or for worse. I don't know. (Interview #7)

In Patty's opinion, Ricardo Hernandez has had a lot of influence, and he often does things for them instead of helping them learn to do it themselves. She was also unsure of the value of his help. One the one hand, when they became independent, they did not know how to apply for

⁹⁶ No information was available concerning who paid the salary of Julia Quiñonez since the AFSC had backed away from its work with the CFO in 2010-2011.

funding and clearly they needed some help; however, she felt that there was a difference between helping someone learn and doing it for them. There is a clear paternalistic relationship in which Hernandez is helping the CFO by doing the work that should be done by the members themselves: he takes away their voice in the decision-making process by making the decisions for them. The irony is that he is in fact one of the obstacles to the grassroots decision-making process he promotes in the fundraising proposals he fills out on their behalf.

Juany, one of the CFO promotoras, provided a comparison of how things were with Ed Krueger and then with Ricardo Hernandez, which seems to emphasize what Patty said about Ricardo doing things for them instead of teaching them so they could do it themselves. However, Juany, contrary to Patty, appreciated this help as she felt unprepared to write policies and mission statements for their independent maquiladora, Dignidad y Justicia:

Well, it's like I told you, when we were with Beto [Ed Krueger], I know him as Beto, it was like I told you, we worked under the table. There wasn't an office and then when we started with Ricardo, it started to get bigger, more with the office, from having an office to doing things publicly...Well, don Beto tried with Julia and, well, the same it was very good but it wasn't the same as Ricardo. Yes, the señor was very trustful and a very good person, but it wasn't like with Ricardo where we say, "Come Ricardo and support us," like with the maquiladora, he is also giving a lot of support. The project of the maquiladora, he is also giving a lot of support. I had to write the criteria, therefore, I didn't know how to and I didn't know anything. I have always worked in a maquiladora but it isn't the same as...I am in sewing and always focusing on production and he told me, it's this way and you have to do the policies and the mission and everything. (Interview #2)

Javier also spoke positively about Ricardo Hernandez's influence when asked what he knows of the AFSC. He explained: "Well, we know it through Ricardo Hernandez, who is a companero that gives a lot of support to the organization" (Interview #4). When asked what Ricardo's role was within the CFO, he stated:

Well, I think that the last times we were talking with him and in meetings, I believe that his role is to teach us to understand many things, many things that as workers we don't understand. And since he represents the group of owners, the group of shareholders of Alcoa, he gives a lot of support coordinating meetings with executives and shareholders and he has done a good job. In reality, his work is to coordinate all of these types of things. (Interview #4)

Maria Elena from Acuña explained that in the past, the representative from the AFSC, Phoebe, would only come once a year to the annual meetings representing the AFSC, but that now that it is Ricardo Hernandez, he comes "continuously. He comes, yes, all year...because he gives support. He gives support right now with the talks with the shareholders of Alcoa. Ricardo has many ideas he shares with Julia" (Interview #3). Clearly, because of the independence of the CFO that Ricardo Hernandez pushed so hard for, the AFSC has been even more involved in the day-to-day organizing of the CFO and its decision-making process. The irony is that the AFSC accused Ed Krueger and the Comité de Apoyo of taking away the power of the grassroots membership to make its own decisions during the pre-independence period. Ed Krueger's role seems to have been divided between Julia Quiñonez and Ricardo Hernandez and therefore the result did not give more of a voice to the grassroots members. The replacement of Krueger's role by Julia Quiñonez and Ricardo Hernandez did, however, result in a stronger transnational presence and more transnational partnerships for the CFO.

5.1.3 Julia Quiñonez is the CFO: The target of slander by the maquiladoras and the CTM union

Being the face of the CFO is not always a positive thing. As Quiñonez herself explained it, there is a flip side to being the face of the CFO. She is often attacked personally by those who oppose what the CFO is doing, mostly by associations that represent the maquiladoras in Northern Mexico and by the large union organizations such as CTM and CROC that are not always happy with the work done by the CFO to promote independent unions in the maquiladoras (2006b). Unfortunately, this also has negative effects on the recruitment of new members as fear of losing their jobs is one of the major deterrents to mobilizing workers in the maquiladoras (as we saw in Chapter 1). As we will see here, it takes courage and strong leadership abilities to stand up to the pressures from the large unions, which Julia Quiñonez displays on a regular basis. Her leadership also inspires many of the CFO members to follow her example, to stand up to the unions and think of their fellow co-workers even though the consequences can be harsh: being blacklisted.

On the CFO website, under the section “CFO in the Media,” we can find an article which was published in October 2000 in the weekly journal *Masiosare, La Jornada*, which carries the byline “By the Comité Fronterizo de Obreras (CFO – Border Committee of Women Workers)” (CFO 2000). This article seeks to counter the slander that the CFO has been subjected to by the CTM, Mexico’s largest and, in their opinion, highly corrupt union. Its intention is to offer the point of view from the CFO concerning all of the newspaper articles and press conferences that spoke against the CFO. The article summarizes the accusations against the CFO by the CTM:

According to local leaders of the CTM in Coahuila, “the troublemakers are U.S. unions who want the maquiladoras to leave Mexico.” But union officials at the border who accuse maquiladora organizers of selling out their country seem oblivious of the fact that the CTM and the AFL-CIO signed a 1998 accord pledging to “facilitate cross-

border contacts between U.S. and Mexican unions in specific sectors, in coordination with their respective national confederations, for the purpose of strengthening union representation and the enforcement of workers' rights, with a focus on Mexican nationals working in the United States and workers employed in the Mexican maquiladoras. (CFO 2000)

Through pamphlets distributed to workers and even using the local newspapers, the CTM and the maquiladoras seek to discredit the person of Julia Quiñonez in the hopes that it will hinder recruitment into the CFO, as they do not want the workers learning about their labour rights. As the third wave in the globalization debate (see Chapter 2 and Bruff 2005) and critical theory in IR teach us, it is the perceived reality and the reaction to that reality that is important. Although the level of union corruption is not agreed upon by everyone (see Quintero Ramirez 2004), the CFO, as an organization, and its members (see later examples in this chapter and in Chapters 3 and 4) perceive it to be corrupt and one of the major reasons for which they are organizing. Huesca states that “the CFO has deliberately avoided working with unions because of repeated experiences — both personal and indirect — where workers have been threatened or fired by such organizations” (2006: 144). This could in part explain why they are seeking to establish independent unions in their maquiladoras — unions they feel would better represent them and would fight to have their labour rights respected.

Many of my interviews, such as my interview with Javier, give an overview of some of the slander Julia Quiñonez has had to endure. She has had to endure this treatment since the CFO became independent and she became the face of the organization in 1998. For example, she was accused of selling out to U.S. unions that were sent to destabilize the workers and to force the relocation of the maquiladoras to other countries. As Javier explains, “there were campaigns against, to discredit, the CFO by the charro [corrupt] union, the CTM, who are the ones in

control. There has always been that, they have always seen us as a threat, as people who destabilize...yes, there have always been campaigns because they are always working, the promotores are always working and the organization is here and the charro union is always here” (Interview #4).

As we saw in the literature review regarding the changing nature of mobilizing for labour unions, due to the changes in globalization of production whereby capital is perceived to be more mobile than labour, this slander capitalizes on maquiladora workers fears. While it is the transnational corporation that moves its operations to cut production costs, the blame is transferred to the “agitators,” in this case embodied in the person of Julia Quiñonez. This slander serves the double purpose of taking away the blame from the CTM union who did not protect its workers (for example, by negotiating better working conditions for its members and better severances packages that would make it more costly for the transnational corporation to move its operations) and minimizing their competition for the workers’ allegiances by discrediting the only other labour organization in the area, one which helps the workers without requiring any union fees.

Another tactic the CTM union utilizes is co-optation of the most visible members of the CFO. Javier explained that as one of the leaders of the movement, to create an independent union in the Alcoa plant in Piedras Negras in 2002, he was first beat up by two individuals. When he didn’t back down, he was then offered a blank cheque by the company representatives to go away. And finally, he was offered a position within the CTM union. As he explained:

They offered me a cheque, not a blank cheque, but they told me that I could put the amount I wanted. [They told me] to go far away from the company and to leave the movement, that those revolutionary ideas that we had were not good. Therefore, [they said] that I should put the price and leave the movement in peace. That was

from the side of the company. From the side of the charro union, they offered me the position of secretary general of the same union. Therefore, on the one hand I did not want to sign the cheque they were giving me because I already had a commitment to the people that had confidence in me and in the other companeros. And the offer of the union to be part of it and become the secretary general and belong to the CTM, well neither was that adequate. I believe that I had already talked with the workers and already thought that the union was going to become independent, and it would not have been good for me or for the companeros if I would have let myself be corrupted by those people. (Interview #4)

Javier showed tremendous courage to have refused both the blank cheque and the position of honour in the large CTM union — a position that could be linked to his respect of Julia Quiñonez, the CFO and the workers he was representing as the leader of their independent union. As we saw in Chapter 4, this decision had very negative consequences for Javier, as he was fired from his role in the workers' movement and has been blacklisted from ever working in a maquiladora again. He however continued organizing workers through the CFO although he did have to leave his work as a promotore due to financial restraints.

Chave linked this campaign against the CFO and Julia Quiñonez to the decision of the CFO to become more visible:

Now the CFO, everyone knows it because all the companies know it, including the company where I am now, a while back they started giving us pamphlets that there was a woman named Julia Quiñonez and that she was putting herself in the company's business. [The pamphlet stated] that if she came to our house, that we shouldn't pay attention to her, that she was not helping us, only making it so that we would be fired from work, that she was making us get fired from work, that she wasn't helping us. (Interview #40)

Chave explained that the pamphlets were handed out to all of the maquiladora workers to not speak with Julia Quiñonez, and that the union, in this case the CROC, also tried to discredit the CFO at a union meeting:

Yes, and it was included also in a meeting that we had. It was with the delegate from CROC, and she also commented in a meeting that this senora Julia Quiñonez is only causing problems and is very problematic, that we shouldn't pay attention to her. (Interview #40)

Unfortunately, as Chave explained, this fear tactic does work and many maquiladora workers are then afraid to speak with any members of the CFO for fear of being associated with Julia Quiñonez. The company would then make their lives so miserable and pressure them to quit (rather than be fired) so they would not receive any severance packages. This is one of the reasons that many of the CFO members only talk with people they trust about their organization.

The CTM union did not only slander Julia Quiñonez in the newspapers and by distributing pamphlets but they also sent someone undercover to work as a secretary for the CFO. As Guadalupe explained it:

There was a secretary that worked in the office, and this secretary that was working in the CFO was being paid by people from Macoelmex. I don't know if it was the manager, I don't know if it was the sub-manager, but people from management wanted to investigate Julia: Why was Julia so interested in creating movements? (Interview #10)

Julia Quiñonez explained this same scenario:

Therefore, what happened with the CTM was that they felt they were losing their power and they started a campaign at the local level. And all of the secretary generals spoke in the media against the organization. They said they would come to throw us out of our offices, but everything was pure threats, and one day I had a workshop in a hotel and I had to sleep there because there was so much tension because they said they would go to my house or my office and take the things. And we always have open doors and many people have come in pretending to be workers, journalists, etc. And when that happened, that they took all of the information [from the computer, the secretary that was hired by the CTM] and went to the newspaper, the whole list of donors, from those who gave \$5 — the whole list was taken. And that's why we knew it couldn't be anyone other than the one who worked on the computer and who had access — well, the secretary. And we had a plan about what we were going to do in Alcoa, and it was published in the newspaper. (Interview #1)

However, as pointed out here, the CTM plan against the movement in Alcoa did not work. Nonetheless, this episode left her with less trust in her CFO colleagues: “but the workers won, they didn’t lose anything. Yes, it is difficult when in your own group, there are these types of people and there are times when you feel that you can’t confide in anyone” (Interview #1). This is one of the reasons she gives for not sharing all of the decisions with the members of the CFO, as it is sometimes difficult to know who can be trusted.

In another attempt to discredit the CFO, Julia Quiñonez explained that the CTM offered one of the CFO members money to denounce the CFO. She showed me a picture of the group from the first Alcoa workers’ movement in 2002 and pointed to one of the men and said:

The one who is standing next to me ended up denouncing the CFO to the newspapers, but it backfired because all of the community saw through it and did not believe them and after the leader of the CTM did not support them and did not give them work. Then, they wanted to return to the CFO, but we didn’t accept them. But don’t think we didn’t accept them because I said so. We had a meeting and I asked, “What do we do?” (Interview #1)

Maria Rosario, who was also offered money to denounce Julia and knew the man who accepted to do so, gives us a vivid account:

Look, when I, when we...when we did a work stoppage at a maquiladora is when Julia helped us a good deal. They put me on the blacklist. This blacklist is held by the charro [corrupt] leader from here, from Piedras Negras, whose name is Localio Hernandez. In that list many were there, including me, and we have never found any word, in fact that is why I am no longer working for a maquiladora, because they do not want me there. Why? Because they don’t give me work because it looks like I was going around with Julia. For three months, I went around looking for work and went to one place and another, and finally I said, “Tell me if I am going to find work, do not send me running around and around,” and he said: “Yes, I will give you work, but on one condition: tomorrow we will have a press conference and you will tell everyone that Julia Quiñonez is a liar, that Julia Quiñonez is a thief, that Julia Quiñonez...that people should not believe in Julia Quiñonez, that to you this happened, that Julia Quiñonez led you there, to your

destruction.” He invited me to do this. And I said you will give me work if I do that. “Yes.” Well, no!

And who was the one who asked you to do this?

