The Politics of Grassroots Support:
NGO Promoted Community-Based Social Change in Contemporary Puerto Rico

By

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Chapter I

Introduction

I. Point(s) of Departure

> *Much of social work at the end of the 20th century has a "back to the future" ring to it. Community is back in vogue as a context, as a method, and as a level of intervention.*

> *Terry Mizrahi, 2001, p.176*

The resurgence of 'community' in social work is symptomatic of the concept's broader revitalization over the last couple of decades. According to Gerald Creed (2006), community is ubiquitous in public discourses today, becoming almost an "obsession" for those articulating all sorts of political and economic change projects (p. 3). The revival of community is a complex phenomenon associated with the convergence of a series of intimately related, although often contradictory, processes in the development field and reformist political projects in general: the global emphasis on poverty reduction through focalized policies; the preference for participatory and local development models; the restructuring of the welfare state by means of neoliberal policies that delegated to individuals, families and social groups the responsibility to secure their wellbeing; the post-Cold War disillusion with the grand narratives and categories of the Left; and the growing demands of identity or territorially defined political movements, among others. Together, these trends created the condition for the renaissance of community as an important concept in debates over how to democratize democracy, end welfare

dependence, make economic development a more inclusive process, and promote the political recognition of heterogeneous demands.

The relevance of community to such a wide range of issues and debates is due in part to the veil of transparency and common sense under which it circulates. Community is used mostly to allude to some basic referents, like distinct groups of people, affective relations, and geographic location (ibid.; Brokensha & Hodge, 1969; Rubin & Rubin, 2001). The concept is also layered with other notions, such as homogeneity, locality, solidarity, harmony and identity (Creed, 2006, p. 5). These referents have construed community as an ideal culturally and politically homogenous, participatory local social system (Bryson & Mowbray, 1981). These qualities portray community as an alternative and/or supplement to the alienation, bureaucratization, rationality, and exclusions of modern capitalist society. As such, community stands as "the defining other of modernity, of capitalism" (Joseph, 2002, p. 2). Unsurprisingly, then, community has become an attractive concept for all sorts of practitioners, such as social workers, development experts, social activists and policy makers, who seek a manageable social context in which to implement change initiatives.

Despite its seeming transparency and positive aura, community is actually a highly ambiguous term that has been subject to multiple reformulations and lengthy scholarly critiques (Brokensha & Hodge, 1969; Bryson & Mowbray, 1981; Etzoni, 1996). These critiques have exposed occasions in which the discourse of community has been complicit with systems of power, gender oppression and discriminatory political process (Guijt & Kaul Shah, 1998). As one of those critics, Gerald Creed points out that community has the potential to do "ideological work" for a variety of causes that range

"from simply reinforcing the status quo to challenging systems of oppression to provoking communitarian violence and genocide" (Creed, 2006, p. 4). For example, community can be invoked to reinforce an exclusionary homogeneity in light of emerging cultural diversity or it can be the source of solidarity for a radical political movement. Ironically, the most notable characteristic of the concept of community might be the indeterminacy of its political effects. Thus, community obfuscates more than it reveals about the political logic and effects of the social change projects pursued in its name.

This indeterminacy has been exacerbated today due to the strong association between community and another equally ambiguous term: nongovernmental organization or NGO.[1] In principle, NGOs are self-governing organizations engaged in public good issues from a social space that claims to be distinct from the public and private-for-profit sectors (Salamon & Anheier, 1998). According to Mora y Araujo and Serantes (1997), this "third" space or sector consists of "organizations that emerge voluntarily from the roots of a community, cohere around objectives that they themselves define, and do not pursue a profit" (p. 49, my translation). As institutional expressions of this third sector, NGOs are the vehicles through which citizens organize to advocate for improvements or changes in the state's dealings with social, economic or cultural issues, and confront the market's inability to provide goods and services in an equitable and/or affordable manner

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[1] A number of terms are used to discuss the general field and organizations to which I am referring by the term nongovernmental organization or NGO: third sector, civil society, nonprofit, independent sector, etc. For a discussion of the subtle conceptual differences among these terms see Mora y Araujo & Serantes (1997). My use of the term nongovernmental organization or NGO is strategic. This concept allows me to emphasize the claim that made by these organizations of belonging to a distinct sphere from the public and for-profit private sector. However, I acknowledge that the term nonprofit (sin fin de lucro) is much more commonly used in Puerto Rico. This latter term's emphasis on the corporate format of the organization is significant, but in my estimation does not capture as strongly the nongovernmental claim of these organizations.

(ibid.; Choup, 2001; Shifter, 2000).[2]   Finally, their voluntary and not-for-profit orientation is expressed quite literally in NGOs' corporate status. In most countries, NGOs are legally incorporated as nonprofit agencies according to state laws, which often include tax exemptions privileges (Salamon, 2002). According to Miranda Joseph, the acquisition of this corporate format has increasingly become a precondition for recognition as a community group in the United States (Joseph, 2002, p. 28).

Like community, NGOs exude a positive aura due to their association with community and volunteerism, and their nonprofit commitment. However, as in the case with community, researchers have pointed out that NGOs are not as transparent as they claim to be. According to William Fisher (1997), NGOs are not a unified source of intentions and practices: "There is no simple or consistent story of good NGOs confronting evil governments…the NGO field is a heterogeneous one encompassing a wide range of groups with different ideological agendas" (p. 452). As Fisher states, NGO is an umbrella term that encompasses a broad array of organizations with different purposes, philosophies, expertise and scope of activities. Contrary to popular perception, not all NGOs trace their roots to community activism or are involved in social change efforts. Moreover, 'nongovernmental' is more often a claim than a reality for some NGOs: governments and corporations often create NGOs, while other NGOs operate as service contractors for states and multinational banks. Finally, as institutions servicing communities in need through the use of scientific knowledge, expertise and financial means, NGOs are possible sites through which power over marginalized groups is

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[2] In this sense, NGOs and the nongovernmental sector are often overlapped with the concept of civil society. Civil society is centuries old concept dating as far back as the European Enlightment. Its definition, uses and political orientation have varied throughout the centuries. For a more in-depth discussion of the concept in the anthropological literature, see Coombe (1997) and Paley (2002).

articulated and deployed today. Thus, like community, NGOs have the potential to carry out not only ideological work, but also actual practical work (social interventions) that advances a variety of political causes.

The ambiguity and political polyvalence encapsulated by both community and NGOs constituted the point of departure for my research on grassroots support.[3] Grassroots support is a community development model that calls for development agencies, such as NGOs, to collaborate with impoverished communities in an effort to help them transform their precarious socio-economic situation. The collaboration consists in facilitating a set of services and resources intended to increase the capacity of residents for community self-management and promote the creation and growth of local economic initiatives. This approach makes grassroots support one of those currently popular anti-poverty strategies that, borrowing from Terry Mizrahi's opening quote, takes community as a context, method and level of intervention.

As a social change model, NGO promoted grassroots support presents itself as an alternative to other much more salient social change paradigms that dominated twentieth century politics, such as the Marxist confrontational politics of class-based internationalism and the top-down, technocratic approach of the international development and modernization aid industry (Appadurai, 2002). By contrast, NGO promoted grassroots support opts for a politics of partnership that seeks to integrate the resources and capacities of a set of actors traditionally envisioned as rivals, such as states, corporations and workers, into a project of emancipation and greater social equality and justice (ibid., p. 22). Grassroots support NGOs summon these disparate actors through

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[3] Political polyvalence alludes to the capacity of concepts like community and NGO to combine with or form part of multiple political projects. This re-combinatory capacity is the source of the indeterminacy of their signification as concepts.

the appeal of participatory, empowerment and community-based discourses today. Finally, this model recognizes the imposing presence of NGOs today and their potential to "be made part of new models of global governance and local democracy" (ibid.).

For proponents of this model, the effects and outcomes of grassroots support are over-determined by its stated goals: Communities are empowered, residents of impoverished communities increase their participation in the political process, and sustainable economic initiatives emerge amidst poverty as a result of grassroots support interventions. However, grassroots support's embeddedness in the broader discourse on community and its use by NGOs implicates this model in the political indeterminacy that encompasses both. This complicates our understanding of grassroots support since the promotion of empowerment and community participation does not carry the same meaning and/or consequences when pursued as a strategy to overcome political oppression or economic exploitation than when it is serves to compensate for the retrenchment of state entitlements or help people succeed in the current capitalist economic system as micro-entrepreneurs. Thus, the defining claims of grassroots support are also tainted with ambiguity and political indeterminacy.

Understanding grassroots support today requires more than just determining whether its implementation by NGOs leads to community empowerment, increased participation or successful microenterprises. Answering those questions, while necessary, results in an insufficient research agenda that does not clarify or establish the ends to which these efforts were directed or their actual effects once implemented. Based on this insight, my research was driven by an interest in examining the effects of grassroots support in an era of deep political and ideological competition in which a

variety of actors, ranging from conservative neoliberal reformers to progressive activists, champion this strategy as a means to overcome poverty. Thus, my research on grassroots support started off by questioning the assumed transparency between the claims of grassroots support and its actual effects on the community-based social change efforts pursued in its name. This starting point implied that the effects produced by grassroots support were to be established ethnographically rather than assumed from its claims.

By questioning the a priori assumptions about the expected effects of grassroots support as employed by NGOs, I aimed to avoid reproducing the general trends (and major pitfalls) of the available literature on NGO promoted social change initiatives. According to William Fisher (1997), this literature is "replete with sweeping generalizations; optimistic statements about the potentials of NGOs for delivering welfare services, implementing development projects, and facilitating democratization; and instrumental treatises on building the capacity of NGOs to perform these functions" (p. 441). By contrast, my research sought to offer a critical analysis that explored the gap between the claims and aims of the model and the actual effects resulting from its implementation by NGOs. The analysis of this gap allowed me to examine precisely those issues glossed over with "sweeping generalizations" and "optimistic statements": the relationship between NGOs and the community groups they claim to support, and the meaning of empowerment and participation that emerges from that relationship.

Nevertheless, this focus on effects and outcomes seemed to disavow, or at least dismiss, the legitimacy and efficacy of the model's stated goals, the NGOs' mission statements, and even the generalized perception that supporting community initiatives is a worthy endeavor that generates positive outcomes. Therefore, as posed, my research

problem generated a new problem: How could I analyze the claims and aims of grassroots support and NGOs in a way that did not reduce them to spurious or frivolous claims undermined by the weight of the results of grassroots support's work? While I was struggling to reconcile these two research problems, I came across David Mosse's article entitled, "Is Good Policy Unimplementable? Reflections on the Ethnography of Aid Policy and Practice" (Mosse, 2004). In it, Mosse was working through a similar problem: Examining the gap between policy aims and actual practices in the development industry. His analysis led him to conclude that development policies/models and practices are related, but not in the causal manner in which it is usually conceived. According to him:

> …policy (development models, strategies and project designs) primarily functions to mobilize and maintain political support, that is to legitimize rather than to orientate practice…Project design is the art, firstly of making a convincing argument and developing a causal model (relating inputs, outputs and impacts) oriented upwards to justify the allocation of resources by validating higher policy goals; and secondly of bringing together diverse, even incompatible, interests—of national governments, implementing agencies, collaborating NGOs, research institutions, or donor advisers of different hues. (p. 648)

For Mosse, policies and models are technical discourses that propose solutions to problems by constructing causal relations out of a set of variables and inputs. These technical discourses function as coherent arguments that help validate an intended line of work in the eyes of interested parties, including those whose lives will be impacted by the development project. As Gerald Creed would say, policies and models do important "ideological work" in the construction of a common ground that makes the project of intervening and transforming people's lives appealing and legitimate to everyone invested in bringing about change.

By contrast, Mosse argues that development practices are determined less by models and policies than by the political and cultural logic of the field itself. Abstract

prescriptions and mission statements usually yield to the demands of carrying out a set of tasks in the field among a diverse set of actors whose interests re-emerge when project resources and responsibilities are being assigned and negotiated. The implementation of development models usually confronts the broader socio-political logic that structures its field of action, such as political patronage, authoritarian local leadership and/or community resident's lack of commitment to participation. Therefore, project outputs are the result of a "complex set of practical improvisations, and institutional and political relations" that often exceed or diverge from the prescriptions of policy or models (ibid., p. 656). Thus, development practices cannot be reduced to policy or model implementation, although they are somewhat organized and driven by them.

Mosse's analysis opened up for me a way to move forward with my research in a way that ended up defining it. Mosse's analytic framework addresses separately two political dimensions of the development field, which he claims are related, but not causally linked: the policy arena and the context of development practices. The policy arena constitutes a contested field of politics in which different proponents define problems and articulate solutions (policies/intervention models) in order to garner the support of potential collaborators and justify the mobilization of resources towards achieving pre-established goals. In my research project, grassroots support emerges as a model whose definition of problems and articulation of solutions attracted the interest and commanded the respect of actors with diverse and even incompatible social change projects. Grassroots support, draped in the allure of community, nongovernmental, participation and empowerment, seemed to encapsulate the dominant ideas in the

development field that define the most legitimate methods and desirable aspirations of social change efforts.

However, like the concepts of community and NGOs, grassroots support gains meaning and efficacy in particular policy contexts and in relation to who articulates it and for what reasons. Therefore, NGO promoted grassroots support and its social change potential need to be examined in a policy context in which neoliberal reforms have significantly altered the scope and meaning of the social contract by redefining the public sector through cutbacks, privatizations and sub-contracting. This analysis is crucial in light of recent research that argues that privatization and state contracting with third parties has negatively impacted the nonprofit sector by limiting its advocacy role and increasing its service provision role (Canino-Arroyo, 2003). Thus, my research focused less on defining grassroots support or deciphering its conceptual inconsistencies than to tracing the political logic orienting the policies, NGOs and community groups promoting its use.

The second dimension explored by Mosse was the context of development practices, which appealed to my research interest in outcomes and effects. Based on his analysis, I moved to consider the effects of grassroots support as outcomes of concrete moments of practice. The practice of grassroots support is definitely motivated and influenced by the political logic of the policies and NGO goals motivating its use. Nonetheless, practice constitutes a political field in its own right shaped by interests and contextual negotiations that, as Mosse points out, often diverge from and exceed the prescriptions of policies, models and intended political reforms. In other words, the claims of grassroots support and the political goals of the NGOs using it do not translate

neatly or uncontested to the field of practice. Therefore, I dedicated a great deal of my ethnographic research efforts to examining the politics of grassroots support practice.

My research, then, examines grassroots support in relation to these two political dimensions: First, as an important model that has been the subject of policies claiming to be promoting social change and, second, as a set of development practices in the field. Both dimensions are intricately linked, but neither exerts a determining influence over the other. Ultimately, though, my interest on effects and outcomes led me to focus my ethnographic research on the second dimension, the politics of practice, as the site in which to explore the contributions of grassroots support to community-based social change efforts in Puerto Rico.

Arriving at the Context and Establishing the Relevance of My Research

My research on grassroots support was carried out in Puerto Rico, a Caribbean society politically subordinated to the United States since 1898.[4] At first glance, Puerto Rico seems like an odd choice to research development issues since the island has not been considered a developing country for decades now. In fact, the World Bank categorizes Puerto Rico as a high income economy.[5] However, despite this categorization, Puerto Rico's economy has been exhibiting structural problems, such as persistent unemployment and high poverty and low labor participation rates, since the 1970s. The island's pressing problems and needed reforms have been documented and analyzed in at least fourteen economic studies commissioned and/or carried out by the Puerto Rican and U.S. federal governments as well as by domestic and international

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[4] Puerto Rico's political status and history under the United States will be covered in greater detail in chapter 3.

[5] The World Bank's high income economy category applies to those countries whose per capita income is at or above $12,196. For the World Bank's full data on Puerto Rico, see http://data.worldbank.org/country/puerto-rico.

nongovernmental agencies over the last three decades.[6] The fact that ten of those studies have been produced since 1989, which points to the growing recent concern over the island's economic model:

- Hacia la Segunda Transformación Económica (1989) [Towards the Second Economic Transformation]
- Nuevo Modelo de Desarrollo Económico (1994) [New Economic Development Model]
- Informe de la Cámara de Comercio (1997) [Chamber of Comerce Report]
- Futuro Económico de Puerto Rico (1999) [Puerto Rico's Economic Future]
- Hacia una Economía Posible (2003) [Towards a Possible Economy]
- The Puerto Rico Life Sciences Road Map (2003)
- Proyecto Puerto Rico 2025 (2004) [Puerto Rico 2025 Project]
- Desafíos de Puerto Rico frente al Siglo XXI-CEPAL (2005) [Puerto Rico's Challenges Facing the XXI Century]
- Estudio del GAO (2006) [General Accounting Office Report]
- Restoring Growth in Puerto Rico-Brooking Institute (2006)

Besides tracing the changing contours of Puerto Rico's imagined economic futures, the list of studies suggests an unyielding search for solutions to an economic situation that is widely acknowledged as being untenable. Puerto Rico's long-standing economic problems and the unrelenting exploration of economic alternatives by both local and international intellectuals led me to disregard such dubious dichotomies as developed/developing countries and to re-consider Puerto Rico a relevant site in which to research development related issues.

The development model I was interested in examining, NGO promoted grassroots support, has been largely overlooked by the above cited macro-economic studies, which have dominated the discussion of Puerto Rico's economic future. Unfortunately, the economists, planners, accountants and entrepreneurs that contributed to these studies do not consider community development or NGO promoted social change as part of the key

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[6] For a full list of the studies, see the ex-Governor Anibal Acevedo Vila's Plan de Desarrollo Económico y Transformación de Gobierno Para Puerto Rico (2006), p. 5.

strategic interventions that will help restore Puerto Rico's economic growth or contribute to greater wealth re-distribution. Besides this thematic oversight, the more general economic literature on poverty and income inequality in Puerto Rico exhibits a number of methodological shortcomings. Eduardo Kicinski, an economist, identified at least three major gaps in that literature relevant to my research (Kicinski, 2005, p. 1, my translation):

- The lack of a holistic view of poverty that integrates the approach of various disciplines, such as economics, sociology, psychology, social work and political science, among others.

- The need for more field studies.

- The lack of micro data, particularly longitudinal studies, that follow the steps taken by people experiencing poverty.

The silences identified by Kicinski's list point to two major limitations: the lack of qualitative research and the absence of interdisciplinary approaches. Although there are some exceptions (Martínez & Catalá, 2002), these limitations need to be rectification in order to enrich the knowledge base on economic problems and development alternatives in Puerto Rico.

My research seeks to redress some of those lapses by establishing the relevance of community development initiatives and development NGOs to broader discussions about Puerto Rico's economic problems and potential solutions. To be sure, my goal is not to assert their validity as options, but rather to include their analysis in the broader conversation about Puerto Rico's economy. Moreover, my research aims to begin to fill some of the voids in poverty studies identified by Kicisnski by following an interdisciplinary approach. My research creates a common intellectual field out of

anthropology and social work, the two disciplinary fields to which I belong. It builds on theories, data and critiques offered by both these fields on such topics as community development, grassroots support, nongovernmental organizations, capitalism, the welfare state, poverty, neoliberalism, among others. I also integrate in my research the knowledge generated in Puerto Rico and abroad about those topics by economists, sociologists and political scientists among others. Finally, my research contributes a field study of an anti-poverty strategy filled with micro data on the practices of grassroots support, including the thoughts, actions and aspirations of people who live in poverty as well as those assisting them in efforts to overcome it.

Puerto Rico also emerged as an appropriate site for my research topic because like its closest neighbors, Caribbean nation-states and the United States, the island has been exposed to the global trends that led to the resurgence of community and popularized NGOs and grassroots support. Neoliberal reforms, such as the reduction and privatization of public social services, have been implemented in the island by both the local state government and the United State's federal policies since the 1980s with dubious results for the wellbeing of vulnerable populations, such as women and poor families and communities (Colón Reyes, 2005; García Toro, 2003; Hernández Angueira, 2001; Negrón Velásquez & Zavaleta Calderón, 2003; Pratts, 1996). Alongside those reforms, the island has experimented with participatory development models. Ex-Governor Sila M. Calderón (2000-2004) inaugurated Puerto Rico's XXI century with a state program to address poverty which focused on community as its object of intervention and relied on a participatory, community development methodology similar to grassroots support (Kliksberg & Rivera, 2007; Ley número 1 del 2001). Other participatory and local

development models have also gained national recognition in recent years, such as the Democratic Governance model of the municipality of Caguas and the Peninsula de Cantera community-based project in San Juan (Rivera Grajales, 2007; Santana Rabell, Santiago Centeno & Rivera Ortiz, 2007). Moreover, the activism generated by dozens of community groups and organizations like the G-8 and the Alliance of Community Leaders has consolidated the community-based movement as an important political actor demanding the vindication of citizen rights in Puerto Rico. Finally, the nongovernmental sector has experienced an extraordinary expansion in Puerto Rico over the last couple of decades resulting in an increase in its overall contribution to the economy and services delivered to island residents (Díaz Olivo, 2000; ÉNFASIS, 2003; Estudios Técnicos, 2002, 2007; Nina, 2003; Senado de Puerto Rico, 2004). In all, 'community' and the nongovernmental sector have become important elements of Puerto Rico's contemporary political and economic life.

The link between community and NGOs has captured the popular imagination, as evidenced by newspaper articles such as "ONG: La alternativa comunitaria" ("NGO: The community alternative") published in *El Nuevo Día* (*The New Day*), Puerto Rico's most widely circulating newspaper.[7] The article presents NGOs as part of the broader global response to the deleterious effects of globalization and state inefficiency. It discusses the work of two well known NGOs in Puerto Rico as evidence of this response: Misión Industrial (Industrial Mission), an environmental advocacy organization, and Iniciativa Comunitaria (Community Initiative), an educational and health service providing organization that focuses on HIV positive and homeless populations. The article reviews their achievements and critiques the obstacles hindering their work, specifically the

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[7] "ONG: La alternativa comunitaria," *El Nuevo Día*, October 24, 2004.

state's untimely payments to these organizations. It concludes by reinforcing the positive construction of NGOs in the popular imaginary: "The objective of community organizations, nonetheless, is not to become a parallel state, but rather to fulfill their commitment, which is to benefit society."[8]

The article reproduces the "sweeping generalizations" and "optimistic statements" that present NGOs as a unified field of intentions and community-based work as the catalysts of positive reforms. To be sure, Misión Industrial and Iniciativa Comunitaria are highly respected organizations widely acknowledged to be critical of capitalism's exploitative transformation of the environment and of the current shortcomings of public agencies mandated to provide services to marginalized populations. However, the blanket statements made about NGOs and community-based work based on these two organizations do not capture the ambiguities and contradictions encompassed by these terms.

Unfortunately, the popular press is not the only one that treats the topic of community and NGOs in such a fashion. Some of the academic literature on these topics in Puerto Rico reflects a similar uncritical bias. Recent analysis of community development programs, from state administered initiatives like the Special Needs Communities Program to semi-autonomous initiatives like the Peninsula de Cantera community project[9], emphasize the strengths of these initiatives in light of the broader political and economic challenges facing the island, such as state inefficiencies, political

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[8] Ibid., my translation.
[9] I refer to the project as semi-autonomous because the project is governed by a law, Ley 20 del 1992, and the board of directors of the Corporation for the Development of the Peninsula de Cantera consists of 11 members, 6 of which are named by the Governor and 5 by the Mayor of San Juan. The law calls for at least 3 of these board members to be residents of Cantera. For more information on the legal aspects of this project, see Estremera Jiménez (2007).

exclusions, poverty and welfare dependence (Colón, 2007; Correa Matos, 2003; Klirksberg & Rivera, 2007; Oficina para el Financiamiento Socioeconómico y la Autogestión, 2003; Rivera Grajales, 2009; Santana Rabell, Santiago Centeno & Rivera Ortiz, 2007). Participatory, community development projects, especially community economic development initiatives, emerge from these studies as initiatives bearing the potential to improve the material well-being of impoverished communities and advance the democratic growth of Puerto Rican society.

The literature on NGOs mirrors the optimism of the community development literature. This optimism is almost expected of some studies. Estudios Técnicos, a local consulting firm, produces the most comprehensive and widely read report on the nonprofit sector in P.R. about every five years since 1996 (Estudios Técnicos, 1996, 2002, 2007). However, they produce this survey at the behest of the most prominent foundations in the island. The 2007 study was produced under the auspices of Fundación Carvajal, Fundación Flamboyán, Fundación Banco Popular, Miranda Foundation, Fundación Ferré Rangel, Fundación José J. Pierluisi and Museo de Arte de P.R. Aside from its compromising funding source, the study is very candid about its objective: keeping the public informed about the contributions of the sector to the country's social and economic wellbeing (Estudios Técnicos, 2007, p. 3). Therefore, these studies lack a critical analysis of the sector and its relationship to major policy trends, such as neoliberalism.

Other major texts on the nongovernmental or third sector in Puerto Rico present and analyze the sector and its organizations as expressions of a new form of citizen activism that emerged in response to state inefficiencies and market exclusions (Díaz

Olivo, 2000; ÉNFASIS, 2003; Nina, 2003; Senado de P.R. 2004). Roberto Mori Gonzalez's (2004) characterization of nonprofit and nongovernmental organizations in Puerto Rico is somewhat representative of the shared analytical framework in which this literature understands these organizations:

> For some time now, many civil society and third sector organizations have been making their presence felt in a decisive manner in our country. In some cases, we are dealing with sectors that have arrived at the conclusion that the State simply cannot solve, as it did in the past, urgent problems and social needs as well as provide some services. In other cases, we are dealing with groups that oppose state policies, such as the privatization of public corporations…This gives a greater importance to local powers and participation by citizens and community groups. (p. 17, my translation)

Thus, this literature envisions NGOs as do-good organizations filling in for a receding State and combating such neoliberal policies as privatization.

The above studies on participatory, community development initiatives and NGOs share a similar limitation: They locate both phenomena within a progressive political framework, which is only one of the multiple political paradigms in which community development and NGOs operate and to which they contribute. However, they do not address, for example, the historical critiques of community development projects in (neo)colonial and post-colonial contexts nor do they consider their potential relation with neoliberal agendas today. According to Hickey and Mohan (2004), community development was used by colonial powers and emerging nation-states during the mid-twentieth century to ensure the legitimacy of the new political order by (re)producing "stable rural communities to counteract processes of urbanization and sociopolitical change, including radical nationalist and leftist movements" (p. 7). More recently, community development and NGOs has been associated with the installation of more inclusive modes of governance that also seek to curtail the expression of more radical

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political movements (ibid., p. 8; INCITE, 2007). None of the above cited studies examined community development and/or NGOs in light of those critiques nor did they explain how the projects or organizations analyzed avoided being part of those re-configurations of power.

Some scholars have made recent efforts to offer a critical reading of community development and NGOs in Puerto Rico. Amelisse de Jesus Dávila (2008) offered an incisive discourse analysis of the law that created the Special Needs Communities Program, Ley número 1 del 2001. Her analysis exposed the links between the program as elaborated in the law and the logic of neoliberalism. According to her, the law's limited focus on poverty deposits the weight of overcoming poverty on the shoulders of impoverished populations by ignoring the need for broader socio-economic transformations. Likewise, Rubén Estremera Jiménez (2007) analyzes the 'desencuentros' (mismatches or gaps) between the claims of community empowerment, self-management and participation in the law that authorizes the Peninsula de Cantera community development project, Law #20 of 1992, and reality of the project as implemented. According to him, the law and, therefore, the project are plagued by the contradiction "between the social wellbeing of the community and the interests of the social classes that advocate for the accumulation of capital" (Estremera Jiménez, 2007, p. 124, my translation). Finally, recent publications in social work have made important contributions to theoretical debates on the links between the politics of empowerment and neoliberal governance as well as on the relation between different social actors and participatory initiatives today (Rivera Díaz, 2009; Zapata López, 2002).

Migdalia Camacho Hernandez's (2009) recent analysis of the existent legislation on the third sector in the island includes a comprehensive literature review on the sector. Contrary to other studies, her review points to the ambiguities in the literature on NGOs. She highlights studies that argue that many of the virtues assigned to the nongovernmental sector, such as being closer to communities, generating social capital, and having an altruistic mission, have not been empirically proven (ibid., p. 59). Moreover, she stresses the findings of certain studies that point to the compromising effects of the sector's dependence on public funding (ibid.). She concludes by affirming that the sector must address these limitations in order to fully develop its potential contributions to society.

Similarly, the report that resulted from the first Social Forum that took place in Puerto Rico on November 2007 calls for a critical review of NGOs. The report proposes the following two suggestions for examining NGOs (Soto López & Cotto Morales, 2007, p. 34, my translation):

1. Organize a comprehensive forum to discuss at depth the nature of these organizations, their history and social function.

2. Be vigilant so their members and ex-members do not use NGOs in order to become consultants for private, for-profit companies. In other words, safeguard the integrity of NGOs and ensure that they fulfill their primary function, which is to provide services to the community and not to service themselves.

Both texts note the possibility that NGOs can contribute to something other than alternative, grassroots, oppositional movements. Moreover, they raise the thorny issue of

dependence on public funds and the uneasy working relations with the private for-profit sector. Yet, both texts are limited in that they raise these issues, but do not follow up their critiques with the necessary empirical studies.

My research aims to contribute to the development of this emerging body of critical studies that acknowledge and address the current political polyvalence of both community development and NGOs. It builds on the theoretical insights offered by these studies about the potential relation among NGOs, their pursuit of community empowerment and participation and the current neoliberal agenda. Following those insights, my research examines the empowerment practices of grassroots support NGOs with close links to U.S. federal neoliberal policies and local pro-market social reformers. Moreover, my research seeks to explore further the gaps and mismatches between policies and mission statements and the reality of community development practice. In fact, one of the most important contributions of my research is its detailed focus on the practice of grassroots support. Thus, my research forms part of a greater effort by critical scholars in Puerto Rico to rethink popular social intervention models and organizations in relation to current models of governance and capitalist reform efforts in the island.

On Methodology

Due to the dearth of qualitative field studies on community development and NGOs in Puerto Rico, I decided to conduct an ethnographic study of the grassroots support work of a local nongovernmental organization committed to combating poverty among underprivileged communities. Ethnography, as Clifford Geertz (1973) emphasized, is characterized by a commitment to 'thickness,' which at its core seeks to generate an understanding of phenomena through rich detail by capturing the full texture

of events, people and ideas. As Sherry Ortner (2006) explains, for years the commitment to thickness in anthropology was synonymous with either exhaustiveness or holism, both of which were associated with the project of trying "to describe entire systems or at least fully grasp the principles underlying it" (p. 43). In recent decades, this approach has been rethought due to epistemological changes in anthropology that have privileged more interpretative approaches and questioned the notion of culture and society as bounded entities (Trouillot, 2003). Today, ethnography is concerned with issues of contextualization; that is, of locating phenomena in relation to systems of power and inequality, such as race, class or gender, or within global political and socio-economic processes (Ortner, 2006.; Marcus & Fischer, 1986). In this reformulated version, ethnography allows us to capture issues and problems at a smaller scale with the conviction that the understanding generated contributes to larger scale theoretical discussions.

Although ethnographic studies are the norm in socio-cultural anthropology, qualitative research is not as widely used or respected a methodology in social work. According to Ian Shaw and Nick Gould, both of whom are strong proponents of qualitative research in social work, this methodology is thought of as "ill-adapted to shed light on social work outcomes, is sometimes lacking in rigour, is not susceptible to enabling generalizations to other contexts, and, more generally, is less likely to yield findings that are useful in a clear, instrumental form (Shaw & Gould, 2001, p. 5). Besides this general critique, the overuse of case studies in nonprofit sector research, the limited generalizability of their results, and the lack of power for predicting the

probability of future events are all criticisms that have been leveled against continued qualitative case studies of grassroots support NGOs (Carroll, 1992).

I contend that the deep and rich understanding of a phenomenon offered by ethnographic case studies is relevant and illuminating to anyone interested in a similar phenomenon, even if it is in a different context or time frame. Nonetheless, I take the lack of ethnographic studies of grassroots support NGOs as a greater concern in Puerto Rico at present than issues of predictability and generalizability. Moreover, Shaw & Gould (2001) as well as others, like Deborah Padgett (1998), have argued convincingly for the value of qualitative research methods in social work, particularly for the following research agendas, which overlap significantly with my own research interests:

- Evaluating social work interventions
- Understanding the processes and outcomes of social work practices
- Describing and explaining social problems encountered by human service organizations
- Capturing the perception of different actors, including interpreting the intentions and meanings of people's actions.

Finally, recent examples of qualitative studies on development NGOs, such as Sanyal (2006), confirm the continued value of this method for producing detailed examinations of these organizations and offering rich analysis of the actual processes and strategies through which they work. Thus, my interest in understanding the practice of grassroots support as well as the politics of the different actors converging around these initiatives justifies, from a social work perspective, my choice of a qualitative, case study research method.

The ethnographic research design of my object of study, NGO promoted grassroots support, presented me with a number of challenges. Probably the greatest challenge was determining 'the field;' that is, where I would locate myself in order to

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examine ethnographically a phenomenon that lied at the intersection of grassroots support and development NGOs. Fortunately, Lisa Markowitz had struggled with similar issues in her article, "Finding the Field: Notes on the Ethnography of NGOs" (Markowitz, 2001). According to her, social and economic processes today associated with globalization have questioned the "social boundedness" of localities, which has undermined the "viability and appropriateness of traditional community-based ethnography" (ibid., p. 41). In response, some anthropologists have moved to multilocal research strategies and shifted to analyzing interconnecting systems. NGOs are examples of these interconnecting systems that constitute new 'fields' of anthropological research. These organizations and their development projects lie at the center of complex social networks that link a disparate set of actors, ranging from international donors, state policy makers, private foundations and grassroots groups. Thus, conducting NGO ethnography "requires doing local fieldwork within a web of relationships that are inherently unstable among groups of people with whom one has widely varying relationships" (ibid.).

Following Markowitz's insight, I decided to select a grassroots support NGO in Puerto Rico and define its web of relations and grassroots support practices as the field of my ethnographic research. This meant that my research would not follow the traditional community-based ethnographic approach, which has dominated Puerto Rican anthropology. Historically, ethnographic studies conducted in Puerto Rico have taken one or more geographically-based communities as their field sites. Beginning with Morris Siegel's (2005) pioneer 1948 study, *A Puerto Rican Town: Lajas*, foreign and domestic anthropologists have relied on the community-based approach, including Julian Steward et al.'s (1956) edited volume *The People of Puerto Rico*; Oscar Lewis' (1966)

controversial culture of poverty study entitled *La Vida*; Rafael Ramirez's (1973) *El arrabal y la política*; Helen Safa's (1974)[1989] *The Urban Poor of Puerto Rico: A Study in Underdevelopment*; Carlos Buitrago's (1973) study on rural households entitled, *Esperanza: An Ethnographic Study of a Peasant Community in Puerto Rico*; and the 1995 ethnographic study, *El barrio Gandul: economía subterranea y migración indocumentada en Puerto Rico*, conducted by an interdisciplinary team of anthropologists and sociologists, Jorge Duany, Luisa Hernández Angueira and Cesar Rey.

My research certainly builds on the knowledge generated by these studies, especially on Puerto Rico's colonial condition, urban poverty, community life and political practices of impoverished populations. However, methodologically, my research joins more recent efforts by anthropologists who have moved beyond this traditional approach by studying cultural institutions (Dávila 1997) and transnational population movements (Duany, 2002; Quiñones 2000).

Given my research interest and the diversity and political polyvalence of the nongovernmental sector discussed in the opening section of this chapter, choosing the organization I was going to study required a very selective process. To begin, I was interested in a particular type of organization within the broader universe of NGOs in Puerto Rico: grassroots support NGOs or (GSOs). I define GSOs broadly as development NGOs providing services and resources that claim to enhance the capacity of underprivileged and impoverished communities and their organizations to build sustainable alternatives to their challenging life conditions. My focus on this sub-set of organizations excluded from my sample an array of organizations belonging to the so-called third sector, but who are not engaged in development, such as civil leagues,

business organizations, research institutes and cultural centers. It also excluded community-based organizations (CBOs) or grassroots organizations (GROs) legally incorporated as nonprofit organizations. These latter organizations receive assistance from GSOs, while GSOs are agencies that provide services and resource to third parties.

In order to identify grassroots support NGOs in Puerto Rico I searched the Directory of Nonprofit Organizations compiled and published by the Non-Profit Evaluation & Resource Center, Inc. (NPERCI), a local nonprofit agency that conducts research and evaluations on the non-profit sector in the island.[10] First published in 2005, this directory is updated yearly and has become an important document used by public and private agencies, both local and international, to find and contact nonprofit organizations in the island. Besides indicating the name, address, phone number and website information, the directory also included a column that describes the services offered by each organization. Based on those descriptions, I identified and pre-selected for further screening a number of organizations that fit the GSO profile.

My interest in examining NGO promoted grassroots support in relation to a non-progressive political paradigm, such as neoliberalism, led me to further narrow my sample to state contracted organizations or agencies that were publicly funded by U.S. federal grants. I searched for agencies contracted by the Department of Family, which is home to most of the human service delivery federal block grants. I eventually focused on NGOs funded by the Community Services Block Grant (CSBG), a U.S. federal grant heir to the anti-poverty programs created during the United States' War on Poverty in the

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[10] For more information on this organization or to obtain a copy of their directory, visit their website: http://www.nperci.org/index.htm.

1960s.[11] In Puerto Rico, CSBG funds two NGOs, Social Action of Puerto Rico, Inc. (ASPRI) and The Socio-Economic Comunitarian Institute (INSEC), as well as municipal programs in Bayamon and San Juan. Both ASPRI and INSEC fit the general GSO profile and, after interviewing with both, I eventually chose ASPRI. ASPRI is a legally incorporated nonprofit organization committed to the cause of poverty-reduction in the island through the promotion of self-sufficiency and the use of a community development program that follows the grassroots support model.

In the summer of 2008, while I was conducting my ethnographic research on ASPRI's community development program, the ex-Governor Sila M. Calderón announced that her NGO, the Sila M. Calderón Foundation, was starting its first ever Capacity-Building Program for the Development of Community Initiatives. The goal of the program was to assist impoverished communities develop community economic development projects. Although not explicitly stated, this program continued Mrs. Calderón's commitment to combating poverty by means of participatory, community development initiatives first developed during her tenure as Mayor of San Juan and Governor of Puerto Rico. Her new program, carried out from the nongovernmental sector, was informed by the basic ideas of the apoderamiento (empowerment) and autogestión (self-management) model developed for the Special Needs Communities Program under her administrations. I saw in this program the possibility of studying a grassroots support project whose director, some of its personnel and basic ideas had transferred, almost literally, from the public sector to the nongovernmental sector. I considered this new case study an opportunity to explore the political ambiguity surrounding grassroots support and the nongovernmental sector.

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[11] CSBG and the U.S. War on Poverty will be discussed in greater detail in chapter 4.

My research examined these organizations in relation to Mosse's two levels of politics. With regards to the first level, I analyzed the relation between the policies, mission statements and models used by these organizations and current reformist political paradigms. This analysis focused on what Deborah Fox (1998) called the organization's categories of knowledge, such as community, participation, empowerment, and their relation to various political paradigms or ideological systems. Also, following Dorothy Smith's (2005) insights on institutional ethnography, I explored how these systems of ideas, such as models, policies and mission statements, shaped institutional structures, particularly the design of their grassroots support programs.

The study of the second political level focused on the practice of grassroots support. My research design in this level was informed by other ethnographic studies that have offered critical perspectives on the social processes that constitute the political field in which community practices take place. Researchers that have used this methodology to study community projects and participatory policies elsewhere have shown its strength for exploring the gap between the rhetoric associated with these models and the actual, observed practices generated by them (Nelson & Wright, 1995). Also, ethnographic research has proven useful in promoting a deeper understanding of social interventions as they take place in specific contexts and at key historical moments (Fisher, 1997). Lastly, ethnographic approaches to the study of community development has allowed researchers to attend meetings in which the diverse political actors involved express and debate their different visions of community, empowerment and participation (Daley & Marsiglia, 2000); witness the transformation of social differences, such as gender, age and educational background, into power differences within community groups and throughout

the development processes (Hickey & Mohan, 2004); and research the process by which community groups accept or reject the social change efforts proposed by governmental and nongovernmental support agencies (Markowitz, 2001).

I used these research experiences to design my ethnographic research of ASPRI and the Sila M. Calderón Foundation. My research consisted in a prolonged and structured process of direct participation in and observation of the different activities constitutive of grassroots support. This allowed me to interrogate how each moment of the process was shaped by political negotiations, such as NGO staff interpretations of policies and program guidelines; and differences between NGO staff and community members over what constituted participation, what was implied by the notion of assistance, and how to best bring about empowerment. My presence in community meetings, needs assessment studies, capacity-building workshops and negotiations between community groups and state agencies allowed me to observe and assess firsthand the subtle debates and intense discussions through which each individual, group or agency tried to maneuver the acceptance of their demands or solutions. It also allowed me to identify the relevance of the greater social, political and economic context that conditions the possibilities of grassroots support work and often point to the limits of its social change effort. Lastly, semi-structured interviews and informal conversations allowed me access to personal histories, provided an understanding of the impact of the accumulation or layering of previous development initiatives and helped clarify the existence and entrenchment of solidarities and conflicts among the different participants.

Chapter organization

 This thesis consists of seven chapters, including this one, the Introduction. The research material is organized in the following manner:

Chapter 2 – *Grassroots Support: The Claims and Critiques of a Field of Practice*

 This chapter elaborates on the issues and debates introduced in the first section of this introduction, Point(s) of Departure. The first part of the chapter defines in greater depth NGO promoted grassroots support and provides a literature review of this method and the type of nongovernmental organization that employ it. It also explores the various debates in which my object of study is embedded, mainly the claims of participatory development, the role of NGOs in development today and the politics of empowerment. My presentation of these three debates includes the perspective of proponents and critics in order to do justice to each perspective. In the second part of the chapter, I propose my particular analytical framework, which aims to supersede the dichotomous framework in which proponents and critics of NGO promoted grassroots support have debated over its contributions. Based on my critical reading of the literature and recent ethnographic studies of development, I propose a theoretical and ethnographic focus on the politics of grassroots support practice.

Chapter 3 - *The Challenge of the Present: The Disillusions and Discontents of Once Model Island*

 This chapter further elaborates on the issues raised in the second part of this introduction, mainly Puerto Rico as the context of my research. It lays out the mayor economic, social and political problems facing Puerto Rico today, such as chronic unemployment, low labor participation rates, economic and social inequality and continued political patronage. These are precisely the issues to which the intervention I

am looking at, grassroots support, is called upon to attend. Also, it gives a historical reading of Puerto Rico's development policies as well as the island's political situation, particularly its neocolonial status and recent preference for the neoliberal model. This chapter aims to clarify why I am studying efforts at socio-economic change in contemporary Puerto Rico. It also introduces the salient issues that will be analyzed in subsequent chapters, such as the neocolonial welfare state, political patronage, and the reigning neoliberal ideology at the level of policy and government practices. The chapter relies on statistical data, ethnographic vignettes and case examples, literature reviews and theoretical discussions.

Chapter 4 - *The War on Poverty in Our Neoliberal Age?: Locating Social Action of Puerto Rico, Inc. in Social Welfare History*

In this chapter, I deal with Mosse's first political level, the level of policy and models. I examine Social Action of Puerto Rico, Inc., its model, missions and claims, in light of the United States' and Puerto Rico's social welfare history. The historical accounts of policy changes and the transformation of approaches to poverty serve to situate ASPRI in relation to the supplemental role played by NGOs in our current neoliberal moment. The analysis of the U.S. policy context and Puerto Rico' party politics exposes the neoliberal logic and intentions legitimating the promotion and financing of NGO-promoted grassroots support by the U.S. and Puerto Rican government. The discussion also serves to expose ASPRI's inconsistencies in regards to a number of claims made about the nongovernmental sector, such as its apolitical orientation, administrative flexibility and fiscal transparency. ASPRI's failures in these key areas question the basic neoliberal proposition of reforming the welfare state through private contracting. Moreover, the chapter documents Puerto Rico's neocolonial situation

by tracing the creation and development of the island's neocolonial welfare state and its social control function. Finally, the chapter discusses the relationship between a very important community education program in Puerto Rico's history, Division of Community Education (DIVEDCO), and ASPRI. The tracing of this institutional connection allows me to outline the important changes regarding community development programs in the island and Puerto Rico's neocolonial welfare state as a result of neoliberal policy reforms in the United States.

Chapter 5 - *The Practices of Grassroots Support: Social Action of Puerto Rico, Inc.'s Community Development Program*

The chapter begins the ethnographic discussion of politics of grassroots support practice. The chapter briefly introduces ASPRI's community development model. From there, the chapter moves to the presentation and analysis of a series of ethnographic vignettes, each of which is preceded by a brief introduction and followed by a detailed discussion of the different issues related to grassroots support. The chapter offers richly detailed accounts of the socio-economic factors, such as gender inequality and educational gaps, political negotiations, contradictory agendas, and institutional limitations that undermine the accomplishment of the mission and goals of ASPRI's grassroots support model. Overall, the chapter aims to expose the gap between the claims of grassroots support and its actual accomplishments once implemented in the field.

Chapter 6 - *Empowering Subjects or the Subjects of Empowerment?: Sila M. Calderón Foundation's Capacity-Building Program for Community Leaders*

This chapter follows the logic of the previous chapter in exploring the politics of grassroots support practices. However, this chapter is based on my research of another grassroots support NGO, the Sila M. Calderon Foundation. The chapter focuses on the

Foundation's capacity-building program with an emphasis on concrete moments of practice. The analysis of the Foundation's grassroots support practices is based on a sample of the workshops and work meetings covered during my research. I chose to focus on a sub-set of workshops and meetings in order to offer greater ethnographic description and analysis of the process. I also focused on a particular set of issues through which I analyze the process, such as the educational gap between NGO personnel and participants, authoritarian practices among community leaders, the limits of community-based initiatives and the goal of empowerment. As in the previous chapter, I emphasize the fissures emerging between the fundamental goals of grassroots support and its actual accomplishments.

Chapter 7 – *The Conclusion*

In the conclusion I reflect on my research findings based on my case studies of Social Action of Puerto Rico, Inc. and the Sila M. Calderón Foundation. My reflections focus on establishing the relevance of my findings for the debates surrounding the claims of participatory development, the role of NGO promoted development interventions today and empowerment politics in a neoliberal policy context. My contribution to these debates is based on my theoretical framework, which focused on examining the policy context and models of grassroots support as well as the politics of its practice. Finally, my reflections will consider the role and contributions of this model to community-based social change efforts in contemporary Puerto Rico.