Localio Hernandez, Localio Hernandez. I said no, and thank you. And I never returned to ask for work. That same month, there was a press conference published in the papers where a man that went to the CFO with us, who was from another maquiladora that had had problems, from Arneses [Alcoa], from Acuña, made a press release saying that he didn't believe in Julia Quiñonez, that he didn't believe in anyone of these people from the CFO. Therefore, I spoke. I said that the people that said those things, to not believe them. [I said] that this man, whose name is Carlos, that it was something done by Localio, because to me, Maria Rosario...[she gave her full name], they offered me, what he is doing. They offered me the same thing, and thank God I did not succumb. And he did. He fell like a dog with his legs cut and he never went to see Julia again because he was ashamed, and that is logical because if I had done what he did I would never have spoken to Julia again And this senior, after he did that, they treated him badly and I felt that he didn't want to. He did [succumb], but he didn't want to. With me they didn't, but they did it with the other companeros. (Interview #42)

As these quotes show, the CTM union, especially in Piedras Negras where the CFO office is located, is clearly threatened by the mobilizing efforts undertaken by the CFO. The union resorted to threats, slander of its leader and bribery of its members, all in an effort to discredit the organization which is competing with it for the membership base. As we saw in Chapter 1, union corruption is common in Mexico's Northern Border Region, and maquiladoras often have protection contracts with the CTM (or CROC) union, unions that then receive membership dues from all of the maquiladora employees. It is therefore not surprising that they would be against any organization that is trying to teach these workers about their rights. This is especially pertinent since the CFO has been focusing on creating an independent union in Alcoa maquiladoras and thus competing directly with the CTM for membership dues. The difficulties in mobilizing maquiladora workers are further exacerbated when this mobilizing is done in order to create an independent union. A strong leadership, as well as brave members such as

Javier and Maria-Rosario, is required in order to counter this slander and to encourage mobilizing because of, and not despite, union corruption.

5.2 The pressures of being the leader of a grassroots organization

As the CFO was created to serve the function of the “below” category in “globalization from below,” it is important to look at how the grassroots base exerts some influence on its coordinator, Julia Quiñonez. The fact that Julia is so charismatic can often be a double-edged sword. Many CFO members, new members and long-time members alike, associate the CFO with the person of Julia Quiñonez, and they fail to participate in different workshops and even the annual meeting unless they receive a personal invitation from her. They view her as a friend and want the friendship to be reciprocated by her visiting with them and extending invitations. Due to her other responsibilities, this is not always possible and it causes tensions when she seems to favour some workers over others. On the other hand, because many associate the CFO with the person of Julia, they do not feel they have the right to criticize or to even to ask questions about funding or about the direction of the CFO, such as major decisions like associating with the Steelworkers Union.

Ofelia mentioned that at the beginning she wasn't sure about participating in the CFO. She had heard of Julia Quiñonez but did not know what the CFO was. Once, someone told her that “Julia is the CFO.” She said, “Okay,” and began to meet with the CFO (Interview #23). Margerito (Interview #41), Maria Rosario (Interview #42) and Chave (Interview #40) also identify the CFO with Julia Quiñonez. When explaining how things changed since the CFO registered as an independent organization and opened their office in Piedras Negras, Chave stated:

Well, I can say that before, yes, it was easier because we were very few and Julia gave us more attention. Therefore, Julia paid us more attention in that almost constantly visited us, visited us. But since now we are more, well, she has not visited as much because she visits all of those that go; therefore yes, yes, it has changed a bit.

For you, the CFO is Julia?

Yes. For me, yes. Since it is more with her, it is with her that I identify most. (Interview #40)

This quote symbolizes a problem with moving from working as a grassroots organizer to working as the coordinator of the organization. While Julia Quiñonez worked as a promotora for many years, she had more time to go and talk with the workers on a regular basis. This was in fact her role in the organization while she was a promotora. When she became the coordinator for the whole organization, the demands on her time increased exponentially, and she could no longer visit as regularly with long-time members who had become accustomed to these talks and associated her with the CFO. Because she came from the grassroots base, some of the workers expected her to continue her role as a grassroots organizer. A lack of understanding of the role she plays within the organization, and a lack of knowledge of the role the organization plays (other than at a local level), fuels this dissatisfaction with what they perceive to be her ignoring them.

Patty, when she spoke about how the decisions are made by Julia in conjunction with Ricardo, also emphasized this point. She explained that Julia used to visit the colonias more and that this led to a lot of workers losing interest in the CFO. As a charismatic leader, Julia was often sought out by the workers who wanted to associate with her. When she no longer had the time to devote to the long-time members because she had to focus on the transnational aspect of the organization or on the new members since they worked for Alcoa and were important to their

future funding efforts, she ended up alienating the members who associated the CFO with her.

Patty explained this:

I think that before [the CFO became an independent organization] Julia was different because she did not feel as independent, as free to make decisions. Before, it was the workers that made decisions. Before, Julia never made a decision without consulting with the workers. The workers were the ones that decided if they made a call, if they decided to go to such and such a city, if they decided to create a movement, the decision was up to the workers. When the CFO went directly to the AFSC, directly, things changed a lot. They changed a lot: now, they do not consult the workers, they do not take them into account, the workers. Now the decisions are made by only Julia and Ricardo. They no longer consult the workers and I'm going to tell you that I am talking to you about six years ago when the CFO still had a lot of people, there were plenty of people. And the workers, that is what they would like, that they take them into account. When they started to look, when there was a meeting, when there was a delegation, when they had to make a trip, that is the only time they looked for them and now they don't visit them. **Julia, before, used to visit the colonias herself, since then, no. She stopped going on visits to the colonias and the workers lost a lot of interest in this [the CFO] because before there was a lot of colonia work, colonia labour. And since she stopped doing all of that, everything ended.** And I can tell you that you can be here when there is no event and it is a rare day that a worker comes by. You understand? Unless they convoke them, that they go look for them, that they request that they come by. (Interview #7, author's emphasis)

This creates a definite problem as many of the grassroots members associate their participation in the CFO meetings with their friendship with Julia. As a leader of the organization (and no longer a promotora), she does not have the time to visit with each individual member of the CFO on a regular basis. Unfortunately, some view this lack of time as a rebuff and think she is looking down on them, which makes them want to participate even less, and it changes the dynamics of the organization as more and more new members are participating and fewer long-time members chose to do so.

Guadalupe, a promotora for many years, became disillusioned with the CFO (after being convinced by the person working undercover for Alcoa), much to the detriment of the CFO local organizing efforts. When asked if the movement Julia Quiñonez was accused of creating was against Macoelmex, Guadalupe answered:

Yes. Why? If they were paying her to destabilize? Who paid her? What interest did she have? I think that if there is no work, it is worse than having little. I see things more clearly now. Before I would say: "Ah no, to me they are going to pay me because my labour is of quality." I know...but if there isn't any work? What use is it if I work really well, if there isn't any work? If the factories are not here or aren't full? Now the workers think like I do. We prefer that there be work, although it is little, not little what they pay, but not as before. Before it was by production and one could take home up to more than a supervisor or an engineer. I earned more than an engineer. (Interview #10)

Rather than questioning why the companies no longer paid by production as they did before and why the salaries in the maquiladoras have continued to diminish, Guadalupe was convinced that it was better to accept a little less than for the companies to go away and leave them without any jobs. She had become disillusioned with the CFO and started believing some of the things the unions were saying about Julia Quiñonez. She explained:

Do you [know] why people are disillusioned? Because they see that the Julia wanted to create movements and, once they achieved the goal, the workers get fired and they stay fired. They do not get reinstated. They make claims, sometimes they win, sometimes no. There were entire families that were left without work. I'm referring to the fact that the mother and the father worked and to say one or two children and they were left without work. These people stayed very disillusioned with Julia, very disappointed...From Macoelmex. They were from Macoelmex, yes. They had to leave here because they could no longer find work. And those people, well the people who stayed realized, the ones who created the movement and stayed, that Julia had achieved what she wanted: to make people talk about the CFO, to create movements, to make the union exercise caution. But what is the objective I think of all of that? To create movements and support the worker because there were donations for the fired workers, but to some they did not give them anything and to others, yes. (Interview #10)

As I mentioned in the previous section, members like Javier and Maria-Rosario showed tremendous courage in resisting the offers of employment, and even high positions within the unions, if they chose to slander Julia Quiñonez and the CFO. They paid dearly by losing their jobs and being blacklisted. This is a consequence of being visible by mobilizing workers, and the CFO cannot offer these fired workers any guarantees or financial security other than limited donations they receive for the fired workers. This does lead to some of these fired workers becoming disenchanted with the CFO as they perhaps did not understand the possible consequences of their participation in the organization, especially when they mobilize other co-workers. This misunderstanding about the CFO leads them to leave the organization.

Other reasons for leaving the CFO were given by one long-time member who asked to remain anonymous for this part of the interview. She explained that she had left the organization because of infighting between the members in her city. She feels that Julia Quiñonez is a good person, but others in the organization became jealous of her relationship with Julia and created problems. She worked as a promotora and was always able to arrange meetings with workers. She felt that others were jealous because they had a harder time recruiting than she did and the others aggressively sought to create a rift between her and Julia. This active member and active recruiter ended up leaving the CFO and participating in another organization because, above all, she wanted to help the workers of the maquiladoras. This created even more problems for her with the CFO as they accused her of taking the workers she had mobilized with her to the new organization.

Other examples of people leaving relate to problems between the promotoras and Julia herself. For example, in the case of Maria-Elena Garcia (Interview #52), whose story we saw in Chapter 3, personal issues between herself and Julia led her to leave the organization and, according to her and Francisca (Interview #57), since then, the organizing efforts have slowly fallen apart in that city. Francisca explained that in Reynosa, the CFO was Maria-Elena and not Julia; she explained that people associated the CFO with the person of Maria-Elena because she was the one they called (and still do, although she is no longer with the CFO) at 2 am when they had a problem (Maria-Elena also mentioned this, Interview #52).

As we saw in Chapter 3, regarding the factions in Ciudad Acuña and as noted above, Julia Quiñonez often finds herself in the role of mediating between ideas that members of the CFO have ideas about where the organization should be heading and what each person should be doing, since many of them strongly disagree. Managing conflicts is the key to reaching a consensus between the regions and between different groups in each region. Ana, the CFO moderator for many years, summarized some of the difficulties Julia Quiñonez has had to deal with in regards to very strong personalities within the CFO. Ana explained:

It is difficult. It is difficult because it is not easy working in teams. When I learned to be a leader, everyone defended their positions, their ideas; therefore, yes it is something difficult. But it is something where I learned many things, because you know how to better yourself. CFO gives you a lot, gives a lot to the workers and sometimes they give them so much...that the workers are confused about the support of the CFO.

They are confused how?

They [CFO] have confused them. When a worker feels he or she has so much support from the CFO after, he or she feels that he or she can demand and that the CFO has to give, but always through the standards. The CFO for me has been a good experience that has given me many things, like I told you, they gave the travel experience, the learning experience, the experience to see what are the situations, that although one complains regarding their work here, there are other parts that are worse and that. Yes, it is possible

to make changes. Because with the work strategies developed in the CFO, we have been able to change things in the factories. We, as workers inside the factory, have made many changes. And when someone says it is not worth it, well, it is worth it! It is worth it to try to learn and work in teams. That sometimes we have different ideas, different characters, and it is a very difficult position that Julia has after all. Because it is not easy to direct the organization; it is not easy to direct people with such strong ideas, leaders. (Ana, Interview #8)

We see in this section some of difficulties in leading a grassroots organization; how trying to be true to the grassroots base yet still play a leadership role is often a thankless task and not one many would want to take on. Although many have criticized her leadership role and a few have left the organization because of her perceived failures as a leader, it must be noted that none of the interviewees, current and ex-CFO members, have expressed an interest or mentioned anyone else expressing an interest in replacing Julia Quiñonez as the leader of the CFO. Rather than trying to resolve conflicts between groups, those who are dissatisfied with the internal strife in the organization leave and create their own group (for example, Maria-Elena Garcia, Interview #52 and Rafaela, Interview #46, who both started their own workers' rights organizations in Reynosa and Matamoros, respectively).

5.3 The high pressure system from above meets the low pressure system from below to create the perfect storm

Julia Quiñonez has had to make some difficult decisions as the coordinator of the CFO. Without funding, her organization would cease to exist because contrary to unions, the CFO does not require its members to pay a membership due and is thus not self sufficient when it comes to financing. However, without its grassroots base, the CFO no longer has any reason to exist;

therefore, pleasing the grassroots base is also important. As we have seen, this is most often done through personal interaction with many of the grassroots members. The transnational partnerships and donors do play a non-negligible role in determining the strategies of the CFO, be it directly or indirectly, which is taking away from the role of the grassroots base. 2006 represented a crisis point in the CFO history, or the perfect storm moment, and Julia Quiñonez had difficult choices to make to try to steer the organization out of the storm, which involved, unfortunately, the loss of some of the membership base. We have seen in the previous chapters how Julia Quiñonez herself bemoaned the lack of human resources or people she trusted to help her do the work of coordinating the CFO. And for that reason, she has had to depend on Ricardo Hernandez to help her with things that should be done by the no longer existing executive council. She spoke of trying to fix squabbles between different groups which led to problems in the different cities (for example in Ciudad Acuña, as we saw in Chapter 3), and she spoke of how the CFO no longer has much of a presence in any city other than Piedras Negras and Ciudad Acuña. She explained how she often had to hold people's hands, how she did not always have the time to visit with each of them and to consult them on every decision. In order to get a real sense of how she felt (they were at a crisis in 2006), it is best to quote directly some of the sections from her interview:

How do you verify the amount of work that each promotora does?

That is a good question because in principle the work is of the missionary type, and cannot be evaluated because the workers can talk or not, can talk about their membership in the organisation at the level that is convenient for them. Therefore, there was the annual meetings, but the promotores did not count. However, more and more, the foundations that give money want to know numbers: how many people are we talking to, how many are we helping, and since three years ago, we started asking the promotores to register the numbers of contacts, a narrative report that explains what they did, for each city there is a binder. But this costs us a lot, because there was not a culture of reporting and now that we ask them to report back, they started thinking that we are doubting them, that we think they are not working and we had many problems because of this with the

promotores. And also they started doing the minimum they could, and a promotora in another city can work or not work because there is no supervisor above her; therefore these problems do exist. And we don't say anything; they are very quiet, but when we ask them for reports because we also have to report to the people who support us and this isn't always accepted by the promotoras, and we need to make them understand that it is part of the obligation of the work...