As the chapter outline suggests, the purpose of my research is to move beyond the popularity of the grassroots support model and NGOs today in Puerto Rico. In order to do that I critically examine how the politics embedded in grassroots support shapes and

delimits their potential for delivering on the putative claims of empowerment and socio-economic transformation. Thus, the chapters that follow offer two case studies of grassroots support organizations with the aim of examining the contribution of grassroots support to broader social change efforts in contemporary Puerto Rico.

Chapter II

Grassroots Support:

The Claims and Critiques of a Field of Practice

Introduction

I am here to 'capacitar' (build your capacity), help you organize, coordinate activities that promote your 'autogestion' (self-management) and help create microenterprises.

Talibenette, community technician
Social Action of Puerto Rico, Inc.

The opening quote is taken from my field notes gathered during my ethnographic research of Social Action of Puerto Rico, Inc.'s Community Development Program between February of 2008 and March of 2009. Talibenette, one of the program's community technicians, made this statement during a meeting with residents of the Pueblo Nuevo community in Maricao on March 13, 2008. Maricao is a relatively small municipality located Puerto Rico's central mountainous region. It is a mostly rural town facing great social and economic challenges: Its 68% poverty rate is one of the highest in the island; only 38% of its population is in the labor force; about 40% of its population has a high school education or higher; and its population of about 6,500 residents is the second lowest of any municipality in P.R.[12]

Pueblo Nuevo is a community located on a hilly area surrounding 'el pueblo,' that is, Maricao's downtown area. Talibenette chose to impact this community because it reproduced Maricao's general profile of high unemployment, poverty and illiteracy rates.

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[12] These statistics are from the 2000 U.S. Census. http://factfinder.census.gov

However, Talibenette focused on a sub-section of this community that had easy road access and fairly well-defined geographical limits. Her choice of area to impact reveals the notion of community used by Social Action's Community Development Program: a geographically defined space inhabited by an impoverished population with a certain degree of social coherence gained from sharing a residential area, a common socio-economic profile and a sense of belonging to that place. The choice of this definition is strategic: According to Social Action, social problems and their solutions find expression in such geographically and socially defined units.

Talibennette has been visiting and developing activities in this community for close to a year now. Yet, since the last workshop, which taught jewelry-making to a group of housewives in the hopes that some would pursue it as an income-generating activity, the resident's participation rate in Social Action-sponsored meetings has fallen. In this meeting, Talibenette seeks to re-energize Pueblo Nuevo residents and develop a new work agenda. Given the meeting's specific goal, Talibenette found it necessary to be very explicit about her program's mission, which resulted in the statement cited in the opening quote. Tali, as I came to know her, expressed her interest in serving the community in the roles of facilitator, coordinator and capacity-builder. In so doing, she presented herself as a particular kind of assistance providing agent, one that offers Pueblo Nuevo residents the support necessary to facilitate their organization into successful political and economic actors in contemporary Puerto Rico.

Through this presentation, Tali sought to distance herself from other assistance providing agents, mainly state employees who work for various welfare service agencies. Many Pueblo Nuevo residents have been long acquainted with those service agencies and

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their personnel, whose main focus has been the satisfaction of pressing needs through the delivery of goods and social services. Unlike them, Tali aims to implement a particular kind of development model which claims to empower people living in poverty, privileges geographically-bounded community groups as its locus of intervention, and relies on capacity-building and community self-management as the triggers for sustained social and economic change. This model of assistance has been referred to as grassroots support in the development literature by, among others, Thomas Carroll (1991, 1992) and myself (Boglio Martinez, 2008).

The analysis of the claims, aims and methods of grassroots support as carried out by nongovernmental organizations constitutes the subject of this chapter. The analysis will unravel the logic underlying grassroots support as a development model in order to provide a clear understanding of its guiding principles and proposed practices. Beyond introducing the reader to the model of grassroots support, the analysis will locate this model in relation to current trends in development thinking, such as the emphasis in poverty reduction, community empowerment, participatory development and the nongovernmental sector as the preferred sphere of action. In so doing, grassroots support will be presented as a progressive political project distinct from both more conservative and radical social change initiatives.[13]

Each claim and aim of the grassroots support model will be critically assessed in light of long-standing debates about the role of participatory strategies, poverty reduction, empowerment and nongovernmental organizations in our current moment of global

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[13] The term progressive refer to a political stance that favor and advocates for reforms through governmental action (Kelleher, 2005). This definition seems problematic given my interest in the nongovernmental sector. However, as will be discussed in this and subsequent chapters, most NGOs are publicly funded through contracts or grants. Moreover, progressive here refers to a form of reformist politics that asserts the need for collective interventions that bring together two or more social classes.

economic crisis, neoliberal reforms and struggles for the construction of alternative political and economic initiatives. These debates have been generated by social work and social science scholars as well as development practitioners, some of whom support participatory development and nongovernmental initiatives and others whom are critical of both as technologies through which power is wielded today. As such, the literature produced by this debate has been structured by a dichotomous framing in which NGOs, participation, empowerment and community-based anti-poverty initiatives are considered to be either strengthening impoverished communities and contributing to the social justice struggles of grassroots movements or facilitating neoliberal forms of governance and advancing market-oriented solutions that reproduce capitalist inequalities. The discussion in this chapter will reproduce that dichotomy in order to capture the nuances of each position and expose the marked contrast between the different readings of similar phenomena. Nonetheless, the chapter ends with an attempt to overcome this dichotomy by proposing an alternative framework that focuses on the politics of grassroots support.

Lastly, this theoretical discussion will result in the introduction of the categories, arguments, questions, and debates that framed my ethnographic study of two grassroots support organizations in Puerto Rico: Social Action of Puerto Rico, Inc. and the Sila M. Calderón Foundation. The discussions and debates introduced in this chapter will re-emerge as research topics during the presentation and examination of the ethnographic case study material in subsequent chapters.

Grassroots support: Laying out the claims and aims of a field of practice

The term grassroots support (GRS) refers to a model of development assistance that consists in the comprehensive packaging of support services deemed essential for

promoting sustainable socio-economic change at the grassroots level in both developing and developed countries.[14] The support services offered may vary, but they usually include a combination of the following: capacity-building, technical support, financial assistance, networking, information-sharing, and advocacy. The institutions delivering these support services, grassroots support organizations (GSOs) can be public or private since nothing precludes an organization from assuming the orientation and methodology implied by grassroots support. Nonetheless, my study focuses on nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) because the convergence of the so-called third sector with this model of grassroots assistance captures, as will be shown below, a number of interesting dynamics central to current trends in development, globalization and democratic forms of governance.

This research, then, will focus on a sub-field of development that consists of nongovernmental organization (NGOs) working with definable populations (impoverished, marginalized), intervening at a particular level (community), by means of a specific method (grassroots support), and seeking a clear goal (sustainable development). An example of this kind of organization in the U.S. is the Center for Community Change. This nongovernmental organization produces summaries of social policies that are publically available, offers a publication on technical issues of organizing and campaigning, assists in the process of organizing local direct-action organizations, and offers them grants and technical assistance to ensure their success (Rubin & Rubin, 2001, p. 391).

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[14] For a full analysis of conceptual definitions, typologies, functions and strategies of grassroots support organizations and grassroots support as a model of practice see Boglio Martínez, 2008.

In Latin America, Anthony Hall (1996) provides a solid case study of a GSO: Sociedade Civil Mamirauá. This Brazilian NGO supported the resistance efforts of caboclo fishermen, a Brazilian ethnic group, against the intrusion of commercial fishing vessels in their fishing areas. It also assisted them in establishing an alternative program protecting local fish stock for local consumption. Sociedade Civil Mamirauá accomplished this through a three part grassroots support strategy. First, staff members assisted local communities in the development of combative strategies against the intrusion of commercial fishermen. Second, they promoted community organizing and educational programs which expanded and solidified the struggle. Third, they engaged in alliance-building strategies to help the community achieve the financial and political resources needed to carry out their advocacy campaign (ibid., p. 38). Sociedade Civil Mamirauá is an example of an NGO supporting a marginalized group through a grassroots support model that helped establish a local biodiversity conservation project.

As the above definitions and examples suggest, grassroots support is premised on three key principles of how to produce social change. First, efforts to overcome poverty and other forms of marginalization should make 'community' or grassroots groups the main level of intervention and the principle agent of change. Second, communities and grassroots groups could benefit from partnering with other actors committed to their cause, primarily professionals working in the nongovernmental sector (Carroll, 1992; Virtuoso, 2001). Third, partnerships with support organizations offer grassroots groups access to knowledge, technical assistance and financial resources that are necessary to empower citizens to carry out effective and sustainable social change initiatives.

For proponents of the grassroots support model, these principles stem not from trendy theoretical suppositions, but rather from critical reflections on the success and failure of development efforts and grassroots initiatives all over the world. Yet, for critics of contemporary hegemonic political and economic projects, such as neoliberalism and global capitalism, the above principles are just a collage of buzz words—poverty, community, NGOs, empowerment—that have served to justify and advance those hegemonic projects rather than subvert them (e.g., Gow, 2002). A closer examination of each principle will help explain the logic of grassroots support, elaborate on its contradictions and contribute to overcoming them.

First principle: Combating poverty through community-based initiatives

"The new century opened with an unprecedented declaration of solidarity and determination to rid the world of poverty."

Millennium Development Goals: A compact among nations to end human poverty

In 2000, the largest-ever gathering of heads of state in the United Nations' history adopted a compact which committed the world's nations to reducing poverty in half by 2015. Known as the Millennium Development Goals, this compact legitimized the emergent consensus in the development industry since the 1990s: poverty is the main problem to which both national and international development efforts would be devoted in this new century. To be sure, poverty has always been a main concern of development efforts. Since at least the 1940s, the development industry has understood poverty as being a consequence of the underlying causes which it addressed: the persistence of 'traditional' agricultural economies, the absence of an industrial sector, the lack of integration to international markets, etc. (Sunkel, 1973). Thus, for decades development efforts attempted to transform traditional economies into industrial ones with links to

international trade in order to trigger a process of modernization and economic growth that would lead to the eventual eradication of poverty and its consequences.

That sort of development thinking persists in certain regions of the world, such as Sub-Saharan Africa and Southeast Asia, but it has definitely run its course in regions like Latin America and the Caribbean (Sachs, 2006). It can hardly explain the persistence of poverty today in most countries since almost all have experimented with industrialization schemes and few, if any, do not participate in global trade. To be sure, these experiments have resulted in economic growth and social improvements, such as improved health care, cleaner water and sanitation facilities, and the reduction of illiteracy and infant mortality rates (Seipel, 2003). Yet, these gains have not been evenly distributed, as Midgley (1996) forcibly points out:

> As many cities have grown, slums have proliferated. As industry has expanded, the numbers of unemployed, homeless and poor people have also increased. Despite the fact that economic growth has enhanced social opportunities for many, the social needs of many others have been disregarded. While many have benefited from development, many others have been excluded. (pp. 5-6)

The situation described by Midgley captures the irony of the currently hegemonic capitalist system: While some populations and countries have benefitted from the untold prosperity and wealth it has produced, others have experienced an increase in poverty and the intensification of income and social inequality. Scholars like Jeffrey Sachs, one of the premier economists in the world today, explain this situation by arguing that certain world regions have grown at slower rates due to factors such as geographical conditions, differential access to technology and different experiences with illnesses and plagues (Sachs, 2006). Others, like Hoogvelt (2001) contend that the global capitalist system is driven by a politics of exclusion that contrasts with the politics of incorporation of

peripheries and margins that characterized its previous developmentalist phase. For her, the pursuit of capitalist accumulation today takes place without the pressing need to incorporate regions and populations at the margins of the market economy, regardless of whether these are found in developing countries, like Bangladesh, or in developed countries, like Puerto Rico. While Hoogvelt agrees with Sachs that poverty and inequality are increasingly concentrated in certain regions, countries and populations, she posits that this phenomenon is a direct result of the logic of capitalism rather than the expression of a lag or differential evolution of capitalism in different places.

This politics of exclusion is a result of a number of important changes in the global economy. First, during previous phases of the capitalist economy, surplus value was generated by the expansion of the productive apparatus and the incorporation and increased exploitation of new labor markets. Today, surplus value is also extracted from the innovative use of technology in the labor process, particularly in what used to be labor intensive industries such as manufacturing (Ortiz Negrón, 1999). The incorporation of technology in this sector has led to the elimination of both blue and white collar jobs due to the automation of production tasks and simplification of supervisory processes. Second, this same technology has created global communication and travel networks that have made possible the fragmentation of the production process throughout the globe. This has facilitated the shifting of various phases of production to countries with lower salaries and more flexible labor and environmental laws, resulting in job losses in many developed countries. Lastly, the predominance of the financial sectors, high tech industries and the information economy has rendered irrelevant non-skilled or poorly

educated workers and increased income and job security disparity between educated and uneducated workers (Hoogvelt, 2001; Morgen & Maskovsky, 2003; Rique & Orsi, 2005).

Thus, we live in a moment of incredible irony in which economic growth produces unemployment and reduces labor participation, and technology displaces human labor in some industries. Capitalism's historic exploitation of labor has now incorporated a new dimension: the creation of a marginal mass or a surplus labor force that has been dismissed even from its historic role as a reserve labor pool (Ortiz Negrón, 1999).

The problems created by this process of exclusion have generated a wide range of responses that include everything from conservative reforms to radical alternative solutions. Some scholars and development practitioners acknowledge the increase in marginalized and impoverished populations, but understand this phenomenon to be the result of the absence rather than the presence of the capitalist system (Sachs, 2006). In fact, some contend that capitalist-induced economic growth has pulled more people out of poverty, as exemplified by China and India, than any grassroots or community-based initiative (Karger, Iyiani & Shannon, 2007). They go as far as to argue that for "the world's desperately poor, sweatshops and other exploitative workplaces can seem more like opportunities than exploitation" (ibid., p. 69). Thus, their continued commitment to capitalism leads them to confront the current crisis by advancing a reformist agenda that can introduce significant changes within the system.

The conservative elements within this reformist group propose a return to liberal economic policies, or neoliberalism, as a way to facilitate the development of a new global political economy and adjust the principles of government and roles of the state to that new system (Amin, 2001; Edelman & Haugerud, 2005). Neoliberal reformers

identified the welfare state as one of the causal factors behind the persistence of poverty since, according to their analysis, it promotes overreliance on public assistance and unemployment, supports unproductive individuals that drains fiscal resources, stifles private entrepreneurship, and limits individual autonomy (Gutierrez, 1990; Morgen & Maskovsky, 2003; Pratts, 1996; Sorj, 2007). Moreover, they contend that the overregulation of the market and costly labor policies were hampering capitalism's potential for promoting economic growth. Besides, some labor policies, like minimum wage, hurt disadvantaged populations because they eliminate the possibility of creating certain jobs, that although ill-paid, would provide a source of income.

This conservative criticism of the welfare state congealed over the '80s and '90s into an anti-statist, pro-market consensus that was translated into a number of concrete policies implemented all over the world. Despite tangible differences in the scope and manner of implementation in Northern countries and the Global South, these reforms shared a number of features, goals and effects (Cox, 2001; Guardiola, 1998; Hokenstad & Midgley, 1997; Mora y Arrujo & Serrantes, 1997; Mullaly, 1997):

- Downsizing governments by eliminating or privatizing social safety nets
- Decentralizing state functions to lower levels of government
- Reducing state spending
- Deregulation of market sectors
- Emphasis on private sector and market efficiency as the model of development

These reforms were based on a free market ideology (Stiglitz 2001) that sought to end poverty through the expansion of markets and the introduction of a corporate world model, which privileged efficiency and fiscal austerity, to the running of government (Gutierrez, 1990, 1996; Mora y Araujo & Serantes, 1997; Pratts, 1996; Rivera, 2004). These policies legitimized market initiatives and private entrepreneurship as the most

efficient model of achieving both individual and common goods. Neoliberal reformers called for the retrenchment of the welfare state's social assistance role and advocated opening up to the market as many areas of public life as possible through privatization and contracting with nongovernmental organizations. This move resulted in the termination of many entitlement benefits and created a situation in which individuals and communities became responsible for securing the goods and services needed for their sustained wellbeing from the market and/or NGOs.

Three decades of neoliberal experimentation have produced enough negative consequences to convince former supporters, such as economist Joseph Stiglitz, of the need to discard this reformist project. According to this former Senior VP and Chief Economist of the World Bank, neoliberal structural adjustment programs (SAPs), which promoted deregulating capital markets; limiting public welfare programs; and introducing user fees for public services, such as hospitals, have proven to be as harmful, if not more, than the problems that motivated the them (Stiglitz, 2001). In his estimation, the set of policies proposed by the neoliberal consensus have contributed to the increase, not the eradication, of world poverty and inequality. In other words, neoliberalism has contributed to the politics of exclusion of global capitalism today.

By contrast, the progressive element within this reformist group proposed the implementation of an alternative development model capable of redressing the deficiencies of both centralized state planning models and deregulated free market initiatives. This alternative development model puts forth a set of ideas and practical strategies to promote the successful inclusion of excluded populations into modified versions of our current political and economic systems. The following are the key ideas

and practical strategies proposed under the rubric of alternative development (Gardner &

Lewis, 1996):

- A commitment to citizen participation, empowerment and community-based initiatives
- Decentralized and local decision-making mechanisms
- Focalized public policies and development initiatives
- Economic growth with significant redistribution
- Ending poverty through income generation schemes
- A preference for channeling all this work through nongovernmental organizations

The politics of inclusion pursued by alternative development is premised on the idea

that the flaws of the current economic and political systems can be overcome through a

greater involvement of people in the development process. The demand for greater

citizen participation in decision-making structures contradicts and undermines the

reductionist view that asserts that politics has no place in economic decision-making,

which allegedly is a technical and numbers-driven process. According to Trouillot

(2003), the pursuit of economic growth requires a consensus as to its aims. In other

words, economic decisions have important consequences, such as the reduction or

increase of income inequality or the destruction or protection of the environment. These

political and ethical decisions should be open to debates that include all parties

implicated. Following this proposition, participatory development seeks to politicize the

field of economic planning and decision-making by demanding greater citizen

participation, especially those citizens most affected by development decisions.

Citizen participation is conceived as being more effective and relevant if it takes

place at local levels:

> Not only do community-based enterprises…have the potential to contribute significantly to employment generation and the maintenance and extension of social services, but community organizations should provide the initial and essential definition of what constitutes 'basic needs.' In this sense they are,

indeed, indispensible to the whole strategy of development envisaged here. (Deer et al., 1990, p. 201)

The demand that participation occur at the local level is premised on the notion that participation succeeds when it takes place in the context that is most relevant to people's lives: their workplaces, their communities, etc. Moreover, the preference for local-level participation is not just a matter of including people who have hitherto been excluded or marginalized from discussions about their economic future, but also of a revalorization of the importance of human capital to the development process (Rique & Orsi, 2005). Citizen participation improves the quality of the development initiative by incorporating the claims of those impacted by the initiatives and allowing the social and cultural complexities of people's lives to surface as relevant information for economic decisions (Gardner & Lewis, 1996). Lastly, participation attempts to substitute the politics of patronage that permeates so many nation-states, including so-called democratic ones, with the politics of citizenship, a politics based on the articulation of demands based on rights and responsibilities (Hicky & Mohan, 2006).

The repositioning of poverty as the central theme of development is to a great extent a product of this alternative development agenda. From this perspective, the insufficiencies, gaps and contradictions of the political and economic models relied upon to generate growth during the greater part of the twentieth century condemned segments of the population to a life of poverty and inequality. In many developing countries, the lack of state institutional capacity, absence of political will from the ruling classes, and rampant corruption impeded the implementation of necessary economic reforms and a just distribution of state resources, including social welfare benefits (Fisher, 1998).

Likewise, capitalism discarded a number of markets due to the diminished buying power of its population and its reduced opportunities for generating profits.

Their solution calls for the amplification of efforts that target those impoverished populations that have borne the weight of the failures of both the state and the market. The preference for focalized initiatives reflects their understanding that the current exclusionary tendencies have intensified the "concentration effect" of poverty and its associated problems in geographically-defined spaces (Chaskin, Joseph & Chipenda-Dansokho, 1997). The experience of poverty as a multidimensional problem, which includes joblessness, lack of education, income inequality, poor housing and inadequate health care, has intensified not only among certain populations or groups, but also in specific cities and spatially delimited areas, such as neighborhoods and public residential complexes. This concentration effect has led to the use the concept of community to describe and characterize spaces that manifest overlapping social, political and economic problems. Moreover, community has also been posed as a unit of solution to those problems, mainly through such focalized strategies as comprehensive community-based initiatives.[15]

Participatory development's commitment to focalized interventions, poverty eradication and community as both a level of development intervention and as a key actor in the development process is best exemplified by its promotion of community economic development (CED). According to José Vega Torres (2005), CED is defined as a

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[15] Community is an extremely slippery term that has been used, analyzed and critiqued intensely by both social scientists, development practitioners and political activists. For the purpose of this study, I follow the logic of participatory development and the organizations I researched for whom community is defined by geographical as well as social characteristics. For a recent effort to deconstruct and understand the multiple uses of community as a place, a set of relations and/or an empty signifier with great political uses see, Gerald W. Creed (Ed.). 2006. The Seductions of Community: Emancipations, Oppresions, Quanderies. Santa Fe: School of American Research.

"strategy to develop the human and physical resources of a geographical zone by creating the organizational context in which residents can plan and implement initiatives that result in an increase of capital in the community as well as in its socio-economic wellbeing" (p. 20, my translation). As such, CED is an alternative to job training programs, which ignore the central problem of the unavailability of jobs due to the overseas shifting of plants or the higher education requirements of the high tech industries that are substituting the manufacturing sector. Instead of investing in the production of a cadre of well-trained but unemployed workers, CED promotes the development of entrepreneurs in areas in where capital has either left for cheaper labor markets or discarded as unproductive investments.

CED claims to be a solution to the current focalization of poverty in certain regions and communities produced by global economic processes (Midgley & Livermore,1998; Sherraden & Ninacs, 1998). It offers what globalization and macro-economic policies have been unable to deliver: Viable economic opportunities for self-employment and income generation targeted to populations that have been excluded from the formal sectors of the economy. As a response to poverty, community economic development initiatives reflect a production-oriented understanding of that social condition. It seeks to transform members of the excluded labor sector into active economic agents, either as owners or employees of community-based economic projects. In so doing, it avoids the pitfalls of consumption-oriented responses to poverty, which merely seek to improve the welfare of impoverished people by increasing their consumption capacity through cash transfers or aid programs. As production-oriented solutions to poverty, community economic development is committed to re-structuring the relationship of people to work

in such a way that work results in the accumulation not the extraction of wealth for the worker.

Furthermore, CED supports economic initiatives committed to elevating the community's wellbeing. To ensure this, CED substitutes the profit-maximizing principle of private enterprises with a mission-driven principle, which usually consists of the desire to secure a public good, such as overcoming a persistent community problem (Meléndez Vélez & Medina Piña, 1999). Lastly, CED promotes the participation of community members in the creation and operation of the local industry as a strategy to ensure its sustainability and combat the problems of state paternalism and patronage politics

Grassroots support (GRS) has blossomed under participatory development and, as such, shares in its premises and claims. As stated at the beginning of this chapter, the goal of GRS is to transform impoverished and disenfranchised populations into successful economic actors and effective political agents in today's world. GRS pursues that goal through an enabling model of assistance that offers a series of support services that help build and strengthen community organizations, facilitate access to financial resources, provide technical skills and training to enhance the self-management capacity of communities, and foment coalitions through the linking of community organizations. This support claims to facilitate the integration of marginalized populations into economically productive activities, the political processes and the active construction of their individual and communal wellbeing.

Along with its orientation towards integration, GRS also shares in participatory development's revalorization of the role of human capital in development. GRS acknowledges the 'hidden' potential of socially and economically disadvantaged people,

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a potential that often expresses itself even in the midst of great resource scarcity (Arrossi et al., 1994). This potential is precisely what GRS attempts to stimulate, support and enhance through an investment in capacity-building and the provision of essential technical and financial resources. GRS is, therefore, an actor-oriented model that supports the active, voluntary engagement of individuals and groups in the elaboration of solutions to the problems affecting their quality of life.

Grassroots support also expresses a strong commitment to broad citizen participation. Grassroots support contends that in order for participation to work people need more than just access to decision-making processes; they also need the capacity to be effective in their participation. For GRS, participation is one aspect of their broader strategy of capacity-building. GRS seeks simultaneously the immediate payoff for communities of achieving concrete gains through participation and the long term payoff of transferring the knowledge and skills learned in those actions to apply to different scenarios. In other words, the objective of capacity-building through participation is to promote the carryover of skills to other issues and contexts beyond the immediate action (Carroll, 1992).

For grassroots support, participation means more than just access to existing power structures; it also means developing the capacity to initiate actions outside of those political and economic structures (Mizrahi, 2001; Lane, 1995). Thus, GRS aspires to much more than just democratizing development. Its capacity-building efforts seek to energize local groups; to create and support people's movements; to transform people from clients to citizens; to produce citizens and organizations capable of becoming part of a strong civil society which can articulate demands and propose solutions to their

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problems (Clark, 1995; Daubon, 2002). In other words, for GRS participation and capacity-building are about enhancing popular agency and transforming subjectivities: making people claims-making agents (Hickey & Mohan, 2006; Virtuoso, 2001). In doing so, GSO promotes a movement away from 'supply driven' notions of development, in which the states defined needs and prescribe offerings, to a 'demand-driven' model, in which communities "articulate their preferences and concerns so as to become active participants in the development process" (Clark, 1995, p. 593).

Grassroots support's specific attention to impoverished populations reproduces participatory development's preference for focalized interventions. GRS attends to the particular needs of community-based or grassroots groups who are actively contending with poverty and its ramifications (Carroll, 1992). GRS entails direct involvement with grassroots groups in order to assist them in their quest for tangible change by supplying services that are needed or requested by grassroots actors. For example, GRS provides access to goods and services that redress serious communal needs, such as a lack of access to credit and/or loans. GRS also offer grassroots groups technical assistance in the design and development of such initiatives as community-based income generating projects. In all, GRS offers tailored institutional and financial support to people engaged in social change efforts.

The Claims and Aims of Grassroots Support Revisited

Despite these claims and aims, grassroots support, along with participatory development more generally, has received strong critiques from scholars and activists who articulate a structural critique of global capitalism and call for the subversion of both the discourse of development and capitalism's mode of production and consumption

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(Amin, 2001; Escobar, 1992; Harnecker, 2005; Petras, 2004). For them, participatory and grassroots support models seek merely the restoration of communities through capitalist principles, such as owning and managing property and becoming small scale entrepreneurs (Rubin & Rubin, 2001). Initiatives such as community economic development end up promoting the adoption by grassroots groups of the same market-based reforms advocated by neoliberalism (Lyon-Callo & Hyatt, 2001). These reforms limit themselves to helping the poor survive in our current neoliberal world by making capitalism work for them too (Fisher, 1997). As such, they do not question the core assumptions and practices of capitalism that produce poverty and inequality.

According to Neederveen Pieterse (1998) the aim of giving capitalism a human face has become a way of advancing a progressive politics without being radical. The project of redressing social grievances produced by capitalism without doing away with it was exposed over a century ago by Karl Marx in his <u>Communist Manifesto</u>. In it, Marx analyzes what he calls Conservative or Bourgeois Socialism, the aims of which he describes as follows:

> A part of the bourgeoisie is desirous of redressing social grievances, in order to secure the continued existence of bourgeois society. To this section belong economists, philanthropists, humanitarians, improvers of the condition of the working class, organizers of charity…They desire the existing state of society minus its revolutionary and disintegrating element. They wish for a bourgeoisie without a proletariat…In requiring the proletariat to carry out such a system, and thereby to march straightway into the social New Jerusalem, it but requires in reality, that the proletariat should remain within the bounds of existing society, but should cast away all its hateful ideas concerning the bourgeoisie. (Tucker, 1978, p. 496)

Marx could very well be referring to what later would emerge as the welfare state or to participatory development or grassroots support. What underlies all of these projects is precisely their preoccupation with and interest in managing and containing the problems

generated by the capitalist mode of production. Yet, Marx astutely points out the inherent contradiction in that reformist agenda: wanting only the bourgeoisie without the proletariat. That, of course, is not possible because in Marxist theory one implies the other: there is no bourgeoisie without a proletariat. The proposal of overcoming poverty by transforming marginalized laborers into entrepreneurs falls prey to this contradiction. It ignores the fact that capitalism still produces labor as a market commodity and, therefore, reproduces the proletariat and its condition of exploitation. A successful community-based business built on capitalist market principles will still be governed by the social relations of production that characterize that economic system, including its exploitative elements. Moreover, the exclusion of large segments of populations from the labor market does not imply the elimination of labor as a market commodity; it merely points to a restructuring of that commodity: its constitutive elements (gender, education), its current demand, etc.

Besides this fundamental critique, radical scholars and activists have other more specific critiques of grassroots support, such as its poverty-focus. At one level, the preoccupation with poverty alleviation represents, following Marx, an effort to defuse a potentially explosive situation in which deprivation boils over into social unrest. Yet, at a deeper level, targeting poverty by itself ignores that poverty is a social relation, one predicated on the production and reproduction of inequality, marginalization and disempowerment. The income-generation schemes promoted by GRS, whether they are CED or micro-finances, treat poverty as an issue of that can be overcome with certain inputs, such as education and financial aid. In that approach, poverty becomes a problem of needs and absences with no reference to the social relations that give rise to those

needs and absences (Kamat, 2002). Put another way, GRS focuses on the capacities of the poor rather than on the practices through which one social group impoverishes another (Murray Li, 2007). In doing so, GRS disregards the fact that poverty is the result of political conflicts over resources and its solution requires the reorganization of the social relations that produce that conflict.

The commitment to end poverty frames the persistence of decades-old social and economic problems in a way that enables initiatives such as grassroots support to elaborate a worldwide agenda to correct them. Yet, it also forecloses more radical solutions, such as the pursuit of an alternative economic model to capitalism based on a structural critique of poverty as a result of private ownership, class politics and the exploitation of labor. In this sense, grassroots support represents a reformist agenda that demonstrates the capacity of the development industry to absorb critiques and self-correct through the cooptation of elements that could lead to a more radical agenda (Li, 2007; Neederveen Pieterse, 1998).

Finally, GRS's emphasis on participation and inclusion are also critically re-assessed. According to Cooke and Kothari (2001), participation has become an instrument of cooptation in the development industry. Participation has facilitated the process of legitimizing the development agenda which serves to demobilize the opposition from communities and grassroots groups (Paley, 2001). Also, participation has become a key instrument in reforming development not in creating alternatives to it. Participation has become a way of increasing its effectiveness by gathering input from the lower tier of society to use in national policy-making. In some cases, citizen participation is reduced to the contribution of labor and other services in order to cheapen the implementation of

these projects (Chambers, 1995). Lastly, the promotion of participation has been a clever way to devolve not only ownership, but also responsibility of the outcomes and consequences of development initiatives to grassroots groups.

The critique of participatory strategies as inherently co-opting is an old debate in development as well as in the community organizing literature (Mizrahi, 2001). Radical scholars and activists have rejected participating in official structures and opted for mobilizing protest movements and building independent organizations. They contend that initiatives emerging 'from below,' such as direct action, classed-based or grassroots movements, are the only political forces capable of resisting and reversing the current patterns of capitalist exploitation (Beverley, 1997; Dussel, 2007; Laclau, 1985; Petras, 2005). For example, Edelman and Haugerud (2005), argue that grassroots income generation initiatives seem to be the only current examples of projects that have successfully subordinated the market to the social goals of the communities they serve. Moreover, Charnela's (2005) literature review of grassroots natural resource management movements lists a number of authors arguing that grassroots groups can successfully develop their own initiatives without the assistance of external agents. This argument would render grassroots support redundant, at best, and unnecessary, at worst. Charnela's own argument is that while external agents can help grassroots groups meet their goals, they can also replace them with an alternative agenda of their own.

This grassroots populism does not respond to a romantic view of mass mobilizations or local direct action initiatives. It is grounded on the proposition that these groups have been the source of concrete demands based on their embodied experience of some form of oppression or injustice. Moreover, the historical evidence shows that grassroots

initiatives and social movements have been responsible for some of the most impressive episodes of political struggle for change in Latin America: from indigenous movements in Ecuador and the Zapatista movement in Mexico to the landless movement in Brazil and civil society groups in post-dictatorship Dominican Republic.

Second Principle: A progressive partnership between NGOs and the grassroots

Some proposals for increased citizen participation in the development process have been over-enthusiastic. They ignore the deeply-rooted barriers faced by impoverished populations that limit their capacity to take full advantage of the promises and opportunities offered by participatory development. Although impoverished and marginalized communities everywhere possess significant human resources and have demonstrated great resilience in the face of adversity, as exemplified by social movements around the world, there is often a limit to what they can accomplish without some form of assistance. This is not to sell people short, but rather to acknowledge the immense weight of poverty and economic and social inequalities on people's lives. In fact, the notion that social change demands political support and the mobilization of social capital, technical assistance and financial resources lies at the heart of helping professions such as social work (Hall, 1996; Midgley, 1996). Thus, the justification or *raison d'etre* of grassroots support lies in the contention that impoverished communities could benefit from partnering with other actors committed to their cause.

The above statement regarding the political possibilities of grassroots groups is repeated consistently in the participatory development literature, specifically the literature focusing on grassroots support. Lee (1998), for example, studied community-based

environmental management initiatives in three Bangkok slums and reached the following

conclusions:

> The first is that there is a limit to what low-income groups can achieve for themselves, either individually or collectively, without some form of technical support and other resources from external agents. The second theme is that external agents can provide support to communities in gaining access to key inputs which will enhance the capacity of communities and their organizations to improve their living environment. (p. 994).

Likewise, Rubin and Rubin (2001) surveyed the landscape of community-based

grassroots movements in the United States and reached similar conclusions:

> Smaller communities and social-change organizations often lack the technical knowledge and economic resource needed to battle big business and government. Fortunately, help is available from an array of larger, established organizations…These *support organizations* help community groups build their own capacity and become better able to accomplish the agendas that their members choose. (p. 388, italics in the original)

The U.S. case is particularly relevant to the discussion of grassroots support because

there has been extensive research on efforts to promote community development

initiatives as a solution to poverty. For example, Chavis, Florin and Felix's (1993)

analysis of some of the failures of the War on Poverty's Community Action Program, a

federal government's initiative that began in the 1960s, identified the following

problems: the limited support system available to community programs, limited

coordination among agencies and communities, and lack of adequate funding

opportunities (p. 42). Based on the "wisdom gained from earlier efforts," Chavis et al.

argue that proposals that envision "grassroots community initiatives as central

mechanisms for tackling entrenched social problems and promoting social change"

should create an "enabling system" to support the desired community-based development

initiatives (ibid.). They defined the enabling system as:

a coordinated network of organizations which nurtures the development and maintenance of a grassroots community development process through the provision of resources, incentives and education…Enabling systems consist of intermediary support organizations and resource networks that broker resources from larger systems for use by community organizations. (p. 48)

This definition captures two fundamental proposition of grassroots support. First, if people who have been marginalized are to become protagonists of the development process, then measures should be taken to ensure that they have access to the tools necessary to carry out that role. In other words, there should be an investment of resources to make sure that people's efforts have a chance to succeed. Grassroots support is a response to that call. Second, the function of grassroots support organizations (GSOs) is to serve as intermediaries that can transfer resources from larger or different systems to more local organizations. GSOs obtain most, if not all, of the financial and human resource they make available to grassroots groups from grants, contracts or donations from public and private institutions, both national and international. This locates GSOs at the center of a network of constituents that allows them to aggregate resources from a number of sources and to distribute them to local grassroots actors on a retail basis. Beyond the aggregation of resources, the notion of intermediary highlights the potential of these organizations to serve as a conduit for innovative ideas and demands across the network (Brown, 1991; Vidal & Keyes, 2005).

Different institutions, such as government agencies, private firms and NGOs can serve as intermediary support organizations. For example, agriculture extension offices deliver technical and financial support to rural communities (Brokenshaw & Hodge, 1969). Development agencies, such as the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), often contract with private firms to carry out technical assistance

initiatives for strengthening democracy and governance, general business development, trade capacity building, and other aspects of economic restructuring. Lastly, many universities and community colleges run community leadership and community research programs that often overlap with some of the work of GRS (W.K. Kellogg Foundation, n.d.).

Yet, my research focuses on grassroots support as carried out by nongovernmental organizations (NGOs). The focus on NGOs is justified for a number of reasons. Over the last three decades, the nongovernmental sector has experienced an exponential growth that has been characterized as a 'quiet revolution' (Leve & Karim, 2001). This 'quiet revolution' is evidence of the relevance of NGOs to recent transformations linked to both new trends in development and neoliberal globalization. Thus, research on NGOs affords a deeper understanding of today's world, including its development models, transnational networks, the revival of civil society and new forms of governance associated with neoliberalism. More specifically, NGOs have become mayor players in the development industry. Their presence in the field signals a qualitative and quantitative change in the manner in which states, markets and nongovernmental sectors are articulated today, especially in relation to national and international funding of development projects (Giomi, 2001). Furthermore, the proliferation of NGOs is related to their growth as an alternative source of employment sector for young, university trained professionals who have a genuine commitment to issues as diverse as poverty, gender equality, environmental protection and health care reform (Fisher, 1998). Thus, research on NGOs is one way to study the politics of interclass alliances and solidarity. Lastly, the nongovernmental sector has been at the center of intense ideological debates over the

proper role and capacity of that state to respond to social and economic needs, the virtues of civic engagement, and the responsibility of private initiatives to redress social ills (Grønbjerg & Salomon, 2002).

The term NGO refers to broad array of organizations with different purposes, philosophies, expertise and scope of activities. In most countries, the nongovernmental sector includes such varied organizations and activities as civic leagues, private foundations, charitable and development organizations, religious, scientific and literary organizations, labor organizations, sports and business leagues, and chambers of commerce (Diaz Olivo, 2000; Lowry, 1995; Salamon, 2002). More than one study has pointed out that probably the only commonality among organizations in this sector is their tax exempt status (Estudio Tecnico, 2002; Katz 2001). In principle, all NGOs engage 'public good' issues, but as the above typology suggests not all NGOs are involved in social change efforts. Moreover, among those NGOs addressing political and socio-economic problems, not all share the same goals or methods of intervention. Therefore, my analysis of NGOs will limit itself to a subset of organizations within this broad category: development NGOs implementing a grassroots support model.

The meteoric rise and increased economic importance of NGOs all over the world, including development NGOs, has been documented as part of the research carried out by the Institute for Policy Studies at John Hopkins University (Salomon, Sokolowski & List, 2003). According to them, the so-called civil society sector contributes 5.1% of the GDP and 4.4% of all full-time employment in the countries surveyed.[16] The majority are social service organizations, whose work focuses on education, health care and

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[16] This statistic includes the contribution of volunteers as full-time employees.

housing, which are key areas of development work. The primary sources of income for these organizations are quotas, fee for service payments and government contracts.

The increased presence of development NGOs points to a gap between the promises of prosperity and wellbeing put forth by the welfare state and the market economy, and the reality of unemployment, poor education and healthcare, and inadequate housing to which millions of people are condemned today (Earle & Simonelli, 2000). As discussed in the previous section, the recognition of this fact has led to a critique of the dominant development and welfare state paradigms established during the post-WWII. In fact, there seems to be an interesting convergence today of the Left and Right around a critique of state-led initiatives. This anti-state critique, which includes everything from its incapacity to redistribute wealth and protect the environment, its bureaucratic inefficiency, its fiscal bankruptcy, its lack of proper representation of minority groups, and its gigantism and corruption, has led to a revalorization of the nongovernmental sector, civil society and/or the grassroots as alternative spaces for political action (Giomi, 2001).

For proponents of grassroots support and participatory development, the nongovernmental sector represents an alternative institutional space from which to respond to the limited capacity of states and markets to deliver public goods. This sector is the site in which citizens organize to advocate for improvements or changes in the state's dealings with social, economic or cultural issues, and to confront the market's inability to provide goods and services in an affordable or equitable manner. From their perspective, then, the nongovernmental sector projects itself as a 'do good' sector,

"unencumbered and untainted by the politics of government or the greed of the market" (Fisher, 1997, p. 442).

Besides their 'do-good' mission, proponents of grassroots support and participatory development highlight a number of features that render development NGOs much more attractive organizations through which to carry out the work of grassroots support. To begin, as mission-driven organizations, development NGOs are committed to the issues and problems affecting impoverished and marginalized populations as well as to the principles and practices of grassroots participatory development (Kamat, 2002). They are unequivocally pledged to social justice oriented development process based on the defense of the civil and political rights of impoverished and marginalized populations (Fisher, 1998). In many cases, they have a long history of involvement with specific issues and/or populations, making them one of the few actors engaged in sustained work at the grassroots level.

The nongovernmental sector is recognized as having a less bureaucratic organizational structure and, therefore, being more flexible and having a greater ability to innovate in the area of service delivery, which is important for an organization trying to deliver a comprehensive package of services (Fisher, 1997; Gardner & Lewis, 1996). This allows NGOs to provide a faster response to needs and better service provision to narrowly defined constituencies. Furthermore, their close ties with the grassroots and the reduced scale of operation makes them more efficient allocators of resources than governments (ibid.) Their increased access to international funds also makes them important bridging organizations that link local initiatives with international resources, which is a key feature of grassroots support organizations as intermediaries (Meyer,

1992). Lastly, the sector affords a greater continuity of efforts when compared to the susceptibility of the state to policies and personnel change with every election. Thus, for proponents of grassroots support, NGOs are revolutionizing the manner in which countries today are mobilizing resources to meet the needs of its population.

Finally, development NGOs, including grassroots support NGOs (GSOs), are self-governed organizations usually managed by professional middle class individuals who are highly qualified in their areas of expertise (Sorj, 2007). This staff has the know-how to implement a grassroots support model, which includes educating communities in participatory practices, transferring necessary technical skills, conducting client-centered research and providing evidence in reports of the success of their work (Roberts, 2000). Yet, this also means that staff members are most likely are not of the same class or background as the community members with whom they work (Carroll, 1992; Fisher, 1998).

GSOs are distinct from the community-based organizations (CBOs) or grassroots organizations (GROs) they support. The latter organizations represent the particular interests of groups or localities in which members share in the risks, costs and benefits of social development or change, and the leadership is accountable to its members (Arrossi et al., 1994; Mamphiswana, 2000). In contrast, GSOs are professional organizations staffed mostly by educated sectors of the middle class who are committed to the ideals of social justice. The nongovernmental sector has opened up to these professionals an alternative work space to state social welfare agencies and programs, whose tendency to reproduce the existing social relations does not resonate with their commitments. NGOs have become havens for professionals who wish to question the logic of the welfare state

by advancing alternative political and economic initiatives (Brito, 2000). Thus, GSOs propose a progressive partnership between a professional elite and the grassroots (Fisher, 1998). They constitute an important institutional site through which professional elites committed to social change can impact communities.

The 'do-good' sector revisited

Some scholars and activists have taken a critical stance towards NGOs, specifically development NGOs. They argue that the mushrooming of NGOs is an effect of the expansion and consolidation of global capitalism and neoliberal reforms (Gardner & Lewis, 1996; INCITE, 2007; Kamat, 2002; Nederveen Pieterse, 1998). Some contend that NGOs have played an instrumental role in the neoliberal agenda to reform the state (Sorj, 2007). Others state that NGOs are part of a renewed development agenda that has transformed the manner in which the poor are linked with the rich and developed countries cooperate with underdeveloped ones (Roberts, 2000). As development NGOs, GSOs are implicated in the claims that the nongovernmental sector has become an alternative manager of development and neoliberalism.

To begin, the sector's alleged autonomy from the state and the private for-profit sector has been undermined. Over the last couple of decades, development NGOs have become important contractors with states and international organizations for the delivery of certain basic services, such as health, education and job creation programs. The proliferation of this partnership between NGOs and national and international funding organizations occurred in the context of neoliberal macro-economic and political reforms which promoted the downsizing of state by transferring former state functions to this sector (Ferguson & Gupta, 2002; Maack, 1995; Salomon, 1993; Trouillot, 2001). This

situation has made development NGOs dependent on funding from both state and international development agencies and banks (Chernela, 2005; Elyachar, 2003; Gill, 1997; Shuller, 2007). Fisher (1997) goes as far as to argue that NGOs not dependent on official aid agencies for the majority of their budgets are more the exception than the rule.

The problem with financial dependence is that it bleeds away the possibility of articulating any radical project of change by conditioning the work of NGOs to the availability of outside funds as well as to the funding preferences of outside people and organizations. The dependence on government patronage limits the possibility of questioning government policies and program goals (Mora y Arujo & Serantes, 1997). Such dependence carries the risks of cooptation of the NGO's mission or work to meet the goals of public and private funding agencies. The latter case complicates the issue even further because private funders, both international and local, are not accountable to the general public in the same way that governments are (Meyer, 1992). In democracies, governments can be voted out if the people reject their policies and/or performance. How can populations hold accountable a development NGOs funded by a private international foundation?

The blurring effect of financial dependence attains a greater significance if we consider that development NGOs often claim to be part of, if not represent, civil society. Schuller's (2007) research of NGOs in Haiti shows how their dependence on foreign aid agencies, such as USAID, extends the perils of imperialism to civil society. Just like Caribbean post-colonial states, civil society in the region has been and continues to be traversed by foreign aid agencies and nongovernmental organizations pursuing their neoliberal agenda through poverty reduction and civil society promotion programs. The

use of NGOs to implement international development interventions, and the privileging of NGOs as representatives of civil society questions the oppositional dichotomy between states and civil society often asserted in the civil society literature. Schuller's focus on internationally funded NGOs exposes civil society not as a separate space of opposition to national and international powers, but rather as a space in which the ideological work of imperialistic politics also take place.

Contrary to the claims made by grassroots support organizations that their work contributes to end poverty, critics have accused NGOs of carrying out the social adjustment policies that have accompanied economic globalization. They argue that NGOs have advanced the neoliberal agenda of promoting market-based solutions to social problems by implementing small scale income generating schemes that require education and training (Kamat, 2002). Initiatives such as community economic development and micro-credit seek to break the cycles of dependence, state paternalism and other forms of sociability that affect the optimum functioning of capitalism.