Who is in this executive council?

Right now, it isn't working, but the structure we had in the past is the coordinadora, the promotores, therefore in the cities there were local committees and then from the local committees, one or two representatives from each city, for example the ones in Reynosa would decide who would be on the council and the council would meet two or three times a year. And other decisions like approving the budget were made in the meetings of the council.

And why doesn't it exist now?

Because they left.

All of the people left?

No, not all, for example, Atanacio that you saw said "I am from the council," he presented himself as from the council; therefore Atanacio, Ana, from here.

Yes, it is Ana that spoke to me of the local committees.

She was part of the council, but then sometimes in the same group...it's that sometimes it is things that you cannot control. Ana said that the people from Reynosa were coming but only to eat, only to sleep, and they weren't making any decisions. And how do you do it. They are the council, they are volunteer companeros that don't receive a pay.

Oh, you don't pay them?

No, because they are workers. Well Ana did work for a time in the office but the council is not remunerated. Therefore, they started to leave, first her, and they left.

And you didn't replace the ones who left?

No, because you have to do the structure over once more. Right now the local committees do not exist. The structure does not exist. Therefore, right now we are in a very difficult moment because on the one side the requests...I feel that we are at the bottom of the barrel, many requests from the workers, from the other cities, many requests from people from the United States that want to help, that want... and here in the bottom of the barrel. Before, at least we were three or four people and now I feel that I am with Belia [the CFO secretary], that there [aren't] many people on whom you can count. And not because I

don't want to, because there are a few that although I want, I can't coordinate and to get involved in the functioning of the structure, well you have to dedicate time to the structure, you have to train them, you have to form them, you have to give them information. I have sometimes felt worn out...We also had a commission, an international commission, whatever person that came from the United States had to be authorized by this commission. You realize that people would call the office and would say: We would like to visit. Therefore, it was a bureaucracy because I would go and see Ana, and had to go talk to Atanacio and say, well Cindy would like to come, she is a student from Canada and she would like to come to stay a month here. What do you think? "No, well tell Cindy that the council will evaluate and to send something in writing." I was all of a sudden I was like...because I tried it, that the structure would function but they don't have e-mails, they don't use computers, therefore everything is verbal and I transcribed everything, what one said, what the other said. What is the benefit? There are things that yes are useful and that we have to look [at], but there are others that really [are] giving power to people that do not use the power well. Because...they feel that they deserve it or that they feel that I don't have to be like their servant, sometimes I felt that way...coming and going giving information on all sides, but if something happens, if you didn't say something [you'll hear back] "Well, you didn't tell me that." It's almost like a jest (or joke), the function of trying to communicate with everyone. It is very difficult...

My next question is that the focus of the CFO seems to be Macoelmex of Alcoa and I was wondering if this is normal for the CFO to focus on one company and then change focus, because the annual meeting seemed to consist mostly of workers from Macoelmex from both Piedras and Acuña and there was not much about workers from other companies and it seems to me that it is a strategy of the CFO and could you talk a bit more about this strategy?

Yes, it's that the organization has always been very large, very inclusive and we helped workers from all of the maquiladoras and when there was a problem we would go running and how could we help this way, then there was a problem in another maquiladoras and we would go and support them and all of a sudden we weren't doing much more than that, and since two year ago, we decided...well actually since 2002 when many workers were layed off in Alcoa, we decided that since we have but few human resources, and finances, we decided to take advantage of these resources and focus on certain companies and we did an investigation and in each city there is a focus, for example in Reynosa, the focus is Delphi and... and we have in meetings with workers from Emmerson and Black and Decker, but the focus is...And this is the same here, here we decided the focus would be ALCOA and LEAR because of all the experience we have had, this is not to say that we are not interested in workers from other companies, but instead of dispersing ourselves, we are focusing our forces on these companies.

It's that you don't have many promotoras now, and it seems that they are going...

And everything is always changing because we are looking at if we want to have a few resources in Laredo or in Juarez instead of concentrating in one city because this is always going on, at the best we need to see how to.

Are the Steelworkers Union giving money to the CFO?

No, not at this time

But, they are interested in the Alcoa workers?

Right now, no. Yes, we would like them to, but it is their decision. Up til now, we have been attacked for receiving funds from American unions without receiving any, but now, yes we are looking to receive funds because if Steelworker supports a campaign, it is going to support it with resources and if they decided to support the workers in Acuña, we are going to need two promotoras, we are going to need all of them that are there, 10 or 15 organizers, therefore those are the plans for the future

So you would like funds from Steelworkers to pay for 10-15 organizers to get workers involved?

Yes, but that is not for now, that is a plan for the future and that was the reason for the visit from the Steelworkers and before we didn't want to receive funds, but why not?

And when was the decision made to change the focus, was it done at an annual meeting?

Yes, it was around three years ago when we decided that.

It's that at the annual meeting there were many new people that did not understand everything about the CFO, it's not a critique, but it seemed that the decisions were made by new people.

What happened was that this meeting was different and you saw that things changed, we did not talk much about plans, and we are going to have to do it in each city. Usually, in the annual meeting, we cover at a minimum the basic things because the details we cover in each city and this time we saw that there wasn't...and precisely because we knew that there would be many new people.

So this wasn't normal, because the decision-making process seemed very quick.

Yes, but for Acuña, they have been discussing this for two or three years, so it isn't new and here in Piedras neither to work with Alcoa workers, but I do think it is necessary to explain more in each city as a group and to see what they want to focus on and then we will develop the activities and the work.

As we can see through these excerpts, Julia herself confirms the crisis the CFO was facing in 2006. Unable to make the membership of the organization understand the changing needs of the organization due to changes in donor funding, and unable to obtain the donor funding to continue the important work of the CFO without the work of the promotoras and the help of the executive council, she has had to turn for more and more help from her transnational partner, Ricardo Hernandez of the AFSC. There does not seem to be an easy solution to this crisis. The changing context of mobilizing, for example the gendered nature of maquiladora work, has changed and there are more and more men in the workforce and, as a consequence, in the CFO membership. The ability to mobilize workers whose jobs are even more precarious than in the past and who are therefore more afraid to mobilize than they were in the past is that much more difficult due to the very real fear of being fired and blacklisted from ever working in a maquiladora again. And for those workers who are willing to participate in the CFO, their active participation has become more and more limited as they have even less free time to meet with CFO promotoras or participate in important meetings such as the Annual General Meeting due to forced overtime and variable shifts because of the just-in-time production demands. The changing nature of globalization has also changed the nature of the response to globalization, particularly labour's response to globalization. Due to the move towards global unions, the USW has taken a particular interest in the CFO in order to achieve its goal of a global union of Alcoa workers. Given all of these factors, Julia Quiñonez did not have many options available to her if she wanted her organization to survive the perfect storm it was facing. We know because of USW articles that she chose to push forward in the direction of the USW and the creation of an independent union in the Ciudad Acuña plants. Unfortunately, we also know that there were some more choppy waters ahead of them, due to losing their partnership with the AFSC in 2010

and the Alcoa maquiladoras being bought out by a Finnish company in 2012 (AFL-CIO 2012b) and which decided to negotiate with the CTM union instead of the independent union that the CFO, with the USW, had helped establish in 2009.

It is clear that the CFO is no longer a women's group if it ever was completely. With the incorporation of more and more men into the CFO membership and the active search for new members that work at maquiladora plants that generally employ more men than women such as the Alcoa plants, it is not difficult to predict that the CFO membership will shift towards having more men than women, although since it does not count its members, we can never ascertain this for a fact. The CFO has foregone its objectives of being a women's organization whose priority was to improve the lives of women, to being a general workers' organization which has a larger male than female membership in order to obtain international funding from large unions like the Steelworkers Union. The pressure to and need to solidify transnational alliances such as the one with the Steelworkers Union has altered the gender balance within the CFO, which in turn has made it move away from its original objectives of empowering women from the ground up, resulting in a loss of its grassroots base.

This organization is much more complex than how it is usually described and can only be discerned when we examine all levels of organizing: the micro, the meso and the macro. The CFO is a moveable object that is enmeshed in the processes of globalization, gender relations and transnational organizing and as such cannot be understood without an understanding of these processes. A lack of resources, both financial and human resources in the form of promotores, has forced the CFO to rethink its strategies. As it no longer has the people (promotores) available

for a variety of reasons, some due to constraints from above related to funding, some due to internal struggles within the organization, the CFO has to refocus on what can be done.

As we saw throughout the thesis, the CFO has had to face many difficulties related to obtaining international donor funds and this has greatly affected the decision making at the local level. We also saw through the analysis of the local level the power dynamics at play in the CFO. Among other power relationships, the focusing on the local allows us a better understanding of the relationship between the CFO and the AFSC which has more than a collegial association. As Julia Quiñonez herself has stated, it is very difficult to make decisions always in consultation with the workers. As Bickham Mendez and Wolf explain:

Tensions exist between feminist principles of non-centralist, participatory decision-making on the one hand, and organizational efficiency on the other. While more collectivist-oriented organizations may sacrifice certain goals in stressing collective decision-making, more 'bureaucratic' organizations run the risk of being coopted or compromising feminist principles of egalitarianism and collective leadership. (2001: 726)

This thesis suggests that the CFO has compromised its feminist principles of egalitarianism and collective leadership. This was in part due to decisions made by their leadership. However, as I have emphasized throughout this thesis, we cannot study the CFO in a void, the context must be understood in order to better understand the choices available to an organization of women (and men) maquiladora workers in Mexico's Northern Border Region. Because of the changing gender composition in the maquiladora workforce and by extension of the CFO membership, and because transnational labour organizing, with whom the CFO is partnering, is more and more focused on combating the forces of globalization from a transnational perspective, women's voices and the local level get lost in the shuffle. As this case study suggests, given all the

obstacles and difficulties relating to organizing women maquiladora workers from the ground up, it is nearly impossible for an organization to sustain itself as a women-only, grassroots organization in the current manifestations of globalization and gender relations in Mexico's Northern Border Region. It is in fact remarkable that the CFO was able to maintain its focus (or at least its portrayed image) on women's organizing for as long as it did.

CONCLUSION

The objective of this thesis was to give a micro-level analysis of labour and women's organizing through the study of one organization, the Comité Fronterizo de Obrer@s. Through this journey into the complexities of the CFO's history, we have gained insights into the intricacies of local organizing and transnational networking in the context of globalization. This thesis suggests that contrary to popular belief, the CFO is not a grassroots women's organization that was created from the ground up and that is fighting "globalization from above" with "globalization from below." Defining the CFO is a much more complex undertaking, one that needs to consider all of the nuances of organizing in the specific context of the maquiladoras in Mexico's Northern Border Region and that needs to take into consideration the influence that is felt from "above" by the transnational advocacy networks and transnational labour movements in the "globalization from below category" of mobilizing. Through a dialectical approach and looking at how the perception of globalization influences the strategies organizations use in their fight against or within the context of globalization, and finally, through field research and feminist-inspired research methods, we looked at an underdeveloped aspect of IR studies, the intricacies of local-global linkages. Although some IR theories such as neo-Gramscian theory are integral in the globalization from below debate, they are limited when it comes to explaining an organization such as the CFO within this category of "globalization from below". One important drawback of Neo-Gramscian theory for the purposes of this thesis is that it does not address the top-down influence from transnational organizations or donor agencies within the "globalization from below" category.

The “top-down” and “bottom-up” approach developed by Cox definitely helps elucidate our understanding of civil society organizations that are trying to form a counter-hegemony, i.e., the alter-globalization and global justice movements, the response from civil society often referred to as “globalization from below” in response to “globalization from above” of transnational capitalism. However, we are still unable to answer the questions posed at the beginning of this thesis: What are the connections between local and transnational organizations that are seeking to resist “globalization from above” with “globalization from below”? Are these equal partnerships or do the pressures and constraints imposed by the transnational organizations that provide the necessary funds for the receiving-end activists constitute another form of “globalization from above”? And, finally, how do these pressures or constraints affect the local grassroots aspect of organizing? Co-optation of grassroots organizations does happen, although not usually from state or corporate interests, but rather from within other civil society organizations such as international donors and other transnational organizations that have their own agendas which might not coincide with the CFO’s. Neo-Gramscian theory does include local community organizing; however, local organizations are only included insofar as they form part of a larger group that makes up the global civil society whose objective is to form an alternative world order.

As we saw in Chapter 1, maquiladoras in Northern Mexico are seen as globalization’s ground zero. Maquiladoras are not just another type of factory; they were created for a very specific reason and play an integral role in the globalization of production. As well, they are affected by global factors such as economic crises and economic booms, by trade agreements such as GATT and NAFTA and by specific characteristics of Mexican labour relations and gender relations. It

was women who were first propelled into these new jobs as a cheap and docile workforce, one that was less likely to mobilize. The types of jobs in the maquiladoras have changed from low-skilled to more technical jobs that favour men over women. Men have since joined the maquiladora workforce in greater numbers and this in turn affects mobilizing of the workers. Mobilizing was considered by many to be nearly impossible due to the double-workday for most of the women workers and the gender-based division in the industrial working class that discouraged mobilizing across gender lines (Tiano 1994). However, on-the-ground research shows that in fact, for many men, this has not been an issue and they are joining the CFO in greater numbers, which has affected the gendered composition of the organization and its focus.

Mobilizing maquiladora workers is also considered to be a dangerous endeavour, mostly for the workers themselves, as many can and do get fired or put on blacklists for participating in any movement of workers. Unions in the maquiladoras are often “submissive” unions or “company” unions that make use of “protection contracts,” set up between the company and a union without the workers’ knowledge, which, in effect, prevent representative unions from setting up. When the unions are in fact more traditional unions, such as in the case of the CTM union in Matamoros, the workers fare slightly better. However, they don’t always have free reign to elect their union leaders, as we saw in the example of the Alcoa workers in Piedras Negras who were fired for trying to develop an independent union in their maquiladora in 2002.