Development NGOs have also been charged with contributing to offset the 'temporary disequilibrium' of structural adjustment programs by accepting the burden of poverty alleviation left behind by retrenching and decentralizing state agencies (Elyachar, 2003; Gill, 1997). Thus, NGOs have become an important component of what Alvarez, Dagnino & Escobar (1998) call the "apparatuses and practices of social adjustment;" Fisher (1997) refers to as the "international welfare system;" and Elyachar (2003) calls the "safety nets for the collateral damage of structural adjustment policies." As such, NGOs are accused of cushioning the symptoms of poverty and becoming apolitical social service delivery organizations that have abandoned their social change mission.

Moreover, NGOs have been shown to carry out their work by means of the same paternalistic and clientelestic practices as the state and, therefore, reproduce existing inequalities, contribute to divide and demobilize marginalized groups, and hinder the formation of democratic citizenship practices (ibid.; Gill, 1997).

As apparatuses of social adjustment, the nongovernmental sector has become an important employment sector for a number of health care and social planning professions, a fact that undermines its claim to be driven by an ethics of volunteerism and responsible citizenship. Also, the increased competition for contracts has demanded a greater professionalization of NGOs staff and practices. This professionalization has led to the reproduction within NGOs of long-standing development practices in which socio-economic and political problems are tackled by means of a techno-managerial approach that is usually apolitical and ahistorical (Ferguson, 1990). In other words, grassroots support ends up being a technical-scientific enterprise that does not take into consideration the need to transform structural inequalities in the global economy, forms of ownership, control of natural resources, access to markets, etc. (Fox, 1998). The project of providing key inputs to assist grassroots solutions to poverty fails to incorporate broader social, economic and political frameworks in which to evaluate the significance and possibilities of these transfers.

The nongovernmental sector is also beset by long-standing class inequalities. As Gill's (1997) study of NGOs in Bolivia shows, popular organizations take note of the class differences and often "reproach staff members for developing projects in the name of the poor, while using 'development aid' to finance comfortable middle-class lifestyles" (pg. 157). Moreover, Prashad (1999) states that the emphasis in and privileging of

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community betrays a classist project that seeks to undermine the emergence of class-based struggles against capitalist exploitation. Following Marx's critique of humanitarian and philanthropic assistance, Prashad claims that development assistance, such as grassroots support, seeks merely to avoid conflict between elites and oppressed groups by substituting class struggle with inputs, such as education and grants, and the promotion of interclass solidarity over class antagonism. Thus, far from being a selfless 'do good' sector, the nongovernmental sector is also a space where class inequalities and antagonisms are played out.

Third Principle: Empowerment for Sustainable Social Change

GSOs are committed to the creation and development of social, political and economic initiatives at the grassroots level that can sustain change efforts. Their investment in communities seeks to generate a series of improvements that can persist without continued outside intervention. Achieving this requires that GSOs create the conditions which will permit them to phase out their support. Numerous studies have documented how GSOs have created those conditions. For example, Brown's (1991) study of 'bridging' organizations in Asia and Africa discusses two strategies used by these organizations to ensure their sustainable development goals. First, they built effective local organizations that continued to channel community efforts. Second, they helped forge horizontal linkages among these organizations and vertical linkages between them and national and international partners in order to enable inter-sectoral cooperation and continued grassroots influence on policy-making. The cases reviewed by Brown showed that bridging organizations and their constituent networks did in fact "contribute to local organization-building, to creating horizontal linkages, and to building vertical

linkages" (p. 826). Thus, these organizations made the kinds of interventions that make lasting imprints on the resources and political capabilities of local communities.

The Center for Participatory Change, a U.S.-based GSO supporting grassroots efforts across Western North Carolina, provides another example of GSOs contributing to the establishment of sustainable social change initiatives. Members from this center developed a community practice methodology for grassroots support work called Participatory Change (Castelloe et al., 2002). As part of their model, they argued that power expresses itself in two ways: participation in formal decision-making processes and shaping nonparticipants' fundamental conceptions of the issues to be decided upon (p. 14). For them, then, "challenges to power occur when marginalized groups develop a critical consciousness, then act collectively to articulate and meet those needs" (ibid.). Members of this center contend that the role of Participatory Change, and grassroots support in general, is "support[ing] marginalized groups as they build the power needed to control their own development and participate fully in the decisions that affect their lives" (p. 15). Thus, for the Center for Participatory Change, as for all GSOs, participation is intimately linked to the expansion of the influence and negotiating power of marginalized groups.

The above examples capture the particular vision of empowerment espoused by GSOs: "the process of assisting disadvantaged individuals and groups to gain greater control than they presently have over local and national decision-making and resources, and of their ability and right to define collective goals, make decisions and learn from experience" (Edwards & Hulme 1992, p. 24). For those grassroots actors receiving the support of GSOs, empowerment is attained when they achieve, through personal and

organizational efforts, "the capacity and capability to deal effectively with the overlapping social, economic, and political contexts within which people are located" (Brown, 2000, p. xiii). Empowerment is predicated on GSO assistance, which is committed to a process in which they support people's efforts to define and shape the kind of society in which they aspire to live.

This notion of empowerment is somewhat different from other notions found in the social work and social science literature. Certain notions of empowerment are in line with the limited views of sustainable development and participation discussed above. For some, empowerment means as little as increasing the bargaining power of the poor without addressing broader configurations of power (Cooke & Kothari, 2001). Others claim empowerment results from involving marginalized groups as consultants to projects or as implementers of programs and interventions (Schneider, 1995; Slocum & Thomas-Slayter, 1995). For some in social work, empowerment can mean the strengthening of participation in institutional spheres and/or improving the effectiveness and responsiveness of human service delivery systems (Weil & Gamble, 1995). While the above notions point to definite gains for communities in need, GSOs have a stronger formulation of empowerment. For them, empowerment can only be claimed when grassroots actors have attained the control and capacity required to overcome the structural limitations on their life possibilities. Thus, for GSOs empowerment extends beyond the ability to successfully integrate into an unequal system; instead it implies the ability to challenge it.

Empowerment Revisited: GSOs as Site of Neoliberal Subject-formation?

Critics of NGOs have shown not only how these organizations form part of the larger context of neoliberal global politics, but also how these organizations have become institutional sites through which different forms of governance and subject formation take place (Chernela, 2005; Ferguson & Gupta 2002; Fisher, 1997; Gill, 1997; Leve & Karim 2001; Li 2007; Ong, 2003; Shuller, 2007). Most of these critics have been influenced by a theory of governance called governmentality by Michel Foucault and others after him. This theory contends that planned investments to sustain and improve human life actually function as mechanisms of governance by directing the conduct of people; that is, by disposing people to think and behave in a normatively defined manner (Foucault, 1991; Li, 2005). As a reformulation of our understanding not only of governance, but also of power, the theory of governmentality argues that power manifests itself not only in moments of imposition (of one will over another), but also through the "setting [of] conditions so that people will be inclined to behave as they should" (Li 2005, p. 387). In other words, power resides in the exercise of structuring the field of possible action of others, which includes shaping people's desires, aspirations and habits. Thus, practices and interventions, along with the knowledge and expertise associated with them, pursued by both state and non-state actors intent on reshaping people into more salutary, productive, and responsible citizens form part of a new form of governmental rationality. It goes without saying that grassroots support figures prominently in that category.

Neoliberalism complemented the strategy of state withdrawal with a governmental rationality that promoted decentralization, citizen participation and empowerment, and personal responsibility (Barry et al., 1996). In so doing, it intensified

and expanded the use of governmentality as a form of governance today. The discrediting of state-centered, top-down forms of governance led to the formulation of more participatory, people-centered approaches to governance that in effect devolved to citizens the responsibility for securing their wellbeing. In other words, neoliberalism prides itself in not delivering social services or goods, but rather in "empowering" people to secure those services and goods for themselves (Gupta & Sharma, 2006). This has resulted in a form of governance that chides away from coercive models of regulating the poor and works through the refashioning of their subjectivity .

The theory of governmentality proposes that rule and power are enacted through institutions, spaces and even social practices that do not automatically fall under the rubric of the state. The multiple development schemes implemented by development NGOs, including GSOs, play an important role in producing these new empowered neoliberal subjects. Initiatives such as local economic projects and participatory governance serve to produce new subjects shaped by the ideas of entrepreneurship, self-help and personal responsibility (Maskovsky, 2001). The whole idea of participatory development and grassroots support is predicated on the formation of this new neoliberal subject, one who is a productive citizen not dependent on aid. According to critics, this exercise in subject formation helps legitimate new projects of capital expansion and political domination. Their small scale, local reach and commitment to participatory methodologies made NGOs ideal institutions through which the micropolitics of neoliberal strategies of governance could be implemented, both nationally and transnationally (Ferguson & Gupta 2002; Trouillot 2001). As Fisher (1997) argues:

> Governments and development agencies express support for NGOs and participation even as they find new ways to fit these new elements into old models of governance

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or development. Thus, the pursuit of participation by development agencies [e.g. NGOs] frequently fails to live up to their rhetoric, which seems to promote it and yet can amount to no more than the restructuring of control. (p. 455)

NGOs, then, function as much more than service delivery organizations; they are part of new schemes of governance invested in producing the kinds of subjects that have the right disposition to live and, sometimes thrive, under our neoliberal global moment.

Superseding Dichotomies: The Politics of Grassroots Support

The above literature on grassroots support, which covers theoretical as well as empirical examinations of such topics as participatory development, capacity-building, community development, poverty-reduction, empowerment, neoliberal globalization and the nongovernmental sector, is densely populated with proposals and critical debates. While illuminating, these proposals and debates have been hampered by the underlying dichotomy framing the analysis of this development model. Grassroots support in general and GSOs in particular are presented as either empowering the poor, strengthening grassroots movements and advocating for political change or facilitating neoliberal governance, furthering capitalist globalization and promoting the status quo. This dichotomous framework has forced this area of research into an either-or paradigm which ignores and disregards the heterogeneity of experiences that emerged during the implementation of development model. By forcing GSOs and grassroots support into one of these two camps, researchers have simplified the complicated existence and effects of historically situated organizations and development practices. This lack of nuance in the

literature has led to a limiting formulation of the issue: *whether* GSOs are institutions of neoliberal governmentality or community empowerment.[17]

My research engages the stalemate in the literature between celebratory accounts and dismissive critiques of GSOs by pursuing a different research approach. To be sure, my research acknowledges the irony behind the fact that grassroots support is simultaneously hailed by activists promoting the empowerment of impoverished communities and policy-makers advancing neoliberal capitalist restructuring policies. It also recognizes the challenge of investigating a model of practice and a set of organizations whose solutions have been discredited as part of conservative or capitalist projects by radical researchers and activists. For example, Kamat's (2002) research focused on how the ideology of development is reproduced within resistance spaces of political action, such as grassroots or community development organizations. Thus, potentially contestatory organizations are derailed into development work, with its discourses, assumptions and limited solutions.

Yet, my review of literature showed that for both activists and policy-makers the effects and/or results of grassroots support initiatives appear to be over-determined by the stated aims and goals of their political project or policy intentions. The discourse of bottom-up, community-based, participatory development has generated a consensus among a disparate set of actors, such as grassroots activists, NGO administrators, private funders, state officials, bilateral aid organizations and multilateral development banks about the need and possibility of empowering communities as a strategy to overcome poverty. The actors that are part of this consensus tend to assume that the discursive

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[17] William Fisher identifies this dichotomy in his seminal article on NGOs in the Annual Review of Anthropology. However, he merely identifies and traces this dichotomy, but does not attempt to overcome it.

proposals to which they subscribe translate neatly into a set of practices and effects in the real world. In other words, there is a sense that organizations whose expressed intent is the empowerment of communities actually produce empowered communities as a result of their interventions. While that is a possible outcome of their work, they seem to disregard the possibility, beyond the recognition of some procedural failure, that the work of these organizations might be contributing to other results and/or political projects.

On the other hand, critics of grassroots support and development NGOs in general interpret them as part of different political projects: capitalist globalization and neoliberal governmentality. Thus, they see no other option but to denounce and reject NGOs and grassroots support as instruments solidifying the status quo. Yet, they seem to overlook the fact that organizational forms and practices of assistance are, in and of themselves, not the exclusive property of any particular political project. Rather, organizations and practices gain political efficacy once they are deployed as part of a political project. Thus, critics that automatically correlate NGOs and grassroots support with neoliberalism and global capitalism render irrelevant a number of contextual variables, historical trajectories and political sensibilities that might account for how these organizational forms and practices function to promote different political projects.

Furthermore, like proponents of grassroots support, they also tend to assume that once asserted and pursued the aims and goals of neoliberalism and global capitalism are always attained in the manner in which they were posed. In other words, they tend to ignore the possibility that just like grassroots support does not always result in empowerment or the improvement of people's life, neoliberal reforms and global capitalism do not always succeed in establishing the forms of governance, market

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initiatives and subjects they aim to produce. Like all political projects, neoliberalism and globalization have fissures and gaps, and produce unintended consequences as part of the implementation of their schemes.

Gupta & Sharma (2006) raised this same issue in their study of two social development programs in India geared towards indigent women with children. They set out to research the impact of neoliberal reforms through a comparison of a social welfare program whose existence preceded neoliberal reforms and a newer program whose aims of empowerment and self-help characterize the neoliberal model. They did not assume that because certain new claims had been made by the more recent women's empowerment program that the everyday practices of the state had changed to reflect those claims. For them, neoliberal reforms had to be borne out empirically not assumed as the existing state of affairs simply because they have been proclaimed. Besides offering interesting insights into how neoliberalism is transforming the redistributive function of the Indian state, their research showed that despite differences in design, policy objectives and ideology, the two programs were very similar in their everyday practices (ibid., p. 291). The research of project practices or implementation exposed a series of continuities that were disavowed at the policy level.

Mosse (2004) and Li (2007) contend that disjuncture in development initiatives between the claimed intents embedded in policies or intervention model and their actual effects once implemented is the result of the politics imbedded at the level of practice. Both Mosse and Li recognize that people are acting agents immersed in complex political relations and social structures, and not just simple executers or recipients of interventions and/or political projects of domination. Therefore, it is in actual moments of practice that

people position themselves as subjects with variable interests, intentions and capacities for action and critique. I would add, following a basic Marxist precept, that people's consciousness and intentions as well as their capacities for action evolve through praxis. Moreover, as Ortner (2006) claims, people everywhere have their own politics with which they contend with "all the local categories of friction and tension" (p. 46), which is often more complex and ambivalent than the politics captured by dichotomous schemes of domination and resistance. This politics is enacted, pursued and sometimes transformed during concrete moments of social engagement.

People everywhere confront the diagnosis, prescriptions and regulatory interventions made by both state and non-state agents, regardless of whether they come in the name of socialist or neoliberal development, with their own politics. Moreover, the agents carrying out interventions, such as NGO staff, also engage the political field in which they enter, which often leads them to divert from the very prescriptions they claim to be executing. This practical political engagement has led to failures and unintended consequences that have made the development industry aware of the politics of practice (Gardner & Lewis, 1996). Likewise, the politics of practice points to the limits of governmentality as an analytical theory of power. As Li (2005) points out, Foucault and others demonstrated how state and non-state institutions and governance techniques structure the conditions in which people live, but failed to account for how people interpret and react to the structures of opportunities and control in which they are immersed. This notion of power ignores that people do not live as masses managed by governmental apparatuses, but rather as individuals and groups caught in social relations.

As such, people gain and mobilize an awareness of their system and articulate political projects of their own.

Moreover, the almost exclusive focus on social control in the governmentality literature has confounded Foucault's ideas about power and subject formation. Foucault was very explicit about the need to disaggregate the notion of power from the negative value judgments associated with its presence:

> We must cease once and for all to describe the effects of power in negative terms: it 'excludes', it 'represses', it 'censors', it abstracts', it 'masks', it 'conceals'. In fact, power produces; it produces reality; it produces domains of objects and rituals of truth. (Foucault, 1979, p. 194)

Any initiative that applies expert knowledge to discipline individuals into acting, thinking or feeling a certain way, is an exercise in power, regardless of whether we are referring to a military academy, a university classroom or a baseball clinic. The inclination, specifically in the Left, to associate power with negative intentions or agendas, has obfuscated the fact that Foucault's analysis of the process of subject formation left open the political question of what political project was advanced by the process of forming such subjects. For him, the exercise of power was about producing domains of reality, including subjects. Yet, nothing impeded that process from resulting in revolutionary subjects, if that were the political aim of the disciplinary process. In fact, no political project, radical as it may be, can dispense with the notion of applying its worldview and values to produce new subjects that reflect those values. Many researchers document moments of subject production as transparent examples of negative use of power (social control), but they ignore the greater political question of the aim of that process of subject formation.

In the governmentality literature, the assumed correlation of subject formation initiatives with social control has blinded researchers to the potential of certain collaborative efforts to lead to the strategic reversibility of power relations (Fisher, 1997). Strategic reversibility points to the transformation of certain techniques of governance into tools that can challenge truths, change notions of self and alter structures of power. This concept extends the notion of resistance beyond the usual political stances of rejection or refusal to be incorporated into a particular project. It suggests the possibility of using categories and techniques used or imposed by states and non-state institutions to demand rights or create new possibilities of struggle. Viewed in light of the concept of strategic reversibility, grassroots support could make important contributions to grassroots struggles. In one ethnographic study of such strategic reversibility, Appadurai (2002) shows how the partnership between development NGOs and community-based organizations facilitated the emergence of an urban activist movement that resulted in important political gains for impoverished urban slum dwellers of Mumbai. These slum dwellers used techniques usually associated with governance—surveys, proposals, budgets—in order to improve their lives, a strategic use Appadurai characterized as countergovernmentality.

Concepts like the politics of practice and countergovernmentality serve to highlight the fact that people actively negotiate organizational goals, funding imperatives and the meaning of poverty and capacity-building during their participation in or resistance to development efforts. Building on this insight, my research will examine the effects of grassroots support as outcomes of concrete moments of practice, moments shaped by interests and contextual improvisations that often exceed and diverge from the

prescriptions of policy and expressed aims of political projects. My analysis, then, focuses on what I call the politics of grassroots support practices. I will examine grassroots support practices as critical sites in which diverse actors—grassroots organizations, NGO personal, funders and state representatives—cross paths and get entangled, leading to tensions and synergies that play a determining role in the outcome of these social change schemes. During the process of project implementation the consensus on empowerment, participation and capacity-building is strained and often crumbles due to the divergent agendas of the political actors involved. The outcome of the struggle among divergent political actors during the process of project implementation is what ultimately determines the result of grassroots support initiatives, which include making strategic contributions to social justice-oriented initiatives, advancing neoliberal reforms and other possibilities in-between.

The analysis of the politics of grassroots support results in a more nuanced consideration of grassroots support and GSOs. This approach opens up the possibility of asking under what conditions, circumstances and relations of power, and through what strategies and practices GSOs produce effects that reproduce, reform or transform the unequal power relations structuring the lives of marginalized groups. Such an approach produces a much more complicated view of GSOs and their effects, such as internal contradictions, unintended consequences, and different meanings produced at different levels of intervention. Thus, this framework affords the possibility of analyzing how and by what means the politics of NGO partnership with grassroots groups impacts the complex field of popular struggles in which power is re-inscribed and contested.

Chapter III

The Challenge of the Present:

The Disillusions and Discontents of Once Model Island

Introduction

...Talibennette stops to talk with four adolescents who are fixing a motorcycle in front of a house. I look at my watch: it's 2 p.m. on a weekday. I immediately think these young men must be out of school and/or unemployed. Tali must have read my mind because she asks them if they have a résumé. If they don't, she continues, she would be willing to bring someone who can teach them how to build one. One of the adolescents answers here in curt manner: "Résumés are good for nothing. Out there [in the United States] they give you a job with only a driver's license and your social security card. Here [in Puerto Rico] you send résumé after résumé and no one ever calls you."

One of the other youth interjects that he is eighteen years old, just recently arrived from New York and wants a job. He says he'll vote for anyone as long as he can get a job. His comment about voting alludes to the fact that one of the main local political parties, the New Progressive Party, is just five days away from its primary to choose the candidates who will run for governor in the general elections next November. The young man has seen us walking through the community with notebooks, visiting house after house, talking to people and filling out questionnaires. He interprets our presence in the community as a last minute visit by politicians to exchange jobs for votes. You can't

blame him for his misreading given the long history of political patronage cultivated by parties and government officials, especially during election time.

Tali responds by clarifying that she cannot guarantee him a job. She can only offer him workshops to teach him how to develop a résumé. The young man who spoke first reiterates his initial assertion: résumés are worthless. He insists that in the U.S. as long as you have a head and two arms they hire you. The second young man restates himself too: he needs money for gas and food. Oh, and to take his girlfriend out to eat. Tali asks them how many other adolescents live around here who find themselves in a similar situation. After conferring with each other, one of the young men gives us a rough estimate: about eight to fifteen. The numbers bounced in my head. I said to myself: "Those are eight to fifteen adolescents trying to find something to do besides riding their motorcycles in the middle of the day."

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Needs Assessment of La Cuevita Community, Moca, Puerto Rico
Conducted by Talibennette, community technician
Community Development Program, Social Action of Puerto Rico, Inc.
March 4, 2008

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The opening vignette offers an ethnographic account of a generalized predicament in which many Puerto Ricans find themselves as a result of capitalism's current exclusionary tendency in the island, mainly the formal economy's incapacity to meet the general population's demand for employment. The unemployment situation in P.R. has been dire since the middle of the 1970s. During this three decade span, official unemployment statistics have remained consistently over 10%, reaching close to 17% in July 2010 as a result of the global economic crisis, the local recession and recent massive

government layoffs.[18] Although this chronic unemployment has had an impact on the population at large, young men with a high school education or less, like the ones I met in La Cuevita, have been affected the most (Mario Martínez, Mattar & Rivera, 2005).

Alongside chronic unemployment, the island has experienced a significant reduction in its labor participation rates: From 55% in 1950 to 41.4% in January 2010, the lowest rate registered during this decade.[19] In other words, more than half of the population 16 years or older who are capable of working find themselves out of the formal sector labor force. This reduction is made even more significant if we compare it to the current world average of 59% and the U.S. average of 65% (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2010). The fruitless search for employment in an economy whose formal sector seems incapable of producing sufficient jobs engenders feelings of frustration and impotence, which leads people, like the young men in La Cuevita, to abandon the job search process and disparage any effort to reinsert them in that process.

Besides capturing an important aspect of Puerto Rico's economic situation, the vignette also portrays one of the main problems underlying the island's representative democracy: political patronage. Jorge Benitez's (2000) study of P.R.'s political culture exposed the persistence of *caudillismo* or charismatic leadership and *la partidocracia* (party-centered regimes). The dominance of the public sphere by political strongmen and party patronage has usurped the place of genuine political representation and citizen rights as the legitimate democratic principles that enable local citizens to make demands on and have access to state benefits and resources. The young men in La Cuevita are

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[18] Official unemployment statistics from the Department of Labor and Human Resources. http://www.net-empleopr.org/almis23/index.jsp (accessed October 20, 2010).
[19] Official statistics from Puerto Rico's Planning Board.
http://www.jp.gobierno.pr/Portal_JP/Default.aspx?tabid =185. (accessed October 20, 2010).

aware of this and at least one of them, the one who voluntarily offered his vote in exchange for a job, is already adjusting his expectations and behavior to the exigencies of this patronage system.

In all, the opening vignette offers a glimpse of the challenges of present-day P.R.: a faltering economy with limited capacity to generate formal sector jobs and a representative democracy whose fissures are exposed by the persistence of patronage politics. The pleas and actions of the young men interviewed by Tali reveal the frustrations and discontents that frame the life of many in the island, especially young people. Unfortunately for them, they face the challenge of having to carve out a living at a moment when the island is struggling to establish itself as a relevant player in a highly competitive global capitalist system

Puerto Rico's current situation cannot be explained exclusively by alluding to recent recessions or the inconsistent ebbs and flows of the world economy. The island's economic and political problems are the result decades of policies and political decisions (or indecisions). This chapter will provide a brief historical overview of major economic and political changes that took place during Puerto Rico's twentieth century in order to historicize and contextualize the island's economic and political situation at the beginning of the twenty first century. This overview does not aim to offer a comprehensive economic or political history of Puerto Rico. Instead, it seeks to outline significant economic and political problems in the island to which the strategy of grassroots support—which is the object of this research—claims to offer viable solutions.

Puerto Rico's Industrialization and Modernization Project: Showcase for the Developing World

In the 1940s, the United States federal government allied with an emergent local party, the Popular Democratic Party (PPD), to implement a populist development and modernization program whose success transformed Puerto Rico from a relatively anonymous Caribbean island into a model for other developing countries and aid programs throughout the world.[20] Puerto Rico became one of the first developing countries to implement the now infamous export-led industrialization by invitation model of development. Operation Bootstrap, as the island's main economic development program was known, focused on attracting foreign capital, mostly U.S. based, through generous tax structures and investment in infrastructure. This model replaced the existent low wage agricultural jobs that characterized the island's sugar-based economy with higher wage manufacturing jobs (Berman Santana, 1996; Colón, 2005). As a result, Puerto Rico's economy grew at an impressive rate in both per capita income and GNP: The former increased from $1,103 in 1940 to $3,979 in 1969 while the latter exceeded 8% and 10% growth rates between the 1940s and 1970s (Irrizary Mora, 2001; Safa, 1989). The strategic substitution of economic sectors elevated Puerto Rico into an upper-middle income economy within a couple of decades, a feat considered by some as an economic miracle (Chase, 1951; Goodsell, 1978; Parker, 1955).

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[20] The literature on Puerto Rico's political, economic and socio-cultural modernization project that took place in the mid-twentieth century is extensive and beyond the scope of this chapter to summarize. However, for a diverse collection of essays covering political, economic and cultural issues during this period, see Sylvia Alvarez Curbelo and María Elena Rodríguez Castro (Eds.). *Del nacionalismo al populismo: Cultura y política en Puerto Rico*. (Rio Piedras: Ediciones Huracán, 1993). For a brief discussion of major works on this and other periods of Puerto Rico's history, see Cesar Ayala and Rafael Bernabe's excellent bibliographic essay published in their recent book, *Puerto Rico in the American Century: A History Since 1898* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007).

Concurrently, Puerto Ricans experienced dramatic changes in their quality of life, changes that produced a different horizon of possibility for current generations. For example, the average years of schooling rose from fewer than 5 in 1950s to 12.2 in 2000 (Collins, Bosworth & Soto-Class, 2006, p. 19). Fertility rates dropped from 5.2 births per woman in 1950 to 1.9 births in 2000, a change that has had a remarkable impact on the personal and professional lives of women (ibid.). Life expectancy increased from 60 years in 1950 to 76 years in 2000 and mortality rates fell from 12.5 per thousand to 7 per thousand in the same time span, reflecting improvements in nutrition, sanitation and health care (León López, 2007). These impressive social improvements, along with the island's economic growth, accounts for why countries like Singapore, which today possesses one of the leading economies in the world, studied and incorporated aspects of Puerto Rico's development model during their own project of development (Collado Schwarz, 2008).

This process of economic restructuring was accompanied by an interrelated process of political reform that sought to make Puerto Rico a showcase for U.S. democracy in the Caribbean and Latin America in general. In 1952 Puerto Ricans voted to approve a constitution which gave juridical form to a new political relationship between the island and the United States: a commonwealth status called the Estado Libre Asociado (Free Associated State) or ELA. This new relationship attempted to redress the colonial status under which the U.S. had maintained the island since its occupation by military forces in 1898. During the first four decades following that invasion, Puerto Rico was ruled by American governors appointed directly by the U.S. President (Cotto Serrano, 2007). For the first two of those decades, Puerto Ricans were limited to electing

officials only to the Lower Chamber of the local Congress, since the Upper Chamber consisted of members appointed from the Governor's cabinet. Puerto Ricans were allowed only one legal representative to the U.S. government: a Resident Commissioner who initially formed part of the executive branch and later became a member of the U.S. Congress with a voice but not a vote. This incapacity to vote in the U.S. Congress is made more significant by the fact that the Congress retained the power to annul or override any law passed by the Puerto Rican legislature. Thus, during the first part of the twentieth century Puerto Rico experienced the incredible irony of being part of the so-called beacon of democracy, the United States, yet living under a political status that denied Puerto Ricans some of the most basic democratic principles.

The 1952 constitution and the new commonwealth status represented an attempt to extend the U.S. model of democracy to the island. The constitution formalized the presidentialist model of democracy that had been taking shape under the aegis of the U.S., with the governor being the highest post in the executive branch. It also opened the state to a higher degree of local autonomy. The ELA had its own Supreme Court and the government in power was now authorized to appoint judges, approve civil and penal laws, determine its own budget, define its tax system and implement its own education, labor and health policies (Mario Martínez et al., 2005, p. 36). Thus, the establishment of the ELA expanded the social, political and economic areas over which the local government would be responsible. This new political arrangement created the conditions for local political projects to be formulated and carried out through the use of the local state apparatus.

Shattering the Showcase

According to official accounts, the economic performance measures cited above and the democratizing political reforms of the 1950s stand as evidence of the dramatic changes that transformed Puerto Rico from a poor, agricultural colony to a modern, industrialized democratic society between the 1940s and 1960s. Yet, the projects of social, economic and political change that were showcased in Puerto Rico soon revealed their limits and deep contradictions. Gordon Lewis, a British social scientist who established residence in Puerto Rico and witnessed firsthand these changes, was by the early 1960s very skeptical of the widely circulating celebratory accounts of Puerto Rico's progress:

> The recent history of the territory is thus presented in terms of the "rags to riches" imagery so dear to the American imagination; a book like Ralph Hancock's Puerto Rico: A Success Story is a typical example. How far is this line of argument legitimate? The more one studies the Puerto Rican situation the more it seems to be an argument at once factually evasive and morally questionable. (Lewis, 1963, p. 181)

The more Lewis studied Puerto Rico the more he realized that the so-called quiet revolution that took place in the island was nothing more than a restructuring of the island's colonial situation, both in its political and economic spheres. What was apparent to Lewis already in the 1960s has become today an inescapable reality. Contemporary Puerto Rico has lost even the appearance it once had of being a society whose political and/or economic model can serve as a standard for developing countries.

The island's political system, the Estado Libre Asociado, seemed to offer P.R. the best solution to the island's colonial dilemma: it afforded island residents their own local government without dissolving its close association with the United States or undergo the political and economic perils of independence that characterized the postcolonial moment

for former colonies in the Caribbean and elsewhere. As Rúa (1978) states, "Muñoz Marín and populism…realized in Puerto Rico, without the mediation of independence and without having even remotely the lineage of African and Asian neocolonial leaders, *part* of the same goals that those other leaders implemented by means of independence" (pp. 68-69, italics in the original). However, Rua's emphasis on the limited achievements of Muñoz Marín's political reforms is crucial precisely because it highlights the fact that the new political status proved to be insufficient, a fact that has been aggravated by recent changes in national, regional and international political and economic processes. In fact, Rúa and others critique the ELA's lack of political powers, which left Puerto Rico in a neocolonial relationship with the United States (ibid.; Berrios Martínez, 1983; Lewis, 1963; Melendez & Melendez, 1993; Trias Monge, 1997).

The evidence for asserting that the ELA constitutes a neocolonial political status is convincing. The 1952 constitution did not exempt Puerto Rico from the application of U.S. federal laws. In fact, U.S.-Puerto Rico relations are governed by the Federal Relations Act, a component of the 1952 reforms which left intact many of the federal powers present in the previous political arrangements between the two countries. For example, Puerto Rico continues to be under the U.S. tariff system and is impeded from entering into direct commercial agreements with foreign countries (Irrizary Mora 2001, pp. 312-313). All U.S. commercial treaties are extensive to Puerto Rico without the local government having any direct participation in treaty negotiations. Moreover, numerous critical areas of economic and political life remain under direct U.S. control including: citizenship, immigration, the regulation of communication systems, commercial marine transport, minimum wage, the monetary system, postal service, air space control, and

food and pharmaceutical regulations (Berrios, 1983). It also left the Resident Commissioner as the only representative to the U.S. government, a representative who still has no vote in Congress. Thus, the ELA has not afforded P.R. enough autonomy to act independently within the international community nor has it provided the representation required to participate in the federal government's decision-making process. This neocolonial conundrum limits P.R.'s current ability to promote necessary economic reforms because it does not afford the political tools necessary to contend with the changing national, regional and international political and economic processes (Collado Schwarz, 2008).

Besides these structural critiques of P.R.'s political situation, other critiques target the political culture developed under the shadows of the (neo)colonial relationship with the United States (Benítez, 2000; Diaz, 2006; Oficina para el Financiamiento Socioeconómico y la Autogestión, 2003). As stated at the beginning of this chapter, political patronage has dominated the practice of politics in Puerto Rico, which in turn has impeded the formation of a strong citizenry. This political patronage system is one of the least discussed legacies of the modernization program implemented by the PPD. The rise to power of the PPD in the 1940s was made possible to some extent by a political program that highlighted the role of peasants and rural proletariat in the efforts to restructure the Puerto Rican society (Ramirez, 1973). During its 24 years (1948-1968) of uninterrupted control of the Puerto Rican state, the PPD translated its commitment to the popular classes into a system of redistribution of state resources that ended up promoting a form of patronage politics between national and local state and party officials and the popular classes:

They [the PPD party and state officials] would provide public services as a form of barter for the political support of the people in their areas. While the *populares* were able to offer the materials to build houses, provide adequate medical services, occasional employment and the extension of public services such as water, electricity and paved roads, the inhabitants of shantytowns would offer their support. (ibid., p. 115, my translation; italics in the original)

This patronage system resulted in the establishment of what Ramirez calls a system of double manipulation in which both the politician and the popular classes try to obtain the upper hand in the negotiation of votes for benefits (ibid., p. 117). This system of double manipulation has entrenched a political practice, as discussed in the previous chapter, in which citizens orient their political agency towards manipulating politicians, who in turn try to transform this manipulation into a network of political support. The consolidation of this form of politics under the PPD administration had two important consequences. First, the access to benefits and resources through political networks worked against the formation of class consciousness among those lower classes that could lead to the emergence of a structural critique of the insufficiencies of the economic and political system. Second, it entrenched a form of politics based not on sound public policy and citizen rights, but on the selective redistribution of state resources and the manipulation of political ties.

This form of politics was not abolished or superseded with the defeat of the PPD in the 1968 at the hands of the pro-statehood New Progressive Party (NPP). This election inaugurated an era in which the PPD and NPP alternate the political control of the neocolonial political apparatus in the island. When in power, both parties continue to tap into this political system of resource redistribution in exchange for political support.

During my research of Social Action's community development program, I confronted this patronage system time and time again. For example, Tomás, a senior

resident of Pueblo Nuevo community in Maricao, revealed very explicitly his participation in this system during a community meeting organized by Social Action. After Talibenette, Social Action's community technician, explained the goals of the community development program and suggested possible activities, Tomás stood up and in a very matter-of-fact tone stated that whenever he has a problem he goes straight to the mayor and gets it solved in no-time. He continued saying that he saw no need for the community to organize in order to identify and solve problems. As far as he was concerned, the mayor was delivering needed services and working well. He ended his intervention by asking, in a rhetorical manner, what is the point of coming together and applying pressure if you can get what you want by just going to City Hall and asking for it?   Tali responded by reiterating the principles of self-management and local empowerment, but to no avail; Tomás seemed set on his problem-solving method.

I also encountered several examples of people dissatisfied with politicians because they were not fulfilling the expectations created by the patronage system. Milagros, the community leader of El Seco community in Mayaguez, expressed her discontent with the mayor during an exploratory interview with Claribel, one of two auxiliary community technicians employed by Social Action's community development program. The source of her complaint was that Guillito, as the mayor is popularly known, was ignoring impoverished communities in Mayaguez, along with their leaders. She stated in a mocking tone that Guillito thinks he is a big time artist who is too good to walk the streets of the very communities that got him elected. As our conversation progressed it became apparent that Milagros was angry at the mayor because she had been trying unsuccessfully for months to get an appointment with him to ask for sports

equipment for local youth. For Milagros, the mayor's unresponsiveness bordered on ingratitude since besides being the community leader she is also the local leader of the Partido Popular Democrático and helped secure votes for him.

Lastly, the patronage system works not only to transfer benefits between a patron and a client, but also to exclude those who are not part of the system from those benefits. Such was the case in com. Calvache in Rincón. While conducting a needs assessment of that community, Lilly, the other auxiliary community technician, and I met two residents who upon seeing us began complaining about the municipal government's inaction in their community. According to them, the municipal agencies do not provide adequate services: they do no pick up the trash on time nor do they fix the roads. One of the men stated in a very cynical tone that apparently the municipal government, which is controlled by the PPD, does not invest resources in certain areas if employees find out that local residents are from the opposing party. Lilly, who has a good working relationship with the mayor's office, politely ignored the comment and moved straight ahead with the needs assessment questionnaire.

These ethnographic examples all point to the same conclusion: state resources are mobilized through a patron-client system and the political behavior of island residents is shaped by their understanding and expectations of how that system works. For significant sectors of Puerto Rico's population, this practice constitutes the conditions under which politics, understood as those activities in which power and resources are negotiated, is possible. Beyond characterizing a form of politics in P.R., this political practice points to the insufficiencies and deficits that hinder the functioning of P.R.'s so-called democratic system, even without taking into account the critiques of persistent colonialism in the

island. The patron-client relationships promoted by political administrations and astutely negotiated by the different sectors of the population work against and sometimes hinder the formation of other forms of politics, such as class-based or issue-based movements.

Unfortunately, this form of politics is one of the political features shared by Puerto Rico with other Latin American countries, with which the island is usually not compared due to its non-independent status. The United Nations Development Program recently published a study entitled Democracy in Latin America: Towards a Citizen's Democracy, which dealt with the problems plaguing the region's democracies. The study concluded that the post-dictatorship experiments with democracy in the region have not delivered on all of their promises and have led to recent calls for the 'democratization' of democracy (PNUD, 2004). Latin American democracies exhibit authoritarian and clientelistic practices; citizens lack adequate representation and accountability from public officials and political parties; and growing poverty and inequality in the region have undermined the claims of equality and justice associated with democracy.

Although Puerto Rico did not endure a dictatorship in the twentieth century, it does share with other Latin American countries many of the political and economic problems identified for the region. In fact, the political picture painted by this study certainly fits the island canvass. The comparison with other Latin American countries is useful because it suggests that Puerto Rico's political problems cannot be reduced to the persistence of U.S. colonialism, a critique that dominates the island's political analysis. Puerto Rico exhibits problems of citizen formation and authoritarian leadership, which manifest themselves in tandem with U.S. colonialism.

With regards to the economic reforms, the idea of inviting labor intensive manufacturing plants to industrialize the economy and provide massive employment for the population also fell short of expectations. The new industrial sector created thousands of jobs, but at the expense of jobs in the agricultural sector, which was the island's most important economic sector. As a result, the 1950s witnessed a reduction of total employment in Puerto Rico, even while the economy was registering impressive growth rates (Mario Martínez et al., 2005). The government was aware of this problem and attempted to reduce the real and potential social and political pressures created by the unemployed masses by promoting the emigration of the surplus labor pool. In what has to be considered a tragic historical irony, Operación Manos a la Obra (Operation Bootstrap) resulted not only in a net loss of employment, but also in the expulsion of part of the labor force from the island.

The majority of Puerto Ricans that left the island went to the U.S. As a result, over 800,000 Puerto Ricans migrated from the island between the 1940s and the 1970s (ibid.)—a number equal to half of the natural population growth of the island during that period. Today, that outpouring of unemployable and/or not well remunerated workers confronts the Puerto Rican nation in the form of a huge diaspora community of over four million people, which exceeds the island's current population.[21] Beyond its magnitude, the impact of this diaspora on the dynamics of Puerto Rican society is such that there are serious debates about whether Puerto Rico should be understood as a commuter nation, one in which people circulate between political, social and cultural spaces. At stake in

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[21] Preliminary figures from the 2010 census discussed in the press point out that the diaspora community has exceeded the population residing in the island, which remained virtually stagnant during the last decade. "La isla pierde población," *El Nuevo Día*, August 4, 2010. For a thorough analysis of the Puerto Rican diáspora see Duany, 2002.

this debate is not only acknowledging the reality of people's movement between the island and the U.S., but, more importantly, grappling with the social, cultural and economic complexities and challenges created by that movement.[22]

The members of the unskilled, excess labor pool that did stay on the island did not fare much better than their counterparts in urban ghettoes in the United States. The gradual erosion of agriculture as a viable economic sector forced hundreds of thousands of peasants to migrate to the island's expanding urban centers, mainly San Juan. The magnitude of this migration was impressive. In 1920 78% of the island population lived in rural areas, a figure that by 1970 had been reduced to only 42% (Lewis, 1974). According to the geographer Carlos Severino Valdez (2007), the island's population exhibited as one of its main characteristics a tendency towards urban concentration between 1950 and 1960. This massive internal migration coupled with the inability of the industrial sector to absorb the growing labor force seeking employment led to the emergence of shanty towns and the intensification of urban poverty. In 1969, it was estimated that there were 421 shantytowns in Puerto Rico which had a total of 79,382 housing units (Safa, 1989).

Ironically, by 1960s and 1970s, social scientists, both local and foreign, were producing as many studies about the urban poor and the effects of social stratification as they were about the macro-economic results of Operation Bootstrap (Lewis, 1965; Ramírez, 1972; Safa, 1989; Tumin, 1961[1971]). Although they reflect different understandings of poverty and inequality, these studies suggest similar conclusions. First,

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[22]The outmigration has been reinvigorated during this last decade and, with it, new social, economic and political challenges. For example, demographer Raúl Figueroa Rodríguez argues that a significant portion of current migrants to the U.S. are young, well educated people in their 20s and 30s. This means the island is losing an important portion of its young, well trained labor force (*El Nuevo Día*, op. cit.)

the economic growth generated by the island's impressive industrialization process did not "raise all boats," as economists like to say. To be sure, the island's economic growth did produce increases in GNP and wages, but the unemployment and economic inactivity which afflicted a significant portion of its population limited the realization of the economy's "rising potential." As early as 1961, Melvin Tumin, an American sociologist from Princeton, commented on this situation in the preface to his study on social stratification in the island: "For while the forces that generate change are continuously operative, they find expressions along lines whose directions have been rather firmly set, and which would be likely to alter only under the impact of genuinely revolutionary forces" (p. vii). In other words, the process of industrialization and modernization experienced by P.R. followed the contours of existing inequalities, which resulted in their intensification and the generation of new ones.

More recently, Sila M. Calderón, ex-Governor of P.R., commented in a personal interview on the relationship between Operation Bootstrap and present day poverty in the island:

> Simply stated: P.R. has been living a mirage over the last fifteen, twenty or twenty five years, a mirage legated to us by the transformation brought about by Operation Bootstrap, that was an extraordinary transformation, which brought about a magnificent urban renovation, but also hid our poverty, which was taken out of our boulevards, our avenues, our streets, from our centers of commerce where it was visible, and hid it in our *barrios*, quarters, urban and rural pockets. The reality of our country is in that hidden poverty and the majority of us, the majority of public officials, historians, commentators of our social reality do not see that reality…[23]

Calderón's historical reading of poverty in P.R. is significant since she was President of and Governor for the Popular Democratic Party, the same party that conceived and carried out Operation Bootstrap. Her critical understanding of the legacy of that landmark

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[23] Personal interview, Sila M.Calderón, March 25, 2008, my translation.

project suggests that the persistence of poverty in contemporary Puerto Rico is an effect of the model of economic development that has prevailed in the island since Operation Bootstrap. Moreover, she contends that the narrative of success in which the story of Operation Bootstrap has been embedded has blinded politicians, academics and public commentators to the existence of poverty, which explains the indifference of the different administrations to this problem.

Second, they suggest in hindsight that some of the major social and economic problems facing the island decades after the implementation of Operation Bootstrap are not mere legacies of the island's previous impoverished condition. Instead, these problems, like high poverty rates, are best understood as the result of Operation Bootstrap and, more generally, the strategies of economic growth pursued by the different administrations since Muñoz Marín. Francisco Catalá (2010), a prominent local economist, has characterized the island's economic model as an enclave economy, which is characterized by the specialized production of a primary commodity with few or no links to other sectors of the economy. Under U.S. rule, P.R. developed first a sugar enclave economy and, later, beginning with Operation Bootstrap, a mono-industrial enclave economy that has included various phases: textile manufacturing, petrochemical refineries, and, more recently, the pharmaceutical industry. This industrial sector has been and still is the main contributor to the island's Gross Domestic Product, which in 2005 accounted for 40% of the island's GDP (Irrizarry Mora, 2007a). Yet, it has never generated more than 150,000 jobs and currently generates less than 100,000 jobs (ibid.), due to technological innovations in the labor process and industry closings. Moreover, since most of the companies are owned by foreign capital, their earnings are siphoned off

the island. According to another local economist, Edwin Irizarry Mora (2007b), companies owned by U.S. capital generated $33,300 million dollars in profits in 2006, of which very little is locally taxed. Thus, U.S. capital extracts not only jobs from the island, but also the wealth produced by Puerto Rico's labor force.

According to Catalá (2010), this development model has resulted in a hypertrophic economy, whose symptoms are:

> …dependence on foreign capital accompanied by excessive repatriation of profits to the exterior, lack of sectorial and interindustrial linkage, low labor participation rates along with chronic unemployment, extreme dependence on public welfare, a disorganized urbanization process with urban flight, disproportion between employee compensations and capital performance, forced migration, environmental degradation and growth of the informal economy, primarily the illegal sector linked to drug trafficking" (pp. 70-71, my translation).

Thus, decades after P.R. was proclaimed a showcase for democracy and economic development, that image has been shattered by the island's limited ability to make decisions in important areas of its political and economic life due to its neocolonial status; the persistent of a political patronage system and a hypertrophic economy that has forced hundreds of thousands off the island and condemned thousands more to an impoverished existence. The combination of these political and economic limitations has resulted in a series of social and economic problems that impose important challenges to current and future generations trying to fulfill their aspirations of a better life in Puerto Rico.

The Challenges of the Present

Recent studies of Puerto Rico's economy conducted by both local and foreign social scientists all indentify chronic unemployment, significant economic inactivity by the population, income inequality and poverty as persistent economic problems affecting

the island (Collins et al., 2006; Colón Reyes, 2005; Duany, 2007; Irizarry Mora, 2001; Kicinski, 2005; Mario Martínez et al., 2005; Sotomayor, 2004). Taken as a whole, these problems point to structural problems with the island's economy that have been brewing since the mid-twentieth century reforms introduced by the Popular Democratic Party.

Local macro-economic policies and capitalism's global exclusionary tendencies manifest themselves in the island in the form of high unemployment and the increasing exclusion of skilled and unskilled sectors of P.R.'s labor force from the formal economy. For example, Puerto Rico's local industrial enclave economy, the island's most lucrative sector, produces high returns, but both technological innovations and the transfer of labor intensive phases to cheaper labor markets has limited the employment capacity of this sector. Also, the lack of investment in promoting links between foreign capital industries and local industries, including the service sector, has wasted valuable opportunities to generate economic activity, especially jobs, associated with the major manufacturing sectors. Moreover, the systematic abandonment of other important economic sectors, such as agriculture, has impeded the formation of local entrepreneurs and employment. These problems offer Puerto Rico the dubious distinction of being an example of what Aronowitz & Cutler (1997) called post-industrial economies; that is, economies whose small agricultural sector coupled with its commitment to high tech industries and finance services exclude unskilled laborers from the formal sector job market.

Inequality in the distribution of income is another significant problem on the island. According to the 2006 American Community Survey, 25% of the total income of island residents went to the top 5% of Puerto Rican households, while only 2% of the island's total income went to the bottom 20% of households. This disparity in income

distribution gave Puerto Rico a 53.5 Gini Index rating, a rating comparable with many countries in Latin America, which is one of the most unequal regions in the world. By comparison, the U.S. had a Gini Index rating of 46.4 in 2006 (Desigualdad social en P.R., 2008). According to one economic study, Puerto Rico's income inequality is 20% greater than that of the U.S., which is the industrialized country with the highest levels of inequality in the world (Mario Martínez et al., 2005, p. 221).

The income disparity between the island and the mainland U.S. is also significant: Per capita income in P.R. is less than one third that of residents on the U.S. mainland (Kicinski, 2005). The circulation of people between the island and the mainland has elevated people's awareness of this difference and has transformed this economic statistic into a frustrating employment experience for island residents, including many of the people I interviewed during my research. For example, Rubén, a leader of one of the communities being impacted by Social Action, complained about salary in Puerto Rico by comparing it with the U.S. According to him, he was making $140 dollars a week as an assistant cook on the island, but claimed to make as much in just two days work in a hotel in the U.S.[24] This salary disparity between the U.S. and P.R. is one of the strongest motivating factor for people to migrate to the U.S. It also serves as a disincentive for those who cannot migrate, which often results in people falling out of the labor force and/or suspending their job search.

Along with income inequality, Puerto Rico exhibits high levels of poverty. To be sure, census data show that poverty rates fell every decade since the 1950s in Puerto

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[24] Personal Interview, Ruben García, March 4, 2008

Rico, from 88% in the 1950s to 44% in 2000s.[25] However, this latter statistic has not improved during the past decade. The 2005 Community Survey found 44% of island residents under the poverty line, a rate that has remained consistent until the present.[26] By comparison, the U.S. reduced its poverty rates during the same five decade span from 23% to 13%[27]. Moreover, if we examine poverty in the U.S. by states, we find that even in the poorest states (including the District of Columbia) the 2000 poverty rates did not exceed 20%: (Mario Martínez et al., 2005, p. 217). In sum, the population of contemporary Puerto Rico is one and a half to two times poorer than that of the poorest state in the U.S.

The above cited data documenting Puerto Rico's poverty rate came to life during my research. I visited a number of low income communities throughout the island and observed firsthand the meager incomes with which poor island residents eke out a living. During my research of Social Action's community development program I participated in the needs assessment of four communities, which resulted in the completion of 96 standardized needs assessment forms. This sample, of course, is not representative of the total population of those communities. The studies were conducted during weekdays when most people who are employed are at work. Thus, this sample captures mainly people who are retired, unemployed or are stay at home spouses, and/or have a home-based business. Nevertheless, the results shed some light on the income of precisely those

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[25]The Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (CEPAL) conducted a study of Puerto Rico's economy in which it adjusted the cost of the basic food basket used to calculate poverty levels in the U.S. (Mario Martínez et al., 2005). With this adjustment the poverty rate in Puerto Rico would be calculated at 32% in 1999, rather than 44%.

[26] The 2008 Community Survey for Puerto Rico showed that 44.8% of individuals are living under the poverty line. http://factfinder.census.gov/servlet/STTable?_bm=y&qr_name=ACS_2008_1YR_G00_S1701&-geo_id=04000US72&-ds_name=ACS_2008_1YR_G00_&-_lang=es&-redoLog=false

[27] U.S. Bureau of the Census, http://www.census.gov/hhes/www/poverty/histpov/hstpov1.xls. Retrieved March 15, 2010.

whose economic situation is most precarious. The tabulation of the study's self-reported income entry gave the following results:

Monthly income	$299 or less	$300-$599	$600-$899	$900 or more
96 total households	13%	26%	27%	34%

All of those who reported $299 or less were either unemployed receiving the nutritional assistance transfer payments and TANF or retired people receiving Social Security benefits. For example, an elderly woman reported receiving $259 a month from Social Security payments, while two other women reported receiving $198 from TANF and $120 from the federal nutritional assistance program, respectively. People in the next two income categories had a similar profile, except that a few reported a salary as their source of income. For example, two ladies reported salaries of $432 and $519 a month, respectively. The last category had a different population profile, with the majority of people earning their income from their participation in the workforce. Of those who were employed, 82% disclosed their yearly income, which revealed salaries that ranged from $6,000 to $25,000 a year, with the average salary being $13,526.

In 2008, the year the needs assessment was conducted, the federal poverty line for the 48 mainland states and the District of Columbia was as follows:

Persons in the family unit	Income
1	$10,400
2	$14,000
3	$17,600
4	$21,200

5	$24,800

According to this table, everyone in the first three income categories of the needs assessment would fall under the poverty line. Moreover, the average of $13,526 is not enough to go over the poverty line if the person is living with someone else in the same household. This small survey not only confirms official statistics, but it further exposes the inadequate income levels of those in poverty, regardless of whether they are generated from transfer payments or poorly remunerated jobs.

This latter point is significant because it suggests that poverty is a result of not just unemployment, but also of inadequate employment. Therefore, poverty needs to be examined not just from a consumption-oriented perspective—the incapacity to acquire the goods and services necessary to sustain an acceptable level of existence as defined by society at a particular historical moment (Colon Reyes, 2005)—, but also from a production-oriented perspective. This latter perspective views poverty as the product of exploitative work conditions. In other words, poverty is one of the conditions resulting from the particular configuration of production in a society, a configuration in which workers play a leading role in the creation of wealth, but are relegated at the moment of its distribution.

The disparity between island wages and the profits generated by U.S. owned industries in the island is the most glaring example of this unjust configuration of production. Moreover, this configuration is also a result of global capitalist tendencies that render redundant a segment of the labor force, forcing it to eke out a living in the informal economy or by piecing together different forms of assistance from the welfare state. Viewed from this perspective, poverty in P.R. can be understood as a structural

effect of P.R.'s economic model in our current globalized moment, specifically its incapacity to not only to generate jobs, but also well-paid jobs.

The discussion on poverty in P.R. has to go beyond merely accounting for the number of people whose incomes locate them below the federal poverty line, which unfortunately has been the tendency of many economic studies of the island (Kicinski, 2005). Although poverty is measured primarily through income levels, its manifestations and consequences exceed the economic limitations that give rise to it. Poverty expresses itself in a number of personal, social and political situations that affect almost every aspect of the life of a person or community, such as hunger, disease, unemployment, environmental degradation, an absence of political voice, and a crippling exposure to violence.

Interestingly, Sila M. Calderón, former Governor of Puerto Rico, has been one of the few recent politicians willing to extend the discussion on poverty to include its social and political ramifications. In a personal interview, Calderón summed up her understanding of poverty in P.R. and its manifestations:

> Each country has its own manifestation of poverty. There are countries like Bangladesh in which poverty implies literally going hungry. In other countries, like Columbia and Venezuela, poverty reveals itself in the form of favelas and shantytowns, which are terrible…People do not go hungry in P.R. because of something called food stamps, to which people have a right by virtue of being U.S. citizens. But, there is a lot of poverty as a result of lack of income, poor infrastructure, inadequate housing, lack of proper education and health services, of opportunities, and to those components we have to add others of our modern life, such as drugs, overcrowding, alcohol, addictions and all those conditions that aggravate human reality. [28]

Calderón concurs with the general interpretation that P.R. does not exhibit extreme levels of poverty, like Bangladesh, but she does not let that obscure her awareness of the

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[28] Personal interview, Sila M.Calderón, March 25, 2008, my translation.

poverty that does exist. Her appreciation of the manifestations of poverty, which is based on her personal experience visiting impoverished communities and meeting with residents, is certainly echoed by official statistics. In P.R. poverty is correlated with the lack of higher education. According to the 2000 U.S. census, more than half of those 25 years or older who are below the poverty line do not have a high school diploma. If we include those with a high school diploma, the percentage of people under the poverty line climbs to 79%. These numbers were confirmed by the results of the four needs assessment studies of which I was a part. In those studies, 15% of those interviewed had a college education; the remaining 85% had a high school diploma or less.[29] The lack of higher education in a technologically-oriented industrialized economy like P.R.'s definitely limits people's ability to enter the formal economy's labor market.

Besides education, poverty levels are higher for certain categories of people, such as women, the elderly and the medically uninsured, due to different but interlocking systems of inequality. Women exhibit higher poverty rates than men, 46.9% to 42.7%, respectively. Although the difference is not overwhelming, it does point to different life exigencies by gender, such as constituting single households and assuming the primary responsibilities for children. Similarly, people 65 years and older have higher poverty rates than those 18 through 64. These higher rates reflect inadequate retirement pensions, including Social Security, which are a result of poor salaries and/or poor job benefits that limit people's ability to save. The population that lacks health insurance on the island also exhibits high poverty rates. A recent study showed that 46.1% of those without health insurance were under the poverty line (Junta de Planificación, 2010, p. 6). In sum,

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[29] A significant portion of interviewees were elderly people who according to census figures have less education than younger populations.

poverty is much more than an issue of income in P.R. Poverty follows the contours of old age, gender inequality, the absence of health coverage, and the lack of adequate education for an industrialized society. When all these elements are considered, poverty as a problem in P.R. acquires a much more daunting stature.

Meeting the Challenge: The Neocolonial Welfare State as Solution

Post-colonial states have been synonymous with development; that is, they have been guided and legitimized by the pursuit of the elusive goals of progress and modernization (Li, 2007). As discussed above, Puerto Rico's status as a post-colonial state is questioned by its neocolonial attachments to the U.S. Nonetheless, the creation of the Estado Libre Asociado was also synonymous with the pursuit of development goals similar to those of post-colonial states in the Caribbean and elsewhere. Like those states, the ELA's capacity to deliver on its promises of 'progress' and 'modernization' had been greatly diminished by the 1970s and continued to deteriorate until the present. This incapacity is due, in part, to an incredible irony: The political and economic reforms on which those promises where based resulted in the systematic exclusion of significant sectors of the population from the attainment and enjoyment of its alleged benefits (Guardiola, 1998). In other words, poverty, income inequality and unemployment are current problems as a consequence of the development initiatives that dominated the island since the 1940s.

The U.S. federal and Puerto Rican governments have pursued a number of responses to the increasing demands generated by an insufficient industrial economy and a growing urban society. Prominent among those responses has been the expansion and intensification of the assistance offered by the federal and local welfare state (Sotomayor,

2004; Weisskoff, 1985). The United State's decision to extend its welfare policies to Puerto Rico resulted in the restructuring of the local state into a neocolonial welfare state model.[30] This neocolonial welfare state was called upon to receive and satisfy the concrete demands of the population.

Puerto Rico's welfare state has been built, for the most part, on the extension to the island of the numerous socio-economic programs created and funded by the U.S. federal government as part of the creation of its own welfare state. Despite being an unincorporated territory of the U.S., Puerto Rico benefits from federal welfare programs, even if their implementation on the island have been delayed by several years or decades and the benefits offered have been usually lower than on the U.S. mainland (Morrissey 2006; Pratts, 1996; Negron Velásquez. & Zavaleta Calderón, 2003). Those inequalities notwithstanding, Puerto Rico witnessed an increase in the number of federal programs extended to the island starting in the 1930s with the P.R. Emergency Relief Administration, the island's version of the New Deal programs created under President Roosevelt (Mathews, 2007). Between the 1950s and 1970s, the island experienced an exponential growth in federal programs as the U.S. social security legislation and the War on Poverty programs were extended to cover island residents. In the 1970s, Medicare, Medicaid, Assistance to Family with Dependent Children (AFDC) and Food Stamps were extended to Puerto Rico (Negron Velásquez. & Zavaleta Calderón, 2003, p. 166). In 1976 the U.S. federal government adopted a tax provision in its Internal Revenue Tax Code,

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[30] The continued role of the U.S. in the restructuring of the Puerto Rican state is not a phenomenon exclusive to Puerto Rico. According to Mark Schuller (2007) the persistent role of foreign (mostly U.S.) interventions in shaping Caribbean states is one of the central features of Caribbean's post-colonial experience.

Section 936, which sought to stimulate economic activity in the island by offering attractive tax incentives to corporations, most of them from the U.S.

Ultimately, the growth of the welfare state in the U.S. during the twentieth century, which included federal transfer payments, social programs and individual and corporate tax exemptions, trickled down to P.R., extending important benefits to local residents and the corporate world. It also stands as one of the most salient areas of the Puerto Rican state in which the island's neocolonial relationship with the U.S. is asserted and reproduced. Welfare transfers and tax exemptions highlights Puerto Rico's financial dependence on the U.S. to deliver a number of programs and services in important social welfare areas as well as its political dependence on U.S. social welfare policies over which P.R. has very little say. For example, federal transfers represented only 9.3% of the island's budget in the early 1950s, but increased to 31.3% by the late 1970s, remaining at this level into the early 1990s (Pratts, 1996, p. 132). Since the 1990s, however, federal transfers have seen a proportional decrease as a result of welfare reforms in the U.S. In 2009, federal transfers represented 20% of the 2009-2010 island budget, which is still a significant percentage.

Since the 1970s, which saw the extension to the island of AFDC and Food Stamps, this welfare state has played a significant role in mitigating the negative impact of unemployment, low labor participation, income inequality and poverty in Puerto Rico. Federal transfer payments have been responsible for reducing income inequality in the absence of a new equalizing stage of development: "While producing respectable growth in product and wages, the development model has been found lacking in employment creation, placing increasing reliance on public transfers for positive change in the

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distribution front" (Sotomayor 2004, p. 1403). In other words, the gap in income among Puerto Ricans has been closed not as a result of those on the lower end of the income spectrum obtaining jobs or increasing their salaries, but rather through federal transfer payments. Transfer payments, which are considered one of the more salient programs of the welfare state, increased their share in Puerto Rican income figures from 4.6% in 1969 to 13% in 1999. In other words, federal transfers at present account for a higher portion of the overall income of Puerto Ricans than they did three decades ago. In 2007, federal transfer payments totaled $10.8 billion, which represented 66% of total transfer payments received by individuals in P.R. Nevertheless, it is worth noting that 82% of these transfers correspond to earned benefits and not means tested programs (Social Security, Medicare, Veterans' benefits, and United States Civil Service retirement pensions). The remaining 18% or $1.9 billion relate to grants, such as scholarships, student loan subsidies, housing assistance and nutritional assistance, among others (Junta de Planificación, 2010).

The number of families that receive welfare benefits in the island is also impressive. According to Esteban Pérez Ubieta, the director of the Administration for the Development of the Family, an office that is part of the Department of Family, a total of 556,000 families in Puerto Rico receive benefits from the federal nutritional assistance program, which constitutes 48% of all island families. The nutritional assistance program is by far the most significant welfare program in the island as $1.7 billion of the approximately $2 billion received annually by the island in federal public assistance go to this program. The program is geared towards low-income families making it a good indicator of the magnitude of the problems discussed above: poverty, income inequality

and unemployment. In addition, of those families receiving nutritional assistance benefits, close to 40,000 are also beneficiaries of the Temporary Assistance to Needy Families program or TANF, which disburses around $100 million on the island.[31]

The impact of this neocolonial welfare state on the wellbeing of the Puerto Rican population has to be acknowledged. As Sotomayor (2004) showed, these transfer payments have served, at the very least, a redistributive function that has partially offset not only income inequality, but also the absence of income in many households due to structural unemployment. Besides these transfer payment programs, other programs such as Medicare, Section 8 housing subsidies, and student grants have offered much needed protection and even improved the quality of life and life opportunities of P.R.'s working class families and marginalized poor. Generations of Puerto Ricans have had access to proper health care, higher education and suitable housing thanks to the support these programs provide. Also, without government spending and public sector employment, economic sectors, such as construction and retail services, would not generate as much demand and the island would have to cope with higher unemployment rates.

Finally, the exponential growth of the state apparatus itself has been an important side effect of the growth of the welfare state (Pratts, 1996). The growth in government agencies and programs led, in turn, to an increase in the number of government employees. This increase in public sector employment has been strategically pursued by different administrations since the 1970s to help alleviate the island's unemployment situation by transforming the state into one of the island's main employers:

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[31]Contrary to states of the union, the federal government caps the amount of funding available for TANF in P.R.
http://www.buengobiernopr.com/arra/files/pdf/ADSEF_Proponen%20trabajo%20por%20beneficencia%20federal.pdf.

After the economic slowdown of the 1970s, public employment grew, financed by an inflow of federal funds and by government borrowing. Between 1970s and 1988, government employment doubled to almost 225,000. By 1990, almost 25 percent of the labor force was employed by the government. (Ayala & Bernabe, 2007, p. 292)

A comparison with the employment figures of the island's main private sector employment provides a sense of the magnitude and significance of public sector employment. As mentioned above, the manufacturing sector has never employed more than 150,000 people and currently employs less than 100,000 people, a figure that pales in comparison with public sector employment, which stood at 274,000 in 2005 and represented 24.4% of all employees in P.R. (Irizarry Mora, 2007a). In 2009 P.R.'s new governor, Luis Fortuño, announced massive government layoffs, close to thirty thousand, as a strategy to resolve the state's fiscal crisis. Yet, in January 2010 official government statistics indicate that 268,000 people still worked in the public sector, which points to only a slight reduction when compared to private sector job loss (Junta de Planificación, 2010). Thus, the welfare state model in P.R. has led to the expansion of public sector employment through the use of funds to cover the payroll expenses incurred by the state in order to provide goods and services to unemployed and impoverished populations. In an interesting twist to the welfare state, the Puerto Rican state has absorbed the labor force which the private sector has proven incapable of employing.

Despite its redistributive role, the welfare state has generated unintended consequences, specifically related to dependence, unemployment and job search. According to one study, public transfers have functioned as a disincentive for those outside the formal workforce to enter the labor force or continue in their search in the job market:

There is a definite link in Puerto Rico between the job search activities and efforts of the unemployed and certain socio-economic traits of the individual/family. Specifically, government-provided transfer payments, while propping up incomes and filling much needed income gaps (in most cases), do generate certain disincentives effects with respect to the job market efforts of the unemployed. Especially prominent in the case of Puerto Rico are those transfers paid out under federal government programs—food stamps and social security. (Mann & Smith, 1987, p. 838)

To be sure, critiques of the welfare state need to be evaluated with a certain degree of skepticism. In her study on the effect of welfare reform on women in P.R., Luisa Hernandez argues that disincentives and dependency have been neoliberal arguments leveled against the welfare state as part of their conservative, anti-state agenda (Hernandez, 2001). Although the argument that public assistance enhances poverty and dependency is not new, it has certainly gained new momentum today. Without question, the primary cause of unemployment and poverty in P.R. is the incapacity of the formal economy, specifically the private sector, to generate jobs and pay competitive salaries. Nevertheless, the increase in the number of people who depend on public transfers as a source of income coupled with the notable decrease in labor force participation do implicate the welfare system to some extent in the persistence of the problem. The welfare state affords the population excluded from the labor market and under the poverty line sufficient resources to postpone, in some cases permanently, the search for formal sector employment. It must also be noted that some welfare recipients do work. Many make a strategic use of welfare benefits as supplementary income to their informal sector economic activities. Nevertheless, federal transfer programs have exacerbated the initial problem that justified their extension to P.R.: unemployment and reduced formal sector labor participation.

Besides these unintended consequences, the redistributive function of the welfare system has been overshadowed by a more pernicious development, the increasing regulatory function of the welfare state. A number of studies have critically analyzed the role of the welfare state in countries with capitalist economies, such as Puerto Rico (Brito, 2000; Fox Piven & Cloward, 1972; Mullaly, 1997; Pratts, 1996). According to these studies, the welfare state emerged in response to the deep socio-economic contradictions generated by capitalism's unequal process of accumulation, which intensified in the early part of the twentieth century. Fox Piven & Cloward (1972) argue that during moments of economic growth, the welfare state has served to regulate labor in order to reinforce the work norms required of the capitalist production system. Conversely, the welfare state has expanded its offering of social relief programs during moments of economic slowdown. For them, the fundamental logic for this expansion is to curtail the outbreak of civil disobedience and violence resulting from economic deprivation by temporarily improving the wellbeing of those at the bottom of the economic ladder. As a form of social intervention, therefore, the welfare state has sought to offset the contradictions of the capitalist system through regulating labor and the unemployed, a solution that in no way alters the capitalist system of accumulation or its process of labor exploitation.

In this light, the neocolonial welfare state in Puerto Rico has proven to be capitalism's right hand. Puerto Rico's high unemployment levels, low labor participation rates and alarming levels of poverty and income inequality are product of structural contradictions that nevertheless have not led to significant class conflicts or to the collapse of the island's economic model because of the cushion provided by the

numerous federal and local welfare programs. In other words, Puerto Rico's economy has been seriously wounded for decades, but, as Pratts argued, it has been given artificial life by a welfare state that has reduced social tension levels, subsidized low salaries, increased the buying power of the unemployed or underemployed and depoliticized social classes and groups who have been either marginalized or excluded from the benefits of Puerto Rico's economic growth. How else can a country have poverty levels hovering around 45% and exclude close to 60% of those able to work from the job market without having serious class conflicts that make it ungovernable?

Besides this indirect benefit, the private sector has also received direct benefits from Puerto Rico's neocolonial welfare state. Corporate tax exemptions have proven to be more useful in allowing U.S. manufacturing corporations to generate millions of dollars in profits for than in creating jobs for island residents. The manufacturing sector, the primary beneficiary of such tax benefits, employed 132,000 people in 1970 and 134,000 thousand in 2003, which demonstrates how employment in this sector remained virtually stagnant over a thirty year period (Irrizarry Mora, 2007a). Corporate profits, however, reflect a different story as a result of provisions in the U.S. Internal Revenue Tax Code, in particular Section 936. This provision created incentives for U.S. corporations to deposit their earnings in local banks by allowing them to transfer their profits to their U.S. corporate headquarters after a certain period free of any tax burden to the U.S. Treasury (Irrizary Mora 2001, p. 234). In addition, the Puerto Rican government agreed to impose a minimal Toll Gate Tax imposed at the moment of repatriating profits, a tax which has averaged only 4.5% (ibid., p. 235). These benefits were so significant that corporations began transferring millions of dollars in earnings from their operations

elsewhere to P.R. in order to evade U.S. federal taxes (ibid.). This corporate tax haven also benefitted local banks who used the millions of dollars in deposits they received to expand the consumption credit of the local population and increase their financial investment portfolios (ibid.).

The Welfare State Re-Visited: Neoliberalism, Participatory Development and the Entrepreneurial State

Over the last couple of decades it has become apparent that the solutions to Puerto Rico's chronic unemployment, inequality and poverty require social, political and economic reforms that are beyond the capacity of the welfare state to enact. At best, welfare state policies create a safety net that temporarily offsets the dire consequences brought about by unemployment, inequality and poverty. Yet, even at its best, the welfare state also generates a series of contradictions, such as disincentives to work, program dependency and corporate welfare, which introduce new challenges and levels of complexity to the development of possible solutions to these social and economic problems. Thus, the welfare state provides important social protections and economic incentives, but, ironically, hinders the formulation of reforms that can make safety nets unnecessary as well as the taxation of private profits which would provide the revenue needed for expanded reinvestment in public programs and the island's infrastructure.

Critiques of the welfare state solution in both the U.S. and the island embarked Puerto Rico in a series of political and economic reforms whose goals extend beyond solving the particular problems of unemployment and poverty. As part of the neoliberal trend that began in the 1980s, these reforms reformulated the principles of government and the roles of the state in order to adequately re-insert Puerto Rico in the new global political economy.

This reformist trend began in Puerto Rico due to their implementation in the U.S., where this process began in the early 1980s under the Reagan administration as a backlash against the perceived failures of the 1960s War on Poverty (Jacob, 1982; Katz, 2001; Lekachman & Briar, 1981; Murray, 1984). As part of the U.S., the welfare transfers and services offered by the Puerto Rican state were negatively affected by federal policy changes, particularly on the availability and funding levels of federal programs on which so many Puerto Ricans depend, especially programs created under the War on Poverty legislation and AFDC (now TANF). To compound matters, due to Puerto Rico's neocolonial status the island's specific socio-economic conditions were not central to the debate to end welfare due to the lack of appropriate Congressional representation (Pratts, 1996).

Macro-economic neoliberal policies implemented in the U.S. since the 1990s have had a significant impact on Puerto Rico. Over the last two decades, the U.S. Congress has eliminated important corporate tax benefits in the island and established free trade agreements that reduced tariff barriers between the U.S. and numerous countries throughout the Americas. Both of these measures eliminated a number of protectionist measures that effectively ended Puerto Rico's preferential trade status due to its political relation with the U.S. That these policies were implemented with little consideration for their impact on Puerto Rico's socio-economic conditions serves only to highlight the island's neocolonial relation to the U.S.

For example, the U.S. signed important free trade agreements, such as the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) and the Dominican Republic-Central American Free Trade Agreement (DR-CAFTA), which have given other Latin American

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and Caribbean nations equal access to U.S. markets, diminishing Puerto Rico's competitive advantage. Moreover, the U.S. Congress approved in 1995 a ten-year phase out of section 936 of the Internal Revenue Code, which was P.R.'s most attractive economic incentive for U.S. corporations. Starting in 2005 no corporation could claim the tax credit against U.S. taxes imposed on profits earned in Puerto Rico. As a result, Puerto Rico's manufacturing sector has responded by closing their production plants, generating huge job losses in this sector: from 134,000 jobs in 2003 to 88,900 jobs in 2010.[32] To make matters worse, workers who lost their jobs have entered the ranks of the unemployed masses who are increasingly marginal players in the formal economy.

Puerto Rico's local governments began experimenting with neoliberal reforms in the 1980s during the last Rafael Hernández Colón administration (1988-1992), with its privatization of affordable housing initiatives. These reforms were implemented in earnest following the 1992 election of the New Progressive Party's candidate, Dr. Pedro Rosselló, who shared the Clinton administration's commitment to re-inventing government and restructuring welfare assistance. Governor Rosselló appointed a 'Privatization Committee,' which eventually approved the selling of P.R.'s cultural pavilion in Spain, the state telephone company, sugar and pineapple corporations, naval merchant fleets, and various hotels (Colón Reyes, 2005; Pratts, 1996). The state also sub-contracted to private for-profit companies the administration of a number of other agencies and programs, such as the public housing agency, state bus services, correctional facilities and public hospitals (ibid.). The privatization of public hospitals is of particular note since under the Rosselló administration the government dismantled its

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[32] Official numbers from the Department of Labor and Human Resources. http://www.netempleopr.org/almis23/ index.jsp (accessed October 20, 2010).

public health system, which served the entire population, and substituted it with a publicly financed health plan provided by private insurance companies and made available only to low income residents. These reforms sought to reinvent the local state, promote economic growth and end poverty in Puerto Rico by adopting corporate administrative models to the running of government and endorsing market initiatives and private entrepreneurship as the most efficient model of achieving both individual and common goods.

The restructuring and retrenchment of the welfare state that has taken place since the 1980s opened the social welfare arena in Puerto Rico, as elsewhere, to nongovernmental organizations funded through government contracts and private donations. The data on this sector in P.R. shows that it has blossomed in the last couple of decades. A total of 51,331 nonprofit organizations were registered in P.R. by 2007, but only about 6,378 were believed to be active (Estudios Tecnicos, 2008).[33] Most significantly, 21,042, or 64%, of all registrations occurred between 1981 and 1999, which indicates that the growth of the sector is a recent trend (Diaz Olivo, 2000). This process has intensified even more over the last couple of years: On average 2,500 new organizations have registered in the island between 1999 and 2003 (ÉNFASIS, 2004).

The sector's economic contribution has mirrored its exponential organizational growth. In 2007 nonprofit organizations contributed $3,041 million to the island's economy, which represents about 5.35% of P.R.'s GDP.[34] Likewise, the primary sources of income for nonprofits in the island are fee for services (mostly from state contracts) and donations, which represented 49.7% and 27.2% of income, respectively. Moreover,

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[33] Registration of nonprofit corporations began in 1911.
[34] The study was conducted in 2007, but the data was from 2006. Also, the GDP estimate is based on calculations of payroll and volunteer work.

between employees and volunteers the sector generated the equivalent of 229,608 full time employees, which exceeds the employments generated by the construction sector (88,000) and the financial services and real estate sector (44,000). However, it must be noted that their economic contribution is highly skewed. In P.R., as in the U.S., most nongovernmental organizations are small: 60.5% of them have an income of less than $350,000 (Estudios Técnicos, 2002). Most of the assets and employments are concentrated in a few organizations, such as universities and hospitals.

The island's nonprofit sector plays an important role in key areas of social services and economic development, which reflect the global trends of both participatory development and neoliberal globalization outlined in the previous chapter. The majority of nonprofit organizations in P.R. offer services in the areas of health, education and housing to a population of mostly children, adolescents and women (Estudios Técnicos, 2008). Of those organizations devoted to the field of education, 21% indicated that they offered capacity-building and training services (ibid., p. 65). Interestingly, 10.2% of the organizations surveyed indicated economic development as one of the areas of covered, which includes such activities as small business development, job training programs and community-based economic development (ibid., p. 59). Lastly, the nonprofit sector provided services to around 800,000 people out of a total population of almost four million (ibid.). Thus, beyond its economic contributions, the sector has an important presence among disadvantaged and needy populations.

The above data on the sector is not quite as impressive as the savings claimed by the nongovernmental sector as a result of their service provision efforts when compared to similar efforts by the state. The 2007 report presented by Estudios Técnicos, a local

consulting firm, listed the following economic data as key findings that demonstrate advantages of the nonprofit sector over all other sectors:

- The service provision costs of nonprofits have remained below the increase in general price levels. The cost of servicing each beneficiary increased by 1.2%, with respect to the 2002 findings. Nevertheless, the increase in prices during this period in P.R. was estimated to be 3.8%.
- The payroll costs in the year of the study represent some 43 cents of each dollar of operational costs. That amount is less that the government's (executive branch) payroll cost, which is about 65 cents.
- For every $1 that the government transfers to a nonprofit to provide health services, it would have to invest $7 to provide that same service. In the field of education, this proportion increases even more: for every $1 that the government transfers, it would have to invest $11 to provide the service.

The data is impressive. The nongovernmental sector is able to deliver services at a cheaper rate and spends less of its financial resources in payroll, which suggests more money goes to clients and program resources. The implicit argument is, of course, that the nongovernmental sector is more efficient, less bureaucratic, more flexible and closer to clients, and, therefore, can offer services for less. The numbers are also an indictment of the state's inefficiency and obsolescence. This is precisely the kind of data that, taken at face value, supports the neoliberal agenda of downsizing states and providing social services through nongovernmental organizations. In fact, these three findings were among the most cited articles of the study by government officials, nonprofit administrators and civil society activists the weeks and months after its release. Interestingly, though, the study does not offer an explanation of why the nongovernmental sector can produce services at such low costs. At most, it points to the sector's ability to recruit volunteers as one of the measures used to offer services at a lower price.

Parallel to the implementation of these economic and political reforms, the late 1990s and early 2000s witnessed the emergence of another model claiming to be changing the role of the Puerto Rican state and improving the economic and social well-being of the population: participatory development. In the public sector, participatory development is most strongly associated with Mrs. Sila M. Calderón, who was mayor of San Juan between 1996-2000 and governor of Puerto Rico between 2000-2004. Unlike the Rosselló administration, Calderón's primary strategy was not predicated on downsizing the state through privatization or relinquishing socio-economic development programmatic areas. Instead, she proposed the creation of a government sponsored, empowerment-oriented community development program known as *Comunidades Especiales* or the Special Needs Community Program. The program was conceived as an anti-poverty program based on the concepts of *apoderamiento* (empowerment) and *autogestión comunitaria* (community self-management), which are key principles of participatory development. It was promoted as the administration's most important policy response to the problems of persistent poverty, chronic unemployment and the island's democratic deficits, specifically the lack of participation beyond the electoral process; and the problems of state paternalism, welfare dependency and clientelistic politics associated with it (Oficina para el Financiamiento Socioeconómico y la Autogestión, 2003).

This program was authorized by the Ley número 1 de 2001, the first legislative piece passed by the newly elected PPD government, which highlights the centrality of this policy to Calderón's administration. The program was proposed as a national initiative administrated by the newly created Special Needs Communities Office, which was

charged with coordinating the anti-poverty efforts of all government agencies. This office also supervised 14 regional offices, which were staffed by community organizers who worked directly with the officially designated Special Needs Communities dispersed throughout the island. By means of an executive order, Calderón also created an advisory council that was chaired by the governor and included cabinet members relevant to the aims of the program and community leaders in representation of the population served. This advisory council provided a formal organizational structure in which state representatives and community members could participate in the program's administration. Lastly, the administration created the Billion Dollar Trust, which were funds destined specifically to improve the deteriorating public infrastructure of communities as well as the construction of housing projects.

According to reports produced by the Special Needs Communities Office, the program's efforts produced significant results. The program's organizing efforts had impacted 712 communities by 2007, of which 599 had legally incorporated boards of directors and 467 had By-Laws (Oficina de Comunidades Especiales, 2008). They also implemented a National Program for the Forging of Community Leaders, which consisted of education and capacity-building workshops and seminars covering such issues as community organizing, leadership, parliamentary procedure, conflict resolution, grant-writing, and social and economic empowerment. By 2007, the program had delivered 2,800 workshops and seminars that impacted thousands of community residents (ibid.)

The inter-agency coordination efforts resulted in the development of concrete programs for Special Needs Communities in a number of public agencies, including the

Puerto Rican Culture Institute, the Departments of Labor, Health, and Education, and the Corporation for Public Broadcasting (Colón Reyes, 2007). Some of these agencies oriented their efforts towards the promotion of economic activities. Community residents received training in the following employment areas: construction, housemaids, computer technician, sowing, and arts and crafts. Besides these training programs, the program opened three Centers for the Support of Self-Management and Community Economic Development to provide free technical and logistical support to any community group or individual interested in establishing a business (ibid.). Finally, by 2008 the government had invested almost the totality of the Billion Dollar Trust in public works and private housing projects (Oficina de Comunidades Especiales, 2008).

Its explicit critique of the welfare state, poverty focus, participatory and capacity-building orientation, and community-level intervention support the official claim that the Special Needs Community Program was a state-promoted experiment in participatory development. An evaluation of the program concluded that one of its major achievements had been the re-introduction of poverty and inequality as central topics of public debate in the island (Kliksberg & Rivera, 2007). The creation of community organizations, offering of capacity-building workshops and establishment of participatory structures allowing citizens greater access to government administrators and program management stand as evidence of government efforts to substitute the welfare model of delivering entitlements to impoverished individuals with a empowerment model in which citizens were collectively organized, provided with important educational tools and public agencies were re-oriented to serve as facilitators of community self-management efforts. Through this program, the Calderón administration gave priority and promoted the

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wellbeing of precisely those sectors of the population that the island's economic model and the current global capitalist system have excluded and rendered irrelevant to the project of economic growth and capital accumulation. Lastly, in the midst of a cost-cutting and agency downsizing era, the Special Needs Community Program reasserted the government's role in attending the needs of its most marginalized population: It created government offices and public sector employment and committed a billion dollars of government resources to impoverished sectors.

Yet, a critical reading of the Special Needs Communities Program's indictment of the welfare state and its participatory logic expose its implicit link to neoliberal forms of governance. According to Nikolas Rose (1996), advanced (neo)liberal democracies, as Puerto Rico, replaced the welfare state contract which collectivized the fate of citizens, especially impoverished or marginalized groups, with a new contract in which the fate of citizens was now tied to its self-governing community. In this new contract, the exercise of governing populations consisted in shaping the will of autonomous individuals and communities to secure their well-being:

> Hence the problem is to find means by which individuals may be made responsible through their individual choices for themselves and those to whom they owe allegiance, through the shaping of a lifestyle according to grammars of living that are widely disseminated, yet do not depend upon political calculations and strategies for their rationales or for their techniques (ibid., p. 5)

According to Rose, the language of empowerment and the notion of increased citizen participation have been key strategies through which this neoliberal form of governance has pursued its project of shaping the will of individuals and groups in accordance with its new political and economic requirements. In other words, along with its policy and economic reforms, neoliberalism also has implemented citizen-shaping programs with the

goal of reconfiguring citizens into responsible, accountable and collaborative subjects

capable of forging their own futures through collective initiatives.

Sila Calderón's Special Needs Communities Program directed this form of neoliberal

governance to those most impacted by capitalism's exclusionary tendencies: the island's

impoverished masses. The program's empowerment and self-management model called

for and pursued the transformation of Puerto Rico's impoverished masses into citizens

capable of assuming the challenge of self-sufficiency imposed by Puerto Rico's

contemporary political and economic situation. For example, Linda Colón, the program's

first director, asserted that one of the fundamental aims of the program was to transform

the ideology of dependence that predominates among impoverished populations:

> Finally, it is important to confront the fundamental attitudes in the ideology of 'welfare dependence' expressed by many community residents—they [the government] have to give me (sic)—without any contribution in exchange nor showing any responsibility with respect to my community and country. (Colón Reyes, 2007, p. 101, my translation)

According to Colón Reyes welfare assistance has engendered the distorted notion that

one has a right to benefits not earned through some form of effort. The ex-governor, Sila

Calderón, not only shares this argument, but it has influenced her response to poverty:

> I believe in personal capacity-building. I believe that there is a wealth of possibilities in this population waiting to receive a lending hand and that lending hand cannot be extended to offer gifts nor to give them more (sic), but rather to empower, educate, train, promote their self-esteem and the self-responsibility that they must assume.[35]

For her, the investment in workshops, seminars and community organizing is, at its core,

a project geared towards reforming the poor in the direction of greater self-responsibility

based on a renewed sense of self. In other words, the investment in capacity-building and

the production of empowered individuals is linked to the political project of creating a

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[35] Personal interview, Sila Calderón, March 25, 2008, my translation.

new type of ethical subject, one less disposed to depend on state benefits and more motivated to achieve their self-development through personal effort. As a strategy of neoliberal forms of governance, this program was charged with refashioning the personhood of impoverished populations. Capacity-building efforts aim to forge new subject capable of surviving under the new neoliberal social pact in which the state frowns upon the delivery of entitlements. This argument is similar to Fox Piven & Cloward's (1972) contention regarding the regulation of the poor by welfare programs. Applied in this scenario, empowerment programs are interventions geared towards moving dependent populations into the workforce as a solution to the fiscal crisis of the state.

For Amelisse De Jesús Dávila (2008), the conception of poverty and proposed solutions articulated by the Ley número 1 de 2001 further reflect the logic of neoliberalism:

> …a focus on a reduced radius of action persists because it suggests that modifying poverty implies changing the poor, that is, it promotes that the poor assume responsibility over their impoverished condition by means of their own efforts to achieve their economic inclusion. Although the law suggests the state play the role of facilitator and collaborator in these processes, it does not question nor does it propose changes in the country's economic model. It appears as if the implications of Puerto Rico's colonial political condition and global capitalism has not been taken into account for all of the country's sectors, especially for those that find themselves in a situation of socio-economic disadvantage. Its recognition of the complex causes of poverty notwithstanding, the focus of action to combat poverty is laid upon those who are affected by it and not over the structures that reproduce the politico-economic conditions that support and promote it. (p. 80, my translation)

De Jesús Dávila's critique of the program as a neoliberal reformist project highlights the limited scope of the program and the absence of an allied project of macro-economic reform, both of which are, according to Li (2007), tendencies associated with development initiatives in our neoliberal age. The program's focus on the capacities of

impoverished populations ignores the colonial context and global capitalist structure that produces and reproduces their condition. Without these considerations, the program ends up being, at best, a limited attempt to manage a persistent problem generated by global capitalism and the islands' inability to generate innovative political responses due to its colonial status. Despite its claims, the Special Needs Communities Program fits within the global pattern of empowerment responses to poverty, a trend in which impoverished populations are increasingly asked to reform their attitudes and gain new skills in order to assume the responsibility for overcoming a problem generated by a complex chain of political and economic policies, structures and opportunities and of which they are but one link.

Twenty years of both conservative and more progressive reforms, such as state sponsored participatory development, have been unable to redress the persistent problems of Puerto Rico's economy. If anything, these reforms have added a new problem to the list: the public sector's fiscal crisis. Ten years ago 16% of the Gross National Income was paid in the form of income tax. At present, the figure is only 11.3%. This figure pales in comparison with the 18% paid in Latin America on average and the 24% paid in the U.S. (Catalá, 2010). This dramatic reduction has resulted in less state income, which accounts for the current fiscal crisis. In 2006, this fiscal crisis forced the unimaginable: the then Governor Anibal Acevedo Vila authorized the closing of the government for two weeks due to a shortage of funds to cover payroll expenses. It also led to the imposition of a 7% sales tax, which sought to increase government revenues by means of a regressive tax policy that has a disproportional negative impact on people with lower income levels. Besides the persistent fiscal crisis, P.R. has a growing public debt that has increased from

13 billion dollars in the early 1990s to close to 50 billion dollars in 2010 (Junta de Planificación, 2010).

Ironically, Puerto Rico's dire economic situation and the state's fiscal crisis have led to the intensification of the neoliberal ideology in the island. In 2009, the new governor elect, Luis Fortuño, signed into law Public Law #7, which was presented as a comprehensive response to the economic and fiscal problems facing Puerto Rico. It is the central legislative element of the island government's attempt to close a $3.2 billion budget deficit and to keep Puerto Rico's public bonds from reaching junk status among rating agencies. To accomplish this, the law calls for cutting the 2009–10 government budget by $2 billion; reducing government payroll through a series of incentivized layoffs and voluntary resignations; and suspending job benefits, including previously negotiated bonuses and pay raises. It thereby targets over-employment in the public sector and over-spending, which are commonly perceived by Puerto Rican elites as the most important economic problems facing the island government.

The Fortuño administration presented the law as both a short-term response to the fiscal crisis (most of the law's provisions are set to expire in 2011) and as a brave, necessary set of measures based on the sound principles of fiscal responsibility and work efficiency. Yet the declaration of a state of emergency embedded in Public Law 7, and the reforms that the declaration makes possible, betray the law's underlying intention: to implement a long-term reform project consistent with Fortuño's publicly asserted conservative ideology. The law is the most explicit articulation yet of the neoliberal agenda being carried out in the island. It seeks to create a smaller public sector by reducing government jobs and clears the way for the consolidation and privatization of

government agencies. Public Law 7 set the stage for Public Law 29, which creates a legal framework for "public-private partnerships." Following the model of articulating state and private sector interests that is currently popular in Europe, North America and Latin America, Puerto Rico's government-owned properties will be leased to private companies and public projects subcontracted for up to 50 years.

These measures have increased unemployment and, given the lack of job creation in the island, could end up engrossing the list of people who have fallen out of the formal sector job market. Moreover, these measures in way attend the problem of poverty or income inequality in the island. If anything, they could intensify those problems and motivate even more residents to opt for migration as the only option to improve their well-being. Though claimed to be temporary, these measures will likely have a long-term effect on labor rights and policies in Puerto Rico by significantly eroding the public sector, its economic viability, and its labor protections. In short, Fortuño and the businessmen in his administration's inner circle are taking advantage of the current confluence of economic problems in Puerto Rico to entrench a neoliberal agenda that will deal a deadly blow to both the credibility and efficacy of the state, as well as to labor benefits and guarantees.

Conclusion

Let us return to the opening vignette: A group of adolescents spending their days riding and fixing motorcycles in their community, frustrated by their fruitless job searches, discouraged by their awareness of the limited life opportunities in P.R. compared to the U.S., and desperate enough to sell their vote to the first, not even the highest, bidder. This portrait suggests that despite decades of public social programs,

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economic reforms and administrative restructuring of the welfare state, Puerto Rico is still in search of solutions to decades-old problems of unemployment, poverty, income inequality and political patronage.

As discussed throughout the chapter, Puerto Rico's neocolonial situation limits the political powers available to local administrations to make much needed macro-economic changes. In the absence of those powers, the island has come increasingly to depend on the financial assistance of the U.S. welfare state, specifically as it pertains to addressing isssues of poverty, unemployment and income inequality. However, the fiscally and socially conservative reformist ideology underlying the restructuring of the federal welfare system has undercut the capacity of Puerto Rico's neocolonial welfare state to continue to cope with the challenges and consequences of the island's socio-economic problems.

Similarly, the reforms that have been carried out by successive local administrations have proven insufficient to end poverty, create jobs or reduce income inequality. Aside from the Sila M. Calderón administration, the landmark reforms of Puerto Rico's ruling parties since the late 1980s have paid little attention to poverty and income inequality, focusing more on expanding the reach and scope of the private sector in the social welfare arena, specifically the nongovernmental sector, and updating the state's administrative structure according to such current good governance principles as privatization, sub-contracting and fiscal austerity. The Calderón administration seemed like an oasis in the midst of these reforms due to its commitment to poverty and public investment in a national, participatory community development project. However, the Special Needs Communities Program's performance on poverty-reduction has been

questionable at best. Also, according to some critics, the program has been complicit with neoliberal forms of governance and capitalist restructuring in the island. Lastly, the program has been marred by accusations of political corruption associated with government spending of the Billion Dollar Trust and of advancing the political ideas of and promoting attachment to the PPD.