Organizing maquiladora workers is therefore not an easy task. The mobilizing of women maquiladora workers, especially women who were not known to mobilize, who were in fact hired over men due to their lack of mobilization potential, is especially remarkable. As we saw in

Chapter 3, the CFO owes its very beginnings to the efforts of a few well-intentioned members of the AFSC who learned about the horrible conditions in the maquiladoras and wanted to find a way to help these workers. The irony is that an organization that self-described and was described by many, including academic sources, as a community-based grassroots women's organization was not in fact created from the grassroots at all; rather, it was created from the top-down by well-intentioned transnational advocacy networks. We also saw in Chapter 3 that we could describe the CFO as a grassroots women's organization within the context of globalization in the late 1970s to early 1990s, the period from its inception to its independence. However, we have to nuance this answer by explaining that this "grassroots" women's organizing was done with the help of some larger TAN organizations such as the AFSC and Comité de Apoyo and, at the outset, SEDEPAC that wanted to help out these "victims" of globalization. There was clear talk of fighting "globalization from above" with "globalization from below," and since no organization of maquiladora workers existed in the 1970s, the tripartite alliance of AFSC, the Comité de Apoyo and SEDEPAC created one.

At the local level, the AFSC, SEDEPAC and the Comité de Apoyo were attempting to raise the consciousness of women maquiladora workers so that they would become aware of their rights under the Mexican Federal Labour Law, which is a very progressive law although not often applied. At the transnational level, the first-hand accounts from the maquiladora workers served as a great source of information and legitimization for these TANs in their advocacy work against sweatshops on the global assembly line.

Neo-Gramscian theory teaches us that context is important if we want to understand the reality of a concept. In trying to understand what the CFO is, what motivates its members throughout its history, we need to adopt a dialectical approach. Through this approach we can see that the 1984 strike in the Zenith maquiladora in Reynosa and the repression that followed served to symbolize the dangers many maquiladora workers associated with mobilizing in order to defend their rights. The archival documents tell us that the tripartite structure of SEDEPAC, AFSC and Comité de Apoyo disagreed on the danger Ed Krueger faced if he continued with his organizational efforts. However, they all agreed on the dangers faced by the workers themselves. This actual danger or perception of danger is important, since as we saw in the theoretical discussion on the third wave in the globalization debate and with postmodern theory, the perception of reality can be just as important as the reality itself and discourse does affect reality and vice versa. This perception of danger for the women maquiladora workers surrounding this incident and throughout his years of organizing women maquiladora workers led Krueger to encourage a more clandestine approach. This was a discourse that was in turn internalized by many of the women that were part of the first groups organized and was then actively promoted by many of them, in particular Maria Guadalupe Torres, one of the first and most active members of the CFO and the first regional coordinator of the organization. It was the main reason many of the workers and Torres among others chose to leave the CFO when it became independent and thereby more visible.

In a top-down manner, however, the AFSC had a different perception of how organizing should be done to better the lives of the maquiladora workers it wanted to help and thus promoted a different discourse: that independence was good and that the transnational level was of the utmost importance. We can therefore already see the dual discourse of the CFO taking place

from its very beginnings. The AFSC, very much like the transnational advocacy networks as described by Keck and Sikkink, started off by pleading for the cause of others, or rather on others behalf, for social justice for the women maquiladora workers of Northern Mexico. The AFSC utilized many of the strategies as described by Keck and Sikkink (1999: 95-98) such as the *information politics*, which as we saw in Chapter 3 was and is an important part of the AFSC's Mexico–U.S. Border Program's objective: to educate Americans about the conditions in the maquiladoras. One important tool to do so is through testimonies from the workers themselves, be it through the visits by Americans to the maquiladoras, through the AFSC-sponsored organization ATCF (see Chapter 4) or through sponsoring members of the CFO to speak directly to the shareholders of important TNCs such as Alcoa to shame them into action (the third tactic of *leverage politics* according to Keck and Sikkink). AFSC also organized talks with union delegates in the U.S. and in Canada and encouraged CFO members to participate in international conferences on labour and women's rights such as at the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995.

We cannot understand the AFSC's discourse in regards to the CFO expanding its visibility on the transnational level without linking it to the ever-present reality of the relationships of power between international donor organizations and the NGOs receiving the funding. The AFSC here found itself in a dual role: it was responsible for much of the funding of the CFO throughout most of its history up until its independence in 1998. It also played an important role in the fundraising strategies of the CFO through its Mexico–U.S. Border Program director Ricardo Hernandez. The AFSC was responsible to its own donors and therefore had to promote the CFO's achievements in ways that were attractive to its donors. This is relevant because it

influenced the way the AFSC encouraged the CFO to promote itself over the years. As we saw in Chapter 4, the AFSC always focused on the transnational level, on how the CFO could provide testimonies to educate the American public about the working and living conditions of maquiladora workers. We also saw in Chapter 3 that the choices the AFSC made at the very beginning of its organizing efforts influenced the very type of organization it would create: a grassroots women's organization that would be attractive to international feminist donors and other agencies that promoted women and development issues. We also saw in Chapter 4 how, after NAFTA came into effect, the AFSC worried about the fact that the CFO was no longer the only organization of women maquiladora workers in existence; the time had come for the CFO to make itself more attractive to international donors by becoming independent and by resembling more of what the AFSC was promoting as a product: a grassroots women's organization. The irony is that when the CFO became less and less of a women's organization, it became less and less a grassroots organization in its decision-making process.

The CFO most resembled a grassroots women-centred organization during the period between its emergence as an organization in 1986 and the decision to become independent in 1998. In the first case, the decision was made at a joint meeting of the Comité de Apoyo and the maquiladora women workers groups in which they named representatives from each town to form their new organization: the Comité Fronterizo de Obreras. The women workers themselves decided to not register as an autonomous civil society organization because they felt they were more effective and it was less dangerous for women workers to meet in a low-key clandestine fashion so as not to draw attention to themselves. Even when the AFSC pushed for registering as a civil society

organization in Mexico at that time, the women maquiladora workers who were making the major decisions regarding their organization refused.

By all accounts the majority of the CFO members were women in the 1980s. We also saw examples of grassroots decision making in the pre-independence period (1986-1998) through descriptions from AFSC staff and from the women workers themselves. They had a well-established structure and the decision making was made in the general assembly of the CFO (see Appendix B). The organizing was done at the local level (in the homes of workers in small groups where they felt comfortable), at the neighbourhood level, at the city-wide level, at the regional level and at the transnational and cross-organizational level. By most workers' descriptions (the long-time members who were interviewed), the focus was very much on helping the local level pool resources that would make their local level even more empowered in the fight to defend workers' rights.

On the other hand, the decision to become independent in 1998 was made at a meeting which was called hastily, at a time when the most vocal opponent of the independence of the organization, one of their first members and at the time one of two regional coordinators of the organization, Maria Guadalupe Torres, could not make it due to a death in the family. By all accounts from the long-time members who remember this meeting, the decision of making Julia Quiñonez the coordinator for the CFO was announced and was not a decision made by the workers. Quiñonez herself states that she was not elected into her role. This meeting represented the growing influence of the men in the organization, the members who pushed the most for the organization to register its independence. The decision to register as an independent organization

is related to a push in that direction from the new AFSC Mexico–U.S. Border Program director Ricardo Hernandez, who very strongly encouraged this step and provided a lot of help in the whole process.

We also saw in Chapter 3 that although the statutes of the CFO established a structure for the organization, one that was similar in description to the pre-independence CFO, this structure no longer exists. There is no longer an executive committee in place composed of representatives of the workers from different cities that could in theory help make quick decisions that must be made by the organization, the decisions that cannot wait for the general assembly meeting that takes place in November of each year. The general assembly is no longer the place and time that symbolizes the grassroots democracy of the pre-independence years in which the workers felt that their voices were heard. Every long-time member said that the workers were more important in the CFO before its independence and that their voices were heard in those years. Although the AFSC pushed for the independence of the CFO by stating that its members were too dependent on the Comité de Apoyo, the CFO members themselves felt that it was more grassroots before its independence and that the AFSC has had more direct influence on their decision making since it has become an autonomous organization.

Through the use of a dialectical approach such as the one developed by Neo-Gramscian theory, we saw that civil society (or an organization within civil society) cannot be defined in a void. The changing context of globalization, since NAFTA and since the CFO set up as an independent organization, must be taken into account when trying to understand the intricacies of organizing workers in the maquiladoras of Northern Mexico. Just-in-time production, which

increases last-minute demands on the producers, has a ripple effect on organizing efforts. Workers are now assigned to a variety of shifts in order to increase production in a maquiladora that operates 24/7 and are often forced to work overtime, cancel taking their days off and lose mandatory holidays because of changes made at the last minute that are more convenient to the maquiladora that needs to meet time-sensitive demands. Setting up meetings of workers, especially large meetings such as an AGM, has proven to be more and more difficult as planning for a day when all the workers are available is almost impossible, and even if they are available, the workers are now too exhausted and have other immediate demands on their time such as taking care of their households and families to attend. This constant pressure on workers has meant they don't always have the will to mobilize for their rights, even if they have overcome their fear of mobilizing. Even recruiting new members has become a more arduous task because it is difficult to know when they will be available to meet with a promotore to talk about their rights. Before independence, funding was handled through the AFSC and the Comité de Apoyo. Since registering as an independent organization, the CFO had to find its own funding sources, although it continued to receive a lot of help from the AFSC in that regard.

In order to obtain much needed resources, the CFO had to change its focus from the local level of grassroots organizing and local and regional meetings of workers to the transnational level. This has meant it has had to learn how to impress the transnational partners (or potential partner organizations) such as the Steelworkers Union in the U.S. which is very involved in wanting to unionize Alcoa workers.

Through field research which included participant observation, open-ended interviews and listening to the voices of the marginalized in order to discover the side of the CFO that is not normally seen, I have been able to provide a more complete picture of the CFO than that which is available in the current literature. My research has provided more nuanced and sophisticated analysis of the CFO by examining the different perceptions of the organization — the official discourse, the public image, the academic and journalistic examinations of its activities; through researching the archives that included many confidential memos concerning some important steps in the history of the CFO; and by letting the members of the CFO share their perspectives on their organization, knowing it would be kept confidential and anonymous. As I have just summarized, the CFO did for a short time, between 1986 and 1998, embody and actively apply the principles of grassroots democracy and women-centred organizing. However, its creation and its post-independence periods show decisions being made from the top-down by the AFSC, SEDEPAC and the Comité de Apoyo (pre-1986) or by CFO coordinator Julia Quiñonez and AFSC representative Ricardo Hernandez. The relationships of power within the organization have caused the grassroots base, as well as any structure within the organization, to practically disintegrate.

This thesis suggests that the CFO can no longer be defined as a women's organization. As we saw in Chapters 3 and 4, through its own choice, one that is embraced by certain media coverage and by its partner organizations (AFSC and ATCF), the CFO began shifting away from both defining itself as and from embracing the ideals of a women's organization when it associated itself with situations such as the struggle for independent unionization in the Alcoa maquiladoras. However, in other circumstances, the CFO wholeheartedly embraced the identity

as a women's organization. At its beginnings, we saw that the focus was on mobilizing women maquiladora workers and on consciousness-raising. This was done in part because the vast majority of maquiladora workers were women and in part because it was felt that they were especially vulnerable to abuse in the maquiladoras. Mobilizing women workers in the context of Northern Mexico necessitated a certain type of mobilizing, one that took into account the specific gender relations of the location. Marx Ferree and McClurg Mueller (2004) explain that it is not necessary for women to be mobilizing because they are women. The authors state that they can be part of a larger women's movement even if they are women mobilizing for another cause such as social justice, as was the case for the CFO for much of its pre-independence history. However, as we have seen in Chapter 4, the CFO is no longer a women's organization because it does not mobilize for women's rights — it has slowly distanced itself from women's issues, feeling that most of the women's issues the CFO once addressed are now dealt with by other organizations or even by government health centres — and because the CFO is no longer made up by a majority of women.

Tiano argued in 1994 that the gender relations surrounding the maquiladora industry in Mexico's Northern Border Region would not allow mobilizing across gender lines. The literature suggested that the gendered relations in Mexico would discourage men from participating in what was perceived to be a women's organization. However, as we saw in the section on the context of gender and the maquiladoras, women are no longer the definition of the ideal maquiladora worker, men have been entering the maquiladora workforce in ever increasing numbers, albeit this is still a gendered workforce and globalization is still very much capitalizing on the gendered nature of the workforce. The changes in the gender relations also meant that the

CFO, if it wanted to be representative of the maquiladora workforce, had to include more men in the organization.

Men maquiladora workers had no problem participating in what was previously considered a women's organization. They simply changed its definition from a women-centred workers' organization (*obrera*) to a neutral or male-centred (*obrero*) one and, with time, even the women in the organization started adopting this focus. With the changing gender composition in both the maquiladoras and the CFO, the strategies of the CFO changed, from the focus on the local to a focus on building more international alliances with such organizations as the Steelworkers Union. Although exact numbers are impossible to come by since the CFO does not register its members, its focus on Alcoa workers, a maquiladora that employs mostly men, to the point where it ignored other potential members who did not work for the maquiladora upon which they were focusing, shifted their focus away from women workers.

We also saw in Chapter 3 that shifting this focus away from women's issues and the inclusion of more men in the organization started before the Alcoa struggle. In fact, many of the long-time members associated the decision to become a registered non-profit organization in Mexico, to open up an office and to becoming a more visible organization to the presence of more men in the organization — men who were used to union organizing and who wanted to be visible in their struggle. It is also in deference to the growing number of men in the organization that the CFO was officially called the *Comité Fronterizo de Obrer@s*, the @ symbol signifying both the masculine and feminine version of worker, as is clearly elaborated in the CFO statutes. Only the

women who have been members for many years continue to use the feminine version of worker when defining their organization.