To make matters worse, the current Fortuño administration has implemented a series of neoliberal reforms that have aggravated some of the island's fundamental socio-economic problems by undermining an already fragile neocolonial welfare state. These reforms have reduced public sector employment, which in Puerto Rico compensated for the lack of private sector jobs; decreased the capacity of the state to create and administer social programs by shrinking its tax base; and eliminated a number of important benefits and subsidies for both individuals and corporations that compensated for the island's low salaries and economic slowdown.

Analyzed in this broader political and economic context, the situation of the unemployed young men in La Cuevita stands as a tragic expression of more general trends, which frame the conditions of possibility of residents of impoverished communities in contemporary Puerto Rico. This is the scenario in which NGO-promoted grassroots support is called upon to carry out significant socio-economic changes. In light of the failures of the neocolonial welfare state and conservative economic reforms, this participatory, community-based development model as implemented by nongovernmental organizations is offered as an alternative through which to begin to redress some of the island's political deficiencies and economic insufficiencies.

For communities like La Cuevita, especially its young residents, NGO promoted grassroots support has the potential to offer a much needed alternative to the limited job creating capacity of the private sector as well as the recent job reductions in the public sector. For example, the promotion of a community economic development project could contribute to transform these young men's need for an income-generating activity into a motivating force for the development of a local entreprise. At the very least, a local economic initiative offers new possibilities to these young men who have been cast aside as a redundant labor pool and have abandoned the job search process. Moreover, it promotes local entrepreneurialism which avoids the somewhat sterile efforts of (re)producing laborers for inexistent formal sector jobs. Furthermore, a grassroots support initiative working to develop these young men into productive economic agents would also contribute to undermine the inclination towards political patronage as a solution to their situation. By engaging people in the construction of their own source of income, grassroots support would be contributing to the formation of a more active, self-sufficient citizenry that would not forced to barter its political support for state resources.

Nevertheless, this development scheme has to be located within the island's broader political context, where recent neoliberal trends in the federal and local governments have informed and guided major reforms. What contribution can community economic development and NGO promoted grassroots support make in a context in which neoliberal reforms have significantly altered the scope and meaning of the social contract by redefining the public sector through cutbacks, privatizations and sub-contracting? Moreover, the example of La Cuevita reveals the potential limitations of this development model. Talibennette reduced the potential of grassroots support to the

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offering of a résumé-building workshop. That, along with the young man's response—

"Résumés are good for nothing"—demands a critical reflection about the capacity of this

model of assistance to produce social change in practice. If résumés are worthless due to

structural unemployment and political patronage, then the capacity to generate one is not

worth much either. Certain initiatives carried out in the name of capacity-building and

empowerment might be limited in their capacity to generate change.

The situation in La Cuevita points to the gap between the grandiloquent claims

and potential of grassroots support and its actual manifestations as interventions at the

moment of practice. This gap introduces a certain degree of skepticism as to the social

change potential of grassroots support. Therefore, the chapters that follow suspend the

assumed transparency between the goals and the empowerment claims of GSOs and the

actual effects of their community-based social change efforts in contemporary Puerto

Rico. They do so in order to offer a critical, ethnographic examination of NGO-promoted

grassroots support initiatives and their capacity to deliver on their claims given the

challenges they face in contemporary Puerto Rico.

Chapter IV

The War on Poverty in Our Neoliberal Age?:

Locating Social Action of Puerto Rico, Inc. in Social Welfare History

Introduction

> *[Social Action] began in '82. Prior to that, the funds used to come to the Puerto Rican government to what was once called Puerto Rico's Community Action Agency, which was assigned to the Governor's Office and [its funds] were distributed among the poor...The federal government changes the law, it amends the law in 1980-1, thereabout, and requires the Puerto Rican government to give those funds to nonprofit organizations. And that is how Social Action of Puerto Rico is created. And the funds, instead of going to the Governor's Office, they went to the Department of Family and to Social Action by means of a proposal.*

> Alicia Ramírez, Executive Director
> Social Action of Puerto Rico, Inc.
> Personal Interview, May 22, 2008

Social Action of Puerto Rico, Inc. (ASPRI), a multi-service NGO committed to combating poverty, did not originate as a voluntary grassroots initiative nor did it emerge as an alternative social change proposal from Puerto Rico's civil society. As Alicia Ramírez suggests in the opening quote, ASPRI's foundation was motivated by U.S. welfare policy changes early in the 1980s, specifically the replacement of anti-poverty programs originally authorized under the War on Poverty's Economic Opportunity Act (EOA) of 1964 with the Community Services Block Grant (CSBG), a funding package managed by state agencies, but awarded mostly to nonprofit organizations. ASPRI, then, is not one of those NGOs that emerged 'from below' as an instrument to voice the concerns and organize the actions of some community group or grassroots movement.

Instead, ASPRI belongs to that sub-set of nongovernmental organizations that emerged in response to the federal government's restructuring of its social welfare policies.

Noting the link between ASPRI's foundation and social policy reforms in the U.S. is extremely important because, as Migdalia Camacho Hernandez (2009) argues, the political character of the relationship between the nongovernmental sector and the State is determined by "the historical, cultural and political moment that serves as its context" (p. 60, my translation). The convergence at any particular moment of definite historical events, cultural ideas and political interests define the role and function of nongovernmental organizations, and their work, vis a vis state projects. Thus, understanding ASPRI and its potential contributions to community-based social change requires examining the reformist political milieu in which it emerged and in response to which it developed its mission and programs.

This chapter will locate ASPRI within the broader changes undergone by the United States' and Puerto Rico's welfare state over the last several of decades. This historical sketch will include an analysis of the origins and political underpinnings of ASPRI's main funding source, CSBG. Besides explaining the policy context in which ASPRI emerged, CSBG's historical account provides an opportunity to historicize neoliberalism in the U.S. and P.R. This historical narrative will document both ruptures and continuities with participatory, community-based anti-poverty programs and state-NGO collaborations developed during the height of the U.S. welfare state in the mid-twentieth century. This narrative builds on recent studies that have offered more complicated and nuanced accounts of the relationship of NGOs with neoliberalism, particularly their emphasis on their role as development agents (Edelman & Haugerud,

2005), and as key organizational sites through which current efforts to govern populations are carried out (Ferguson & Gupta, 2002; Fisher, 1997; Sorj, 2007). It also builds on more recent studies, such as Gupta and Sharma (2006), which have highlighted continuities of current neoliberal programs with previous development approaches.

ASPRI's history will help trace the impact of U.S. welfare reforms in Puerto Rico. ASPRI will also serve as a case example of the transformations undergone by NGO-promoted, community-based participatory initiatives in this neoliberal era. Finally, ASPRI's examination will help reassess the current neoliberal preference for state-NGO collaborations. The preference for funding nongovernmental organizations is based on the notion that, as citizen-organized institutions, NGOs are "scrupulous and efficient alternatives to the corrupt, bloated and ineffective public sectors" (Edelman & Haugerud, 2005, p. 27). However, ASPRI's long-standing political connections and its past financial management problems will be used as evidence to question the claim that NGOs are "outside the domain of and morally superior to the state" (ibid., p. 28). Ultimately, ASPRI's detailed historical analysis will question the claims and actual performance of neoliberal reforms.

From the War on Poverty to Servicing Impoverished Communities: The Community Services Block Grant

The Community Services Block Grant was authorized by the Omnibus Reconciliation Act of 1981, P.L. 97-35. In this bill, President Ronald Reagan requested the consolidation of 85 anti-poverty programs authorized by the Economic Opportunity Act (EOA) of 1964 into seven block grants (Conlan, 1998). Congress modified that proposal and agreed to consolidate 77 programs into nine block grants. As one of those block grants, CSBG replaced eight categorical programs: Local Initiative, Community

Food and Nutrition, Senior Opportunities and Services, State Agency Assistance, Community Economic Development, National Youth Sports, Housing and Community Development, and the Rural Development Loan Fund. In addition, the CSBG legislation ordered the closure of the Community Service Administration, which managed the EOA programs, and created the Office of Community Services within the Department of Health and Human Services to administer CSBG (United States General Accounting Office, 1984, p. 2).

CSBG retained the main purpose of the programs it replaced: the amelioration or elimination of poverty and its causes. Therefore, CSBG provided continuity to the official aims of previous EOA anti-poverty initiatives. However, its creation was part of President Reagan's plan to eliminate the EOA, a legislation that marked the most significant expansion of the U.S. welfare state since the New Deal. The Omnibus Reconciliation Act of 1981 resulted in a major restructuring of the U.S. welfare state that effectively undermined the principles and commitments promulgated by President Johnson's War on Poverty. This act represents the initial stages of a conservative, cost-cutting reformist era that changed the manner in which the federal government funded the anti-poverty programs it had sponsored for decades (Nemon, 2007).

To begin, the newly created block grants received about 25% less funding than the programs they replaced (Finegold, Wherry & Schardin, 2004, p. 2). CSBG resulted in an even more drastic funding reduction. In 1981, the Community Services Administration received $525 million dollars to fund the anti-poverty, community action programs it administered. The following year CSBG received $350 million to cover basically the same programmatic areas, which represents a 34% budget cut (Eisner, 2009). Moreover,

this budget cut was not a one-year deal since federal funding of CSBG would remain fairly consistent until 1996 (Nemon, 2007).

Most CSBG funds were delegated to Community Action Agencies (CAAs), a network of public and private development organizations responsible for implementing various EOA programs, including the Community Action Program (CAP), which was replaced by CSBG (ibid.). By 1981, there were over 900 CAAs operating in almost every U.S. county, most of which had been incorporated in the 1960s by both local governments and private citizens, including grassroots community leaders and social welfare professionals. In principle, these CAAs functioned as a grassroots support system that promoted popular agency through direct citizen participation in the agency and its programs, and coordinated community-based initiatives to reduce the causes of poverty. As GSOs, CAAs invest in human capital formation through educational programs; provide support services to help integrate the unemployed to the formal economy, and mobilize resources to attend issues such as inadequate housing in low-income communities (Chavis, Florin & Felix, 1993). Recognizing the value of these agencies, CSBG legislation mandated that funds continue to flow primarily to the CAAs that had been designated as eligible entities under the EOA. It also allowed CAAs to continue to be the principal decision makers concerning program priorities and implementation approaches as they were under the categorical programs. Interestingly, CSBG's continued reliance on the CAAs network maintained a key aspect of the War on Poverty's strategy for combating poverty.

However, CSBG altered the manner in which the federal government related to CAAs. Under the EOA funding flowed directly from the federal government to CAAs.[36] By contrast, CSBG introduced an intermediary that interrupted that flow: state agencies.[37] Contrary to categorical programs, block grants are "fixed-sum federal grants to state and local governments that give them broad flexibility to design and implement designated programs" (Finegold, Wherry & Schardin, 2004, p. 1). As a block grant, CSBG transferred both funds and primary administrative responsibilities to states. The substitution of the federal government's Community Services Administration for the Office of Community Services was accompanied by a reduction in both staff and administrative roles over CSBG. CSBG legislation mandated states to designate a pass through agency, a public administrative unit responsible for allocating 90% of funds to eligible entities, mostly CAAs (United States General Accounting Office, 1984). As a result, states assumed new or expanded grant management responsibilities, which included establishing program requirements, monitoring agencies, providing technical assistance, collecting data, and arranging for audits (ibid.). These expanded roles required new administrative structures and personnel, which increased state administrative costs. CSBG legislation compensated states by allowing them to use up to 5% of CSBG funds to cover administrative costs.

CSBG exemplifies the shift to devolution that characterized President Reagan's New Federalism (Finegold, Wherry & Schardin, 2004; Trattner, 1999). States' authority was greatly expanded under CSBG legislation when compared to their limited

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[36] Some states and local governments, like Puerto Rico, established public community action agencies and/or local Economic Opportunity Offices which made them recipients of EOA funds.

[37] For CSBG's purposes, the term state refers to each of the 50 states, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, Guam, the U.S. Virgin Islands, American Samoa, the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana, and Tribal Organizations.

involvement with previous CAP funds. This shift of grant management and decision-making authority to states certainly gave them much needed flexibility to attend the local causes of poverty. However, the shift towards devolution was about much more than just empowering local public administrative units. Block grants give states greater discretion at the moment of allocating funds, which effectively eliminates the concept of entitlement, that is, individual's and organizations' rights to benefits (ibid.).[38] Thus, President Reagan's reconfiguration of federal-state powers sought to eliminate federal guarantees to impoverished populations. In other words, devolution was a strategy to reduce federal social welfare spending and responsibilities.

CSBG's history also illustrates the long-standing collaborations between the federal government and nongovernmental agencies, especially in the social welfare field. CSBG continued and expanded the tradition of state-NGO collaborations established by its predecessor, the Community Action Program. CAP was an innovative program that opened up federal funding to private agencies. According to Howard Nemon (2007), CAP "marked the first time that the federal government directly sponsored and financed community organizations on a large scale to carry out federal policy" (p. 2). Thus, CAP funding resulted in an unprecedented partnership between the federal government and nongovernmental organizations to combat poverty. This unique state-NGO venture consisted of federal funding and oversight of CAAs and local service delivery of CAP-compliant anti-poverty programs by designated CAAs.

Contrary to the dominant neoliberal narrative, U.S. government contracting with nongovernmental organizations to carry out social welfare policies is not a recent

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[38] Block grants provide a fix financial award to states that does not necessarily match or equate with the total award that would have been required if financial resources were distributed to the totality of potential recipients who qualified based on individual need or right to benefits.

phenomenon associated with the dismantling of the welfare state that began in the 1980s. In fact, U.S. government partnerships with nongovernmental agencies are decades-old initiatives that were promulgated as part of the federal government's expansion of its social welfare apparatus in the 1960s. Katz (2001) documents how the number of nonprofit organizations rose from 309,000 in 1967 to over 1 million in 1997, a threefold increase (p. 143). Grønbjerg & Salamon (2002) contend that this growth was fueled by the financial support made available by federal programs created in the 1960s. Therefore, although CSBG was part of the federal government's restructuring of the welfare state, it did not inaugurate federal collaborations with the nongovernmental sector and does not represent a shift from publicly operated programs to publicly funded programs operated by nongovernmental organizations. Instead, CSBG maintained the federal government's historical collaborations with CAAs even though the Reagan administration substituted the programs that gave rise to those collaborations.

Yet, the transition to CSBG did alter the conditions of state-NGO collaborations. Under CAP, both public and private agencies were considered viable alternatives to administer community action programs. Although CSBG also authorizes the funding of public and private agencies, it prioritizes funding for nongovernmental agencies: "In designating new or replacement entities, states may select a public agency only when no qualified private nonprofit organization is available, in accordance with the 1998 CSBG amendments" (Spar, 2008, p. 4). Moreover, CAP funding went exclusively to CAAs, while CSBG left a residual 5% of its funds that could be delegated to non-eligible entities, mostly nongovernmental organizations. Thus, CSBG exemplifies the post-1980s

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neoliberal tendency to increase the government's reliance on nongovernmental organizations for social welfare services.

As mentioned above, CSBG reduced the funding available for anti-poverty initiatives, which translated to fewer funds for CAAs. In response, CAAs expanded the number of federal and state programs they administrated in order to compensate for lost funds. A longitudinal analysis of CAAs finances demonstrates this expansion. For example, in 1986, a report from the U.S. General Accounting Office stated that CSBG funds accounted for 17% of the total budget of the CAAs surveyed for their study (United States General Accounting Office, 1986, p. 18). The report also indicates that CAAs ran other federal programs, such as Head Start, Community Development Block Grants and Low Income Home Energy Assistance. Including these programs, federal funds accounted for 89% of the total budget of these organizations, which points to an almost complete dependence on government funding for their operation (ibid.).

By contrast, a similar study carried out in 2005 by the National Association for State Community Services Programs, a lobbying organization that defends the interests of CSBG state recipients, revealed that CSBG funds accounted for only 6% of CAAs total budget, while federal funds accounted for 63%, state programs 11% and local government funding 7% (Power et al., 2006). These ratios show the continued dependence of CAAs on government funds, especially the federal government. However, CSBG funds suffered a significant reduction in their overall contribution to CAAs budgets. Interestingly, Congress began increasing CSBG funding appropriations in 1996, to the point that by 2005 CSBG funds matched the pre-1981 funding level of the EOA programs it substituted (Nemon, 2007). Thus, CSBG's reduction as a portion of total

funds administered by CAAs is not the result of less funding, but rather of the overall expansion of alternative government programs run by these agencies.

CAAs' dependence on federal funds and expanded administration of government programs transformed these agencies into grant managing, social service delivery organizations. To be sure, CAAs have dealt with the tension between community empowerment and social service delivery since their inception (ibid.). Yet, at present CAAs have followed the neoliberal trend of transforming nongovernmental organizations into an important arm of the state's social welfare apparatus. Like their international counterparts, CAAs have become social service delivery organizations that have watered down their social change mission to become part of the welfare safety net that attends to, but does not overcome existing inequalities (Alvarez, Dagnino & Escober, 1998; Elyachar, 2003). Thus, for CAAs the transition from CAP to CSBG funds transformed them from a community action network to a social welfare network.

CAAs' greater emphasis on social services illustrates the broader transformation that has taken place in the U.S. federal government's approach to poverty. As mentioned above, CAAs were created to implement the mandates of the Community Action Program. According to the EOA, the purpose of this program was to "provide stimulation and incentive for urban and rural communities to mobilize their resources to combat poverty through community action programs" (P.L. 88-452). In order to achieve that, the program called for the maximum feasible participation of residents of impoverished areas in the planning and implementation of solutions to their socio-economic problems. The insistence on the active participation of local residents reflected a commitment to combine social service coordination with citizen empowerment as a necessary approach

to overcoming poverty.[39] As such, CAP represented a clear effort by the federal government to promote and enact a participatory development model as a solution to its lingering problem with poverty.

However, this proactive stance towards poverty was modified by President Ford when in 1974 he replaced the Office of Economic Opportunity with the Community Services Administration (Nemon, 2007). As the name suggests, this new office changed CAP's focus to a service delivery program. President Ford also added the energy assistance and weatherization program to this office, which offered important assistance to low-income people, but was not oriented towards transforming their situation (ibid). CSBG's authorization in 1981 represented a continuation by President Reagan of the conservative, social services trend initiated by the Ford administrations (ibid.). In fact, CSBG was emphatic about that change in orientation: it substituted CAP with a Community Services Block Grant.

This shift was facilitated by an ambiguous concept in the original EOA legislation which was adopted by CSBG: self-sufficiency. In the EOA, the concept of self-sufficiency was part of a progressive reform that sought to move the issue of poverty "from a state of benign neglect to a prominent place on the public agenda" (Trattner, 1999, p. 321). Also, the federal government accompanied its call for greater self-sufficiency and citizen participation with an investment in public programs that expanded the opportunities of impoverished populations to move from welfare to work.[40] By

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[39] Despite its theoretical claims, citizen participation was critiqued from the outset because its contribution to the goal of overcoming poverty could not be clearly established. See Moynihan (1969).

[40] The War on Poverty and its key concepts, like self-sufficiency and maximum feasible participation, were not without critics. Some critics pointed out that the War on Poverty sought to reinforce a commitment to a work ethic among the poor and emphasized changing the victims of poverty rather than transforming society. To be sure, the War on Poverty programs were not a radical response to poverty in the U.S. Moreover, as all state-sponsored social change programs, they carried a governmental rationality of shaping

contrast, self-sufficiency was re-signified in the 1980s to convey both citizen

empowerment and a critique of citizen dependence on welfare assistance:

> The purposes of this subtitle are—''(1) to provide assistance to States and local communities, working through a network of community action agencies and other neighborhood-based organizations, for the reduction of poverty, the revitalization of low-income communities, and the empowerment of low-income families and individuals in rural and urban areas to become fully self-sufficient (particularly families who are attempting to transition off a State program carried out under part A of title IV of the Social Security Act (42 U.S.C. 601 et seq.))…(P.L. 105-285)

CSBG retained the language of the previous participatory development model, CAP:

citizen participation, empowerment and poverty reduction. Yet, its creation responded to

a conservative reform interested in ending welfare dependence without increasing its

investment in the kinds of educational, training and service programs required to help

people re-enter the workforce and/or move up in the salary scale. Thus, CSBG stands as

an example of the capacity of neoliberal reforms to absorb existent community-based,

empowerment programs and re-signify them in order to align them with its anti-welfare

state critique and its new forms of governance. These changes trickled down to CAAs,

who have molded to CSBG by becoming social service agencies.

At the Crossroads of Puerto Rico's Social Welfare History: From the Division of Community Education to Social Action of Puerto Rico, Inc.

Social Action of Puerto Rico, Inc. was legally incorporated as a domestic

nonprofit corporation in Puerto Rico's State Department in August 17, 1982 by Flor de

María Cacho, Gladys Molina and Ardin Terón (Departamento de Estado, 1982). Flor de

María Cacho, ASPRI's principal incorporating agent and first Executive Director, was an

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impoverished populations into the desired self-sufficient subjects. However, when contrasted with the cash and public works programs of the New Deal and the benign neglect of the '50s, the War on Poverty seems much more like a progressive reform project. For a summary of these critiques, see Trattner 1999, pgs. 321-324.

established professional who held a Masters in Social Work, taught at the University of Puerto Rico's School of Social Work and served as Auxiliary Dean of that university's Social Science Faculty (Pérez Quintana, 1984). Besides being a professor, Mrs. Cacho also served as a personnel training and program assessment consultant for the Division of Community Education (DIVEDCO), a public community-based educational agency, between 1978 and 1980. She later served as the agency's Executive Director between 1980 and 1981, a year prior to ASPRI's foundation (ibid.). Thus, DIVEDCO and ASPRI share a historical connection through Mrs. Flor de María Cacho.

However, their connection extends beyond being steps in Mrs. Cacho's professional career. As community-based programs financed with federal funds, DIVEDCO and ASPRI are implicated in the federal welfare state's transformations outlined in the previous section, specifically as it impacted Puerto Rico. Therefore, DIVEDCO's and ASPRI's historical trajectories also meet at the crossroads of the U.S.'s and Puerto Rico's social welfare history.

The Division of Community Education was created in 1949 and became an important piece of the Popular Democratic Party's mid-twentieth century modernization project, which sought to democratize the local political culture and satisfy the island's pressing socio-economic needs. Located within the Department of Education, DIVEDCO was conceived as an adult education program for Puerto Rico's rural communities, which were plagued by high illiteracy and poverty rates. It carried out its educational mission through the innovative use of films, graphic art and a popular book series, all of which were used by community organizers to promote discussion and popular mobilization in participants' community settings (Wale, 1953). Although in principle not an economic

development program, DIVEDCO also attended to the local infrastructure needs of rural communities by organizing public works projects that combined government funding and technical expertise with local resident planning and labor.

DIVEDCO operated exclusively with state funds until 1965. In that year, the program began receiving federal funds from the recently approved Economic Opportunity Act of 1964, specifically Title II-A, better known as the Community Action Program (Clapp and Mayne, Inc., 1976, p. 9). Although DIVEDCO and CAP were independent initiatives created by different administrations and government entities, they shared a number of features that made for an organic connection between the two. First, both programs were major state initiatives created by progressive, liberal administrations to promote the well-being of marginalized populations, albeit under different political projects: DIVEDCO was part of P.R.'s neocolonial modernization project, while CAP was part of the federal government's renewed commitment to combat poverty. Nevertheless, DIVECO and CAP are examples of the mid-twentieth century expansion of the public sector to assume a greater role in the social welfare of its population.

CAP and DIVEDCO promulgated and enacted progressive elements advanced by a development model popularized between the 1940s and 1960s, community development (Ander Egg, 1980; Brokensha & Hodge, 1969; Cooke & Kothari, 2001). Both programs defined the community as the preferred site in which to concentrate their intervention efforts. They also promoted the participation of residents in the planning and execution of educational and economic development programs. Moreover, both programs allowed residents the flexibility to develop their own programs based on the local assessment of needs and capacities. Their endorsement of what today is called

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participatory development reflected a commitment to citizen empowerment as a necessary approach to overcoming the social, political and economic limitations imposed by poverty. As such, CAP and DIVEDCO are examples of the modernizing and development impulses of the mid-twentieth century, both in the U.S. and internationally, that sought to integrate people into national reformist agendas (ibid.).

Finally, DIVEDCO's access to CAP funds was part of a broader shift in U.S.-Puerto Rico relations in the social welfare field. Prior to the 1950s, P.R. had limited access to the U.S. welfare state. To be sure, since the U.S. invasion of P.R. in 1898, P.R. received federal aid for projects associated with the U.S.'s colonizing endeavor, such as road planning and agricultural experiments (Mathews, 2007). Moreover, Puerto Rico received a colonial version of U.S. New Deal programs in the 1930s: the Puerto Rico Emergency Relief Administration (PRERA) and the Puerto Rico Reconstruction Administration (PRRA) (ibid.; Morrissey, 2006). However, island residents were denied access to probably the most important social welfare legislation in the U.S., the Social Security Act of 1935, on the grounds that Puerto Rican citizens did not pay federal taxes (ibid.). However, Morrissey contends that this argument "belied a more complex story involving divisions on the mainland and the island about the issues of political status and Puerto Rico's future role in the U.S. empire" (Morrissey, 2006, p. 30). Until the 1940s, P.R. was a Caribbean colony governed primarily by U.S. colonial administrators and its further integration into the U.S. federal system remained uncertain.

Puerto Rico's redefinition of its political relationship with the U.S. in the 1950s coincided with the opening up of the federal welfare state to island residents. Congress began extending the Social Security Act to P.R. in 1951, a year after it approved P.L.

600, which authorized Puerto Ricans to develop their own local constitution and led to its eventual Commonwealth status. Congress extended Title II of the Social Security Act in 1951, followed by Titles I, IV, X, XIV and XVI in 1952—the year P.R. approved its new constitution—, and disability benefits in 1955 (ibid.). Puerto Rico's inclusion in the EOA of 1964 and DIVEDCO's access to CAP funds in 1965 marked another important milestone in the island's progressive integration into the U.S. welfare state. These extensions set Puerto Rico on a path of continued access to federal social insurance and means tested programs, which increased dramatically over the decades as the island's development initiatives proved incapable of creating jobs and eradicating poverty.

By the late 1970s and early 1980s, when Mrs. Cacho was a consultant with and director of DIVEDCO, the program was still committed to its original mandate, but was no longer as vibrant as in the '50s and '60s. A 1980 evaluation of DIVEDCO revealed that the agency had a 63.8% vacancy rate in its 134 regular positions and a 26.8% vacancy rate for all its 557 positions (Bathia, 1980, p. 3). The vacancies included such important administrative positions as the agency's Sub-Director, the Director and Sub-Director of the Field Unit, the Director of the Visual-Aids Section, and the Chief of the Editorial Unit (ibid., p. 13). Moreover, the evaluators found that the agency's group organizers were ill-prepared: "Schooling and experience of group organizers is very limited to mostly high school and two years experience. Some have not had any formal community development training" (ibid., p. 3). Furthermore, 60% of hired employees were funded through various federal programs: Titles I and II, CETA, CAP, P.L. 81-874 and Affected Areas, among others (ibid., p. 3). In fact, federal funds accounted for 60.8% of the agency's total operating budget (ibid., p. 6).

The above numbers paint a picture of a decaying agency. The local state's disinvestment reflected in part DIVEDCO's gradual obsolescence. DIVEDCO had been created in 1949 to serve a poorly educated, rural agricultural society which by 1980 had transformed into a fairly well-educated, urban industrial society. Puerto Rico's urbanization process, increased literacy rates and changes in rural community life all account for the diminishing relevance of DIVEDCO as it was originally formulated. However, the disinvestment also reflected local party politics. Since 1976, Puerto Rico was governed by Carlos Romero Barceló and the New Progressive Party (PNP), a pro-statehood party. As mentioned above, DIVEDCO occupied an important place in the political history of its main electoral competitor, the Popular Democratic Party (PPD), and its broad-reaching modernizing reforms. Thus, DIVEDCO's personnel vacancies are a sign of Romero Barceló's lack of political and financial support for a program associated with the PPD and its historic economic reform project that ran counter to the PNP's statehood aspirations. With these vacancies, especially the administrative positions, Romero Barceló's administration limited the agency's production of new educational material and effectively stalled the fulfillment of the agency's educational mission.

DIVEDCO's increased dependence on federal funds exposes another political dilemma: the questionable results of Puerto Rico's integration to the federal welfare state. DIVEDCO went from being a locally funded agency until 1965 to being one in which federal funds covered 60% of its operating costs. This shift supports Morrissey's (2006) contention that P.R.'s greater access to federal social welfare programs led to the formation of a colonial welfare state, one in which the local state depends on federal

funding to cover many of its basic service areas while the federal government retains fiscal authority and political power of those funds (see also Pratts, 1996). Ironically, despite being a progressive legislation in the U.S., the EOA and its Community Action Program, contributed to forge and expand Puerto Rico's neocolonial welfare state.

According to Weisskoff (1985), this neocolonial welfare state has been strategically used by the federal government to sustain the status quo by financing that portion of the population's expenses not covered by the wages and profits generated by the island's economy. This financial injection into Puerto Rico's economy has served as an indirect subsidy to the private sector by increasing demand for goods and creating a more profitable market for private, mostly U.S. owned companies (ibid.). Certainly, this neocolonial welfare state has helped improve the living standards of Puerto Rico's impoverished population by subsidizing consumption patterns that could not be possible based on the locally-produced wealth. However, it has also tied the Puerto Rican government to a perennial political manipulation of that system in pursuit of increased benefits. This politics of dependence has hindered the formulation of the necessary political and economic reforms to overcome the island's pressing socio-economic needs.

However, DIVEDCO offered citizens educational services, not cash transfers or other in-kind benefits. Yet, as Mariam Colón Pizarro argues (2011), DIVEDCO's adult education efforts played a crucial role in the PPD's modernization project: It trained and disciplined Puerto Rico's rural population to be part of the island's emerging democratic political system and its new industrial workforce. In that sense, DIVEDCO resembles other welfare state programs that served to regulate citizens, both as political subjects and potential labor force, during moments of economic growth (Fox Piven & Cloward, 1972).

As that economic growth waned, so did DIVEDCO's relevance, although it would take some years before the federal and local welfare state re-adjusted to that reality.

Similar to the U.S., the early 1980s marked an important crossroad in P.R.'s social welfare history. By 1982, six years of PNP administration had contributed to erode DIVEDCO's impact as a public, local development program, despite Mrs. Cacho's commitment to the agency's mission (Bathia, 1980).[41] Moreover, DIVEDCO's precarious situation was symptomatic of the greater decay of the PPD's political and economic reform project that transformed the island between the 1940s and 1960s and in which DIVEDCO played an important role. Furthermore, DIVEDCO's dependence on multiple federal funds denotes its gradual transformation into one of the many grants receiving programs characteristic of Puerto Rico's neocolonial welfare state. To make matters worse, the EOA, an important financial source for DIVEDCO, also lost its political support in the U.S. and was eliminated in 1981. Thus, the early 1980s witnessed the decline of progressive social programs both in the U.S. and P.R.

ASPRI emerged precisely at this historical crossroads. In 1982, a few months after leaving DIVEDCO and in CSBG's inaugural year, Flor de María Cacho founded ASPRI as a nonprofit organization. During the 1982-1983 fiscal year, ASPRI was classified as an eligible entity to implement and develop community programs under the Omnibus Budget Reconciliation Act of 1981. According to its certificate of incorporation, ASPRI was founded for the purpose of "developing, implementing and coordinating counseling programs and/or social welfare services that have a tangible

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[41] DIVIDCO would linger for another decade, finally being eliminated in the early 1990s under the PNP's Pedro Rossello administration. It continued to receive federal funds after CAP's elimination through the Education Consolidation and Improvement Act of 1981, authorized by the same legislation that created CSBG, the 1981 Omnibus Budget Reconciliation Act.

impact on communities or those geographical areas in which poverty constitutes an acute problem" (Departamento de Estado, 1982, my translation). In other words, ASPRI was created for the purpose of providing a diverse set of services to impoverished communities, understood as geographically situated populations. ASPRI's mission is significant not because it committed the agency to fighting poverty, but rather for its similarity with CSBG's original mission: "To provide services and activities having a measurable and potential major impact on the causes of poverty in the community or those areas of the community where poverty is a particularly acute problem" (P.L. 97-35, 1981). ASPRI's mission statement seems almost to plagiarize CSBG's main purpose. The similarity is not a mere coincidence, but results from the fact that ASPRI was founded to gain access to and operate with CSBG funds.

ASPRI's foundation constitutes a local response to the federal government's welfare reform that created a new funding program, CSBG, which gave preference to collaborations with nongovernmental agencies. To be sure, federal programs funded local nongovernmental organizations prior to 1981. In fact, CAP funds were used by the local Office of Economic Opportunity to partially finance not only DIVEDCO, but also a number of nongovernmental initiatives (Nieves Falcón, 1970). Nevertheless, ASPRI's foundation points to a transformation in that trend. First, CSBG's substitution of CAP impacted the state differently than the nongovernmental sector. While for the state CSBG represented the elimination of a plethora of important anti-poverty programs and an overall reduction in federal funds, the nongovernmental sector found in CSBG a welcoming funding source to which they could submit proposals to finance their operations.

Second, these changes resulted in a personnel shift from a public agency to a private, nongovernmental one. Flor de María Cacho literally embodies this shift by moving from being DIVEDCO's Executive Director, a public agency receiving CAP funds, to becoming ASPRI's Executive Director, a CSBG-funded nongovernmental agency. Beside Mrs. Cacho, other DIVEDCO employees transferred to ASPRI, including some that are still with the agency, like Mrs. Ehida Torres, ASPRI's current Community Development program director and Mr. Francisco Pereira, one of ASPRI's current evaluation and monitoring assistants. Moreover, Mrs. Cacho and her successor in DIVEDCO, Mr. Waldemar Pérez, established a collaborative agreement in which DIVEDCO employees were assigned to ASPRI to work together in community development projects.[42] Interestingly, Mr. Waldermar Pérez would later leave DIVEDCO to become ASPRI's Sub-Director under Mrs. Cacho.

ASPRI exemplifies how CSBG legislation led to the creation of nongovernmental organizations and the transfer of social welfare professionals from the public sector to private nongovernmental agencies to pursue similar community initiatives. Leslie Gill identified this personnel shift between state agencies and NGOs as an interesting manifestation of the entrenchment of neoliberal politics:

> NGOs are increasingly accepting the burden of poverty alleviation from retrenching and decentralizing state agencies. Personnel regularly circulate between them and state agencies. They are thus situation themselves within the context of state policy and the parameters of neoliberalism. (Gill, 1997, p. 146)

Thus, these personnel shifts further capture the neoliberal character of the CSBG legislation and ASPRI's role within that reformist project.

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[42] Personal interview, Alicia Ramirez, May 22, 2008.

Besides its relationship to federal welfare reforms, ASPRI's foundation was also motivated by local political dynamics. The general perception of ASPRI personnel, politicians and community activists is that ASPRI's foundation was promoted by the Romero Barceló administration to gain access and distribute the newly created CSBG funds.[43] While the degree of orchestration by the Romero Barceló administration is not completely clear, what is undeniable is that a high level government official, Mrs. Cacho, left public office to create a nongovernmental organization that very swiftly gained access to CSBG funds, a process which requires the support of the local state. In addition to that personal connection, Mrs. Ehida Torres claims that DIVEDCO and ASPRI remained closely affiliated—"under the same umbrella"— until 1984, the year Romero Barceló lost the general election and a new PPD administration took over. This institutional relationship offers another indication of the close political connections between the PNP administration and the newly created nongovernmental organization.

This association was so pervasive that the new PPD administration that took over in 1984 tried to cut ASPRI's access to CSBG funds as a way to undermine what was understood to be a PNP initiative. However, since CSBG funds were earmarked for ASPRI the government could not distribute those funds to other projects. In order to curtail that obstacle, the PPD administration promoted the foundation in 1986 of another nongovernmental community action agency, the Instituto Socio-Economico Comunitario (INSEC), in order to re-direct CSBG funds to an agency that had close political ties to them. Mrs. Cacho resisted those attempts to usurp her funding and even took the government to court. Nevertheless, she eventually reached a compromise in which

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[43] Mrs. Cacho's personal motivations for founding ASPRI remain uncertain since I was not able to locate her for my study. As will be discussed below, Mrs. Cacho was involved in a corruption scandal, which forced her to leave ASPRI and serve time in prison.

ASPRI and INSEC would split the CSBG funds, with ASPRI receiving 39% and INSEC 32%.[44] Thus, a local political dispute over the control of a federal funding program created a somewhat unusual situation in which two community action agencies were created to offer similar programs within the same jurisdiction.[45]

Besides representing a shift to greater collaborations between the state and nongovernmental organizations, ASPRI also exemplifies another shift: a greater emphasis on a social service delivery format to combat poverty. As mentioned above, ASPRI was not created by grassroots leaders nor did it emerge as a collaborative effort with community leaders. Instead, it was founded by social welfare professionals that had experience delivering educational and community development programs to impoverished communities and who had never promoted adversarial tactics to achieve their goals. As such, ASPRI is not guided by a grassroots agenda of transforming the life conditions of impoverished populations nor is it an instrument of social struggle for marginalized communities. Moreover, ASPRI has followed the trend of most existing CAAs in which client participation in the organization's strategic planning and program development has been reduced to a proportional representation—one third—in the Board of Directors (Nemon, 2007).[46]

As a community action agency, ASPRI manages and implements a number of programs whose goal is to offset the impact of poverty. Yet, ASPRI's main area of

[44] The remaining funds go to the municipalities of San Juan (15%) and Bayamon (14%). This account is pieced together from information offered by Mrs. Alicia Ramirez, Mrs. Ehida Torres, and Ms. Elizabeth Pérez Chiques, Auxiliary Administrator of the Community Preventive Services office in the Department of Family, Families and Children Administration, which is the local state office charged with managing the CSBG grant.

[45] Community action agencies usually cover a county or city that is not serviced by another CAAS.

[46] CAAs are mandated by the Green Amendment of 1968 to establish a tri-partite board consisting of elected public officials, representatives of the low-income communities served, and private sector leaders such as business owners, and leaders of faith-based groups, charities, and civic organizations.

intervention has been a service provision program: administering adult day care centers throughout the island for people who fall under the poverty line. In these centers, ASPRI provides food, medical check-ups, recreational programs, and assistance with multiple issues, from dealing with social security or Medicare to intervening with family problems. While these are important services for an elderly population with scarce resources, they certainly do not advance the cause of eradicating poverty, which is CSBG's and, by default, ASPRI's goal. The same can be said about some of its other programs. In the early 1980s, ASPRI offered an emergency assistance program, which supplied medical equipment and supplies to underprivileged elderly populations who had an immediate need. It also ran an employment program, which was geared towards helping people secure and retain a job, mostly through employment subsidies. Besides CSBG, ASPRI also received funds from the Emergency Community Services for the Homeless Program (ECSHP), which was part of the Reagan administrations emphasis on serving the homeless population (ibid.). In all, these programs denote a commitment to working with impoverished populations facing various challenging life circumstances, such as unemployment and homelessness. However, service delivery and subsidies have proven incapable of altering the conditions that gave rise to poverty, homelessness and unemployment (ibid.).

Under Alicia Ramirez, who became ASPRI's Executive Director in 2001, ASPRI has incorporated new programs, such as an after-school tutoring program, which impacts 28 schools and close to 1,500 students, and a music program for school-age children and youth. The agency also offers a hydroponic agriculture program in two municipalities— San Sebastian and Rio Grande—, which educates its clients in an innovating agriculture

production process. Finally, the agency formalized the community development program it had operated since its inception. Unlike its other programs, these seem to address the fundamental causes of poverty: education (after-school programs), job creation (hydroponic agriculture) and political organization (community boards). These newer programs suggest that ASPRI is operating much more as a grassroots support organization; that is, offering a set of support services imbued with a basic understanding of the complexities of poverty. However, the goal of reducing or eradication poverty is not achieved merely by providing relevant support services. ASPRI's success in combating poverty depends on the effectiveness of these services in generating changes in client attitudes and practices and in public and private resource mobilization.[47]

ASPRI's commitment to a service delivery approach is best demonstrated by its reliance on the Family Development Model to orient, design and implement its diverse programming. Conceptualized for CAAs during the mid-1980s, this model proposes a comprehensive service delivery approach that "utilizes intensive case management to help families assess their barriers to self-sufficiency and then create a plan for escaping poverty" (Nemon, 2007, p. 13). This model was devised in order to provide a certain degree of uniformity to the overly fragmented service delivery approach that resulted from the flexibility offered by CSBG to CAAs in the formulation of local programming. The delivery of multiple, coordinated services to impoverished populations is recognized as an essential component of anti-poverty programs, especially by the grassroots support model discussed in this work. However, the Family Development Model re-centered CSBG's unit of intervention from communities to families. It also changed the

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[47] Chapter IV offers a detailed examination of ASPRI's impact on its client population through an analysis of its community development program's field practices.

intervention approach from community action to case management. As such, this model

represents a movement away from the community empowerment approach officially

promoted by CSBG to a family case management approach.

ASPRI is pursuing the implementation of the Family Development Model in all of

its programs. For example, Mrs. Alicia Ramírez explained its integration into the after-

school tutoring program:

> We are interested in providing a tutoring service in which the child is not the only
> one who receives a service, but also his/her family. [We are interested in] going to
> his/her house, visiting the house. If in that house there is an elder person, we can
> provide assistance. Find out if in that house [family members] are employed or
> unemployed (sic.). Find out what the home situation is like. That way we
> intervene with the family as a unit.

The model has even been extended to the community development program. During an

interview Mrs. Ehida Torres, the program's coordinator, explained and justified the move

to the family development model within the community development program:

> Now we work less with the community and give greater emphasis to the family
> and to the integration with other [agency] programs. We now focus more on
> family case management, although we still do some community work. Previously,
> community development focused more on common problems, streets and
> infrastructure. But, the problem is that people are no longer interested in getting
> involved. The community is not as relevant a unit as the family. That is where
> people's interests lie.

Certainly, the shift to the family development model was motivated by the need to

comply with the federal guidelines that promoted that model. Nevertheless, Mrs. Torres

links this change to the challenges of community organizing today in which 'community'

has lost some of its power to compel people to action. The reasons for the shift

notwithstanding, the implementation of the family development model refocuses the

program's effort from local infrastructure development, political organizing and resource

mobilization to family case management. At least one of ASPRI's community social

workers, María, expressed her frustration with having to combine case management with community organizing work. According to her, both types of work require a lot of preparation, intervention and follow up time. She claims that case management has taken away valuable time, hours and even days, from her community work.

ASPRI stands as a concrete example of a community action agency that has molded its operation to fit the conservative social service approach promoted by CSBG. Like CSBG, ASPRI retains the official language of poverty reduction, community-based participation and empowerment promotion in agency documents and promotional brochures. However, ASPRI´s mission, programs and service model define it as a grant managing, service delivery organization that functions much more as a safety net cushioning the symptoms of poverty than as a grassroots support organization committed to rattling the foundations of inequality. While it provides essential resources and services to impoverished communities, these are ultimately inadequate for the dismantling the structural barriers separating low-income communities from income security and wealth creation.

ASPRI as a Case Study in State-NGO collaborations

The above historical account of the U.S.'s and P.R.'s welfare state documented how state-NGO collaborations were common during the height of the welfare state era in the 1960s. However, it also showed that these collaborations have gained a new momentum since the 1980s as a result of the federal government's restructuring of its welfare state. That restructuring process has been driven by the "increasing separation of government from its output and the increasing role of nonprofit organizations in the delivery of public services" (Milward, 1994, p. 73). This process has resulted in the

state's gradual retrenchment from its role as a guarantor of rights and benefits to become a facilitator of services through private contracting. The preference for contracting with nongovernmental organizations was justified on the grounds that they constituted a "do-good sector" sustained by volunteers and "unencumbered and untainted by the politics of government or the greed of the market" (Fisher, 1997, p. 442). As such, this sector presented itself and was presented by welfare reformers as an alternative institutional space from which to make up for the state's limited administrative and financial capacity and the market's withdrawal from certain service provision areas due to their unprofitability.

As a federally funded agency, ASPRI stands as a case example of a nongovernmental agency carrying out U.S. anti-poverty policies. ASPRI's foundation in the early 1980s, its almost exclusive reliance on CSBG funds, and its over 25 year trajectory of uninterrupted services to impoverished populations in P.R. makes it an ideal candidate to examine some of the fundamental neoliberal premises supporting state-NGO collaborations. The analysis of the dynamics and results of this collaboration will focus on three key issues: Has contracting with ASPRI avoided the politicization of anti-poverty interventions? Is ASPRI less prone to corruption? Does ASPRI offer greater administrative and service-delivery flexibility through innovative initiatives?

Political Neutrality?

Critiques of the entanglement of party politics with state agencies, particularly service delivery ones, have served to legitimize state sub-contracting of NGOs. The public sector's susceptibility to party politics introduces rent seeking and vote maximizing considerations that often derail its pursuit of social goods and the delivery of

goods and services to impoverished population (Meyer, 1992, p. 1116). By contrast, the nongovernmental sector's distance from party politics helps it avoid these pitfalls (ibid.). ASPRI's history contradicts somewhat this argument. As mentioned above, ASPRI's foundation was linked to a political party. Even Mrs. Alicia Ramírez admits that the agency's origins are closely related to the PNP, an association from which she claims to have tried to distance the agency. Ironically, Mrs. Ramírez herself represents a continuation of that association since she served under the Romero Barceló administration as director of the Gericulture Commission, which protected the rights of the aging population.

Despite Mrs. Ramirez's claims to be working towards attaining political neutrality, ASPRI has yet to overcome its historical association with the PNP party. During my visits to community projects, veteran community leaders would assert that ASPRI has been historically linked to the PNP. Also, the Hon. Carlos Delgado, Vice-President of the PPD and current mayor of Isabela, a municipality in which ASPRI runs an adult day care center, commented during an interview that ASPRI was connected with the PNP political structure. His claim is supported by the fact that ASPRI's Board of Directors has historically limited its inclusion of public officials to political figures associated with the PNP, such as Guaynabo mayor Hector O'Neill, Salina's ex-mayor Basilio Baerga, Senator Lucy Arce and ex-Senator Nestor Aponte. Finally, of the four community workers with whom I conducted my fieldwork two openly expressed their political preference for the PNP.

ASPRI's close political association to the PNP led it to be involved in a bitter political dispute with the 1984-1988 PPD administration over the control of CSBG funds.

According to Ms. Elizabeth Pérez Chiques, Auxiliary Administrator of the Community Preventive Services office in the Department of Family, Families and Children Administration, which is the local state office charged with managing the CSBG grant, this dispute captures the deep politicization of CSBG funds and community action agencies in PR.:

> We are the pass through agency for CSBG funds and 90% of those funds are already assigned to the eligible entities, which are four in P.R.: the San Juan and Bayamón municipalities, ASPRI and INSEC. ASPRI receives 39% of the funds and INSEC 32%. I think San Juan receives 15% and Bayamón the rest. This is a historical formula. Other states have other types of formulas, but ours is a historical one…[The formula] was determined by means of a very contentious, political process at the federal, state and local level. One party created one organization; another party created the other. A very complicated process. A very, very contentious [process] between organizations, and between the organizations and the state. In other states, for example, there are over 50 eligible entities. Here we have only four. In other states, the funding formula varies depending on demographic changes, changes in poverty levels. Not here. I would like to move towards that, but I acknowledge that at the current moment…I began in this office less than two years ago and it is not politically viable for me to implement such changes.

Besides ratifying the political connections between ASPRI and INSEC and local political parties, Ms. Elizabeth Chiques implicates those connections in the determination of funding rates. Ms. Chiques argues that party politics, not sound policy criteria like demographic changes or poverty rate fluctuations, determine the funding rates of each organization. Moreover, her interest in reforming the funding allocation process has faced strong resistance and forced her to confront the weight of the political establishment that supports this status quo. Thus, ASPRI and CSBG funds are very much immersed in party politics. In that sense, ASPRI does not represent an alternative institutional space untainted by politics, but rather stands as one more space to which party politics has been transferred in P.R. In other words, ASPRI's foundation inaugurated a new battle ground

in which local parties could carry out their political struggles for the control of federal funds and their disbursement among impoverished populations.

Administrative and Service-Delivery Flexibility

As a nonprofit organization, ASPRI is not driven by a profit motive. However, ASPRI's mission, programming and administrative decisions are still subject to financial considerations, specifically its dependence on CSBG funds. ASPRI does have service contracts with a couple of municipal governments and regional consortiums, most of which have PNP connections: Bayamón-Comerío, Mayaguez-Las Marías, y Dorado-Manatí, and the municipalities of Vega Alta and Cayey.[48] Unsurprisingly, ASPRI has translated its deep historical connections with the PNP to service contracts. However, the bulk of its operating budget comes from CSBG funds, which in 2008 totaled $10.8 million.[49] Meyer contends that financial dependence carries with it important consequences for nongovernmental organizations, such as being "responsible only to their donors and commercial supporters rather than to the general public" (1992, p. 1117). ASPRI's dependence on CSBG funds obligates it to comply with the federal government's fiscal demands and subjects the agency to the political sea-saw of changing policy priorities resulting from the different ideological bearings of every new political administration.

ASPRI's dependence on the federal funds is reflected in the fact that its mission mirrors CSBG's main purpose and its programs are limited to those financed by CSBG funds. Moreover, the agency's strategic plan consists of a set of objectives and programs elaborated to meet CSBG's goals and prescriptions:

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[48] Cayey is the only exception as it has a PPD mayor. The consortiums have at least one PNP municipality.
[49] ASPRI's financial information was retrieved from the 990 form submitted to the IRS for 2008-2009 fiscal year.

Social Action of Puerto Rico, Inc., echoing CSBG's call for the reduction of the causes and effects of poverty, has developed the administrative and geographical structures necessary to work at firm pace towards the fulfillment of the national goals by means of a strategic plan designed through great organizational challenges to reach low-income people and families. (Acción Social, 2006, p. 1, my translation)

ASPRI's strategic plan is limited to CSBG compliance activities. For example, the agency's 2006-2008 Action Plan consisted of a detailed outline of six national goals, which were:

Table IV.I. National Goals of the Community Services Block Grant Program	
Goal 1	Low-income people become more self-sufficient (self-sufficiency)
Goal 2	The conditions in which low-income people live are improved (community revitalization)
Goal 3	Low-income people own a stake in their community
Goal 4	Partnerships among supporters and providers of services to low-income people are achieved.
Goal 5	Agencies increase their capacity to achieve results
Goal 6	Low-income people, especially vulnerable populations, achieve their potential by strengthening family and other supportive systems.(family stability)

For each goal, ASPRI developed a set of performance indicators, institutional strategies and activities, and outcome measurements, which stood for the totality of activities and programs to be carried out by the agency those two years.

These national goals were not developed by ASPRI nor are they specific to Puerto Rico's national context. These national goals were developed in 1994 by the CSBG monitoring and evaluation committee, with input from the Office of Community Services and the Department of Health and Human Resources, in order to comply with the Government Performance and Results Act (GPRA) of 1993, which imposed strict guidelines for the fiscal monitoring of all federally-funded programs (ibid.). The CSBG

legislation was amended in 1994 to include the above six national goals as well as their performance targets and outcome measures. In order to measure their success implementing these goals, CAAs were required to integrate the use of the Results-Oriented Management and Accountability (ROMA) system, a tool developed to track and evaluate whether CAAs are meeting the results they intend to produce (ibid.).

Both GPRA and ROMA represent an important shift in the way the federal government financed and administered its diverse set of programs. According to Callahan and Holzer (1999), GPRA and ROMA were part of President Clinton's government reforms which attempted to redress the growing critiques of government inefficiency, over-spending and lack of accountability. In his attempt to reinvent government, President Clinton promoted a series of reforms, among which was the call to move the federal government away from compliance- to results-based assessments. This shift was part of a new phase of neoliberal restructuring in which the previous welfare state's reliance on human conduct experts to determine a program's need or efficacy was substituted with accounting and financial considerations. In his characterization of advanced liberal democracies, Nikolas Rose (1996) makes explicit mention of this shift:

> The powers once accorded to positive knowledge of human conduct are to be transferred to the calculative regimes of accounting and financial management. And the enclosures of expertise are to be penetrated through a range of new techniques for exercising critical scrutiny over authority—budget discipline, accountancy and audit being three of the most salient. (p. 54)

Thus, GPRA and ROMA are examples of neoliberal government reform efforts during the early 1990s that emphasized cost-efficiency and budgetary considerations over process and human conduct expertise.

For ASPRI, as for all CAAs, this shift in government accountability added another set of guidelines with which they had to comply. These goals as well as ROMA's evaluation added additional tasks at all levels of the organization, from greater field documentation to additional administrative reports. Moreover, they also specified and circumscribed ASPRI's possible field of action. This generated some confusion among agency workers, who in 2008 were still struggling to determine the limits of what is possible under these guidelines. For example, Claribel, one of ASPRI's community workers, was constantly struggling with ROMA. During one of our visits to the El Seco community in Mayagüez, Milagros, the community leader, told Claribel that local children and youth had approached her asking for workshops. Claribel responded by saying she would gladly give those workshops, but she would have to consult with her supervisor. She explained that the agency requires her to offer workshops that result in measurable outcomes, which means she cannot deliver just any workshop.

Later, in an aside, Claribel told me that ever since the agency has been emphasizing the application of ROMA she no longer knows what workshops to give and which ones do not qualify. She recounted how not long ago she approached one of the office supervisors, Mr. Fransisco Pereira, and told him she was assisting a family with a problem with pigeon excrement in their roof. He told her that had nothing to do with ROMA; that is, she cannot show any tangible change in the client as a result of that intervention. After that, she desisted from helping that family.

ASPRI's strategic plan and actual field practices are geared specifically to comply with CSBG's demands, specifically its national goals and ROMA requirements. Mrs. Alicia Ramírez and Mrs. María Elena Rivera, ASPRI's Director and Sub-Director,

confirmed this during an interview when they acknowledged that the agency does not have any other goals or objectives beyond those prescribed by CSBG. In other words, ASPRI does not have an alternative mission based on its own, or its client's, aspirations.

Scholars like John Clark (1995) argue that NGOs have a greater capacity for innovation and experimentation (p. 594). Likewise, Paromita Sanyal's (2006) research on capacity-building and intermediary NGOs leads her to conclude that NGOs are more locally responsive and flexible (p. 74). However, ASPRI's over-determination by CSBG's administrative and programmatic requirements belies the contention that nongovernmental organizations have greater administrative flexibility than state agencies or that they have a superior ability to innovate in their service delivery areas. Although the six national goals are broad enough to allow local variations in the programs implemented, ASPRI can only use federally-recognized service models and has to discard implementing programs whose outcomes cannot be translated into statistical results. Ironically, ASPRI's potential administrative and programmatic innovations are curtailed by the need to meet the prescribed federal requirements. Moreover, ASPRI's bureaucratic processes mirror CSBG's yearly grant requirements: elaboration of grant proposal, compliance with trimester evaluations and yearly state monitoring visits. These administrative exercises are geared towards securing ASPRI's continued CSBG eligibility. Interestingly, ASPRI does not pursue similar accountability efforts with its clients and/or population served.

As a case example of state-NGO collaborations, ASPRI undermines the claim that nongovernmental organizations represent an alternative institutional space to state agencies. Instead, ASPRI functions as an appendage of the state, having played an

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instrumental role in the neoliberal agenda of reforming the federal welfare system. As an instrument of social adjustment, ASPRI translated both President Reagan's conservative welfare reform and President Clinton's fiscal accountability measures into concrete administrative processes and program reforms that changed the procedural requirements and services offered to impoverished populations. Moreover, ASPRI's collaboration with the federal government is predicated not on its innovative programs and flexible administrative structure, but rather on its capacity to deliver the services and accountability measures demanded by the federal government. In that sense, ASPRI also questions the critiques of neoliberalism which posit that the proliferation of NGOs has undermined the authority and/or relevance of the state. Instead, as Aradhana Sharma has noted for NGOs in India, these nonstate actors have increasingly found themselves entangled "within the webs of governance as instruments and not just targets of rule" (Sharma, 2006, p. 78). In ASPRI's case, the federal government retains its authority in this policy area through a series of legal specifications: national objectives, evaluation measures and acceptable service models. The federal government might have downsized since the 1980s, but its authority was not completely transferred.

NGO Corruption

The federal and state governments' tightened fiscal oversight enforced during the Clinton administration led to a corruption investigation that uncovered a number of embezzlement schemes by various ASPRI administrators. An audit report submitted by P.R.'s government accounting inspector found that between 1990 and 1995 ASPRI administrators "deprived ASPRI of the timely use of [CSBG funds] for the purposes for which they were assigned, which were, among others, the offering of services to agency

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clients, such as elder populations and low-income people" (Oficina del Contralor de Puerto Rico, 2001, p. 9, my translation). The principle administrators signaled by this report were Mrs. Flor de María Cacho, ASPRI's Executive Director; Mr. Waldermar Pérez, DIVEDCO's former Executive Director and by then ASPRI's Sub-Director; Mr. Catalino Soto, ASPRI's legal advisor; Mrs. Paulina Colón, ASPRI's Personnel Supervisor; and Mr. Juan de la Torre Sánchez, ASPRI's Internal Auditor.

According to the audit report, in 1988 Mrs. Cacho and Mr. Waldermar Pérez incorporated another nonprofit organization, the Center for Education and Community Services, Inc. (CECSI), without securing the consent of the agency's Board of Director or informing the Department of Family, which manages the CSBG grant (ibid.). Mrs. Cacho and Mr. Pérez used CECSI as a front to carry out a series of embezzlement and fund misappropriation transactions that cost ASPRI and their clients millions of dollars. One of the schemes consisted of paying CECSI inflated prices for food used by ASPRI's served population:

> In the case of food purchases, the employees that carried out these tasks in the agency acquired these goods from various providers. Two of these employees indicated that from the bills submitted by those providers they prepared other bills under CECSI (subsequently "Food Distributor") to give the appearance that this latter agency was the one selling food to ASPRI. Also, they indicated that, per the Executive Director's instructions, they were to add between 20 and 30 percent to the amount billed by the providers. The bills were prepared outside of their regular work hours, in the house of one of ASPRI's employees who was responsible for buying the food. One of the employees told us that he received a monthly compensation from CECSI that fluctuated between $150 and $300 for carrying out those tasks. According to ASPRI's checks registry, between October of 1990 and September of 1995, the agency paid CESCI $1,851,003 for the alleged purchases. (ibid., p. 6, my translation).

Mrs. Cacho and Mr. Pérez used a similar scheme to purchase medical supplies for ASPRI's clients. The money diverted to CESCI was used by Mrs. Cacho and Mr. Pérez

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to purchase bank certificates, which generated interests. These certificates and their interests were used by ASPRI's administrators to get loans to cover ASPRI's overdrafts and as collateral for credit lines for CESCI. More significantly, these funds were used for personal gains, such as paying of personal debts, buying cars, acquiring real estate properties, clothing, perfumes and vacation trips (ibid., p. 8).

As a result of these and other irregularities identified by both state and federal investigations, on July 16, 1997 a Federal Grand Jury found probable cause to accuse Mrs. Cacho and Mr. Pérez of the following five charges (ibid., pp. 6-7):

- Count One - Conspiracy to Commit Theft from a Program Receiving Federal Funds, 18 USC Section 371.

- Count Two - Theft from a Program Receiving Federal Funds, 18 USC sections 666(a)(1)(A) and 2.

- Count Three - False Statement on an Application for a Bank Loan, 18 USC Section 1014.

- Count Four - Frauds and Swindles, 18 USC Section 1341.

- Count Five - Criminal Forfeiture, 18 USC sections 982(a)(2)(A) and 982(a)(4).

In August of 2000, after a four month trial, Mrs. Cacho and Mr. Pérez were found guilty of counts one, two, four and five, while Mrs. Cacho was also found guilty of count three. In total, Mrs. Cacho and Mr. Pérez were found to have embezzled close to $5.8 million in federal aid money earmarked for food and shelter for the elderly and the homeless population. Both Mrs. Cacho and Mr. Pérez served prison time for their corruption schemes.

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The audit report also faulted ASPRI's Board of Directors and the Department of Family for failing to monitor and evaluate ASPRI's financial and administrative operations. In the case of the Board of Directors, the audit report found the following:

> The absence of periodic meetings impeded the members of the board from evaluating the performance of ASPRI's administrators and familiarizing themselves with their operations. On the other hand, the presence of the Legal Advisor in the Board's meeting as acting President undermined the credibility and objectivity of the work realized by said body, since [the Legal Advisor] was an agency official that actively participated in the decision-making process of the work realized [by the agency]. (ibid., p. 13, my translation).

Paradoxically, José Calderón, the president of the Board of Directors, kept his post throughout the whole legal ordeal and to this day continues to preside over the Board.

Mrs. Cacho resigned her position as ASPRI's Executive Director on August 18, 2000. ASPRI went through a short period of court-mandated syndication in a re-structuring phase that ended in 2001 with the appointment of Mrs. Alicia Ramírez as the agency's new Executive Director. Under Mrs. Ramírez, ASPRI has complied with all federal requirements and has slowly regained the confidence of both state and federal agencies. During my interviews with Mrs. Elizabeth Chiques and Yolanda González, the Department of Family's program evaluator assigned to ASPRI, both expressed that ASPRI had overcome its past corruption scandal and was currently a compliant organization, which met all of the agency's monitoring requirements.

The personal failures of ASPRI's administrators should not be used to characterize the whole nongovernmental sector. However, ASPRI's corruption scandal demonstrates that despite being managed by a group of highly educated professionals, nongovernmental organizations are not immune to embezzlement schemes or the misappropriation of funds. This case problematizes the nongovernmental sector's do

good image, supported as it is by the volunteerism and social commitment of the people who form part of the sector. ASPRI's financial scandal actually fit the general profile adopted by Puerto Rico's government accounting inspector in a publication on fraud in nonprofit organizations (Oficina del Contralor, 2005, pp. 1-2):

> All organizations, public, private or from the third sector, are vulnerable to acts of fraud and corruption by some of its members or clients. Nonprofit organizations have a determinate set of characteristics that make them even more vulnerable. Among them, we can mention:
> - An atmosphere of extreme confidence due to the labor they carry out
> - Excesive control of the organization by the founder, a director or a specific contributor
> - The absence of personnel with financial experience in the board of directores
> - The frequent use of reciprocal transactions (receiving donations without anything in exchange which makes it easier to appropriate)
> - Limited funds assigned to operational and accounting areas
> - Job security is tied to the existence of specific programs or the granting of solicited funds

ASPRI met many of these conditions. As a well-known NGO associated with adult day care and community development, ASPRI would be the last place in the general accounting inspector's office would look for fraud and corruption. Moreover, Mrs. Cacho, as founder and director, exercised unfettered control over ASPRI that was not questioned by the board.

The claim that NGOs are more trustworthy and/or impervious to corruption than public agencies because they are mission-driven organizations not motivated by profit-seeking interests is based on a spurious assumption. At the very least, ASPRI's experience with corruption demonstrates that the state and other funding agencies need to establish as strict financial monitoring procedures as if they were dealing with any public agency. Moreover, ASPRI's case example further undermines the uncritical acceptance of the nongovernmental sector as an alternative, do-good sector that would help the state

avoid the politicization of services, public-fund embezzlements and ineffective bureaucracy.

Conclusion

Claudio Giomi (2001) characterizes our current political era as one which has witnessed a quantitative and qualitative change in the manner in which states, markets and the nongovernmental sector are articulated, especially in relation to national and international funding of development projects. This chapter has attempted to capture the neoliberal character of that change in the U.S. and P.R. through the analysis of an anti-poverty program, CSBG, and a nongovernmental organization, ASPRI. While ASPRI's analysis supports Giomi's thesis, it also tempers its emphasis on the rupture between eras by documenting important continuities, such as mission statements, continued funding support and sustained collaborations between the state and nongovernmental agencies. These continuities are noteworthy because they give historical depth to the policies and models shaping current participatory, community-based initiatives and, more importantly, to state funding of development NGOs with an anti-poverty mission. Unfortunately, some research on development NGOs and their role in the current neoliberal policy context have emphasized the recent prominence of state-NGOs relations without properly documenting previous historical linkages. As Lesley Gill (1997) demonstrated in her study of development NGOs in Bolivia, tracing these historical linkages shifts the focus from characterizing the 'newness' of state-NGOs relations to analyzing their transformation across changing political eras.

The acknowledgement of continuities does not imply that things remained the same. CSBG's and ASPRI's analysis showed how decades-old mission statements,

participatory initiatives and state-NGO collaborations were re-orientated to acquire a new relevance in light of important political changes. Beyond tracing ruptures and continuities, this chapter tried to demonstrate that policy contexts and party politics matter for the kinds of social welfare interventions that are possible at any given time and in any organizational context. The federal policy changes and funding shifts that gave rise to CSBG and led to ASPRI's foundation were politically motivated by the conservative, anti-welfare state and pro-market ideology of the Reagan administration, which has persisted, albeit in modified forms, in U.S. policy circles even under Democratic administrations like the Clinton adminstration. This policy orientation played a significant role in determining the service-oriented character of ASPRI's anti-poverty programs and their limited social change potential.

ASPRI also become a contested institutional site in which Puerto Rican political parties tried to maintain or contest control of federal funds designated for impoverished island residents. ASPRI's susceptibility to local political interests questions the widespread notion that nongovernmental organizations represent an associational field "of structured citizen action outside the bounderies of the market and the state" (Salamon, 2002, p. 11). Contrary to this external or oppositional view of the nongovernmental sector, ASPRI history exposed the nongovernmental sector as a deeply political sphere in which ruling parties pursue their ideological work (Laclau & Mouffe, 1985; Schuller, 2007). In ASPRI's case, local political parties envisioned the opportunity of increasing their political appeal among impoverished communities by controlling the access to and distribution of services and resources.

Finally, reforms of the welfare state and international development have legitimated the sub-contracting of NGOs by claiming that these organizations reduce corruption, avoid politicizing services and offer greater administrative and service-delivery flexibility. The World Bank's Participation Sourcebook, for example, identifies a number of strengths that makes local NGOs more suitable development intermediaries than states. Among those strengths, they list their ability to innovate and adapt and their cost-effectiveness.[50] Likewise, John Clark (1995) lists the capacity for innovation and experimentation as one of the potential contributions that make development NGOs important actors that can respond to the failures of the public and private sector (p. 594). ASPRI's regretful corruption scandal and their strict submission to CSBG's and the federal government's administrative and fiscal demands undermine any claim it might have had to being a more suitable alternative to the Puerto Rican state. Specifically, its strict accountability to CSBG's mission, objectives and evaluation models, such as ROMA, saps away any innovative potential ASPRI might have.

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[50] The World Bank Participation Sourcebook. http://worldbank.org/wbi/sourcebook/sb0404t.htm (accessed August 12, 2007).

Chapter V

The Practices of Grassroots Support:

Social Action of Puerto Rico, Inc.'s Community Development Program

Introduction

> *We arrange for them to function by themselves. We arrive, lend them a helping hand and later they continue by themselves. [We have done that] in Cabo Rojo, Puerto Real; in the Sapo community in Fajardo, where we are working right now. We are also in Corozal. There are ten community offices that are developing, working in those communities and have them functioning by themselves. We offer them help. We are the liaison between government agencies and them [communities]. We help them create their boards, get them incorporated [nonprofit status], and then we leave them by themselves. What we want is for them to be self-sufficient. If we have to help them establish a business, we help them, so they can have their own business. We get them resources from government agencies…*

> Alicia Ramírez, Executive Director
> Social Action of Puerto Rico, Inc.
> Personal Interview, May 22, 2008

In the opening quote, Alicia Ramírez establishes a counterpoint between 'we' and 'them' that captures the dynamics of the form of assistance referred to in this study as grassroots support: a professional, development NGO offering assistance to community-based groups. She also provides a general sketch of the work that gives substance to this form of support. According to her, Social Action of Puerto Rico, Inc. (ASPRI) assists communities in the creation of boards and helps to legally incorporate them. They serve as liaisons with government agencies and facilitate the transfer of resources from such agencies to communities. They invest human and financial resources to help

communities establish businesses. In sum, ASPRI offers a helping hand to communities with the purpose of empowering them to become self-sufficient.

Alicia Ramirez's general description of ASPRI's grassroots support work presents a technically sound approach to community development, one built on concepts and methods currently understood to be at the forefront of anti-poverty work. Besides colloquially stating the program's mission and activities, Ramirez's statement reproduces ideas and approaches that have become common sense as a result of the popularity of participatory development models and neoliberal anti-poverty initiatives in Puerto Rico and elsewhere, such as self-sufficiency promotion. Thus, Ramírez's presentation of her agency's community development program serves not only to describe its work, but also to legitimize it in light of current dominant notions about how to end poverty and promote social justice.

My research, however, attempts to go beyond the analysis offered in chapter IV on CSBG's discursive coherence and the claims of ASPRI's grassroots support model. It also seeks to offer much more than just a theoretical characterization of the agency and its empowerment and self-sufficiency aims as instruments of the neoliberal safety nets available in the U.S. and P.R. While that theoretical analysis and critique is necessary and certainly illuminating, it is also insufficient to capture the actual effects of ASPRI's interventions among impoverished communities. The impact and effects of grassroots support work can be fully grasped only through the analysis of the social practices through which it is articulated and becomes a reality in the field.

This chapter, therefore, pursues an ethnographic study of the support practices generated by the model of assistance sketched out briefly in the opening quote. The

emphasis on practice is strategic and builds on David Mosse's (2004) distinction between development policy/model level and intervention practices in the field. This distinction serves to highlight the gap between the conceptual formulations of the agency's 'empowerment' and 'community self-sufficiency' model and its actual accomplishments in moments of implementation. According to Mosse, examining the actual accomplishments of development interventions, such as grassroots support practices, requires giving careful consideration to moments of practice, specifically the "political contests, the feigned compliance, the compromises and contingencies" that transform the practice of grassroots support into a complex political arena (ibid., p. 645). Thus, this chapter offers a detailed study of the politics of grassroots support by analyzing the relationship between the political and socio-economic factors and contingencies that frame the field of intervention as well as the actual performance of ASPRI's community workers with community members as they pursue their grassroots support activities.

Finally, this line of research extends beyond any evaluative stance; that is, assessing whether the program design was effectively implemented. Assessing program performance entails measuring and quantifying pre-established thresholds, which determine the success or failure of an intervention. However, the focus on the success or failure of an intervention often exclude process evaluations and offer little insight into what the intervention did accomplish beyond the stated evaluation measueres (Schuller, 2007, p. 68). Thus, my goal is to research not whether, but *how* development works, specifically grassroots support. This latter research goal is premised on the notion that development practices produce effects and outcomes that are not necessarily determined

by policy goals or intervention designs, regardless of whether these are informed by radical, progressive or neoliberal political orientations.

Social Action of Puerto Rico, Inc.'s Community Development Program

ASPRI formally established its community development program in 2003, although it has carried out community initiatives since its inception in 1982. Its creation formed part of a series of reforms introduced by Alicia Ramírez when she became ASPRI's Executive Director in 2001. Prior to 2003 and under a previous director, ASPRI's work focused primarily on administrating adult day care centers, funding emergency assistance programs and running an employment assistance/job training program. A significant part of Ramírez's reformist agenda consisted in giving greater emphasis to community-based programming, which is the main purpose of the CSBG funds that finance the agency's operation. During Ramírez's initial visits in 2002-2003 to the Office of Community Services in Washington, D.C., the federal office responsible for administrating CSBG funds, it was suggested that she should re-focus ASPRI's programming towards community initiatives in order to align it more closely to CSBG's mission. Thus, the community development program was part of a series of reforms enacted by Ramírez, but motivated by the federal government's demand that the agency's programming adhere to the spirit of the CSBG legislation.

Interestingly, the agency did not use or consult existent community development or grassroots support models in the design of its program. Instead, ASPRI's administrators chose to develop their own program based on the recommendations offered by a group of employees that, according to Alicia Ramírez, had vast experience in the field of

community development.[51] The recommendations offered by this group were molded into the agency's community development program under the supervision of Maria Elena Rivera, ASPRI's Sub-Director. Eventually, the agency prepared a document outlining the program's general guidelines, in which the program was charged with the following mission:

> Develop an innovative program organized throughout the island in communities classified as falling below the poverty line. The program will attend to families in such a way that individuals, the family nucleus and the general community may receive the support necessary from Social Action of Puerto Rico, Inc. to develop in the areas of self-sufficiency, family stability and community integration. (Acción Social, 2006, my translation)

In the same document, this mission was further specified in a series of well-defined objectives:

- Identify low-income communities that have been marginalized and have little or no access to the services to which everyone has a right as citizens and human beings.
- Achieve the integration of the community and incorporate public agencies and private enterprise as facilitators in the development process.
- Develop activities that help increase the self-esteem and improve the values and life styles of families.
- Contribute to the development of self-sufficient and productive individuals.
- Follow up on the progress made by individuals, families and community groups.

Besides defining the mission and objectives, the program's guidelines detail the structure and logistics of the program. The program divides the island into thirteen regions, each of which covers an average of six municipalities. Each zone has several community technician assigned to it that are responsible for developing three

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[51] Besides the Executive Director and María Elena Rivera, the agency's Sub-Director, the core group of employees that brainstormed the ideas that forged the agency's community development model included Edel González, who currently heads the tutoring program; Ehida Torres, who in 2008 became the new director of the community development program; Aramis Rodríguez, who was the Coordinator of the Mayaguez Regional Office; and Mr. Feliberti, who was the original Coordinator of the Mayaguez Regional Office, but by 2008 was no longer working with the agency. Personal interview, Alicia Ramírez, May 22, 2008.

communities per municipality. In 2008, ASPRI's community development program employed thirty-eight technicians.[52]

ASPRI's community development program was designed to be implemented in three phases during a two year span. The first phase is dedicated primarily to the process of organizing the community and ideally should last six months. During this phase, ASPRI's community workers select a community; carry out the community's needs assessment; mobilize community members through visits and flyers; identify local leaders and resources; and establish initial contacts with public and private agencies (ibid.). Once that preliminary work is done, ASPRI enters the second phase in which it carries out the grassroots support initiatives deemed necessary to develop the community. This phase begins with the community workers negotiating with the community the development of an intervention plan that defines the goals and objectives to be pursued, the strategies and activities to be implemented, the resources required, and the appropriate evaluation plan. For approximately six months, ASPRI community workers help build local institutions, such as community boards[53]; offer training and capacity-building workshops; lobby and establish collaborative agreements with public and private agencies to invest in local infrastructure; promote self-employment initiatives; develop recreational opportunities for the different age and social groups; and attend to health and other emergency situations in the community. The work carried out during this phase is

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[52] This model underwent two significant modifications during the 2008-2009 calendar year. First, the agency decided to expand the services offered at its adult day care centers to include the community at large. This meant that the responsibility for developing communities was transferred from the regional offices to the social worker employed in the center. This change brought about a second one, which was the reduction of community technician's work to only one municipality.

[53] Community boards are institutional spaces created to help organize residents and administer community initiatives. Community boards will be discussed in greater detail in this chapter in the sub-section entitled, *Phase #2: Supporting Grassroots Development, B. Practice #2: Institution-Building – Community Boards.*

evaluated and tracked during the third and final phase. In this follow-up phase, which lasts a year, the community worker visits the community to offer support and assistance, but gradually phases-out that support as the community solidifies its autonomy and self-sufficient status.

ASPRI's Community Development Model as a System of Representation

Even though ASPRI's community development model was the result of an internal brainstorming exercise carried out by agency employees, it embodies some of the general principles of participatory development and grassroots support, as outlined in chapter 2. As articulated in its mission statement and program objectives, the model is premised on assisting impoverished communities through the provision of a series of support services. The support services proposed reflect a commitment to building the human capital of impoverished communities, such as capacity-building workshops and local leadership training. Moreover, the model includes the promotion of local economic initiatives, such as self-employment, which demonstrates an implicit awareness that overcoming poverty requires the generation of new economic activities. Furthermore, the model calls for ASPRI to function as an intermediary between public and private agencies and community groups. The agency assumes the challenge of mobilizing and/or aggregating public and private resources to benefit marginalized communities. Finally, the model aspires to produce self-sufficient individuals and communities. It aims to offer resources and create new opportunities in order facilitate the emergence of individuals and communities groups that can successfully integrate into the current political and economic system.

ASPRI's model, then, exemplifies what I characterized as participatory development's politics of inclusion, which is the notion of redressing the flaws of the current economic and political system through a greater involvement of people in the development process. Specifically, its capacity-building and leadership training propositions reflect a revalorization of the role of human capital in development. The objective of investing in human capital extends beyond the realization of a particular community project. It is part of the greater goal of substituting the politics of patronage, which has defined the conditions under which politics is possible for many impoverished communities, with the politics of citizenship, in which demand rights and generate new possibilities for political and economic activities. Finally, the emphasis on self-employment denotes the model's commitment to the integration of marginalized populations into economically productive activities and the active construction of their individual and communal wellbeing.

The parallels between ASPRI's model and participatory development were not haphazardly achieved. These parallels reflect the imposing presence of the principles of participatory development in the field of community development today in P.R., as elsewhere in the world. The fact that it was the result of a brainstorming exercise rather than an exhaustive literature review process or a prolonged evaluation of existent models furthers the contention that the principles of participatory development have entrenched themselves as common sense ideas and constitute the dominant hegemonic system of thought in this field today.

Nevertheless, it must not be overlooked that ASPRI developed its model in response to demands made by its main funder and administrative interlocutor: CSBG. In

fact, ASPRI's model reflects very explicitly CSBG's three mayor principles (Acción Social, 2006, my translation):

- Strengthen and coordinate local efforts to increase the opportunities for low income families to become self-sufficient
- Improve and revitalize communities through an injection of resources that result in the promotion of initiatives and projects that help reduce poverty
- Ensure the maximum feasible participation of low income community residents in the process of attending to their needs and problems.

As these objectives suggest, CSBG funds are conceived as a form of assistance to improve and develop the social and material conditions of impoverished communities through the direct involvement of residents. ASPRI's model exhibits strong similarities with the CSBG's objectives, which seems like an obvious or expected relationship since CSBG not only funds ASPRI's programs, but offers strict guidelines. The group charged with elaborating the program unsurprisingly ended up offering a series of recommendations that resulted in the formulation of a program tailored to CSBG's explicit mission. The reciprocities between the two support Mosse's (2004) contention that development models function to legitimate development agencies before their funders and validate higher level policy prescriptions and goals. In other words, the ideas and principles used to build and give consistency to ASPRI's community development model were chosen having CSBG's mission and guidelines as the primary referent, not necessarily field practice requirements. Therefore, ASPRI's model constitutes a system of representation that is best interpreted and decoded in relation to the public policies and funding prescriptions upon which its very existence depends. To put it in simpler terms, the model was designed to comply with CSBG and legitimate ASPRI's continued support by this federal program, rather than by best practices considerations or lessons learned from the field.

Finally, the program's mission and objectives conveys the ambiguities embedded in CSBG and demonstrated by CAAs, which were discussed in the previous chapter. There is a tendency in the agency's model to reduce CSBG's anti-poverty discourse to individual or personal reforms that do very little to challenge systemic inequalities. For example, the program's repeated emphasis, both in its mission statement and objectives, on family stability and community integration betrays a functionalist view of society that posits problems, such as poverty, unemployment and public and private disinvestment, as disruptions of an otherwise well-designed socio-economic system. Moreover, it is not clear whether the goal of achieving an integrated community entails a previous disruption of existent unequal relations and processes and the subsequent establishment of a new form of integration. Without that disruption, the goals of family stability and community integration can serve to sideline the need for deeper changes in both social arenas.

A couple of the model's objectives emphasize very clearly interventions that result in individual and family-level reforms:

- Develop activities that help increase the self-esteem and improve the values and life styles of families.
- Contribute to the development of self-sufficient and productive individuals.

Contending with poverty certainly requires attending to personal situations that reproduce marginalization, dependence and economic inequalities. Yet, the emphasis on reforming self-esteem, family life-styles and the promotion of individual productivity merges with neoliberal trends in which, as Amelisse De Jesús Dávila (2008) has argued, impoverished populations are increasingly asked to reform their attitudes and gain new skills in order to assume responsibility for overcoming a problem generated by a complex chain of political and economic policies, structures and opportunities of which they are but one

link. In other words, these initiatives seem to divert the model from a clear emphasis on poverty-reduction through income redistribution and reformed political spaces of action for impoverished populations. Thus, ASPRI's community development model exhibits some of the conceptual contradictions that have led some scholars to critique participatory development as tool of neoliberal politics.

Nonetheless, regardless of how ASPRI's model may be conceptually analyzed and critiqued, the challenge lies in determining how it translates into a set of field practices, which, at the end of the day, are the ones responsible for generating a series of effects in world.

The Ethnographic Research Agenda

My research of ASPRI's community development was conducted between March and September of 2008. Since doing an ethnographic study of the entire national program seemed unfeasible, I chose to focus on one of ASPRI's regional offices. After consulting with ASPRI's administrators, I decided to locate myself in the Mayagüez Regional Community Services Office. I chose this office because it followed ASPRI's general model discussed above and carried out all of ASPRI's programs, including the community development program. Besides being representative of ASPRI's mission and programming, the Mayagüez office serviced a number of rural municipalities with documented high poverty rates, such as Añasco, Moca, Las Marias and Maricao, which was a key component of my research. The office also served impoverished communities in Mayagüez, Rincón, Hormigueros and San German.

During my research, the community development program had four employees assigned to it. Two employees who held bachelor's in social work and had their social

work license occupied the position of *community technician*. The other two, who did not hold a professional degree in social work, occupied the position of *community auxiliary*. Nevertheless, their educational differences were not related to different workloads or field tasks. Community technicians and auxiliaries were assigned a similar work load. They were assigned to two municipalities, were required to work at least one community in each, and carried out similar tasks in the field.

During the seven month research period, I analyzed the available documentation of past and on-going community projects to learn about the communities being impacted, and examine the work being carried out as well as the existent documentation of that work. Each community had its own file, which was created, managed and updated by the community worker in charge. I also shadowed the community technicians and auxiliaries during their visits to communities, government offices and private organizations. I shadowed one worker per week, which meant that I worked with all of the community workers during a month's cycle, unless one of them went on vacation or was assigned to another duty. In that case, I would spend two weeks with one of the community workers. I chose this method because it followed the logic of the community worker's schedule: they would work one community per week. This allowed me an extended and continuous research period with each community worker and offered me the opportunity to get to know in some depth specific communities. However, it also meant I did not visit all of the communities being intervened. In all, I had the opportunity to visit regularly seven communities in seven different municipalities throughout my research.[54]

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[54] Hormigueros was the only municipality in which I did not visit a community.

The bulk of my ethnographic research consisted of observing and participating in all of the activities in which the community worker engaged in during their week long work with a specific community. I would arrive at the Mayagüez regional office every morning by 8:00 a.m. or 8:30 a.m. and would accompany the community worker as she prepared for the day's work. We would leave the office by 9:30 a.m. for the community or relevant government offices riding in their cars. Car rides afforded me valuable time for talking with and interviewing community workers about a number of issues, including their communities, its residents, the municipal government, their jobs, ASPRI and even contemporary social and political issues. It was during these car rides that I got to know each community worker in some depth. I would accompany the community worker throughout the day and return to the office with them by 5:00 p.m.

Shadowing community workers throughout their daily routines gave me the opportunity to observe and participate in all aspects of the community development work. I was present for the sampling and selection of 2 new communities, observed the needs assessment of five communities, and participated in the promotion of countless community meetings, by handing out flyers and visiting houses. I attended community meetings with residents, including board meetings and workshops in which ASPRI brought external resources to provide assistance to the community on a specific issue related to their development project. I observed and participated in special community events, like the election of a community board and a month long summer camp. Finally, I entered the homes of community leaders and observed as they negotiated the terms of ASPRI's assistance and received helped coordinating their community events.

Outside of the community, shadowing community workers allowed me to assist meetings with government officials during which ASPRI's personnel would mediate between the community and government resources. I was present for meetings with two mayors and one vice-mayor as well as countless meeting with directors of state and municipal agencies, such as the Office of Citizen Assistance, the Department of Public Works, the Department of Housing, and the Department of Education. I also was present for a meeing with the Executive Director of another nongovernmental organization, EduDeportes, from which ASPRI secured assistance for their summer camp. Finally, I visited the WIA offices (Worker's Investment Act), a federal program with which ASPRI collaborated as part of their employment-seeking program.

Besides my fieldwork with community workers, I also conducted a series of in-depth interviews to gather information about the history and current situation of ASPRI and its community development program. In all, I conducted a total of 21 in-depth interview most notably with Alicia Ramirez, Executive Director; Maria Elena Rivera, Sub-Director, Ehida Torres, National Coordinator of the Community Development Program; Francisco Pereira, Program Evaluator. I also interviewed all four community workers, both formally and informally. Moreover, I interviewed community leaders, government officials and other relevant professionals to obtain their perspective and evaluation of ASPRI's community development program and of its social change potential. I interviewed leaders from four communities, two mayors, the personnel from the Department of Family responsible for supervising ASPRI's CSBG funds, the Director of the Faith-based Initiatives Office, who advises the Governor on issues related to the

nongovernmental sector, and the editor of the now defunct Community Section of Puerto Rico's main newspaper, El Nuevo Día.

As with most qualitative research, my research was limited by the scope of activities and events in which I could participate. My research focuses on one of ASPRI's regional offices, and, therefore, does not analyze the totality of ASPRI's activities under its national community development program. Moreover, I was not privy to all of the conversations, negotiations, meetings and activities carried out by the four community workers throughout my research, which limits my full understanding of events. Lastly, ASPRI's work in most communities had begun before I arrived and continued after I left. Thus, my research did not capture the totality of their effort and magnitude of its impact from start to finish.

The Practice of Grassroots Support

What is the relationship between ASPRI's community development model analyzed above and the actual grassroots support work that takes place in specific communities? How do CSBG's mission and prescriptions influence the concrete interventions carried out by ASPRI's community workers? Are the principles of participatory developments transferred to the field as a set of activities and practices that determine the nature of ASPRI's work at the community level? Or, does the field confront community workers with its own socio-political logic that imposes repeated negotiations and adjustments that render sterile much of the discursive debates about the theoretical consistency and orientation of ASPRI's community development model?

The objectives, structure and sequential logic of ASPRI's community development program certainly prescribe definite forms in which community workers

should relate to low income community residents, their needs and problems. Yet, Mosse (2004) argued, these forms often succumb to the social and political complexities of the field in which the work of grassroots support is inserted. Thus, practice presents serious challenges not only to models and policies, but also to grassroots support work in general as an effective form of promoting social change. This section will subject to ethnographic scrutiny several of the activities contained in the different phases of the community development model.

Phase #1: Organizing Communities for Grassroots Support
A. Practice#1: Selecting a community

ASPRI's Strategic Plan and Program Guidelines are comprehensive documents covering almost every detail relevant to the organization's mission and structure. However, these documents have one glaring oversight: they do not include the agency's working definition of community. As argued in the introduction, community is a very ambiguous term that, nonetheless, circulates under the guise of transparency. ASPRI fell prey to this contradiction since the organization's main documents are littered with the concept community, but are silent as to its meaning. This lack of specificity in relation to such a key concept, in the midst of detailed outlines of other concepts, categories and program structures, is extremely revealing. It exposes 'community' as a self-referential buzz word today whose definition is literally unnecessary. ASPRI's silence exemplifies this: To a community action agency running a community development program directed to impoverished communities defining 'community' seems unnecessary because it would be (re)stating the obvious.

Although not explicitly stated, the program did have a working definition of community. As discussed in the introduction to chapter 2, in practice ASPRI took

community to mean a geographically defined space inhabited by an impoverished population with a certain degree of social coherence gained from sharing a residential area, a common socio-economic profile and a sense of belonging to that place. Thus, community referred to a territorially bounded area as well as the social construction of that space carved out by its residents.

ASPRI relies on the federal poverty line as its main criterion for determining the eligibility of communities for its programming. CSBG legislation requires the use of this poverty index, which is widely used in Puerto Rico since the island lacks a locally developed instrument to measure and determine poverty levels. According to Mr. Francisco Periera, one of two evaluation and monitoring assistants employed by ASPRI, the community development program's personnel should use the socio-economic information compiled by the U.S. Census and the local Department of Family to identify and select impoverished communities in which to work.[55] The agency relies on the census and Department of Family because both use widely accepted standardized criteria to collect socio-economic information about individuals and families. Also, the data generated by both of these sources is used by almost all public and private agencies to determine program eligibility.

The four community workers I accompanied during my research used the federal poverty index to determine if residents were eligible to receive the services of ASPRI's community development program as well as other programs, including emergency assistance. The process of determining eligibility consisted in verifying that the person's individual or family income fell below the official income tables provided by the Department of Family, but defined by the federal government. However, the

[55]Personal interview, Fransisco Pereira, February 8, 2008.

qualification process occurred after the community worker had identified a community in which to work. In other words, community workers carried out the process of qualifying people for their program(s) in communities that had already been pre-selected.

During my research, none of the community workers identified potential communities by previously examining the available data on income distribution generated by the census or the Department of Family. The absence of this preliminary sampling exercise was due, in part, to the lack of internet access and hardcopies of this material in the Mayagüez regional office. The agency did not provide its community workers with the materials and/or tools necessary to carry out the preliminary identification process, although community workers could have managed to access that information on their own.

So, how were communities initially identified? The usual practice consisted of a combination of two methods. In the first method, the community worker requests a referral from the town's mayor or the director of the Office of Citizen Assistance in City Hall. Consulting city administrators seems like a logical strategy since presumably they know the town, its communities and residents better than any national agency. Also, they use census data as well as other data generated by public agencies, including the Department of Family, to plan and justify the investment in public infrastructure and service programs. This gives city officials a certain degree of knowledge over which communities and sectors fall below the poverty line and/or have greater needs and problems.

The second method consists of an informal and subjective evaluation of communities carried out by the community technician. In this approach, the technician

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drives through the community evaluating the types and quality of houses, infrastructure and businesses. Implicit in the use of this strategy is the notion that poverty can be determined not just by numbers (income levels), but also by observing housing conditions, the deterioration of public infrastructure, and the absence of local businesses.

Ethnographic case study: Identifying a community

María, one of the program's community technicians, and I were headed to the Las Marías municipality to begin the process of identifying and selecting a community in which to work. As we drove, María called Gabriel, the director of the Office of Citizen Assistance in Las Marías, to confirm whether the Bucarabones community, which was where we were heading, was in fact a special needs community, that is, a community being impacted by the central government's Special Needs Communities Program. This information matters because ASPRI cannot work communities that are already receiving services from other programs, public or private. This prescription is in place in order to avoid duplicating efforts with other agencies. Gabriel informs María that Bucarabones is a special needs community and suggests she visit Alto Sano, Maravilla Este, Maravilla Norte or Espinos to search for other communities. Las Marías is a rural town with over 65% of its population under the federal poverty line, which implies that, unfortunately, most of its communities qualify for ASPRI's programming.

Ironically, María has spent months trying to identify a community in which to work, even with the assistance of city officials. When she first was assigned to Las Marías, María visited Gabriel to ask for his help identifying a community with needs, but that was not already being serviced by the Special Needs Communities Program. Gabriel initially recommended working the Santa Rosa community, which María began

organizing until the community organizer from the Special Needs Community program attended one of her meetings and passed an attendance sheet, suggesting the event was somehow related or sponsored by that program. María decided to meet with the mayor and explain to him that she had to abandon that community because it was already being serviced by a different program. The mayor understood the situation and asked Gabriel to recommend a different community, which he did: Com. Plato Indio. María visited the community, but residents soon informed her that it was also a special needs community, which forced María to abandon it.

This morning's call to Gabriel constituted María's most recent effort to identify a community in collaboration with the city administrators. After hanging up and briefly reflecting on the options offered, María decides to head to Alto Sano. We arrived to Alto Sano around 10:35 a.m. and María immediately begins her visual examination of the area from her car. As she drives, María creates a mental catalogue of the local businesses and social institutions she sees: a basketball court, a local bar, a hardware store and a protestant church. She comments that some of the houses are abandoned, but the majority are in good shape. Since María does not know the exact geographical limits of the community she decides to stop and ask an older woman who is standing just outside her porch. The woman, Doña Angelina, welcomes us and, besides explaining to us where the community begins and ends, tells us that it is already organized. She had even been a member of the community board, but quit due to persistent gossip.