As I explained in the introduction, maquiladora workers are caught between a rock and a hard place. Even if they are exploited in their work, they cannot simply treat maquiladoras or TNC's as the enemies (Bickham Mendez 2002). This is also true for the CFO members. None have expressed any desire to see the maquiladoras go. They simply want to be treated with dignity and respect and to earn a salary that is sufficient to feed their families. Not one of the members of the CFO disputes its ideals to teach workers about their rights so that they can defend themselves and make decisions about their own future with full knowledge about what rights the Mexican Federal Labour Law provides them. The local objectives and methods are not in dispute. However, the number of people the CFO can help at the local level is very dependent on the level of funding at the international level.

Further in-depth study is needed on other similar types of organizations in order to analyze how they have addressed the dilemma of needing to remain true to the local grassroots level while maintaining a viable marketable image for transnational partners and donor agencies. Further study would tell us if any other organization with similar dependent origins has become and remained a grassroots women's organization or if the idea of grassroots women's groups that can mobilize at the transnational level is simply an idealistic notion. It would also be of great benefit if an even more in-depth study of the CFO could be pursued, one in which more of its members who have left the organization could be reached to find out the reasons behind their decision. It would be of great interest to see if the new members who were part of the movement to create an

independent union in the Alcoa maquiladora have stayed on with the CFO. Finally, exploring how the end of the partnership/relationship with the AFSC in 2009 has affected the CFO would be of great analytical interest to determine if the split pushed the CFO towards building partnerships with global labour unions in order to obtain the necessary funding to survive or it has been even more detrimental to the grassroots base, especially to those members who chose the CFO because it did not resemble a union and did not have a hierarchical structure.

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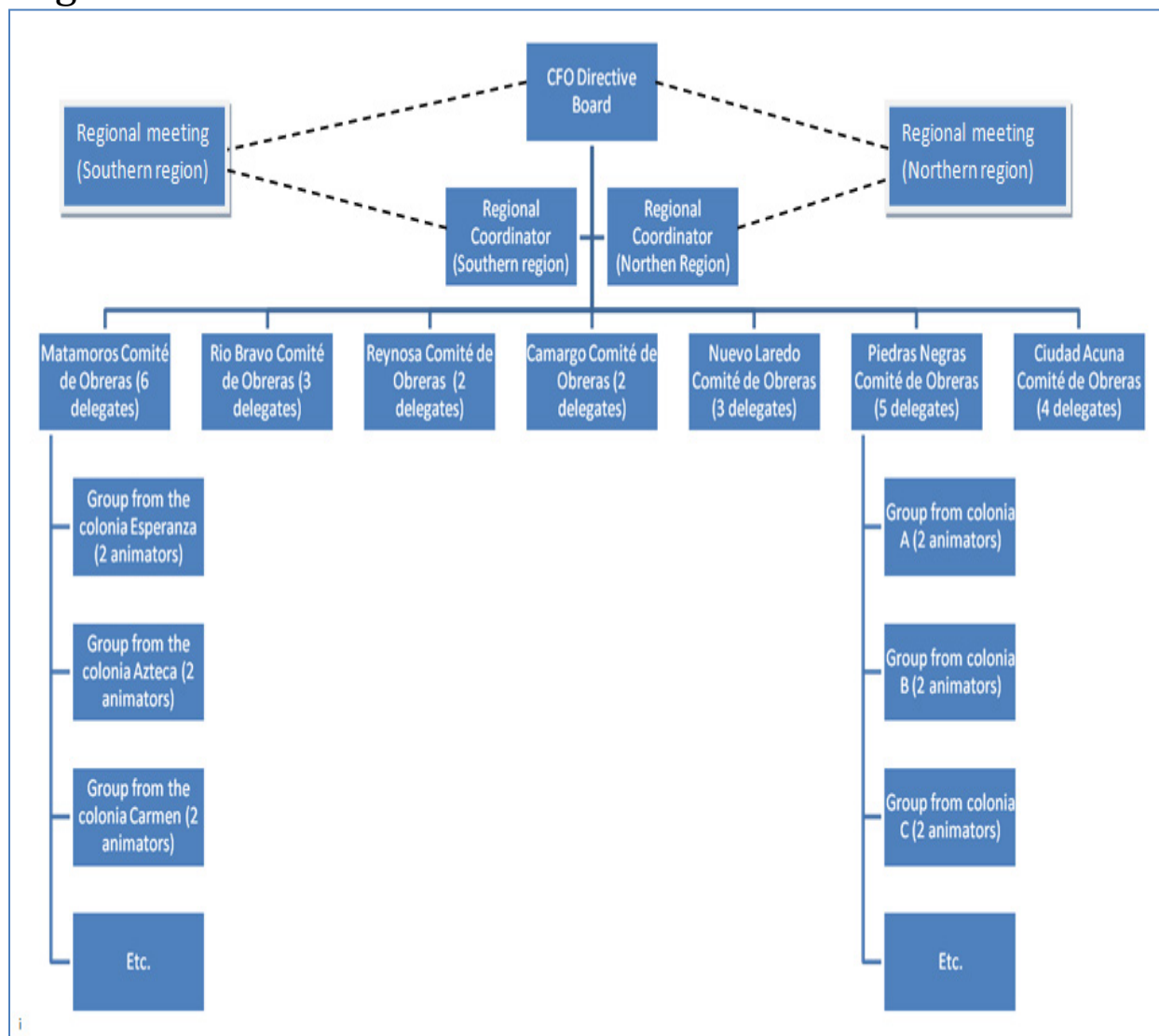
APPENDIX A

CFO Geography



APPENDIX B

Organizational Chart of CFO⁹⁷



⁹⁷ CFO (1988), [1988 CFO report: Organizational structure].

APPENDIX C

CFO Statutes⁹⁸

CHAPTER 1. – DENOMINATION, LEGAL CHARACTER AND DURATION.

The following persons: _____

Agree to constitute a civil association (*Asociación Civil*) with the name **COMITE FRONTERIZO DE OBRER@S, A.C. (CFO)**. This association will hold the objectives and aims that are determined in the present statutes.

FIRST. The associates of the Comité Fronterizo de Obrer@s, A.C. are Mexican workers (*female and male – trabajadoras and trabajadores*) of the maquiladoras, as well as ex-workers that agree to follow the objectives and aims of the association.

SECOND. The association will not seek profit, nor will it have a preponderant economical character, and it will adjust its functioning and nature in accordance with the civil code in effect.

THIRD. The duration of the association will be for an indeterminate period of time beginning with the date of signature of the present writing.

FOURTH. The registered office of the association will be Ocampo # 509B in the city of Piedras Negras, state of Coahuila, without prejudice of being able to establish offices in whichever other part of the Mexican Republic, and without this meaning that it is changing its registered office.

CHAPTER II. – SOCIAL PURPOSE AND SPECIFIC GOALS OF THE ASSOCIATION

1. -The fundamental mission of the Comité Fronterizo de Obreras A.C. (CFO) is:

The Comité Fronterizo de Obreras is an autonomous organization formed and run by maquiladora industry workers (*obreras and obreros*) whose purpose is to improve our working conditions inside the factories, to defend fundamental human rights, especially women's rights, and to protect the health, the life and the wellbeing of both ourselves and our communities.

Our primary function is to educate, train and raise the awareness (consciousness-raising) of other factory workers (*obreras and obreros*), starting with the Federal Labour Law, so that they may themselves, united with us, be the ones that confront the problems and injustices that the maquiladoras cause. We are a clearly Mexican non-governmental, not for profit organization, which is committed to social justice. We are forever seeking self-determination of the working class base and act according to grassroots democracy principles.

2. The objective of the association will be to educate, train and raise the awareness (consciousness-raising) of factory workers (*obrer@s*) on themes that help them improve or

⁹⁸ Translation of the statutes from Spanish done by author.

change their general work conditions which will lead to improving their living standards. Some of the work we propose to carry out is:

- a) To provide training en judicial, labour, and health and security matters to groups of factory workers (*obrer@s*) and their communities.
- b) To promote and execute all types of educational activities that correspond to the expectations of the groups.
- c) To celebrate and participate in meetings (*encuentros*), forums and formational workshops.
- d) To prompt and support local initiatives aimed at satisfying basic or work needs.
- e) To carry out research and studies relating to the issue of workplace safety and the violation of workers and human rights.
- f) To elaborate, print, publish and distribute all types of study material to achieve the association's own functions.
- g) To participate in local, national and international networks, associations and exchanges that have similar or congruent objectives to those of the association.
- h) To acquire, own and lease all class of property or real estate that may be necessary or convenient in order to achieve its social objectives.
- i) To establish branch offices or representative offices in whichever locality in the national territory.

CHAPTER III – WORK METHODS AND RECOURSES

In order to achieve its objectives and purpose, the association will make use of the following work methods and recourses:

- 1.- We will employ all the legal recourses that are stipulated in the Political Constitution of Mexico and its statutory laws.
2. – The Federal Labour Law and the Social Security Law.
3. – All of the methods of diffusion and communication at our disposal will be used when it is considered convenient to do so.
4. – The necessary didactical and educative materials will be used for our development.

CHAPTER IV. – THE PATRIMONY OF THE ASSOCIATION WILL BE CONSTITUTED:

1. – With the volunteer activities and contributions of the associates.
2. – With the volunteer contributions of groups, foundations, churches and individuals with whom this association has decided to carry out pacts or common works.
3. – With the goods we obtain from donations, inheritances or whatever other cause.
4. – With the property and real estate that we acquire in order to pursue our objectives.

CHAPTER V. – ORGANS THAT MAKE UP THE ASSOCIATION

1. – General Assembly

2. – Executive Committee
3. – Coordinators and organizers

CHAPTER VI. – THE ASSOCIATION’S GOVERNING BODIES AND THE ASSEMBLIES’ POWERS

1. – The highest authority of the CFO resides in the General Assembly. This assembly will meet in ordinary session during one weekend around the 20th of November of each year.
2. – Extra-ordinary meetings of the CFO can be convened when there exists an agreement between half of the workers (obrer@s) of the executive committee.
3. – The persons who end up being part of the General Assembly will be elected by the workers (obrer@s) who have participated for at least three meetings in the colonias during the last year, in the cities where the CFO is working. These elections will take place in a general meeting when all of the groups of the city which have held at least three meetings during the past year are invited.
4. – The following are powers exclusive to the assembly: deciding on all questions related to the object of the association that affect the whole of the associates, approving and modifying the work projects, defining the way in which each associate will participate in the tasks proper to the association and any others that have been conferred by the present statutes.
5. – The decisions of the assembly legally installed will be obligatory for all the associates, even those who were absent.
6. – From each assembly, an act will be written down in the appropriate register, in which will be noted the each point that was treated as well as the resolutions that were passed. The act will signed by those who were present.

CHAPTER VII. – POWERS OF THE COORDINATOR AND OF THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

1. – The administration, coordination, representation and enforcement (legal force) of the association will remain entrusted to the Executive Committee, which will be composed of a moderator, a secretary, a treasurer and two members with their respective replacements. These persons will be elected by the General Assembly, and will last in their positions for twelve months. The same people will not be able to be re-elected in the same position in the following period except with the agreement of 50% plus one of the total of the associates.
2. The following are powers of the Executive Committee:
 - a. Administrating the goods of the association, the groups and the communities with whom they work, subjecting itself by this to the stipulations of the present statutes and the agreements of the General Assembly.
 - b. Authorizing the expense budgets of the association, supervising the correct application of the necessary funds. Representing the association before all class of authorities or tribunals of the federation, the states or the municipalities, whether they be civil, penal, administrative and labour.
 - c. Acting themselves, or by means of commissaries, as arbitrators in the conflicts that take place between associates.

- d. Approving, convening the sessions the general and ordinary assemblies, and proposing its agenda.
- e. Approving the statements, balances, general budgets and other propositions that have to be submitted to the General Assembly. (or that the General Assembly must submit - need to verify)
- f. To ensure the respect of the statutes, of the agreements of the assemblies and of its own decisions.

CHAPTER VIII. – For the better part of its work, the association will act through an organizing commission, which will have a coordinator.

CHAPTER IX. – WORK, RIGHTS AND OBLIGATIONS OF THE ORGANIZERS

1. The organizers will have as fundamental activities the organization, promotion and development of the training that the local groups and communities require. In order to better carry out their duties, they may seek help from qualified persons or institutions.
2. The organizers will be the ones responsible for organizing all the communication and training events that the association engages in with the local group and communities. Also, they will have the responsibility of organizing exchanges of experiences with workers' (obrer@s) groups from other cities of the association, and with other groups.

CHAPTER X. – WORK, RIGHTS AND OBLIGATIONS OF THE MODERATORS AND SECRETARIES

1. They will be responsible to follow through with what has been decided upon in the general assemblies and to diffuse the information and agreements to the appropriate people. They will also take notice of and document specific cases of factories and follow up on information about maquiladoras in the different communication medias.

CHAPTER XI. – WORK, RIGHTS AND OBLIGATIONS OF THE COORDINATOR

1. The coordinator's responsibility will consist in fulfilling the necessary analyses on the political, economical and social situation of the committee. The coordinator will carry out the analysis, investigations and diagnostics that the groups and communities need, provided these are carried out with the same communities.

CHAPTER XII. – WORK, RIGHTS AND OBLIGATIONS OF THE TREASURER

1. The finance and administration commission will be responsible for all economic negotiations on behalf of the association and of the communities or organized groups with whom we are working. Likewise, the commission will receive the amount of the fees (or dues) and other funds that for whatever reason the association comes into, making out the corresponding

receipts. The commission will pay all the authorized expenses for the coordinating commission, providing statements in each assembly and at the end of its management (term).