Doña Angelina points us towards Mr. Edgardo Vélez's house, whom she identifies as the community leader. We decide to visit him in order to verify the information offered by Doña Angelina. As luck would have it, he is not home, but his wife explains to us that

he heads the neighborhood's watch group that serves as liaison with the local police. She adds that the watch group also channels resident's demands to the appropriate government agencies, attends to residents' needs, especially older folks, and requests government aid to improve deteriorating houses. María thanks the lady for her help, and before leaving asks her if she knows of another community that needs assistance. The lady tells us that the community where her mother lives, the Parcelas Lavergne, could use help. María writes it down in her field notebook.

As we leave, María tells me that she is not going to work this community because it is already organized. She comments that the process of identifying a community takes up a lot of time. However, the agency [ASPRI] does not schedule time for her to plan this process. They only schedule time for her to implement programs and activities. That is why she ends up driving around town and asking the first person she sees. While she vents, she looks for a map of Las Marías in order to figure out how to go to Maravilla Este, one of the other barrios suggested by Gabriel. We need to find another community. We head to Maravilla Este, but once there María concludes that the houses she sees do not suggest that this is a low income area. She discards Maravilla Este.

As we continue to drive, María tells me that she wants to find a community like Plato Indio, where houses were poor and people had needs. The problem is that the government's Special Needs Communities Program has monopolized the island's low-income communities, leaving agencies like ASPRI very few communities with which to work. To make matters worse, the government's program is inefficient and has abandoned many of its communities. She has visited Special Needs communities, like

Plato Indio, and people ask her for help, but ASPRI's and CSBG's guidelines prohibit her from working those communities.

We continue our drive through Las Marías and eventually arrive at the Parcelas Lavergne. María decides to do a visual examination of the community from the car. As we advance through the community, she comments that there are many abandoned and poor-looking houses. I ask her what she means by poor-looking houses and she replies that some are wooden houses, others have a decayed look…They just look poor. She adds that the community is not that big and has only one entrance and exit. Suddenly, María stops the car and states with great relief, "this is it!" It is 1:30 p.m. and apparently we finally identified a community in Las Marías. Now we only have to verify if the population qualifies for ASPRI's services and programs.

Discussion:

Katy Gardner and David Lewis argue in their seminal book, <u>Anthropology, Development and the Post-Modern Challenge</u>, that one of the fundamental contributions of applied anthropology to development studies has been highlighting the fissure between what people claim they do and what gets accomplished in practice: "what people say they are doing may not be the same as what they are actually doing, and what projects set out to do may in practice have very different outcomes" (Gardner & Lewis, 1996, p. 43). The above vignette on ASPRI's community identification process exemplifies precisely this gap between model and practice and between aims and outcomes. This ethnographic example exposes a series of undue political interventions, restrictive agency policies and pragmatic complexities that consistently recur during the process of identifying a

community. These dynamics begin to outline the political field that conditions the practice of grassroots support.

The combination of referrals from city administrators and visual examinations of communities generates a series of problems, contradictions and uncertainties that protract and obstruct the process of identification. In the above example, the absence of a previous sampling process translated into a hasty identification process that betrayed María's lack of planning. To be sure, ASPRI's model gives community workers an hour and a half each morning, between 8:00 a.m. and 9:30 a.m. to plan their daily work activities. It also schedules one day a week, usually Fridays, as an office day for community workers to plan and document their weekly work. However, the four community workers with whom I worked concurred that their high work volume consumes their planning time. They use their mornings and Fridays to fill out the required paperwork to document their work: Document home visits, fill out weekly reports, tabulate needs assessments, prepare referrals to other programs, attend their casework load, and produce the always stressful trimester report. They all complained that managing individual cases, as part of the agency's emergency assistance program, consumed a lot of time and limited giving full attention to communities. On top of that, the agency often required them to attend a meeting or special events on Fridays, which cut into valuable office time.

The practice of sacrificing planning due to the paperwork demand of the agency eventually caught up with community workers in the field. In the above example, this cost María weeks of work in communities that ultimately did not qualify. The agency's urgency to implement forced María to rely on an improvised strategy of identification

that further delayed her work: Driving around Las Marías in a desperate search for a community in need. Besides consuming valuable resources (María's time, gas, paperwork), it also inverts the logic outlined in the agency's community development model: Instead of identifying communities and then visiting them, María visits communities in order to identify a candidate. This search results, as in the example narrated, in numerous fruitless visits that question the logic driving the agency's urgency to implement.

The above example also questions the effectiveness of relying on referrals by city administrators. In this case, as in other instances during my research, these referrals were characterized by the lack of coordination between ASPRI's and the local government's criteria and interests. City administrators were usually unaware of which communities were designated as special needs communities, which points to the lack of effective communication between the state office that administers the program and the local government in which the communities are located. This lack of intergovernmental coordination undermines the efficacy of consulting city administrators because, as was the case in Las Marías, they often cannot provide trustworthy information on the status of communities within their jurisdiction.

In other cases, city administrators recommend communities because of personal and/or institutional interests in channeling resources to them. As María mentioned, many special needs communities have been somewhat abandoned by the central government, leaving many pressing needs unattended. Therefore, city administrators try to re-direct resources made available by nonprofit organizations like ASPRI to these communities in order to help overcome their persistent problems and needs. Yet, they do so without

giving much consideration to the rules and regulations imposed by internal agency guidelines as well as the federal programs that fund them. As a consequence, community technicians like María spend valuable time and resources organizing communities that they soon have to abandon.

Finally, city administrators also inject their political interests into the process of community identification. On occasion, these administrators assign resources to certain families and communities in exchange for their political support. An example of this took place in the town of San Germán, whose mayor was a member of the Popular Democratic Party. Talibenette, the other community technician in the program, was referred to com. Capriles by city administrators and told to speak with Mr. Rubén Babilonia, who was supposed to be the community's leader. We soon found out that Mr. Babilonia was a city employee identified with the mayor's party, and was not well liked in the community. Talibenete's inquiry with local residents led her to identify other leaders, such as Mrs. Elsie, who had been a member of a previously existent community board. When we visited Elsie at her home, we were greeted in her living room by three large framed pictures of famous PPD leaders: Isidro Negrón, the current mayor, Sila M. Calderón, the former ex-governor, and Jorge A. Ramos Comas, San German's former mayor and PPD leader who passed years ago. Despite the clear political link between the community's leadership and city administrators, Talibenette decided to work the community. After a few visits, she had to abandon it due to lack of interest and commitment by local residents. In this case, city administrators directed ASPRI's resources to a community whose leadership responded the local ruling party without considering the level of interest or needs of community members.

The other identification method, the visual examination of communities by community workers, fared somewhat better than City Hall referrals. At the very least, this method compensated for an important sampling limitation implicit in the use of census or Department of Family data: their unit of analysis—family and individual income—is not necessarily equivalent to ASPRI's unit of intervention—an impoverished community. María's drive through communities demonstrated how the visual evaluation of houses, infrastructure and business expands the limited conception of poverty expressed by income statistics. This visual evaluation acknowledges that poverty cannot be reduced to income levels because it also manifests itself in inadequate housing, deteriorating infrastructure and the absence of easy access to goods and services. The evaluation of these variables by means of a purposeful community drive adds new information not present in statistics that allows community workers to make a more appropriate selection of communities that can benefit from ASPRI's programming.

However, the practice of this visual examination method exposed a series of deficiencies associated with its highly subjective character. For example, during a visual examination of communities in Rincón with Idaliz, one of the program's community auxiliaries, she commented that she evaluated the quality of the houses, but did not rely on that evaluation to determine if the community qualified because "las apariencias engañan" (appearances can fool you). What if that family built its house during a moment of economic bonanza, but now is struggling due to unemployment? She swears that she has entered into very good houses where the only sources of incomes are social security and the federal government's nutritional assistance program.

Idaliz's intuition materialized time and time again during my research. Houses can fool you. Or better yet, community workers fool themselves by assuming that poverty and needs are transparent to the eye. In many instances, they are transparent, but on occasion needs and problems hide behind the mask of property acquired during economic circumstances that have dramatically changed. I asked myself on numerous occasions: How many of those communities discarded by María based on the appearance of its houses needed or could have benefitted from ASPRI's resources?

The process of visiting communities to evaluate them allows community workers to verify firsthand the actual conditions of a community; that is, if what they are observing is in fact a community. In other words, another problem with the method of visual examination is that the geographical limits of a community are not always obvious. María, for example, had to stop and ask a resident where the community began and ended. Without this information, a community worker carrying out an evaluation might cover a fragment of a community or overlap two communities. These mistakes cost time and effort in work that is often abandoned. Moreover, visual examinations cannot get at the social boundaries that also define the landscape of a community. These boundaries are constructed by non-visual elements, such as who residents consider their neighbors, which stores are considered to be 'local' and which recreational facilities residents consider to belong to their community.

B. Practice #2: The needs assessment

The success of any grassroots support effort depends on how well the problems and needs of a particular community are understood. The needs assessment is one of the basic tools used to gather the information that offers that understanding (Chinman, Imm,

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Wandersman & De La Torre, 2004). This tool serves not only to identify problems and needs, but also to build a socio-economic profile of the community, examine the existent community resources and capacities, determine implementation strategies, and introduce the community worker to residents (ibid.). In sum, the needs assessment is the instrument that helps transform an indeterminate mass of people and resources located in a specific geographical area into a clear object of study, analysis and intervention.

ASPRI's community development program requires that a needs assessment be carried out in every selected community. The model calls for community workers to develop their intervention plan based on the data generated by the needs assessment. Each community worker is responsible for conducting the needs assessment of their assigned communities. The community workers uses a standardized document developed by the agency to collect the following information: type of zone in which the community was located (urban, rural); demographic and socio-economic data of individuals interviewed and their families; size, type of tenancy and material conditions of houses; family and community problems and/or needs; and residents' availability to volunteer for communal affairs. The standardized document usually took between five and fifteen minutes to fill out, depending on the person interviewed and how well they knew the information required. Completing a community's needs assessment could take as little as one day and as long as two weeks, depending on the community's size, the weather and other contingencies that emerge in the community or in the regional office. During my research, I participated in seven needs assessments and observed and recorded a total of ninety-six individual interviews.

Needs Assessment: An Ethnographic Case Study

I call Idaliz at 9:15 a.m in order to plan our day together. She tells me she is already in com. Calvache in Rincón conducting the community's needs assessment. I head out there as fast as I can and arrive just as Idaliz is beginning a new interview. When I catch up with her, Idaliz is talking to two older men, one of which is standing next to the fence of what I later gathered was his house and the other one was standing next to Idaliz closer to the street. Idaliz had already interviewed the man next to the fence and was now beginning to interview the man closest to her, who lives right across the street. She informs him that the study is confidential and proceeds to ask him a series of questions straight from the questionnaire. I immediately think of the irony of informing someone that the study is confidential while asking them questions about their income, house, education and medical needs before his neighbor and an unknown person, me.

After she is done, we move to the next house, where we are received by a woman with some health problems. Idaliz introduces herself by repeating the basic format used by all four community workers: stating her name, the name of the agency for which she works, Social Action of Puerto Rico, Inc. and indicating that it is a nonprofit organization not affiliated with any religious or political organization. She explains her intention of organizing the community and inviting the mayor to a community meeting in which residents can discuss their problems with him. She also plans to offer workshops to interested residents.

Once Idaliz is done, the lady immediately tells us, almost in tears, that her gas tank broke last week and she does not have the money to buy a new one. Idaliz empathizes with her and offers her a brief religious message. Among other things, she tells the woman that when she feels depressed due to challenging life situations she

should confine herself in her room to pray to God and the Divine Child. Idaliz is a very devoted catholic and often assists clients through such religious practices. Although she assured me over and over again that she does not mix her religious views with her work, Idaliz often substitutes secular social work interventions with faith-based practices, which sometimes lead her to offer moral interpretations of clients' situations, rather than attend to the social, political and economic factors provoking or sustaining their problems. After her brief sermon, Idaliz fills the needs assessment questionnaire and we continue.

As we walk through the community, we pass seven houses without Idaliz stopping to call. I ask her about those houses and she tells me in a very matter-of-fact tone that they are closed and nobody is home. I comment that maybe some of the residents just keep their doors closed when they are home. Before I finish my comment, we see a woman come out of one of the houses that Idaliz alleged were closed and empty. Idaliz looks at me and tells me that she will cover those houses later.

Our next stop is in a house in which the owner has opened an informal beauty salon. The stylist lets us in and agrees to complete the needs assessment's questionnaire if Idaliz can do it while she blow dries a client's hair. Idaliz accedes to her request and begins asking her about all those empty houses in the community. The stylist tells us they are not empty; they just won't open their doors because they think we are Jehova's Witnesses. I laugh and think, "Who else would be walking around going house to house at this time of day under this morning heat?" The stylist tells us that if we want people to open their doors we must announce that we are here to give away goods. Her comment

reproduces the generalized notion that people in the island are moved by personal interests.

Idaliz proceeds to fill out the questionnaire, but under unfavorable conditions since the stylist is working and does not offer her full attention. Idaliz reiterates that the study is confidential, even though there are five people present and one of them is a client. In front of all these people, the stylist tells us that she is a single mom, is twenty five years old and has a six year old daughter. She states with some pride that she does not receive alimony from her daughter's father nor does she receive government assistance. She earns about $200 a week, although that varies depending on the season and clients. After thinking it over, she insists that Idaliz should write down that she makes $200 a week.

We leave the beauty salón and while we continue to walk, Idaliz comments that the process of conducting a needs assessment had recently been changed. The agency used to ask community workers to orient residents about ASPRI's different programs during the needs assessment. But, recently Mr. Francisco Pereira told the personnel to conduct the needs assessment and later revisit residents to orient them about the agency's programs. The purpose of this change, he argued, was to avoid mixing the community's problems with ASPRI's programming. I tell her I think that makes senses because residents could limit their identification of problems and needs to the specific programs and resources offered by ASPRI.

We stop in front of the next house and, as usual, Idaliz calls residents by yelling: Buenos dias! (Good morning!). A few seconds after, we hear someone inside turn on the radio and blast bachata music really, really loud. We look at each other and without

saying anything we turn around and continue walking to the next house. We get the message. We stop to call in the next house and someone from inside the house answers saying she was busy and could not meet with us right now. I recall what the stylist told us earlier and ask myself: "Do they think we come on behalf of a religious organization? Is there any way to pre-empt or redress that?"

We pass two or three more houses and stop in front of a welding shop. The owner, a young man, greets us. He tells us he lives in his father's house, which is the next house over from the shop. He agrees to answer Idaliz's questions. He informs Idaliz that he is married, thirty two years old and his wife is twenty eight. They have a two year old baby. He says the welding shop generates four hundred dollars a month. I immediately think this cannot be true, especially since he has an employee whose salary has to exceed that amount. Idaliz does not question his income estimate. While she writes down this information, the welder asks if we work for the city government. Idaliz tells him she works for ASPRI, a nonprofit that receives federal funding, something she forgot to clarify before conducting the survey. I am not sure whether linking her presence there to a federally-funding program clarifies or further complicates Idaliz's identity for him.

Idaliz decides that she is not going to cover the remaining houses. She explains that she is sampling the community. Also, she adds that one of those houses belongs to the owner of a local bakery shop and given his income she presumes he does not have any problems or needs. She ends the needs assessment at 11:50 a.m. She carried out the Calvache's needs assessment in about three hours. Now she has to tabulate the results and develop the community's profile before creating the intervention plan.

Discussion:

Filling out a standardized document with clearly articulated and defined questions and criteria seems at first like a simple and reliable process. However, the process of transforming such a complex social phenomenon as a community into numbers is very challenging. Maybe the biggest challenge faced by these studies is determining the reliability of the information gathered. The uncertainty over the veracity and quality of the information generated is a result not of a lack of rigor in the development of the questionnaire, but rather of the complexities involved in the interview process itself and the different expectations that frame the encounter between the community worker and residents.

The above example exposes a series of contradictions and challenges resulting from the practice of carrying out a community's needs assessments that affect the quality of the information gathered. One of these contradictions is Idaliz's constant violation of the principle of confidentiality. This principle is important because it offers interviewees a guarantee that the information offered will be held private and anonymous. This guarantee allows interviewees to speak to total strangers as freely as possible about intimate and delicate matters. The presence of third parties during the interview process disables that guarantee and raises serious doubts as to whether the interviewee alters or distorts the information offered.

In the case of the two neighbors interviewed by Idaliz, their social proximity could lead one or both of them to alter their income figures or inhibit them from sharing a need or problem they are currently confronting. In fact, both indicated having the same monthly incomes, seven hundred dollars, which could be true, but raises the question of whether these figures represent an attempt to avoid establishing an embarrassing

difference of income. In the case of the stylist, the veracity of her two hundred dollar a month income is in question not just because one could expect a beauty salon to generate more income, but rather because that sum was articulated before a client who she was about to charge for services rendered. Exposing her income allows clients to evaluate the cost of her services and/or the meager incomes of her business, which reflect poorly on the quality of her work. In both cases, the incomes reported could be true, but the process by which they were obtained raises doubts that need to be not only considered, but also addressed.

The income information gathered during the needs assessments, which is key information for the program, is profoundly problematic, even when confidentiality is guaranteed. Almost every interviewee offers an approximation of his or her income, just like the stylist and welder did in the above example. Yet, some of the approximations offered are highly questionable. The welder, for example, claimed an income of four hundred dollars a month, which could not even cover the cost of operating such a business. This raises a more general preoccupation: Are people underestimating their income? The phenomenon of underestimating incomes results from the anxiety that frames the interview process, especially when the interviewee suspects the presence of the state behind this information-gathering exercise.

In the case of the welder, Idaliz did not specify for whom she worked when she introduced herself. Faced with that uncertainty, the welder asked Idaliz whether she worked for the local government, which revealed his reading of our visit and work: before his eyes we represented some government agency that was probably inspecting the young man's local business. Thus, the income declared by the welder needs to be

reassessed in light of how he framed our presence in his shop. His misreading of Idaliz's employment background and presence in his shop that morning generates a gap between his real economic situation and what his needs assessment's profile will show. This gap carries with it other consequences since his distorted profile will be used by Idaliz to program community services and search for resources from public and private agencies.

At another level, the existence of this gap points to the misunderstandings and lack of trust generated by the logic of the field's identity politics. The needs assessment thrusts community workers and residents into an uneasy encounter made even more uneasy by the fact that it requires the exchange of personal information. This exchange of information takes place while residents are still trying to makes sense of and many times fix the interviewer's identity. In the case of the welder, he found himself answering sensitive financial questions without being clear whether Idaliz was someone who could jeopardize his current work and income situation. He managed this predicament by offering veiled responses that neutralized his risk. Thus, his distorted profile is also a somewhat logical result of a social exchange defined by uncertainty and suspicion.

ASPRI's community workers were aware of these dynamics. Some of them even compensated for the lack of honesty they perceived from interviewees. María, for example, found some of the questions in the needs assessment form problematic, mainly the income and drug use questions. It was her understanding that people did not truthfully answer these questions. She used to make a small mark besides any answer in which she felt that the resident had not been completely forthcoming. For example, if she knew about drug use in a house, but residents denied it, María would mark that answer as dubious. She did the same thing with income questions. If she visited a big house with

expensive cars and residents told her their only source of income was government cash assistance checks, she would place a question mark besides that answer. At the moment of tabulating results, María would review the marked answers and determine whether to include or exclude that information.[56]

The above suggests two important problems related to the data generated by the needs assessment. First, the information gathered relies on a voluntary, self-disclosure method that makes no demand on the interviewee to produce documents to support their claim.[57] Without this demand for evidence, people often tell community workers what they think they want to hear or what they think would benefit them the most. Second, the community worker is aware of this phenomenon and judges the information provided based on additional information observed during the interview. However, this judgment is also highly subjective because it is not based on verified information, but rather perception. At the end of the process, what we have is a needs assessment profile whose data is more illustrative of a series of interpretations and value judgments made by both interviewees and community workers than of the socio-economic reality it attempts to capture.

Resident's expectations of the person or agency interviewing them also influence their disposition towards answering questions. Presenting ASPRI as a nonprofit organization and alluding to possible collaborations with state agencies seemed to encourage residents to make concrete requests. Such was the case of the woman with serious health problems who, upon Idaliz identifying ASPRI as a nonprofit organization,

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[56] She never clearly explained what criteria she used at that moment to determine that the information was reliable or at least acceptable.

[57] Except in cases where the individual or family is being considered for the emergency assistance program. In that case, the agency asks them for evidence of all income sources claimed.

told us she did not have money to buy a new gas cylinder. During the numerous needs assessment studies in which I participated, I heard people ask ASPRI's community workers for domestic appliances, construction materials for their houses, subsidies or money to pay utilities, and economic assistance to pay medical expenses. Their willingness to share with us their economic needs, real or invented, came from their vast experience living under P.R.'s welfare state. These requests open a window into the subjectivity that has emerged under the cover of the welfare state: citizens recognize that the state and nonprofit organizations are sources of resources and, therefore, they construct individual or family representations that demonstrates their precarious economic situation or some need, both of which are common requirements used by agencies to qualify individuals or families for assistance (López, 1992). In this case, the needs assessment interview transforms from an information gathering exercise to a drama in which residents put forth their best act in order to secure some desired benefit.

Finally, conducting the needs assessment during the day and limiting the study to a non-statistically random sample of community residents affects the profile generated by the study. Most people work during the day, which explains why many of the houses in Calvache, as well as in other communities visited, were closed. The profile of working residents is extremely important because it covers a different segment of the population: residents who are employed. The absence of these people from the needs assessment skews the community's profile towards those retired and unemployed sectors that are at home during the day. This might create the false impression that the profile of a segment of the community represents the community at large, especially its economic circumstances.

The use of sampling methodology also excludes people from the study, people whose profile, needs and potential willingness to volunteer might be crucial for the success of subsequent planned interventions. Moreover, the exclusion of people based on their income, such as the owner of a bakery, ignores that these people are also impacted by the community's existent problems. This exclusion is the result of the previously mentioned gap between the requirement of qualifying individuals and families by income levels and defining the community as the level of intervention. Even people with higher income levels can be adversely impacted by infrastructure deficiencies and/or an environmental problem in a community. The needs assessment should include all residents even while it can be acknowledged that not all of them are equally implicated or have the same resources to contend with certain community problems.

C. Practice #3: Working with Community Leaders

Autogestión or self-management[58] is probably the most important goal of community development and grassroots support work. According to this goal, residents should assume a leading role in the social and economic change processes taking place in their communities. The community worker supports and facilitates this process of change, but residents, especially community leaders, are ultimately responsible for assuming the task of developing their communities. Therefore, working with community leaders is a crucial task of any grassroots support effort.

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[58] Autogestión is loosely translated here as self-management in lack of direct equivalent in the community development literature in English. By autogestión I mean the process by which a group decides to define its goal and objectives vis a vis a problem, situation or an aspiration, and assumes the challenge of making that goal a reality. This definition is informed by the discussion of the term found in Oficina para el Financiamiento Socioeconómico y la Autogestión (2003). Defined in this way, autogestión includes or conceptual aspects implied by both self-management and self-sufficiency. However, self-sufficiency is used in this chapter and throughout the dissertation to translate another relevant term: autosuficiencia. As discussed in this thesis, autosuficiencia is a highly ambiguous term with neoliberal overtones today. Autogestión is also an equally complex and often ambiguous concept, but in order to not confuse the two I have chosen two different translations.

The community leader is usually a local resident with whom community workers make initial contact before entering a community and helps introduce the community worker to the community. A good leader develops broad social networks within the community, which gives him or her knowledge of pressing community needs and problems and allows him or her to serve as liaison between external agents, such as public agencies, and local residents. An active leader negotiates the local control of change processes with external agents and is vigilant that local knowledge and skills are not ignored. Finally, the presence of a stable local leadership furthers the sustainability of community initiatives.

Following CSBG's mission, ASPRI promotes the self-sufficiency and empowerment of communities. In order to achieve that goal, the community development program has as one of its objectives the recruitment and training of local leaders. In fact, during 2008 the program strived to work with at least fifty people in each impacted community and recruit at least four volunteers that would function as community leaders. Moreover, the community workers were charged with establishing community boards to help organize and institutionalize the local leadership. If for some reason a community board could not be established, community workers were suppose to work with an organized group of volunteers who would assume leadership roles in the development of the community. During my research, all of the community workers maintained a close working relationship with local community leaders.

Ethnographic Case Study: Working with a Community Leader

Claribel, the program's other community auxiliary, has been working in com. Castillo in Mayagüez since November of 2007. In May of 2008, she began planning a

summer camp, called Vivencias de Verano (Summer Experiences), for boys and girls from the community. She recruited once again the community's leader, Tito el Gallero (Tito the Cockfighter), to help her promote, recruit for and organize the summer camp. El Gallero is a local resident who has assumed a leadership role in the community. He is in charge, or at least responsible, for the local recreational facilities, which include a baseball park, a basketball court and a playground area for kids. He has a vast collection of sports equipment, such as basketballs, volleyballs, soccer balls, and gloves, bats and baseballs. He lends this equipment to the local youth to encourage their participation in local sport events that he also helps organize. Lastly, he also organizes the community's Velorio de Reyes (Three King's Wake Festival), with the help of the city's government. In all, he is an active community member who is known by everyone.

Claribel has worked with him before. When she organized the first community meeting back in April of 2008, Claribel gave him a stack of invitations so he could help her distribute them. He complied with her request and since then they have kept in touch to discuss issues related to the community. Also, el Gallero has expressed interest in collaborating with ASPRI. He has expressed his satisfaction with ASPRI's decision to work this community because Castillo has been somewhat forgotten by the city government. He also has let it be known that he has always wanted someone like Claribel to help him out in organizing community events.

However, today, two weeks before the camp's opening, Claribel tells me that she has been having problems with el Gallero. She recently found out that he works for the local government's Public Works agency, but only attends his job sporadically. He is in charge of maintaining the community's recreational areas as part of his job, not because

he is a self-less volunteer. Even so, he does not comply responsibly with those tasks. She also found out that el Gallero and the mayor's wife are cousins and, apparently, he exploits that family connection by being irresponsible in his work place. While Claribel tells me all of this, I begin to suspect that the resources he obtains for the community are channeled via his family connection with the municipal government and not because of effective leadership and lobbying skills.

Claribel continues to tell me that a couple of days ago she went to his house to deliver a stack of invitations for him to distribute and noticed that he seemed mad. She asked him if there was anything wrong and he told her he was going to be honest with her. He asked who was responsible for the summer camp, to which Claribel answered that ASPRI was the main agency responsible for it. He told her that he deserved credit for the summer camp because he had been organizing it since the beginning. Claribel told him that his work would be acknowledged at some point as important volunteer work from community members, but that ASPRI is who coordinates and finances the summer camp. At that point, el Gallero became irritated and lost it. He told her that he made the important contacts, obtained resources and, therefore, demanded that ASPRI acknowledge in all their communications that he was a co-organizer.

Claribel explains to me that apparently he got word that she had been telling community residents that el Gallero was not the summer camp's organizer. She admits that she had to clarify that to not only community residents, but also to the local elementary school's principal since he had been telling everyone otherwise.

After that exchange, el Gallero continued venting about other issues. He told her there was no need to organize a community board because he already had one. Claribel

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asked him for their names and he denied her that information because they were people he called when he needed them. It was his work group. Moreover, he added that he did not have to ask the Department of Housing for permission to use the basketball court for the summer camp because he could offer that authorization. Claribel explained to him that the agency insurance policy required her to get the appropriate government permission in case there was an accident. He insisted it was unnecessary and Claribel told him that he was not the owner of the recreational activities. She left after that discussion. She tells me he used very rude language with her and has the impression that he believes that nothing can be done in that community without his expressed consent.

Discusión:

Claribel's encounter with Tito el Gallero is not necessarily representative of the dynamics between community leaders and community workers. Nevertheless, this case helps to demystify the current romance with everything that is community-based, including leaders. The discourses that privilege community and citizen participation assume the existence of political subjects driven by the motivation to work for the common good. However, community workers confront a different reality in the field: community leaders reproduce many of the prejudices, authoritarian behavior and political interests that permeate the rest of the population. In fact, Irma Serrano (1984) found in her study about the promotion of empowerment through community based projects in Puerto Rico that community leaders associated with party politics ended end being control rather than change agents (p. 180). According to Serrano, community leaders with political ties are more interested in maintaining their personal authority, impeding

the rise of other community leaders and controlling resources that in promoting the community's well-being.

Claribel's tough encounter with el Gallero seems to support Serrano's findings. To be sure, el Gallero acted like a responsible community leader in the beginning. Yet, as responsibilities and activities mounted his personal motivations eventually came through. His leadership position in the community was based more on his family connection with the mayor's wife than from the respect earned from local residents. Moreover, this family connection allowed him privileged access to resources from the local government, but that access contributes to reproduce the clientelistic form of politics that dominates the island's political culture. This form of leadership certainly does not contribute to the formation of a strong local citizenry exercising both their civic rights and responsibilities.

Likewise, el Gallero demonstrated his adherence to authoritarian and chauvinistic leadership styles associated with Puerto Rico's patriarchal gender system (Colectivo Ideologías y Vivencias de los Géneros, 2003). His direct challenges to Claribel's work, disrespectful comments, and even threatening tone are examples of the verbal violence and emotional abuse through which Puerto Rican men exercise authority and re-inscribe their control of women, both in domestic and non-domestic contexts, such as workplaces (Silva & Martínez, 1990; Vidal, 2001). Although this is somewhat speculative, I wonder if he would have dared to exert the same verbal abuse against a male community organizer and what would have been the consequences of his actions. What is not speculative is that his authoritarian and chauvinistic behavior was extremely worrisome to Claribel as a woman doing community organizing, who in all probability would have to meet with el Gallero at some other point. These worries certainly affected her capacity

to work with him as a community leader. Furthermore, his demand to be in the limelight contradicts the principle of volunteerism which lies at the heart of ASPRI's notion of resident's involvement in community work.[59] His demand of certain privileges and credit undercut his capacity to effectively exercise the leadership role that ASPRI, and perhaps his community, expected of him.

The case of Tito el Gallero serves to remind development practitioners, especially those supporting participatory development, that there is still work to be done in order to forge the type of citizen required to make the project of autogestión comunitaria (community self-management) a success. El Gallero was immersed in the island's complex web of political inequalities: gender oppression, political clientelism and the privileging of personal interests that were not compatible with broader community interests. These political practices run counter to the kind of citizen participation sought by the model of self-sufficiency and empowerment.

Despite the above, Tito was justified in his critique of Claribel and ASPRI's summer camp. Claribel relied on el Gallero to do the tough work of going through the community giving out flyers and promoting the camp. Also, she used to visit or call el Gallero when she wanted something done. El Gallero's complaint reveals his frustration with Claribel and ASPRI for their instrumental use of his labor. ASPRI claims to facilitate community empowerment, yet in this case refused to cede control and even credit for the community initiative. Claribel turned the summer camp into an agency

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[59] Volunteerism is not the only notion of why or how residents get involved in community affairs. As Prof. Julia Paley pointed out to me, the notion of self-interest is also associated with community organizing and community development. However, I do not conceive of volunteerism and self-interest as mutually exclusive. At some point, self-interest has to coincide with a more generalize will or interest in order to serve as a motivator for uniting forces with others. That commitment to working with others is and needs to be self-effacing. If not, self-interest could potentially tear a movement apart.

initiative made possible by the volunteer (free?) work of community residents. However, when el Gallero claimed co-ownership of the summer camp, Claribel was quick to pull rank and deny him the acknowledgement he wanted. In this case, the relationship established with the community leader fell short of the enabling claims made by ASPRI's brochures.

Phase #2: Supporting Grassroots Development
A. Practice #1: Community Meetings

The meeting is a basic tool used to transform communities into functional units of development. Meetings create a recognizable work space in which official community business is discussed and decisions are taken that put social change efforts in motion. Meetings are also one of the most important sites in which citizen participation takes place. During meetings, residents become active community members by voicing problems, proposing solutions and engaging other residents in debate. Meetings are also the work spaces in which external agents and communities negotiate their development agenda and the delivery of the needed assistance. These characteristics make community meetings instances in which the ideas and ideals of participatory development and democracy are concretized and practiced.

Meetings are structured events with clearly defined functions. The date, time, place, duration and purpose of a meeting structure not only the conditions under which they take place, but also their possibilities for success. Meetings are also internally structured, usually by an agenda, which determines its unfolding, defines its different stages or moments, specifies who participates and in what order, and organizes the discussion of topics or the realization of activities. Finally, meetings fulfill very specific functions. ASPRI's community workers relied on meetings to present the agency's

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programs, plan and organize community boards, inquire into and discuss community problems and needs, plan social events and/or to construct a social space in which community residents could fraternize. However, meetings are planned interventions that, like most others, confront serious, unexpected challenges once they become realities in the field itself.

Ethnographic Case Study: Community Meeting in Pueblo Nuevo, Maricao, March 13, 2008

Talibenete and I arrive at 3:30 p.m. to the Pueblo Nuevo (New Town) community in Maricao, a low-income municipality located in Puerto Rico's central mountain chain. We park directly in front of the elementary school located in the community's main entrance. We go to the principal's office to inform her that we had arrived and head to the school's basketball court, where the meeting was to take place at 4:30 p.m.

During our wait, Tali takes out her field notebook and writes down some notes in preparation for the meeting. Once she is done writing, I ask her how she promotes community meetings. She tells me that she visits the community two or three days before the meeting and visits each house extending a personal invitation to each resident and distributing flyers with the meeting's information. She scheduled this meeting for today, a Thursday, so she visited the community on Monday to hand out the invitations. She also left a flyer in the pizza parlor located near the community's main entrance, but cannot confirm whether they displayed it.

At 4 p.m., the school principal stops by to ask Tali how many chairs she needed. Tali thanked her, but said she would be using the court's bleachers. I was struck by her response because Pueblo Nuevo is a big community and the bleachers only seat about 50 people. Is she not expecting a big showing from residents? Also, the bleachers will force

people to sit in rows that do not face each other. This seating arrangement lends itself to a conference-like event in which someone speaks before a group. By contrast, chairs could be organized in a circle or semi-circle, allowing residents to see each other and facilitating communication among them.

The principal asks a couple of students to clean the bleachers and the court area. While they pick up paper wraps and sweep the bleachers, Tali and I observe our watches strike 4:30 p.m. No one from the community has arrived. Not even the agricultural extension worker she invited to give a talk to the community. I am not surprised by it, but Tali tells me she is about to have a crisis de nervios (nervous crisis). She lets me know, almost on a defensive tone, how much she sacrificed to hand out those invitations, one by one, house by house, and to what avail? To have no one come?

José Ramos, the agronomist Tali invited, arrives at 4:35 p.m. Tali introduces us and, since there is no one for him to address yet, we chat informally about his work and how it relates to ASPRI's grassroots support efforts. He explains that the Agricultural Extension division, a federal program known mainly for its technical assistance to farmers, runs four programs, one of which focuses on developing community resources. The goal of this program, like most other community programs, is to promote community self-management by developing community leaders. The program is staffed by an agricultural extensionist and a home economist, both of whom are university trained professionals who offer technical assistance to interested parties through seminars and workshops on topics promoting self-management and local development. He adds that although the program is not new, its participatory, empowerment-oriented focus is about three or four years old. Before this, the model followed the classic top to bottom

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approach in which the staff brought already made solutions to communities. For example, if a community lacked a reliable source of water, the extensionist would develop a distribution system and sought out funds and community labor to construct it. Today, instead of offering solutions, the program encourages residents to identify the problems as well as the solutions. As he speaks, I think to myself that even this program has been bit by the participatory development bug.

José supports the new method, but acknowledges that it presents various challenges. First, the process of change is much slower. Before, they would identify the problem, have experts plan the solution and implement it. Now, the process of organizing a community and its decision-making process takes a long time. Their efforts do produce results, but they take four or five years to materialize. Second, people are the biggest obstacle to community development! They do not seem interested or committed to the process of community development. In his experience, people do not get involved in these projects unless there is money or some other form of material assistance involved.

Talibenete interrupts our conversation to tell us that it is 5 p.m. and she is going to begin the meeting. There are only two residents present at the moment: Tomás, a retiree who worked in this school as a janitor, and Miriam Vargas, a middle aged woman. As we made our way to the bleachers, three other people—a married couple and Damaris, a young woman—join us as well. The married couple came to the school to take their adult literacy classes, but when Tali told them about the meeting they decided to stay.

Tali begins the meeting by apologizing for the delay, but she was waiting to see if others would join. She expressed her surprise for the lack of attendance, especially after

she distributed invitations to almost everyone in the community. She introduces José as an agronomist from the Agricultural Extension program and presents me as someone who is currently collaborating with ASPRI. Finally, she introduces herself and the agency, ASPRI, by saying that it is not related to any political party or religion and receives financial support from the CSBG federal grant. Interestingly, she did not ask the attendees to introduce themselves. Maybe everyone knows each other.

After introductions, she asks for a volunteer to read the opening reflection. No one volunteers; at least two people informed Tali they did not know how to read. Tali is left with no choice by to read it herself. The reflection deals with the topic of cooperation and helps set the tone for today's meeting. Even though Tali read it in a loud, clear voice, the noise generated by kids playing basketball and yelling, and cars going by with really loud reggaeton music made it extremely difficult to follow what she was reading. Tali compensated as best as she could by standing closer to the crowd and speaking with more energy and assertiveness.

Tali leaves José to speak to those present, but did not explain the purpose of his presence here or the nature of this talk. José begins to talk at length about the Agricultural Extension program, its history, mission, functions and activities. After a while, the attendees lose interest. Some begin to talk among themselves while others shift their attention to the basketball game taking place right before them. Damaris answers a phone call and disconnects from the meeting.

José is introducing residents to the program for which he works in order to make them aware of the services available to them, such as arts and crafts workshops and leadership development seminars. This is an example of the grassroots support work

carried out by ASPRI: they contact and bring resources that could help the organizing and development efforts of communities. Unfortunately, much of the information José provided as well as Tali's effort to bring him to this meeting was lost to those present. José is partly responsible for that because he was not an engaging speaker. But, more importantly, Tali did not frame his presentation properly in order for residents to understand the relevance of his talk to the overall goal of the meeting, which was to begin the community's organizing efforts. The lack of interest expressed by attendees is the most eloquent statement of the ineffectiveness of this part of the meeting's agenda.

José abruptly finishes his presentation. He asks for questions, but no one volunteers one, which is not surprising giving the lack of attention offered to his talk. Tali takes over again. She thanks José for his presentation of his agency's programs. Tali turns to the five community members attending the meeting and repeats once more her mission: I am here to 'capacitar' (build your capacity), help you organize, coordinate activities that promote your 'autogestion' (self-management) and help create microenterprises. She asks the attendees to share this information with other community members that did not come to the meeting. Miriam interjects that people did not and will not come, yet they are always complaining about everything. Meetings like this one are organized, yet they do not take advantage of them.

Tali does not respond to that comment. Instead, she proceeds to explain her work in ASPRI. She works in four towns as part of the agency's community development program, but also does casework and community outreach for the agency's emergency assistance program. She reiterates that her goal is to help communities become self-sufficient. Miriam responds by saying that she understands. Tali is like a mother with her

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baby: she helps communities until they can fend for themselves. I find Miriam's response surprising. The model of assistance proposed by Tali emphasized facilitation and capacity-building. However, Miriam interpreted her offering in a paternalistic (maternalist?) framework in which Tali served more as a guardian or overseer than a facilitator. Miriam's response highlights the problem of interpretative frameworks through which community residents process ASPRI's work and offerings. Damaris adds that more people would come if Tali gave presents at the meeting. Both, Damaris and Miriam encourage Tali to incorporate a bingo or a raffle to the meeting's agenda in order to more people to come.

Tali once more glosses over comments made by attendees and moves on to the next item on her agenda: a brief survey. She begins to hand out a paper and pencils and asks everyone to write down their name. Miriam immediately tells her she does not know how to write. It seems like the same two people who earlier said they could not read also do not know how to write. Tali tells her that she will help her out in a minute.

Tali asks them to write down the first survey question: What are the community's pressing problems? Instead of writing it down, Miriam and Damaris shout out their answers: Seal the public sewer system because they are always clogged. However, Damaris immediately corrects herself saying they cannot be sealed because the community needs them. Miriam voices another one: Provide proper maintenance to the community's green areas. She complains that the city does not mow the grass or pick up the trash. They have to make angry visits to City Hall before they mobilize to clean in their community. Miriam has made such visits herself and claims to have told city

officials that people, not animals, live in Pueblo Nuevo and demands that they carry out

regular maintenance duties there.

Another person yells out jokingly that they should change about half of the

community residents. People are still laughing when the man who was going to attend the

adult literacy classes suggest that something needs to be done with the stray dogs in the

community. Finally, Tomas interjects that there are no significant problems in the

community.

Overwhelmed by the responses, Tali clarifies she is not here to solve the

community's entire set of problems, but rather to gather information that can be used to

develop a work plan. She moves to the second question: How can you help or collaborate

to solve these problems? Miriam again chooses to voice her response rather than write it

down: We can cooperate by not creating problems; for example, not disposing of

garbage in the green areas. After her comment, silence sets in as no one else ventures a

response. The older women and Tomás are just sitting there without writing down the

questions or their responses. José takes advantage of the moment to propose a recycling

workshop, which would teach people how to reduce waste and manage garbage using an

environmentally-friendly strategy. Community members frown on his proposal. Miriam

says she has heard that you have to clean and remove the labels from all recyclable

plastic bottles. José explains that you only have to rinse them, to which Miriam responds

that in New York you do not have to rinse or clean anything, but in this country…Even

though Miriam does not complete her thought, everyone understands what she implies:

Things in Puerto Rico do not work as effectively and as easy as in the U.S., which is the

preferred yardstick of island residents.

Tali reads the third question: Would you like for this community to be organized? Damaris asks for what purpose, to which Tali offers a generic answer: to have seminars and carry out community activities. José adds that an organized community has greater political power. Someone else asks, what does organizing entail? Tali explains that it would consist of creating a community board, soliciting funds through grant writing…Tomás interrupts Tali and tells her that he goes straight to the mayor whenever he has a problem and gets help immediately. There is no need to organize the community to solve problems because the mayor and his staff are well disposed to assist them and offer quality services. What is the point of organizing and applying political pressure if anyone can go to City Hall and have their problems solved? Tali responds to Tomás' challenge insisting that community organizations are still necessary and useful. This abstract proposition does not convince Tomás, who seems set in his views.

After that uncomfortable exchange, Tali tries to lighten the atmosphere by formulating the next question: Would you like to work as part of a volunteer group? What ideas do you propose for that group? Everyone expresses an interest in volunteering except Tomás. He makes it clear that at his age he is not going to assume any responsibilities for the community. Tali asks for ideas, but no one offers any. After a prolonged silence, José decides to stimulate people by proposing a couple of concrete ideas about possible community projects. He tells residents that they do not have to come up with big projects. They can begin with small ones, like painting the sidewalks or making sure there is no stagnant water in the community during the dengue (breakbone fever) season.

Damaris tells Tali that since José has good ideas he should write them down and they could copy them from him. José remains faithful to the ideals of participatory development and replies that he only offers some general examples, but does not wish to impose them. Tali seconds his remark by reminding them that she came to gather not offer ideas. Tali's and José's comments shifted responsibility back to the residents, which further silenced the crowd.

After a few minutes of silence, Tali decides to end the survey and, with it, the meeting. She asks one final time if there is any interest in organizing this community. Tomás states that they (ASPRI) have put forth a great effort and offer wonderful services, but the community is not interested. Miriam agrees, but volunteers her home as a possible future meeting place. With that, Tali thanks the attendees for coming and participating. She emphasizes that she will be in touch with them about her future work in the community.

As everyone leaves, José asks Tali her thoughts on the meeting. Tali gives him a look that suggests disappointment. José comforts her by saying that people from Maricao are aguantados (restrained) and very timid. They do not get involved in community work. He believes many of them are already set in their ways and do not venture into new areas. With those last thoughts, José says goodbye and Tali and I head for the car. As we leave, we watch Miriam and Tomás walking up the main road back to their houses. I leave with great uncertainty over whether Tali will come back to continue to work this community.

Discussion:

Process-oriented research on anti-poverty and public health community initiatives identifies operational barriers and logistical issues as key factors limiting program success and effective citizen participation. Chaskin et al.'s (1997) research on the possibilities and limitations of comprehensive community initiatives in the U.S. found that "operational barriers such as time, resources, and organizational structure inhibit their (sic) development of integrated programs" (p. 441). Similarly, John Daley and Flavio Marsiglia's research on a participatory substance abuse program in the U.S. concluded that 'good ideas' were "subverted by logistical issues such as: (1) inconvenient time and place of meetings; (2) poor communication processes; and (3) lack of respect for community member's expertise" (p. 73). Like the above research experience, the Pueblo Nuevo community meeting dramatizes a series of methodological deficiencies and contextual challenges that limit the effectiveness and overall contribution of ASPRI's grassroots support work.

To begin, a community meeting can only achieve its goals and fulfill its functions if residents attend. Pueblo Nuevo's meeting was not well attended for reasons that have little to do with Tali's promotional efforts. As she explained, Tali visited residents and distributed flyers with the meeting's information. Also, the meeting took place in the local school's basketball court, which is a widely recognized local building and is walking distance from most, if not all, community residents. Certainly, she could have complemented the individual home visits with a community-level promotional strategy, such as displaying a billboard near the main community's entrance with ASPRI's logo and the meeting's information, stapling flyers on light poles, and committing local businesses to posting the promotional flyer. By publicly displaying the information in this

manner, residents would confront the invitation on repeated occasions and it might even generate conversation among interested parties. Yet, these additional efforts could only complement, not substitute, Tali's personal invitation to almost all community members.

However, Tali's decision to meet at 4:30 p.m. on a Thursday, a weekday, did affect attendance. To be sure, retirees and housewives, like Tomás and the women that came, have flexible schedules that can be adjusted to most meeting times. But, weekdays are extremely busy for most people, especially those that work and/or care for children. On a regular Thursday at 4:30 p.m., most people are still in the process of arriving home from work, picking up their children from school or after-school activities, starting to prepare dinner, etc. For these people, attending a 4:30 p.m. community meeting requires making a series of arrangements with family members or friends that are often too taxing and, therefore, not worth the effort for a community meeting. Thus, the exigencies and rhythm of the island's social life, including work schedules and family responsibilities, impose conditions of possibilities that Tali ignored at the moment of planning this meeting.