CHAPTER XIII. – THE ASSOCIATES

1. The position of associate will be ended:
 - a. Due to resigning or separation
 - b. By agreement by the general assembly
2. The position of associate is non-transferable. The associates do not acquire any real individual rights over the patrimony of the association. The assembly will decide on the usage rights that each associate acquires over the goods of the association and will specify the modalities of such use; likewise, if any of the associates resigns or is excluded, they will not be able to claim any part of the estate of the association, neither will their creditors or their heirs be able to do so.
3. In order to exclude an associate, it is necessary that the assembly approves it.

CHAPTER XIV. – RIGHTS OF EACH OF THE MEMBERS OF THE ASSOCIATION

1. Participating by voice and vote in the assemblies of the association
2. Voting and being voted on to carry out some function in the assemblies for such a purpose.
3. Using and enjoying the goods that the association acquires in the ends and means that are determined by the assembly.
4. Presenting initiatives and projects to the assembly for their discussion and approbation.

APPENDIX D

Interview guide for CFO members

1. Questions relating to CFO membership:
 - a. How did you first hear about the CFO?
 - b. How often and since when do you participate in CFO activities?
 - c. What CFO activities have you participated in?
 - d. Do any of your friends or family members also participate?
 - e. Have you met any of the CFO members from the other cities?
 - f. Have you participated in any of the activities with US partners of the CFO such as the AFSC?

2. Work related questions:
 - a. Please briefly describe a typical day for you. (How long it takes to get to work, how many hours worked, housework, childcare, etc.)
 - b. When did you start working in the maquiladoras? How many years have you worked in the maquiladoras?
 - c. Have you ever worked elsewhere than in the maquiladoras?
 - d. Are there any differences in maquiladora work for men and women? If so, how would you describe these differences?
 - e. Are there any health risks or any other concerns you have about your work? If yes, could you please describe them?

3. Biographical information:
 - a. Age, sex, marital status, number of children
 - b. Information about housing situation: how far from work, running water and electricity or not, single-family housing or extended family
 - c. Income: what is her or his weekly income, is she or he the major provider for the family, who else works in family
 - d. How the family feels about her or his a) work in the maquiladoras, and b) participation in the CFO?

4. Specific questions about how they would describe the CFO and their role within this organisation:
 - a. Do you consider yourself to be a member of the CFO? How would you define what being a member of the CFO is?
 - b. How would you define the CFO? And your role within the CFO?
 - c. Do you talk about the CFO at work? With your friends and family?
 - d. Do you (or would you) encourage others to become a part of the CFO?
 - e. Has participating in the CFO changed things at your work? For example, if you were to describe a typical day when you first started working in the maquiladoras vs. a typical day now that you are participating in the CFO? If answered yes to changes, what would you say have been the most significant changes?
 - f. Are there any other benefits or negative aspects of participating in the CFO that you would like to mention? (In the workplace, at home or in the community)?
 - g. In your opinion, has the fact that the CFO now has men as members changed things? If so, how?

- h. Have you ever felt any danger or other forms of repercussions by virtue of being a member of the CFO?

- 5. Participation in other groups :
 - a. Are you part of any union? If so, how would you describe your experience as part of this union? How would you say you experience within the CFO resembles or differs from your experience within the union?
 - b. Are you a member of any other organisation (i.e. women's organisation)? If so, how would you describe your experience as part of this organisation? How would you say you experience within the CFO resembles or differs from your experience within this other organisation?

- 6. Is there anything else you would like to add?

APPENDIX E

Interview guide for CFO employees

7. Questions relating to role within CFO:
 - a. What is your role within the CFO?
 - b. How did you first hear about the CFO?
 - c. Were you a member of the CFO before becoming an employee?
 - d. Are you a maquiladora or ex-maquiladora worker? If yes, how long have you worked in the maquiladoras? Are you hoping to be able to work again in a maquiladora, why or why not?
 - e. Could you briefly describe a typical day of work at the CFO?
 - f. In what capacities do you interact with the CFO's other offices (in the 6 other cities in which the CFO has an office)? And with other organisations, either in Mexico or at an international level?
 - g. Have you ever traveled outside of Mexico for CFO work? If so, how would you evaluate the benefits of such experience for the CFO, yourself, or your community? Do you have any concerns or negative aspects linked to such international travels?

8. Biographical information:
 - a. Age, sex, marital status, number of children
 - b. Information about housing situation: how far from work, running water and electricity or not, single-family housing or extended family
 - c. Income: what is her or his weekly income, is she or he the major provider for the family, who else works in family
 - d. How family feels about work in CFO

9. Specific questions about how they would describe the CFO and their role within this organisation:
 - a. How would you define what being a member of the CFO is?
 - b. How would you describe the evolution of the CFO?
 - c. How would you define what the CFO is today?
 - d. Do you consider the CFO to be a fully independent organisation? If so, since when? If not, why?
 - e. In your opinion, what factors led you to decide to work with the CFO?
 - f. Have you ever felt any danger or other forms of repercussions by virtue of working with the CFO?
 - g. In what ways does the CFO differs from a union?
 - h. How would you describe the danger and the benefits of participating in the CFO vs. those of participating in an independent union?
 - i. The CFO used to be called Comité Fronterizo de Obreras and now uses the symbol @ to symbolise both women and men. Would you say this symbolise or not a change the objectives and strategies of the CFO? If yes, how? If no, why do you think the name was changed?
 - j. In your opinion, has the fact that the CFO now has men as members changed things? If so, how?

10. Questions pertaining to CFO relationship with other groups:
 - a. If applicable (if the person was working for the CFO at that time): How would you characterise the AFSC-CFO relationship in the following periods?
 - i. pre-1986, in the early years before the CFO became an organisation
 - ii. between 1986 and 1998 when the CFO was an organisation but did not have the status of asociación civil
 - iii. since 1998 and the year the CFO became an asociación civil in Mexico and what does this change in status mean for the CFO?
 - b. If applicable (if the person was working for the CFO at that time): How would you characterise the CFO relationship with the Coalition for Justice in the Maquiladoras (CJM)?
 - i. In the beginning: What role did the CFO play in the creation of the CJM?
 - ii. What, in your opinion, led the CFO to terminate its membership within the CJM?
 - iii. What, if any, relationship does the CFO now have with the CJM?
11. Is there anything else you would like to add?

APPENDIX F

Recruitment letter to CFO employee participants

Dear (CFO employee),

My name is Cindy Doucet and I am a graduate student from the University of Ottawa, in Canada, doing research on new ways of organizing in the maquiladoras. My goal is to better understand how the Comité Fronterizo de Obreras came to exist and how it is different from other types of organizing such as unions or other women's organizations.

I would like to find out about your own experiences and opinions on issues such as the challenges associated with organizing in the maquiladoras, to learn more about your daily life and about how you came to work for the CFO. There is no obligation to speak with me and if you do choose to accept to do the interview, everything will be confidential. No one will have access to any information you share except for me and my supervisor, Claire Turenne Sjolander. I can also provide anonymity if you so desire by using a pseudonym. I would also like to observe and participate when appropriate in your daily activities and more specifically in group activities organised by the CFO, such as the annual meeting and workshops. I realise that my presence can take up some of your work time and in order to lessen the burden I may place on you, I am willing to help out with the preparations of the activities.

If you do accept to speak with me, you still have the right to refuse to answer any question or end the interview when you wish. You can also ask me questions you may have regarding my research. If you agree, I would like to tape the interview. This also means that if you do not wish to sign a consent form, you may also give a verbal agreement which will be tape-recorded. I would like to stress that information you give will only be used for my research and for articles I may write for academic journals and will not be shared with anyone else. All of the information (notes, signed forms and interview tapes) will be kept under lock and key in my home in Ottawa, Canada with a copy (also under lock and key) in the office of my thesis director. The interview itself will take approximately 1 hour of your time and will take place at the CFO office.

I hope that you will agree to participate in this research. If you have any questions or would like more information about my research, please let me know and I will be happy to give you more information.

Sincerely,

Cindy Doucet
School of Political Studies, Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Ottawa
Ottawa, Ontario Canada K1N 6N5

Supervisor: Claire Turenne Sjolander
School of Political Studies, Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Ottawa
Ottawa, Ontario Canada K1N 6N5

APPENDIX G

Consent form for CFO employees

Title of the study: Women workers in Mexico's maquiladoras: A new form of cross-border organising

Researcher: Cindy Doucet

University: School of Political Studies, Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Ottawa
Ottawa, Ontario Canada K1N 6N5

Supervisor: Claire Turenne Sjolander

University: School of Political Studies, Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Ottawa
Ottawa, Ontario Canada K1N 6N5

Invitation to Participate: I am invited to participate in the Ph.D. research on alternative forms of worker organizing in the maquiladoras of Mexico, which will be conducted by Cindy Doucet.

Purpose of the Study: The purpose of the study is to conduct research on an alternative form of worker organizing in the maquiladoras of Mexico. More specifically, it seeks to better understand how the Comité Fronterizo de Obreras came to exist and how it is different from other types of organizing such as unions or other women's organizations.

Participation: My participation will consist essentially of participating in a one hour interview with Cindy Doucet, which may or may not be tape recorded, depending on my preference, during which I will be asked to answer questions about my work with the CFO and about my experiences and opinions on issues such as the challenges associated with organising in the maquiladoras. This interview will be scheduled at a time that is most convenient for me, and will take place at the CFO office. I will also be asked to interact with Cindy Doucet in my daily activities and more specifically in group activities organised by the CFO. Cindy Doucet will participate in some of these activities and help out with the preparations of the activities.

Risks: My participation in this study will entail that I volunteer some personal information about my work and home life and this may cause me some discomfort. My participation will also entail that I be observed in my daily work activities and be asked questions about these activities that might take up some valuable time I need to do my work. I have received assurance from the researcher (Cindy Doucet) that every effort will be made to minimize these risks such as ensuring my anonymity if I wish and by receiving help in my daily work activities by Cindy Doucet in order to minimise the extra burden that having her observe and participate in these activities may cause me.

Benefits: My participation in this study will allow me to tell my story of mobilising workers in Mexico's northern border region. This study can also be useful to society in general as it can play a public education role in informing a wider audience with an in-depth analysis of the difficulties of organising in the maquiladoras, and at the same time give an overview of the working conditions in the maquiladoras.

Confidentiality and anonymity: I have received assurance from the researcher that the information I will share will remain strictly confidential. I understand that the contents will be used only for research and for articles the researcher (Cindy Doucet) may write for journals and that my confidentiality will be protected. No one will have access to any information I share except for the researcher, Cindy Doucet, and her supervisor, Claire Turenne Sjolander. If I wish for the information I provide to be anonymous, **anonymity** will be protected by using a pseudonym for this consent form and nowhere will my real name appear (not in any notes, transcripts, taped interviews or publications). I also understand that the confidential character of my information cannot be guaranteed if I wish to have a copy of my transcripts sent to me by E-mail because there is a risk this information could be intercepted.

Conservation of data: The data collected will be kept secure at all times. The researcher (Cindy Doucet) will keep the data on her person at all times during her trip to Mexico and once back in Canada, the data collected (notes, tape-recorded interviews, transcripts and signed consent forms) will be kept under lock in the home of Cindy Doucet with a copy of all of the research data to also be kept in the office of Claire Turenne Sjolander. The data will be conserved for a period of 5 years from date of publication of the doctoral thesis and any scholarly journals. The written material will then be shredded and the tapes erased. The only people who will have access to the data will be Cindy Doucet and Claire Turenne Sjolander.

Voluntary Participation: I am under no obligation to participate and if I choose to participate, I can withdraw from the study at any time and/or refuse to answer any questions, without suffering any negative consequences. If I choose to withdraw, all data gathered until the time of withdrawal will be destroyed (the tapes will be erased and the notes and transcripts and signed consent forms will be shredded).

Acceptance: I, (*Name of participant*), _____ agree to participate in the above research study conducted by Cindy Doucet of the School of Political Studies, Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Ottawa, Canada, whose research is under the supervision of Claire Turenne Sjolander, School of Political Studies, Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Ottawa, Canada.

I, (*Name of participant*) _____, accept _____ or do not accept _____ that my interview be tape-recorded.

I, (*Name of participant*) _____, wish _____ or do not wish _____ that my participation be anonymous.

If I have any questions about the study, I may contact the researcher or her supervisor.

If I have any questions regarding the ethical conduct of this study, I may contact the Protocol Officer for Ethics in Research, University of Ottawa, Tabaret Hall, 550 Cumberland Street, Room 159, Ottawa, ON K1N 6N5
Tel.: (613) 562-5841
Email: ethics@uottawa.ca

There are two copies of the consent form, one of which is mine to keep.

Participant's signature: _____ Date: _____

Researcher's signature: _____ Date: _____

Appendix H

List of interviews conducted during fieldwork

1. JULIA QUIÑONEZ, coordinator of the CFO since 1998, Piedras Negras, Coahuila, Mexico, November 2006.
2. JUANY, CFO member since 1990 and promotora since 2006. Ciudad Acuña, Coahuila, Mexico, November 2006.
3. MARIA-ELENA, CFO member since 1992 and promotora since 1993. Ciudad Acuña, Coahuila, Mexico, November 2006. (Alcoa)⁹⁹
4. JAVIER, CFO member since 2000 and promotore from 2003 to 2006. Piedras Negras, Coahuila, Mexico, November 2006. (Alcoa)
5. ESMERALDA (not her real name), CFO member since 1986, volunteer for many years and promotora in the 1990s, Piedras Negras, Coahuila, Mexico, November 2006.
6. NORMA, CFO member since 1991, volunteer for many years and promotora since 2006. Piedras Negras, Coahuila, Mexico, November 2006. (Alcoa)
7. PATTY, CFO member since 1994, volunteer and part-time promotora for many years. Piedras Negras, Coahuila, Mexico, November 2006.
8. ANA, CFO member since 1984, moderator from 1998 until 2003. Piedras Negras, Coahuila, Mexico, November 2006.
9. RAFAEL, CFO member since 2000 and promotore from a short period of time on a volunteer basis. Piedras Negras, Coahuila, Mexico, November 2006. (Alcoa)
10. GUADALUPE, ex-CFO member since 1995, volunteer and part-time promotora for many years. Piedras Negras, Coahuila, Mexico, November 2006.
11. DIEGO (not real name), CFO member since 2000. Ciudad Acuña, Coahuila, Mexico, November 2006 (Alcoa)
12. SOFIA (not real name), CFO member since 2003. Ciudad Acuña, Coahuila, Mexico, November 2006.
13. BIANCA (not real name), CFO member since 2003. Ciudad Acuña, Coahuila, Mexico, November 2006
14. PEDRO (not real name), CFO member since 2003. Ciudad Acuña, Coahuila, Mexico, November 2006
15. MARCOS (not real name), CFO member since 1997. Ciudad Acuña, Coahuila, Mexico, November 2006 (Alcoa)
16. ROSA MARIA, CFO member since 1998. Ciudad Acuña, Coahuila, Mexico, November 2006
17. MARCELO, CFO member since 1999. Ciudad Acuña, Coahuila, Mexico, November 2006 (Alcoa)
18. JUAN, CFO member since 1995. Ciudad Acuña, Coahuila, Mexico, November 2006 (Alcoa)
19. JULIO (not real name), CFO member since 2003. Ciudad Acuña, Coahuila, Mexico, November 2006 (Alcoa)

⁹⁹ Since Alcoa has been a big focus of the CFO's organizing efforts, whenever a CFO member works or worked for Alcoa, it is indicated in parentheses.

20. ARTURO (not real name), CFO member since 1999. Ciudad Acuña, Coahuila, Mexico, November 2006 (Alcoa)
21. MARIA-ANGELES, CFO member since 2001. Ciudad Acuña, Coahuila, Mexico, November 2006
22. NICOLAS, CFO member since 1992. Ciudad Acuña, Coahuila, Mexico, November 2006
23. OFELIA, CFO member since 2002. Ciudad Acuña, Coahuila, Mexico, November 2006
24. PILAR, CFO member since 1995. Ciudad Acuña, Coahuila, Mexico, November 2006
25. AMERIGA, CFO member since 1995. Ciudad Acuña, Coahuila, Mexico, November 2006
26. LUPE, CFO member since 1995. Ciudad Acuña, Coahuila, Mexico, November 2006
27. REYNA, CFO member since 1992, worked as a promotora from 1998 to 2002. Ciudad Acuña, Coahuila, Mexico, November 2006
28. HUMBERTO, CFO member since 1995. Ciudad Acuña, Coahuila, Mexico, November 2006 (Alcoa)
29. NANCI, CFO member since 1993. Ciudad Acuña, Coahuila, Mexico, November 2006
30. MARIA-EUGENIA, CFO member since 1998. Ciudad Acuña, Coahuila, Mexico, November 2006
31. MARTA, CFO member since 1991, volunteer for three years in the early 1990s, Piedras Negras, Coahuila, Mexico, November 2006.
32. JOSEFINA, CFO member since 2002, also volunteered for a few years, Piedras Negras, Coahuila, Mexico, November 2006 (Alcoa)
33. ZOILA, CFO member since 1980, Piedras Negras, Coahuila, Mexico, November 2006.
34. ALMA, CFO member since 1995, Piedras Negras, Coahuila, Mexico, November 2006.
35. MICAELA, CFO member since May 2006, Piedras Negras, Coahuila, Mexico, November 2006 (Alcoa)
36. MANUELA, CFO member since 1990, Piedras Negras, Coahuila, Mexico, November 2006.
37. OCTAVIO, CFO member since August 2006, Piedras Negras, Coahuila, Mexico, November 2006 (Alcoa)
38. MARIA-TERESA, CFO member since 2000, Piedras Negras, Coahuila, Mexico, November 2006 (Alcoa)
39. TOMAS, CFO member since 1995, Piedras Negras, Coahuila, Mexico, November 2006 (Alcoa)
40. CHAVE, CFO member since 2000, Piedras Negras, Coahuila, Mexico, November 2006
41. MARGERITO, CFO member since 2000, Piedras Negras, Coahuila, Mexico, November 2006
42. MARIA-ROSARIO, member since 2003, Piedras Negras, Coahuila, Mexico, November 2006
43. MARISELA, member since 1998, Piedras Negras, Coahuila, Mexico, November 2006
44. TERE, member since 1990 and worked as a promotora for 10 years, lives in Matamoros, Tamaulipecas, interviewed at CFO annual meeting in Ciudad Acuña, Coahuila, Mexico, November 2006
45. LISA, member since 1997 (no longer participates as no longer any CFO groups in Matamoros), Matamoros, Tamaulipecas, Mexico, September 2007.
46. RAFAELA, coordinator of Apoyo de Comunidades Maristas and CFO member and promotora from 1987 to 2002, Matamoros, Tamaulipecas, Mexico, October 2007.

47. LUPITA, member and promotora of Apoyo de Comunidades Maristas since February 2007, Matamoros, Tamaulipecas, Mexico, October 2007
48. ALEJANDRA, member and promotora of Apoyo de Comunidades Maristas since February 2007, Matamoros, Tamaulipecas, Mexico, October 2007.
49. ANGELICA, member of Apoyo de Comunidades Maristas since February 2007, Matamoros, Tamaulipecas, Mexico, October 2007
50. SORENA, not a member of any organization. Works 2 full-time jobs, one in a maquiladora and one as a cleaning lady, Matamoros, Tamaulipecas, Mexico, October 2007
51. ELEUTERIO, Assistant coordinator for FITIM. Reynosa, Tamaulipas, Mexico, November 2007.
52. MARIA-ELENA, ex-CFO member and promotora, Reynosa, Tamaulipas, Mexico, November 2007.
53. PAULINA, volunteering as a promotora for the Comité de Apoyo since 1979, Reynosa, Tamaulipas, Mexico, November 2007.
54. ANETH, volunteering as a promotora for the Comité de Apoyo since 1999, Reynosa, Tamaulipas, Mexico, November 2007.
55. MARY, member of Comité de Apoyo's group since 2006, Reynosa, Tamaulipas, Mexico, November 2007.
56. FRANCO, member of Comité de Apoyo's group since 1994, Reynosa, Tamaulipas, Mexico, November 2007.
57. FRANCISCA, ex-CFO member since 2001 and promotora, Rio Bravo, Tamaulipas, Mexico, November 2007.
58. VIRGINIA, member of Comité de Apoyo's group since 2005, Rio Bravo, Tamaulipas, Mexico, November 2007.
59. FERNANDO, member of Comité de Apoyo's group since 1994, Rio Bravo, Tamaulipas, Mexico, November 2007.
60. CHAYO, member of Comité de Apoyo's group since 1994, Rio Bravo, Tamaulipas, Mexico, November 2007
61. ED KRUEGER, Founder of the CFO, Comité de Apoyo, Reynosa, Tamaulipas, Mexico, November 2007

APPENDIX I

Comité Fronterizo de Obreras or Comité Fronterizo de Obreros? The evolution of the CFO name throughout the years¹⁰⁰

1991: “an informal confederation of women’s committees, the CFO (the Confederation of Border Workers)”¹⁰¹

1993: “Border Committee of Women Workers”¹⁰² (no mention of CFO or Spanish version of name)

1993: “Comité Fronterizo de Obreras (CFO), the Border Women Workers Committee”¹⁰³

1994: “Border Committee of Women Workers (CFO)”¹⁰⁴ (no mention of Spanish version of name)

1996: “Comité Fronterizo de Obreras”¹⁰⁵ (no mention of CFO or English version of name)

1998: CFO or “Comité Fronterizo de Obreras”¹⁰⁶ (no English translation mentioned)

1998: “Comité Fronterizo de Obreras or Border Committee of Women Workers”¹⁰⁷

1999: “Border Committee of Women Workers (Comite Fronterizo de Obreras/CFO)”¹⁰⁸

1999: “Comité Fronterizo de Obreras”¹⁰⁹ (Spanish language article; no mention of CFO acronym)

2000: “Comité Fronterizo de Obreras (Border Labor Committee)”¹¹⁰

2000: “the Comité Fronterizo de Obreras (CFO, or in English, the Border Committee of Women Workers”¹¹¹

2000: “Comité Fronterizo de Obreras (CFO- Border Committee of Women Workers)”¹¹²

¹⁰⁰ Articles found on CFO website (see CFO 2009g)

¹⁰¹ Miriam Davidson (1991), “Organizing in the Maquilas”, *NACLA Report on the Americas/Free Trade*, vo. XXIV, no. 6, May.

¹⁰² Paul E. Brink (1993), “Women workers target Mexico’s ‘maquiladoras’: Conditions in foreign-owned assembly plants are comparable to U.S. factories in the 19th century”, *The Kansas City Star*, Thursday July 1.

¹⁰³ Mary E. Tong (1993), “Reaching Across the Rio: Worker exchange forge solidarity for fights in labor’s common self-interest”, *Beyond Borders*, Spring, reprinted in Rachael Kamel and Anya Hoffman (eds) (1999), *The Maquiladora Reader: Cross-Border Organising Since NAFTA*, Philadelphia: American Friends Service Committee.

¹⁰⁴ Robin Alexander and Peter Gilmore (1994), “The Emergence of Cross Border Labor Solidarity: Report on Mexico”, *NACLA Report on the Americas*, vol. XXVIII, no 1, July/August.

¹⁰⁵ Sam Quinones (1996), “Maquiladora Justice”, *Global Frontrunners, Continental Airlines Magazine*, August.

¹⁰⁶ Ricardo Hernandez (1998), “Taking Flight”, Masiosare, La Jornada, July 5th, reprinted in Rachael Kamel and Anya Hoffman (eds) (1999), *The Maquiladora Reader: Cross-Border Organising Since NAFTA*, Philadelphia: American Friends Service Committee, 1999, p. 91.

¹⁰⁷ Sandra Dallas (ed.) (1998), “Making life bearable in the Maquiladoras”, *Business Week/Letter from Mexico*, September 21.

¹⁰⁸ Red Beard (1999), “Maquiladora Workers Demonstrate Solidarity at Gap Protest, Talk Solidarity at Church Forum”, *The Working Stiff Journal*, vol. 2, no. 8, October.

¹⁰⁹ ___ (1999), “Los problemas sociales que genera describen “la otra cara” de la industria maquiladora”, *Diario de Yucatan*, March 3.

¹¹⁰ Ignacio Ibarra (2000), “Border Workers Struggle to Survive”, *Arizona Daily Star*, July 23.

¹¹¹ Elvia Rosales Arriola (2000), “Becoming Leaders: The Women in the Maquiladoras of Piedras Negras, Coahuila”, *Frontera NorteSur*, October 2000.

- 2001: “Comité Fronterizo de Obreras (CFO) or Border Committee of Women Workers”¹¹³
- 2001: “Comité Fronterizo de Obreras (CFO, or Border Committee of Women Workers)”¹¹⁴
- 2001: “Border Committee of Women Workers (Comité Fronterizo de Obreras or CFO)”¹¹⁵
- 2001: “Comité Fronterizo de Obreras (CFO, or Border Committee of Women Workers)”¹¹⁶
- 2001: “Comité Fronterizo de Obreras (CFO)”¹¹⁷ (no English translation mentioned)
- 2001: “Comité Fronterizo de Obreras (Border Committee of Women Workers)”¹¹⁸ (the CFO acronym is used later in the article)
- 2001: “Comité Fronterizo de Obreras (Border Women Workers Committee, CFO)”¹¹⁹
- 2001: “Border Workers Committee”¹²⁰ (no mention of CFO or Spanish version of name)
- 2002: “Border Committee of Women (CFO)”¹²¹ (no mention of Spanish version of name)
- 2002: “Comité Fronterizo de Obreras (Border Committee of Women workers – CFO)”¹²²
- 2002: “Comité Fronterizo de Obreras (Border Committee of Women Workers, or CFO)”¹²³
- 2002: “Comité Fronterizo de Obreras (CFO or Border Committee of Women Workers)”¹²⁴
- 2002: “Border Workers Committee (CFO)”¹²⁵ (no mention of Spanish version of name)
- 2002: “Comité Fronterizo de Obreras”¹²⁶ (no mention of CFO or English version of name)
- 2002: Comité Fronterizo de Obrera/os”¹²⁷ (no mention of CFO or English version of name)
- 2002: “Comité Fronterizo de Obrera/os (CFO)”¹²⁸ (no English translation mentioned)
- 2002: “Comité Fronterizo de Obreras (or Border Committee of Women Workers or CFO)”¹²⁹
- 2002: “Comité Fronterizo de Obreras”¹³⁰ (no English translation mentioned; (the CFO acronym

¹¹² Comité Fronterizo de Obreras (2000), “The CTM and the “Gringo Conspiracy” in the Maquiladoras”, *Masiosare, La Jornada*, Sunday, October 1.

¹¹³ Greg Norman and Judith Rosenberg (2001), “Solidarity Group Visits Border”, *AFSC-TAO: Texas Arkansas Oklahoma*, December.

¹¹⁴ Juan Pablo Hernandez (2001), “Organizing for Justice in the Maquiladoras”, *AFSC-TAO: Texas Arkansas Oklahoma*, August.

¹¹⁵ Ricardo Hernandez (2001), “Dignity is the Reward”, *La Jornada: Histories of Maquilatitlan*, Sunday July 1.

¹¹⁶ Josefina Castillo (2001), “Free Trade Reality Tour Speaks Truth to Power”, *AFSC-TAO: Texas Arkansas Oklahoma*, May.

¹¹⁷ Elvia Rosales Arriola (2001), “Of Woman Born: Courage & Strength to Survive in the Maquiladoras of Reynos and Rio Bravo, Tamaulipas”, *La Prensa de San Diego*, April 13.

¹¹⁸ Eric Garza (2001), “Workshop highlights the costs of free trade”, *The Daily Texan*, Monday, April 9.

¹¹⁹ Greg Bloom (2001), “Workers and Unions on the Tamaulipas Border”, *Frontera NorteSur*, April 2001.

¹²⁰ Sam Dillon (2001), “Profits Raise Pressures on U.S.-Owned Factories in Mexican Border Zone”, *The New York Times*, February 15.

¹²¹ Pete Capano (2002), “Weekend on the Mexican Border: Free Trade Face to Face”, *Electrical Union News – IUE-CWA (AFL-CIO)*, Tuesday, January 15.

¹²² Greg Norman (2002), “Maquila Workers Celebrate Victory in Struggle for Freedom of Association”, *AFSC-TAO: Texas Arkansas Oklahoma*, March.

¹²³ Judith Rosenberg (2002), “The Human Face of Globalization”, *AFSC-TAO: Texas Arkansas Oklahoma*, June.

¹²⁴ Judith Rosenberg (2002), “International Solidarity Takes on Labor Abuses in Mexico”, *AFSC-TAO: Texas Arkansas Oklahoma*, December.

¹²⁵ Maquiladora Solidarity Network (2002), “Alcoa workers vote for democratic union”, *Maquila Network Update*, vol. 7, no. 4, December.

¹²⁶ Lisa Sorg (2002), “Free Trade or Slave Trade”, *San Antonio Current*, December 5.

¹²⁷ Judith Rosenberg ? (2002), “Texas & Mexican groups join together in San Antonio to make Alcoa feel the pressure”, *La Voz de la Esperanza*, November 22.

¹²⁸ Judith Rosenberg (2002), “Losing the Whole World and Finding Each Other: Mexican Struggle for Justice in Alcoa and learn the Meaning of Solidarity”, *La Voz de la Esperanza*, December.

¹²⁹ Linda Stern (2002), “The Maquiladoras: A Summer Trip to the Texas-Mexico Border”, *Massachusetts Community College Council*, August.

is used later in the article)

2002: “the CFO, a Mexican grassroots organization of maquiladora workers, both women and men”¹³¹ (no mention of Spanish version of name)

2003: “Comité Fronterizo de Obrer@s (an AFSC partner organization)”¹³² (no mention of CFO or English version of name)

2003: “Border Committee of Women Workers (CFO)”¹³³ (no mention of Spanish version of name)

2003: “Comité Fronterizo de Obreras (CFO or Border Committee of Women Workers)”¹³⁴.

2003: “Border Worker’s Committee”¹³⁵ (no mention of CFO or Spanish version of name)

2004: “Comité Fronterizo de Obreras (CFO), or Border Committee of Women Workers”¹³⁶.

2004: “Comité Fronterizo de Obrer@s (CFO)”¹³⁷ (no English translation mentioned although the article does refer to the CFO’s solidarity model as women-led)

2004: “Comité Fronterizo de Obrer@s (CFO)”¹³⁸ (no English translation mentioned)

2004: “Comité Fronterizo de Obreras”¹³⁹ (no mention of CFO or Spanish version of name)

2004: “Comité Fronterizo de Obreros, or the Border Committee of Women Workers”¹⁴⁰ (the CFO acronym is used later in the article)

2004: “Comité Fronterizo de Obreros, or the Border Committee of Women Workers”¹⁴¹ (the CFO acronym is used later in the article)

2005: “Border Committee of Women Workers” or “Julia Quiñonez’ organization”¹⁴² (no mention of CFO or Spanish version of name)

2005: “Comité Fronterizo de Obreros”¹⁴³ (no English translation mentioned; the CFO acronym is used later in the article)

2005: “Comité Fronterizo de Obreras (CFO)” and “Border Committee of Workers”¹⁴⁴

2005: “Comité Fronterizo de Obreras”¹⁴⁵ (no English translation mentioned; the CFO acronym is used later in the article)

¹³⁰ ¹³⁰ Arnie Alpert (2002), “Mexicans need fair wages, not just backpacks”, *New Hampshire Business Review*, June 14-17.

¹³¹ ___ (2002), “Persistence pays off in victories for maquiladora workers”, *Quaker Service Bulletin*, Spring.

¹³² Arnie Alpert (2003), “Workers Voice Fears, Frustrations During Labor Forum”, AFSC website, November 20.

¹³³ Ken Hechtman (2003), “Maquiladoras meltdown: As the multinationals’ factories leave Mexico for cheaper pastures, a bad situation for workers gets worse”, *Montreal Mirror*, vol. 19, no. 15, September 25-October 1.

¹³⁴ Josefina Castillo and Judith Rosenberg (2003), “Free Trade and Women: A Form of Low-Intensity Warfare?”, *AFSC-TAO: Texas Arkansas Oklahoma*, Summer.

¹³⁵ John Hanron (2003), “Trade Activist Host Forum”, *Methow Valley News*, February 5.

¹³⁶ Nicole Bradford (2004), “learning Through Play”, *AFSC-TAO Newsletter*, September.

¹³⁷ Greg Norman (2003), “Arriving with “Manos Vacias””, *AFSC - Austin Area Newsletter*, December.

¹³⁸ Judith Rosenberg (2004), “Boiling Under the Surface”, *cfomaquiladoras.org*, October.

¹³⁹ Rachel Stohr (2004), “Students see sweatshop brutality”, *University of New Mexico*, www.dailylobo.com, Monday, November 22.

¹⁴⁰ Brian Chasnoff (2004), “Profit and Poverty: Mexico’s Maquiladoras”, *Daily Texan – Top Stories*, February 11.

¹⁴¹ Brian Chasnoff (2004), “Workers endure harsh conditions”, *Daily Texan – Top Stories*, February 13.

¹⁴² ___ (2005), “Woman’s Fight for Women’s Cause”, Ugebrevev A4/Danish Confederation of Trade Unions, November 14.

¹⁴³ ___ (2005), “Network makes a splash at the world safety congress”, *Maquiladora Health and Safety Support Network Newsletter*, vol. IX, no. 2, October 30.

¹⁴⁴ ___ (2005), “David Bacon speaks with Julia Quiñonez”, *KPFA, The Morning Show*, Berkeley, CA, May 4 (Broadcasted June 8).

¹⁴⁵ Ricardo Hernandez (2005), “Mutual Trust and a Global Strategy: Foundations of Cross-Border Solidarity”, www.afsc.org, August.

- 2005: “Comité Fronterizo de Obrer@s, or the Border Committee of Women Workers”¹⁴⁶ (the CFO acronym is used later in the article)
- 2006: “Comité Fronterizo de Obreras (CFO)”¹⁴⁷ (no English translation mentioned)
- 2006: “Comité Fronterizo de Obrer@s (CFO, or Border Committee of Women Workers)”¹⁴⁸
- 2006: “Comité Fronterizo de Obrer@s (CFO, or Border Committee of Women Workers)”¹⁴⁹
- 2007: “Comité Fronterizo de Obrer@s (CFO)”¹⁵⁰ (no English translation mentioned)
- 2007: “Comité Fronterizo de Obreras (CFO), or Border Committee of Women Workers”¹⁵¹
- 2008: “CFO (in English, the Border Workers Committee)”¹⁵² (no mention of Spanish version of name)
- 2008: “Committee for Border Workers (CFO)”¹⁵³ (no mention of Spanish version of name)

¹⁴⁶ Ruxandra Guidi, “Maquiladoras: From Bad to Worse”, *Latino USA, radio journal of news and culture*, broadcasted March.

¹⁴⁷ ____ (2006), “Julia Quiñonez speaks out before Alcoa’s shareholders and Alain Belda responded”, Alcoa Annual Shareholders Meeting, Pittsburg, PA, April 21 [Excerpts from Q&A session].

¹⁴⁸ Willie Colon Reyes (2006), “One Stitch at a Time: In Maquiladora Dignidad y Justicia , workers are learning to be the bosses”, *Toward Peace and Justice: The American Friends and Service Committee monthly e-newsletter*, February.

¹⁴⁹ Willie Colon Reyes (2006), “Resisting globalization from the bottom up”, *AFSC Quaker Action*, Spring.

¹⁵⁰ Susan Mika, OSB (2007), “Justicia! – Made in Mexico, Worker-Owned”, *Network Connection*, July-August.

¹⁵¹ Judith Rosenberg (2007), “News from the Chinese-Mexican-Michigan border”, *AFSC Now – Central Regional News and Views*, Fall.

¹⁵² Leah Kolar (2008), “Our Community: Bigger Than We Think”, *The Menu: Newsletter of the UCC Social Justice Team* (unspecified publication date).

¹⁵³ Mary K. Isaacs (2008), “Reverb”, [no publication date is available and no journal title is mentioned. It simply states she is the Interim Director of Religious Education, perhaps for the AFSC?]

APPENDIX J

Personal reflections on the challenges encountered in conducting the field work

I believe that objectivity is neither possible nor desirable. My main focus was and is to give a voice to the women (and men) I have interviewed. However, I was also aware that as an outsider, especially a *gringa* from Canada, I might not be easily accepted by some of the group. This is why the introduction by someone they trusted was so important. Wanting to put the members of the CFO I might be interviewing at ease, I arranged to be introduced to the members of the CFO by the AFSC during my first field trip in November 2006 since there was already an established trust relationship between the CFO and AFSC. However, I was also aware that this could backfire in the sense that the CFO members might be less critical of the AFSC if they believed I was friends with them. This second scenario did in fact happen. I noticed very early on that many interviewees were hesitant to share any type of information regarding the CFO or AFSC. This was probably in large part due to the fact that CFO employees accompanied me on many of the interviews and sat in the same room and sometimes even interjected during the interview. After a dozen or so interviews conducted in this fashion, I was able to make alternate arrangements with the coordinator of the CFO, Julia Quiñonez, in order to speak to CFO members privately. Even in these private conversations, many of the members were hesitant to speak about the CFO or the AFSC until they were assured that any information they provided would be kept confidential. Moreover, some CFO members used very clandestine methods in order to provide me with information they felt was essential to my study of the CFO. In one example, a past interviewee contacted me and asked me to meet her friend at a certain street

corner at a specific date and time and described her friend and the car that would bring me to another unspecified location so that I may conduct the interview away from prying eyes of certain CFO employees. Unfortunately, someone did see us and this was reported back to the CFO leader, Julia Quiñonez. I was then confronted by both Julia Quiñonez and Ricardo Hernandez of the AFSC who demanded to know why I had interviewed this particular person (they correctly guessed who the person was) and wanted me to share the information from the interview with them. I re-explained the confidential nature of the interviews and explained that they could see the final results but not the interview transcripts and reminded them of the consent forms they had both been provided with before my trip which detailed the confidentiality requirements set out by the Ethics Board. My interview with Julia Quiñonez took place on the last night of my stay in Mexico, at 8:30 pm, and Julia indicated to me that she was not pleased with me for having spoken to certain ex-CFO members. Julia's parting words to me after the interview were that if she had known at the beginning that I was going to speak to people who were against her and not share the interviews with her, she never would have invited me. She also never gave me a copy of the previous years' annual reports and the CFO's operating budget which she had stated she would give before I left, nor did she send them by e-mail as she then promised to do during her interview.

Rather than imposing myself on a leader of a group who no longer wanted to participate or have her group participate in my research and thereby creating more problems between the members of the CFO and their leader simply by virtue of them being seen with me, I chose to go to other cities where I could still speak to current and former CFO members without causing any issues with Julia Quiñonez. This did not work out quite as planned as one of the first people I met with

in Matamoros was a former CFO member still quite friendly with Julia Quiñonez (she had been present at the CFO annual meeting in Ciudad Acuña in 2006) who rather than introduce me to current and former CFO members I could interview asked more questions to find out what I already knew so she could report back to Julia.

Research in another country always poses some difficulties, especially when travelling alone and going to a new country for the first time. Some challenges I faced were physical: heat exhaustion and stomach infections requiring medical treatment. Some were cultural: inconspicuously meeting with and confidentially interviewing maquiladora workers so as to avoid the attention of management, unions, and Mexican authorities were difficult endeavours for a pale Caucasian woman travelling alone in the Mexican border towns. Extremely conservative, covering dress did nothing to alleviate such attention. I quickly realized that a woman travelling unescorted or outside of a group was considered anomalous to the point where Mexican locals and even police officers questioned such women. This experience was also shared by another Norwegian researcher studying NGOs in Matamoros and seems to be very particular to the Northern Mexico border region (women travelling alone would not experience the same level of unwanted attention in Mexico City for example).

Other difficulties were encountered by the simple fact of staying alone. Hotel rooms meeting Canadian safety standards were used for security reasons, but were also used for interviews. One of the specifications on the interview consent forms was that the interview would be conducted wherever the interviewee preferred, and so the option to use my hotel room may have compromised my safety. Groups of maquiladora workers who returned to my hotel room

uninvited compounded this issue. Long stays at a hotel and meetings with maquiladora organizers who were associated with people who had been kidnapped and tortured for organizing maquiladora workers likely aroused suspicions in hotel staff and beyond, compromising the safety and confidentiality of interviews. I do wish to specify that there were no specific threats against me or any of the interviewees. I did however have some cause for concern and left the hotel in question as soon as I had finished my interviews.

On a final note, I do want to mention the fact that although my gender did pose some problems on a level of personal safety (the need to be a bit more cautious), it also helped people to open up to me, especially women maquiladora workers. I do strongly believe that my gender helped them feel more comfortable telling me about personal stories of oppression in the workplace or outside. I do therefore feel that, although it is slightly more dangerous for women to travel alone to certain areas, it would be a disservice to research in general to limit female researcher's travel because of possible difficulties. The objectives of my study were met despite these observed challenges. I do however feel that the success of future research projects in similar settings might be better ensured through such considerations noted below. For future research projects in border communities, researchers might do well to consider fieldwork conducted by a research team, conducting interviews for shorter periods of time on the ground in a single location. A group (possibly of mixed gender) might attract less attention in such areas than would a lone Caucasian woman. Less time spent in a single field location might mitigate the risks of drawing unwanted attention to both a research team and its interviewees. A final suggestion would be for the researcher to not conduct the interviews where he or she is staying.