Community residents repeatedly voiced these challenges during my research. Claribel organized the first community meeting in the Castillo community on a Wednesday at 6:30 p.m. At 6:40 p.m. there were only 6 people in the meeting, all of which were members of just two families. At 7:00 p.m., Julie, an older woman who was there with two other family members, urged Claribel to start because she was already missing the 7:00 p.m. novela (soup opera), her favorite. Everyone laughs and some express their solidarity with her dilemma. One woman said she was taping it in order to see it when she went home that night. Although it seems like a trivial issue, one over

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which people laugh in a community meeting, novelas are an important part of the daily routine, especially for women, who usually outnumber men in meetings. Claribel took their comments, and people's absence from the meeting, seriously and asked what would be the best time to have a meeting, to which most responded that at night because work and other responsibilities make it impossible for them to come during the day. Claribel cleverly responded that this meeting is at night, to which one person answered: "But, las novelas…"

In com. Capriles in the municipality of San German one couple asked Talibenete if ASPRI could hold their meetings on weekends, since they worked late during the week and could not attend. Weekends probably offer the best possibilities for high resident turnout since most people have more free time at their disposal. Yet, ASPRI's community workers only work Monday through Friday from 8:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. They have to ask Ehida Torres, the program's national coordinator, for permission to carry out or attend events outside their work hours. They usually ask for such permission when it comes to community meetings, but both Claribel and Idaliz informed me that Ehida Torres did not encourage them to work outside their regular hours. Moreover, some community workers, like María, have family responsibilities that impede them from working nights and weekends. María is a single mom with two young children and her salary—close to $1,500 a month—is not enough for her to hire a nanny to watch them while she works nights and weekends. Furthermore, her employment contract clearly states that her work hours are between 8:00 a.m. and 4:30 p.m. María feels the agency cannot require her to work outside those hours. Thus, while community workers are aware that community

work requires adjusting to people's time and visiting communities when it best suites residents, their work schedules and family circumstances conflict with those demands.

Finally, religion, or more specifically, attending church is another prevalent social activity that competed with scheduled community meeting. During the needs assessment of com. Ajies in Añasco, Talibenette asked residents what would be the best time and day of the week to have the first community meeting. Resident after resident mentioned their commitment to church as a limiting factor. Some residents attended a protestant church that met on Tuesdays, Thursdays and Sundays. Other residents were Jehovah's Witnesses and attended services on Wednesdays, Fridays, Saturdays and Sundays. Still others were catholic and committed their weekends to practicing their faith. Thus, Tali was bound to exclude one or various sectors of community residents regardless of the day she chose for the community meeting.

Ultimately, the seemingly simple task of scheduling a community meeting met, in practice, a number of obstacles related to the everyday social, cultural and economic activities of low income community residents and community workers' own work schedule, which was incompatible with the flexibility required by grassroots support work. The point of this discussion is not to offer a laundry list of contingencies that affect community work, but rather to emphasize the local socio-cultural practices and institutional policies that are not envisioned by the agency's grassroots support model, but play a determining role in delimiting its possibilities for success. The Pueblo Nuevo community meeting showcased the contextual factors and inconsistencies in the agency's model that reduced the scope and success of the meeting, and, more broadly speaking, the goals of grassroots development and participatory democracy. The grandiloquent claims

of participatory development and democracy as enacted through community meetings translated, in practice, to the participation of the five or six residents whose family and church responsibilities did not conflict with the community workers' work schedule. The Pueblo Nuevo meeting represents a truncated expression of the ideas and ideals of participatory development that motivated the planning of the meeting in the first place.

Pueblo Nuevo's community meeting also tested José's interpretation that people themselves are the biggest challenge to participatory development and the work of promoting self-sufficiency. According to him, people in Puerto Rico today are generally not interested in community work and some get involved in order to satisfy a personal need or interest. Many Pueblo Nuevo residents expressed their apathy towards community development by not attending the meeting. Apathy in this case should not be confused with disinterest towards the community's well-being. Eliosoph's (1998) research on apathy in U.S. politics shows that citizen's lack of belief in the value of political discourse leads them to disengage from politics. In other words, the American public sphere and its multiple competing discourses tend to silence people rather than move them towards engaging public discussions. In a similar manner, Pueblo Nuevo's residents are not new to ASPRI's community meetings and support work. Their apathy could be interpreted as a silent indictment of ASPRI's ineffectiveness or its instrumentalist use of resident's participation.

Some of those that attended did express their disinterest and even disdain for community organizing and self-development. Tomás went as far as defending the current system of political patronage in which people like him rely on their personal relationship with the mayor to resolve their problem. Damaris and Miriam suggested on multiple

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occasions that Tali hand out gifts or program a raffle in order to mobilize residents. This demand reproduces the pattern of dependent relationships that the welfare state has been accused of, if not creating, at least solidifying in Puerto Rico. Ironically, instead of presenting this type of political relationship as the problem to be overcome through community-based initiatives, Damaris and Miriam encouraged Tali to build on it. Finally, Damaris' renounced the protagonist role offered to her by this participatory model by proposing that the group use José's ideas instead of generating her own. Again, the model of top-down recommendations and ideas was not rejected in the meeting, but rather claimed by attendees.

The above examples speak to José's contention that people do not embrace the opportunities offered by participatory development initiatives. However, his explanation does not account for the fact that the perceived lack of embrace of empowerment models is the result not of moral deviance or a culture of poverty, but rather of a political system in which patronage has been an important, if not primary, mechanism in which political parties and state officials have interacted with these populations. Besides elections every four years and public hearings in the national and municipal legislature, Puerto Rico's official political process does not afford many other opportunities for direct citizen participation.[60] In the absence of those political spaces, this political system has fostered the formation of a citizenry, as exemplified by Tomás, Damaris and Miriam, for whom politics works through personal favors, gift-giving, and loyalty, rather than through the demand and exercise of political and civil rights.

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[60] I am referring here to official state channels through which citizens can express themselves. Certainly, people can express themselves in the streets through protests and strikes as well as through the press.

Certainly, clientelismo is a political strategy relied upon by impoverished populations to secure benefits that otherwise might be beyond their reach. This political strategy, however, runs counter to the requirements and expectations of the citizen participation model underlying community meetings. This model requires people who are disposed to volunteer for their communities; can analyze their surrounding environment; are capable of proposing solutions; know what activities and actions are necessary to transform their communities; and have the necessary skills to carry them out. This is precisely the type of citizen engagement that Tali was promoting through an open community meeting in which she allowed community residents to define not only the problems but also the potential solutions.

That gap between the ideal political subjects of community meetings and the existent subjects living in Pueblo Nuevo exposes an important contradiction in not only Jose's, but also Tali's and ASPRI's expectation during their grassroot support activities. Tali conducted the meeting as if residents are already committed to the model and are receptive to its responsibilities and demands. In other words, she assumed the existence of the type of political subject that paradoxically she is supposed to help develop. The meeting's agenda demanded that Pueblo Nuevo residents make an immediate transition from the clientelistic political system under which they have been operating for decades to the recently introduced model of empowerment and self-development. Moreover, while the meeting and potential local development projects afforded residents different political possibilities, such as direct participation in their affairs, this is just one instance embedded in a broader political context that promotes and compensates a clientelistic

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political behavior. This is ultimately one of the practical limits of this model: it is an oasis in a broader political field that also requires transformation.

Tomás' resistance to this transition and Miriam's and Damaris' insistence on re-introducing the political strategies they know and trust is an eloquent example of how the current political system overshadowed the alternative model of politics presented by Tali and José. This meeting exemplifies a moment of failure, temporary as it may be, of the reformist project of subject formation pursued by ASPRI's grassroots support model. This reformist project is part of broader logic of governance called governmentality by Michel Foucault (1991). Governmentality refers to a modern logic of disciplining the conduct of populations in order to direct them to behave in specific ways and to determinate ends, such as the pursuit of their well-being through self-care. The community meeting called by Tali is one of the methods used to facilitate the production of self-sufficient citizens, which is one of the goals of grassroots support. In this meeting, Tali used a series of techniques and offers to urge Tomás, Miriam and Damaris to accept greater self-responsibility for the construction of their individual and collective well-being. Tali and José even made explicit their intended goals of their intervention by questioning the political logic of patronage and exposed the benefits of self-management and empowerment.

Nontheless, Tomás openly rejected their invitation to adopt a different political consciousness as well as the accompanying set of practices. Miriam and Damaris were more subtle in their dismissal: they joked about the impossibility of that political project and responded with condescending comments about raffles and gifts. These rejections and dismissals are illuminating because it shows how certain community residents in

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Puerto Rico simply walk away from efforts that summon them to form part of a political project that requires of them greater self-reliance and less dependence on state resources. However, as in the case of apathy discussed above, their rejection and dismissal should be interpreted as signifying much more than an expression of a clientelistic or welfare-dependence mentality. Their rejection makes sense in the context of the offer. Tali offers them little other than self-assurance and laudable ideals about community empowerment in a meeting in which only five or six residents showed up for a community meeting. From Tomas' perspective, that hardly seems like a better offer than the system he knows and upon which he relies. Miriam and Damaris, who seem open to Tali's ideas, react to the failure, in practice, of what in theory seems like a great idea. Thus, due to contextual considerations, the techniques of governance used by Tali were ineffective in producing and enabling what her community development program would consider an empowered citizenry.

There is one final factor that accounts for why resident's participation did not live up to the standard expected by Tali and José. First, the meeting reflected the education gap between the professional community workers and residents. Tali and José relied on instructional formats—conference-style presentations, written surveys, abstract propositions—much more compatible with university-level education than with grassroots support assistance to adult populations. The residents that attended this meeting, as well as most of the other meetings in different communities, were over fifty, had very little formal education and had deficient reading and writing skills. Tali should have gathered that information if not from the needs assessment, at least from multiple instances in which it was told to her in the meeting. The activities carried out during the

meeting, such as the survey, were not informed by a serious analysis of the demographic particularities and class inequalities that configure the reality of impoverished residents in the island. The absence of this analysis manifested itself in the unfortunate incongruity between the tasks required for residents to participate and the level of education and skills they possessed which limited that participation.

B. Practice #2: Institution-Building – Community Boards

The realization of any development project requires communities to adopt an organizational structure that makes sense to residents given their human resources and goals. The model developed by the Center for Participatory Change, a U.S.-based GSO, calls for communities to select an organizational structure that gives them the least burden and the most freedom to operate in a self-determined way (ibid., pp. 21- 22). According to the Center, communities can choose to organize in diverse ways, including:

> operating as an informal community group (i.e. running projects as a group of interested citizens, without having any formal, legal status) [or] operating as an independent program of another nonprofit organization (i.e. running projects as part of another nonprofit organizations but having the ability (via an advisory board) to make independent decisions about project work) [or] forming as a nonprofit organization (i.e. filing with the IRS for nonprofit status, and being a completely independent and self-sustaining organization). (ibid., pp. 22)

In choosing an organizational structure, residents need to consider, among other things, the capacity of that structure to sustain the concrete gains of the community over the long haul (Brown, 1991; Carroll, 2001). They also need to consider what kind of institutional space is best suited for residents to engage in debates, develop frameworks to understand current and future problems, and plan activities to address them (Njonga, 1995).

GSOs assist communities in this process by offering them two types of help: organizational capacity building and individual skill development. The former consists of

providing support to members as they write official documents, such as by-laws and work plans, offer technical assistance in the elaboration of a budget and fund-raising activities, and, if, need be, facilitate their incorporation as a nonprofit. The latter consists of developing individual technical skills in such areas as managing financial accounts, writing letters, and interpersonal leadership skills, such as facilitating meetings, speaking in public and mediating conflict. As a GSO, ASPRI is committed to offering these support services to help communities in the institution-building process.

Ethnographic case study: La Cuevita's community board

Talibenete arrived in com. La Cuevita (The Little Cave) via a referral from Moca's mayor, José "Kiko" Aviles. The mayor recommended this community in part because it already had an organized group of volunteers led by a young resident, Hector Acevedo. Although raised in Chicago until he was four years old, Hector has lived most of his life in La Cuevita. His family is originally from there and he lives in a section of his father's house, which was built on a plot of land inherited from his father (Hector's grandfather).

Hector has been active in the community since he was an adolescent. In the late eighties, he organized a group of local youth. Despite the fact that the community had a significant youth population, they did not have public recreational facilities. Whenever the local youth wanted to play basketball they had to travel outside the community to another sector, El Coco, which had a court. Hector and the local youth group decided to build a half court in an empty plot of land near a creek towards the end of the community. They found a wooden light poll that had been knocked down during a car

accident and used it to hold up the rim. They all chipped in to buy a plywood panel to use it as the rim's board. Finally, Hector himself bought the basketball.

Once he married and gained family responsibilities, Hector no longer got involved in community affairs. That was until 2005, when an accident at work changed his life. He fell while working in McDonalds, where he is a manager. After that fall, his legs started to swell, had constant pain and could not work during his medical treatment. As a result of his prolonged stay home, he became depressed and starting looking for something else to do. One morning, while talking with a couple of friends, both from the community and nearby sectors, Hector decided to organize them to get involved in community work once more.

Hector and three other of his friends decided to voluntarily work for the community, with or without the city government's help. They began by maintaining the green areas. From that, they posed a more ambitious project: building gutters. The community's main road was never properly built and the rainfall slowly dug under the road removing the asphalt. As a result, the road had to be continuously repaved. Hector decided to ask for the mayor's help and after some minor problems with city administrators, he finally got the mayor to pay for the construction materials necessary to build the gutters, such as cement and sand. Hector mobilized a total of twenty people for this project, including his core group of friends. Together this group of residents and community friends built the gutters for the whole road during their free time: afternoons, weekends and some mornings. It has been almost four years since they built the gutters and there has been no need to pave the road during that time.

Hector recalls that the majority of residents did not trust that the project would be brought to fruition. Apparently, many residents had asked for help from the city's government with poor or no results. But, Hector highlights the difference between those efforts and the ones he led: Before everyone made individual requests, while they made the request on behalf of a community group. Also, Hector points out that they volunteered their work. If they had asked the municipal government to do the project, they would have taken years. Instead, they requested the help of the municipal government buying the materials, but they offered to supply the labor. That way the project not only got done, it got done a lot faster. He adds that his experience working with the mayor has been positive. He understands that these are difficult times for everyone, including the government, and people have to assume a greater responsibility for their situation. People should follow their example and stop being dependent on the government for everything.

I hear him speak about greater responsibility and suddenly I re-evaluate Hector's accomplishments. Is Hector's approach to community development an example of what critiques have called neoliberalism? Is his work contributing to relieve the local government of its duty to provide sound infrastructure to its constituents? Is the community making up for the government inefficiencies? Has participatory development been reduced to the mere contribution of labor by community residents to cheapen project costs? Is his notion of community empowerment entangled with moralizing discourses of responsibility and dependency rather than with notions of citizen rights? On the other hand, does it matter to critiques that the community got the government to invest resources that it otherwise might not have spent in the community and fixed a

problem? Critiques of neoliberalism, so clear in theory, might lose some of their appeal to residents of La Cuevita once gutters are made and roads fixed.

After that project, Hector decided to continue working for the community. He coordinated a cleaning campaign in which the government agreed to mobilize garbage trucks and tow trucks (flatbeds) to help remove rubble, old cars and electrical appliances. Since then, Hector has kept active planning numerous other community activities geared towards improving the infrastructure and quality of life. For example, he is trying to acquire enough trash cans to begin a community recycling program. He also has planned a number of social events, such as a communal Thanksgiving dinner and a local Three Kings Day celebration. For Thanksgiving, Hector got the city government to donate two turkeys and McDonalds gave him free soda. He also got two youth dance groups to perform for the community free of charge.

One day during the summer of 2006, Hector received a phone call from Talibenette. The mayor had given her his name as the main contact person for the community. She explained that she worked for ASPRI and was interested in supporting their community initiatives. Hector was thrilled because he welcomes anyone or any agency that is willing to work with them to improve the community. Shortly thereafter, Tali began visiting the community. One of her first recommendations to Hector was that they should transform the volunteer group he headed into a formal community board. He agreed and together they organized a community meeting where residents voted for their first community board. Unsurprisingly, Hector was elected president, and two female residents occupied important positions in the board: Miriam Pérez was elected vice-president and Madeline Nieves was elected secretary. Another community resident was

elected as treasurer, but due to inconsistencies he was replaced by Edwin Méndez, an accountant who is not a community resident, but has been a lifelong friend of Hector.

Tali not only helped constitute the community board, but also helped develop it. She attended all community board meetings in order to observe how they work. She oriented them on how to run a meeting and how to plan community events. She provided them with forms to help document different aspects of their work, such as collaborations with public and private agencies. In other words, she accompanied them in the process of consolidating the board.

For Hector, Tali's assistance has been very useful. Before she came to the community, he worked with only a small group of volunteers. Now, more people are involved and he is much more accountable to the community. Tali's help handing out flyers and visiting residents to talk about community issues and promote community events has helped raise the resident's awareness about their community, which translated into an increased interest in attending community meetings and activities. Fellow residents even stop him in the street to ask when the next meeting or activity will take place. However, Tali's most important contribution has been her mere presence. For Hector, Tali is someone that helps him with questions, clarifies doubts and asks for help in carrying out community tasks.

Tali's help has allowed Hector and the community to expand the scope of their work. With her assistance, the community board has coordinated and held a number of community events: a youth summer camp, workshops and social activities. Tali has helped especially with contacting agencies and securing needed resources to celebrate events.

Hector acknowledges that the community board needs more funds to sustain their initiatives. He wants to legally incorporate the board as a nonprofit organization in order to qualify for government funds. He is aware that this would introduce new challenges, such as audits, but he understands that such new demands are necessary if they want to grow. He needs more advice on how to do all the legal paperwork associated with becoming a nonprofit and hopes Tali can help.

By March of 2008, when I first visited the community with Tali, she had been visiting the community for over a year and a half. Tali planned this visit to distribute flyers and personally invite residents to a workshop on hors d'oeuvres confection she coordinated with the home economist of Moca's Agricultural Extension program. Her goal with this workshop is to encourage local residents, especially housewives, to develop a catering business.

The workshop is scheduled to take place in Ruben's house, a farmer and active community member. We visit his house and after some small talk, Ruben tells Tali he has been quarreling with the mayor over the repairs to the community's main road. La Cuevita is located on a very steep hill and when it rains the road becomes extremely slippery and dangerous. Tali made the initial contact with the mayor to request that the road be fixed in order to ameliorate its steep angle. Tali informs Ruben that according to the mayor fixing the road was too expensive. Ruben questions that explanation stating, in an irate tone, that three thousand dollars would do. He adds that if that is too expensive, how come the mayor spent five thousand dollars to show Carlos "El Indio" Quintana's, a local boxing champion, most recent fight free of charge in the plaza. Tali remains silent

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not knowing what to say. Unfortunately, this is an election year and mayors get more political millage from that kind of political activity than from fixing a community road.

We continued visiting residents distributing flyers and hearing their complaints and ideas. Eventually, we reach Hector's house. Hector greets us and talks to Tali once again about legally incorporating the community, a new recreational project on which they have been working and general community problems. Tali asks him about the new speed bumps. She says many residents have complained. He responds somewhat angrily that people who complain only think about themselves; they only view things from an individual point of view. He had them built thinking about the general community's safety. Nonetheless, if people want to complain he will put up a suggestions box near his house where people can express themselves. He will not be able to attend all the complaints, but so be it. Besides, he is interested in fulfilling those tasks to which he originally committed and, after that, he will quit and let someone else continue the work. Hector's comments capture the frustrations of a community leader. After that, Tali politely said goodbye and we continued our visits with the remaining residents.

After a couple of visits, we arrived at Wanda's house, a local resident with whom Tali has a good relationship. Tali casually asks her where she has been hiding since she has not seen her in a while. Wanda tells her that she is upset with a couple of the community leaders after an incident with her son during the Three Kings Day celebration. Wanda thought that the general consensus was that all the kids were going to receive gifts. Nevertheless, her oldest son, who is 13 years old, was told he did not qualify because he was too old. Only after some gifts were left over, did the organizers call her son to give him a gift. At that point, Wanda felt insulted and returned the gift.

Wanda tells Tali that she is unemployed and a single mom, but she still has her pride left. She is not interested in second-hand gifts. She can make the necessary sacrifices to buy her son the gifts he wants. After that, she decided to no longer participate in community events.

Tali responds in shock because she attended the event and even helped distribute gifts. She knew nothing about this. Tali assures Wanda that she will bring this issue up with board members and reiterates her commitment to working with everyone. Wanda tells her she is aware that Tali had nothing to do with this. But, she insists that the community is divided into camps that favor some over others. She knows this because she was not invited to another community event: an excursion to Ponce, one of Puerto Rico's main cities.

We hand Wanda the flyer and after a couple of other house visits we arrive at Miriam Pérez's house, the board's vice-president. We call at her house and fortunately Miriam is home. Tali asks her immediately about the incident. Miriam tells her that Wanda blew this whole thing out of proportion. Her son did not deserve to receive a gift because he is too old, 14 years old. Tali does not correct Miriam about the boy's age. Miriam continues saying that the gifts were for the younger kids, not for teenagers. Like him, there were others that did not receive gifts. Miriam criticizes Wanda saying she is presentá (shameful) and wanted by all means for her son to get a gift.

After Miriam finishes, Tali limits herself to saying that she thought everyone should have received a gift and that these things need to be addressed before the board. She hands her the promotional flyer and we leave. As we are walking, Tali tells me that these problems never happened when ASPRI was in charge of events because they work

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with everyone. But, when communities begin to operate independently through their boards these sorts of problems and misunderstandings begin to emerge…

Discussion:

The vignette on La Cuevita's community activism offers very rich ethnographic material to analyze a number of practical issues related to organized volunteer groups and ultimately to the politics of grassroots support. Unlike most of the other communities in which ASPRI chose to work, La Cuevita had a core group of volunteers and a committed leader already working prior to Tali's entrance in the community. Moreover, this group had established a good working relationship with the mayor through positive project experiences. Therefore, Tali avoided the recurrent issue of selecting a community that required developing the very notion of community activism. Also, Tali entered La Cuevita at a moment in which Hector and his group saw the need and could benefit from outside assistance. Thus, the community was ripe for the development of a collaborative agreement between a GSO like ASPRI and local active residents.

This experience suggests that GSOs like ASPRI should probably expand the criteria of community selection beyond the mere identification of communities that fall under the poverty line and exhibit a number of social and infrastructure problems and needs. These elements should be accompanied by other factors, such as communities with some level of activism present and whose leaders find themselves at a point where they recognize the value of grassroots support work. This is not to disdain efforts to work with communities that demand greater organizational work, but rather to assert that the type of assistance offered by GSOs might be best invested in communities that are receptive to it because they find themselves at a point where external assistance not only makes sense,

but is needed. In the absence of community activism, the assistance offered by GSOs like ASPRI seems too abstract or unnecessary, as was the case in Pueblo Nuevo and Capriles.

The existent of these social conditions in La Cuevita allowed Tali to transform a series of local initiatives into organized community work. Her first contribution was to help the existent volunteer group transition to a formal community board. This gave the community not only a structured leadership, but also an institutionalized mechanism, a board, that could be occupied by others and was accountable to the will and scrutiny of residents. Hector never tired of mentioning that Tali's greatest contribution was helping them expand their work from a small group of volunteers to a formal group representing the community.

Talibenete also contributed by serving as an intermediary between the community and public and private agencies. Unfortunately for community residents, public and private agencies are more receptive and respond more quickly to requests made by NGOs such as ASPRI than to individual or group requests from low-income residents. As part of her grassroots support work, Tali lent her agency's credibility to the community by visiting public agencies to request resources on their behalf.

Yet, even NGOs like ASPRI see their intermediary function undermined by political considerations. As narrated in the above example, Tali presented a request to the mayor on behalf of the community: to fix the main road. The mayor's rejection of her petition because it was too expensive was critiqued by community residents, like Rubén, on the grounds that politics, not government finances, were the real reason behind the mayor's refusal to help. Rubén knew of other municipal expenses that exceeded the amount required for their project, but were politically more attractive to the mayor:

offering the town free access to a boxing match in which a local champion was disputing his crown. In an election year, this sort of activity helps project the mayor's image to all sectors of the population and earn him the voter's sympathy. Although residents are well aware of the political motivations behind his decision, Tali and ASPRI lost some credibility before community residents because in their eyes she failed to deliver on an important community demand. Ironically, the mayor's political calculation made Tali look as impotent as residents themselves, which could lead some, like Rubén, to lose confidence in her capacity to mediate between public agencies and the community, and, therefore, stop channeling requests through the agency she represents.

Party politics also played an important role in the community's activism. Tali soon found out that Hector was a young political ally of the mayor and had some political aspirations. Thus, La Cuevita is another example of a mayor referring a community to ASPRI relying on political criteria: channeling resources to a political ally. Hector did not hide his political affinities with the mayor's political party. In fact, he openly admitted to making some of his community requests to state and municipal politicians during party events, which he regularly attended. Hector was also very aware of his role as a community leader in the broader political scene. He once told me that his community work contributed to boost the mayor's image. By developing local projects and publically crediting the mayor for his help, Hector let people know about the mayor's commitment to local communities. In other words, Hector was very aware that his success as a community leader indirectly advanced the mayor's political career.

Hector knew that politicians considered community leaders as valuable assets. Community leaders have direct contact with residents and command their respect.

Politicians often use community leaders as political pawns to win over voters and mobilize the masses to help further their individual political aspirations. Hector's awareness of his political attractiveness to politicians allowed him to critically engage this political game and benefit from their mutual manipulation. This mutual manipulation exemplifies the dual manipulation that Rafael Ramirez (1973) argued was embedded in patronage politics in Puerto Rico: politicians and citizens attempted to advance their own interests by demanding and facilitating the transfer of state resources. In Hector's case, politicians were certainly going to use him to gain political capital out of his work, but he took advantage of their interest in him to secure favors and resources for the community.

Hector's community involvement was not driven exclusively by his committment to improving his community. He was also an aspiring politician who was using community work and his presidency over a community board as his political springboard. As such, Hector exemplifies the dual objectives motivating people to participate in community initiatives identified by Gordon Hannah (2006) in his research on community-based anti-poverty initiatives. According to Hannah, people "choose to become involved in initiatives because they perceive that involvement will further their own objectives as well as go for the greater good of the community" (p. 12). In Hector's case, he often spoke of his interest in expanding his influence beyond La Cuevita. His inclusion of Edwin as treasurer in the board responded to those interests. Edwin lived in a nearby sector and together they began reaching out to other sectors to promote community work. According to Hector, La Cuevita was only one of the many sectors in this neighborhood that were somewhat abandoned. He had already attempted to mobilize

residents in other sectors, but apparently had not had much success, in part, because he does not command the same respect there as in La Cuevita. Yet, these initial failures did not deflate his enthusiasm for expanding his area of influence as a community leader.

Hector's political interests and loyalties had not compromised the community's support of the board or his leadership. However, I knew of at least one family in the community that sympathized with an opposing political party and did not participate in any events because they labeled Hector as a political pawn of the mayor. Politics is a very divisive issue in Puerto Rico, as in most places. Thus, community board members who identify with political parties run the risk of alienating residents who might otherwise collaborate since they might identify their work with party politics rather than community activism.

Besides politics, internal conflicts between or among residents also threatens the viability of community development efforts. This threat increases if some of those residents are part of the community board. The incident involving Wanda's son was one such case. The board decided that adolescents were not to be included in the distribution of gifts during a Christmas celebration, yet apparently that decision was not clearly transmitted to all community residents. Wanda felt insulted when her son was first denied a gift and later offered one only after there were some leftover. At stake in this issue is much more than the hurt feelings of a young boy and his mother. As Tali suggested, once residents take command of their community boards, they are responsible for not only implementing community events, but also managing inter-personal conflicts. If board members fail to do so, residents, like Wanda, will withdraw not only their support to the board, but, more importantly, their (and their family's) participation in events.

GSO offer conflict resolution workshops to give board members the necessary skills to address and contain potentially divisive situations among community residents. Tali expressed to me during a subsequent visit to the community that she was planning on offering such a workshop during the next community board meeting. Yet, there are situations which nullify the effects of these workshops. Communities are spaces of solidarity, but also of interpersonal violence. Conflicts between or among neighbors or family members often divide communities, creating resentments that last years and are often passed down to younger generations. Wanda alluded to that when she argued that she had not been invited to other events. Also, the disdain with which Miriam treated Wanda's complaint points to deeper differences between them. While the issue at hand, the Christmas gift, seems like the kind of misunderstanding that could be rectified by means of a conflict resolution intervention, the problem might be an expression of deeper differences between Wanda and board members. Personal conflicts between or among neighbors, especially those that have been dragged for years, point to the limits of grassroots support. Conflict resolution strategies are designed to deal with differences emerging during the process of working together in a project or making tough decisions. However, some communities are beset with internal problems among residents whose complexity and emotional scars transcend the differences expressed during a community development initiative. These scars are beyond the capacity of a tool like conflict resolution workshops to redress.

Tali faced an even greater internal conflict involving a board member in another community, Ajíes in Añasco. She had been working for about a year and a half in that community, in which time she had helped organize a board, social activities and health

clinics. Everything seemed to be working fine, until one day the president of the board decided to move in with a teenage woman from the community. His decision was not well received by many community members due to her age and the fact that they were living in a consensual union. In a community populated by deeply religious families, many interpreted his actions as an immoral act. Some residents not only chastised him, but also withdrew their support from the whole community organizing project that was so closely identified with him. Tali tried to organize a new board, but faced the disinterest of many former active members. This type of internal conflict exceeded Tali's mission in the community and lied beyond the capacity of her grassroots support tools and intervention strategies to resolve.

By contrast, there were other instances in which Tali could have assisted the community, specifically the board, in its development, but did not have the knowledge or experience required. For example, Hector expressed to Tali on repeated occasions his interest in legally incorporating the board as a nonprofit organization. Tali suggested that he visit the State Department, which is where the Puerto Rican government processes those requests. Besides that, Tali did not orient him on how to go about incorporating the board or assisted him in actually doing it. I asked Tali about this and to my surprise she told me that she had never incorporated a board. I was surprised because Tali has worked for ASPRI about four years and has been involved with numerous communities. Yet, according to her the communities with which she has worked had been satisfied working as volunteer groups and never expressed interest in acquiring the nonprofit status.

Incorporating nonprofit organizations was not the only skill about which Tali lacked both knowledge and experience. Tali's bachelor education in social work offered

her very little training on community development. As part of her education, Tali took general courses on social work theory and practice, including one course that dealt with groups and communities. Tali did her internship at a local Head Start program, in which she did mostly clinical work. Unfortunately, social work programs at the undergraduate level in Puerto Rico do not offer any specializations. Graduate programs do offer them, but they focus mostly, if not exclusively, on clinical work, with the exception of the doctoral program at the University of Puerto Rico at Río Piedras, which focuses on policy analysis.[61] Therefore, Tali did not even have the opportunity during her education to receive training in the professional field in which she would later work.

When she was hired by ASPRI to work in their community development program, Tali was handed the job description which specified her responsibilities and a brief orientation on community work by Francisco Pereira, a program evaluator, and Yulissa Morales, the former director of the community development program at the Mayaguez Regional office. Aside from that, ASPRI has not offerd Tali any other professional or institutional training on community development.

Tali is not the only one who lacked specialized education in the professional field in which she was working. None of the other community workers had professional or institutional training in the field of community development or grassroots support either. This contrast with the official version offered by Alicia Ramirez, ASPRI's Executive Director. According to her, ASPRI has made a conscious effort to hire well-trained social workers in their respective areas, including community development. Moreover, she claims Maria Elena, the sub-director, translates all the modules prepared by the Office for

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[61] Psychology, specifically, community psychology has filled somewhat the gap left in community organizing and development by the social work profession in Puerto Rico

Community Service, which they later use to train their personnel. But, Ehida Torres, who besides being in charge of the community development program has worked in the agency for close to twenty five years, admitted that ASPRI used to train their recently hired personnel in the community development program, but no longer does so. She recalled that the agency used to offer them three day workshops delivered by external resources. The workshops used to provide written materials and covered such topics as what is a community, how to enter a community, how to carry out community interventions, etc.

The practice of hiring social workers not specifically trained in community development and the absence of a training module for new hires in ASPRI resulted in community workers who were not properly trained to carry out the multiple tasks and interventions required by the program. Community workers were aware of this. In fact, the gap between what the agency and the program's model expected of them and their lack of knowledge, skills and experience in the field of community development was one of their constant complaints. For example, while conducting a needs assessment, María interviewed a participant in the presence of a third party, even though she stated that the interview was confidential. After the interview, I mentioned this to her and she told me that if she made such mistakes it was because she never had any formal training in the field of community development and ASPRI did not train her on organizing or development models beyond the general introduction offered by Pereira and Yulissa. She insisted that she had learned on the job and through trial and error.

Tali and María attended regular continuing education seminars required of them by the Colegio de Trabajadores Sociales, the local organization that regulates the

profession. They complained that the Colegio rarely offered a seminar on the topic of community development. When I contacted the Colegio to inquire about such seminars, Wanda Ramos, who is in charge of the continuing education program, told me that they do offer them from time to time, but they almost always end up canceling them because few people register for them.[62] For example, the seminars scheduled for January and February 2008 were cancelled because only two people registered for the first and only three people registered for the second. She expressed they are more than willing to offer such seminars, but that social workers do not seem interested in the topic.

Tali's lack of proper education and training in community development points to much more than personal deficiencies. Community development, particularly community economic development, has not received the proper attention by social work programs in Puerto Rico, both in public and private schools at the undergraduate and graduate level. Unfortunately, this deficiency in social work education in Puerto Rico is not unique to Puerto Rico. Margare Sherraden and William Ninac argue in their introduction to the 1998 volume of the *Journal of Community Practice*, which was dedicated to exploring the relationship between community economic development and social work, that "[m]uch of CED's [community economic development's] expertise is still in the field and not in the halls of academia, and this certainly weakens education about CED" (Sherraden & Ninacs, 1998, p. 8). Thus, social work education in the U.S. and Puerto Rico has underemphasized not community development training, specifically the business know-how required of community economic development.

Like social work education programs, the Colegio de Trabajadores Sociales (Social Worker's Guild) and the local chapter of the National Association of Social

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[62] Personal interview, Wanda Ramos, February 4, 2009.

Workers (NASW) have not developed community development as an important field of professional development. There seems to be a contradiction between the popularity of the discourse of community development in the island and the lack of institutional investment in producing professionals with the necessary skills to carry out these local development initiatives. This disinvestment in producing professionals in this field is surprising since the government runs a national program called Special Needs Communities, which requires community organizers operating throughout the island.[63] Also, the expansion of nonprofit organizations offers a potential sector in which professionally trained community workers could be employed. Agencies like ASPRI certainly need such professionally trained community workers. Yet, neither the universities nor the professional organizations in social work have responded to these new employment sectors or professional needs.

My interview with Mrs. Ana Lopez, the local National Association of Social Workers (NASW) president in 2008, was emblematic of this situation. When I asked her for information on community social work in the island, she mentioned that although they do administer a questionnaire to track where social workers are employed, the questionnaire does not have any entry for community work. NASW had work related information on social workers, but she could not tell me how many social workers worked in community development or community-oriented agencies. In fact, she told me she did not know much about the field and expressed that she had not thought much about it either.

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[63] The Fortuño administration laid off most of the employees of the Special Needs Communities Program as part of his neoliberal government restructuring program in 2010. The program still exists, but its lack of employees has left it almost inoperative. Yet, throughout the past decade, the program employed tens, if not hundreds, of organizers, most of which had no educational background or professional experience in community organizing or development work.

Besides reflecting a huge institutional oversight by both universities and professional organizations, the implications of this oversight are huge for communities and community workers. Grassroots support has to be delivered by trained professionals or experienced community workers knowledgeable of the various models it integrates, which includes being competent in adult education and technology transfer (Chavis et al., 1993). The current enthusiasm over the potential of community development, particularly community economic development, to contribute to social change efforts in the island has not been matched with the proper human capital necessary, professional community workers, to help transform this promise into a viable reality. Professionals like Tali and María are committed to their work, but lack basic skills and knowledge necessary to make them useful resources to communities. Thus, their promise of grassroots support assistance is backed mostly by their good faith and genuine effort to help, but not by the necessary knowledge and experience.

Finally, ASPRI's disinvestment in training programs is equally puzzling. How useful are intervention models if the agency's personnel is not properly trained to execute them? The absence of an expert and experienced personnel undermines the whole premise of grassroots support: a professional class sharing their knowledge and expertise with community residents to assist them as they develop their own projects. If such knowledge and expertise is not available, what justifies the continued financing of agency's like ASPRI? On what grounds do they justify their intervention in the field of community development?

On the other hand, communities, especially community leaders, look for assistance to develop their efforts from organizations that allegedly have the expertise to

help them. However, they confront the reality that so-called professionals are people who have learned the field, like them, through trial and error. Hector's request for assistance from Tali to incorporate the board as a nonprofit faced this dilemma: Tali, the professional community worker, knows little more than he did about the process. Moreover, her incapacity to deliver on his request has broader implications for her overall grassroots support agenda. According to L. David Brown and Archana Kalegaonkar's (2002) research on support organizations, those agencies "that lack competence or credibility for work on key sectorial issues, for example, can create skepticism and distrust for future efforts" (p. 255). By not having a personnel that is competent in such key areas as incorporating a board, agencies like ASPRI run the risk of becoming one more unfulfilled promise or one more obstacle community leaders have to overcome.

C. Practice #3: Levering Resources for Communities

In the participatory development model, the support of public and private agencies is crucial for communities to achieve the broad outcomes of self-management and economic self-sufficiency. The term intermediary is used to capture the unique ability of GSOs to coordinate and manage the transfer of extensive resources from these agencies to communities in order to help them realize their projects (Chavis et al., 1993; Vidal & Keyes, 2005). As intermediaries, GSOs play a very important role: they fill the structural gap separating community-based organizations and national and international governments, financial institutions and foundations. Their location at the center of a wide network of constituents allows GSOs to aggregate resources from a number of sources and to distribute them to local grassroots actors as they demand them. Beyond the aggregation of resources, the notion of intermediary highlights the potential of these

organizations to serve as a conduit for innovative ideas and demands across the network, negotiate deals and mediate conflicts (Brown 1991, p. 812).

ASPRI functions as an intermediary organization. The general guidelines for its community development program specify the coordination and transfer of resources from public and private agencies to community groups as one of its main objectives. Moreover, ASPRI obtains most, if not all, of the financial and human resource they make available to communities from donations made by these agencies. Yet, the process of coordinating resources from multiple agencies is often mired by bureaucratic clogs, intra-agency conflicts and individual inefficiencies, which sometimes interferes and/or hinders the realization of community projects. Moreover, this intermediary function exposes GSOs as organizations dependent not only on the will, but also the finances of other agencies to deliver on their promises of grassroots support.

Ethnographic Case Study: Summer Camp in Com. Castillo, May 2008

May 5, 2008

I met up with Claribel at the regional office. Today, and for the next couple of weeks, Claribel will be busy coordinating the summer camp for com. Castillo, which will be held during the first three weeks of July. Claribel hopes to recruit a total of 45 children and youth from the community, as well as some adults to help out. Besides sports, she plans to offer educational talks, transportation and food to all attendees.

She begins her quests to secure resources for the summer camp by visiting the Department of Education's regional office in Mayagüez, specifically the Administration of School Cafeterias. Claribel is trying to get the Administration to supply breakfast and lunch for the summer camp. When we arrive, Claribel is told that Carolina, the person with whom she had an appointment, is absent. Claribel complains that no one called her

to cancel the appointment. She asks to speak with someone else, but the only other person who can see her has a full calendar. The secretary offers Claribel the basic information she needs in order to qualify for the food service and invites her to make a new appointment.

As we leave, Claribel shares with me the department's requirements. They require a salon equipped to serve lunch, that is, with tables and chairs. She was hoping to have lunch in the community's basketball court, but it will not pass inspection. It is missing a part of its ceiling, there are doves nest and excrement everywhere, and, most importantly, there is nowhere to serve the food. Claribel decides she will try to have the court fixed before contacting Caroline again.

Claribel looks worried. She confirms this when she shares with me her fear that without proper facilities they will not approve food for the camp. She adds that this is the second bad news she has heard today. Earlier in the morning Claribel confronted problems confirming the use of the local elementary school as site for the summer camp. The principle told her that Claribel had to obtain permission from the regional office. She called and someone from the regional office told her that the principle, not them, made that sort of decision. Claribel called the central office in San Juan and they informed her that the region was responsible for authorizing those sorts of collaborations. She was also informed that she would be asked to pay a deposit. Claribel is well aware that ASPRI does not have money to pay that deposit. Without the school and food, Claribel fears that the summer camp will not happen.

This is the first time Claribel plans a summer camp, but ASPRI holds them every year in different communities. She has never heard of anyone having problems

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coordinating help for the camps from municipal and state agencies. She fears that this will reflect poorly on her and might get her fired.

We head to the municipal government's Sports and Recreation Office. Claribel wants them to fix the court for the camp as well as for the general community's use. She also wants them to recommend someone for the position of camp recreational leader. ASPRI will pay this person $750 for more or less 20 days work in July. Upon our arrival, Claribel is informed that the two directors did not come to work today. The secretary is kind enough to call Joshua Sanabria, an employee who might be able to help us.

Claribel explains the court's problems to Sanabria, who expresses his surprise since he visited that court not long ago and did not notice any problems. He also mentions that Tito el Gallero takes good care of that court. But, he clarifies that the court was one of 32 that the state government just ceded to the municipality in the latest installment of state devolution of powers to municipal governments.

Claribel dramatizes the urgency of her request by informing Mr. Sanabria that com. Castillo has never had a summer camp and although she is interested in coordinating one, the facilities might undermine her effort. Sanabria empathizes, but tells her she needs to speak with Mr. Rafael Pau, the Director of not only this office, but also the Municipal Housing Agency. As we leave, Claribel expresses her frustration. This, like all her other efforts this morning, have been fruitless. Sanabria only told her what she already knew: she needs to speak with the director, who is not available. She feels like her efforts are a waste of time.

We head to the community. Claribel decides she will take pictures of the court's missing ceiling to document the need for repair. When we arrive, we meet the elementary

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school's physical education teacher, who is in the court with a group of fifth graders. He tells us that he has written over twenty letters since 2002 asking for the court to be fixed. He gets the run around from every agency: the municipal government tells him the state Housing Agency is responsible and this latter agency claims the city is responsibility. Claribel tells him what we just found out and he wishes us better luck than what we had.

Before we leave, the teacher suggests using the facilities of a protestant church right across the street from the court. He claims they have good facilities that could seat forty to fifty people. Claribel writes down this idea and tells him she will speak with the pastor.

Claribel decides to visit Tito el Gallero, the community leader who has been helping her coordinate the camp. Claribel asks him about the possibility of using the church, but he informs her that they have their own summer camp. I am confused. Did Claribel lie when she told Sanabria that Castillo had never had a summer camp? Has Claribel contacted all organizations serving the community to find out their programs? Tito suggests that Claribel speak with the Pentecostal church further down the road. In fact, he volunteers to get Claribel a meeting with the pastor.

Claribel tells him how frustrated she is with the different government agencies she has visited. Tito hears her out and counsels her on how to deal with the government in P.R. She needs to work her way from the top to the bottom. Claribel needs to get the mayor's or the agency's director's approval of what she wants before going to the employees requesting a particular service. Once you have your request approved by the boss, so to speak, employees follow orders and get things done. If she insists on working her way from the bottom up, her requests will be put aside.

Tito informs Claribel that he has been spreading the word about the summer camp and the local youth have shown interest. It would be regrettable if the camp does not take place after the youth are looking forward to it. Claribel tells him she is doing her best, but that not even the school principal is cooperating. She has resisted authorizing the use of the school's classrooms for the summer camp. Tito complains that she never wants to help with anything. She has created animosity with parents, does not spend time with students, does not attend their activities, and has even sued teachers.

We leave Tito's house and head back to the office. During our ride back, Claribel shares with me that Tito's comments on the principal confirms what she has been hearing from various other sources: there is an internal power struggle between the director, on the one hand, and parents and teachers, on the other. However, Claribel clarifies that she does not side with anyone and is willing to work with everyone. Moreover, the director has never spoken ill of anyone in the community.

We came back to the office because Claribel has to pick up a proposal the agency plans to submit to the WIA (Worker's Investment Act) office, a federal employment, adult literacy and vocational rehabilitation program. Ehida Torres asked Claribel if she could get WIA to sponsor two people to work in the summer program. Claribel inquired and was told she had to submit a proposal. Ehida and Ligsia, the regional office's secretary, wrote the proposal and Claribel was supposed to formally submit it on behalf of the agency. We look over the proposal and, interestingly, Ehida petitioned two more people to work in the office with Ligsia. Claribel hopes that does not hurt her chances to get the people she needs for the summer camp.

After lunch, we drop off the proposal at the local WIA office. Claribel decides she is going to catch up on some of casework and we call it a day.

May 8, 2008

Before leaving with Talibenete for com. Capriles in San Germán, I speak briefly with Claribel to catch up on Castillo's summer camp. Claribel informs me she spoke with the church's pastor, who expressed her willingness to lend the church's facilities, but requested that Claribel submit a formal request to the Presbitero, an authority figure above the pastor. Claribel tells me she is in the process of writing that letter. She also tells me she met with the director of the School Cafeteria division in the Department of Education and was told that she still had time to submit the request and that the church facilities would do. Tito continues to hand out flyers and spread the word, something she has confirmed because people from the community have approached her expressing their interest in participating. Today she is going to call again about the classrooms. She tells me that apparently no one likes the principal, not even the School Cafeteria director. Finally, WIA approved a person to work in the summer camp and is going to fund an arts and craft workshop taught by a registered artisan.

Claribel feels satisfied with these results. Most of her requests to the different agencies have resulted in ASPRI securing the necessary resources, free of charge, to carry out the camp.

May 20, 2008

Claribel and I meet up early in the morning because she has an 8 a.m. appointment in the Administration of School Cafeterias. Today she is signing a contract with them that guarantees the summer camp breakfast and lunch throughout July. After

signing the contract, we head over to the Housing Department to personally hand a letter to the director requesting permission to use the basketball court for the summer camp. The director asked for this letter because there is a lawsuit pending over an accident that occurred in the court. In the letter, ASPRI specifies they have their own insurance policy that covers any accidents and potential lawsuits. The director wants the legal division to analyze whether with this policy ASPRI can use it for the camp. Claribel hands him the letter and, after a quick glance, the director asks her to include the name of the insurance company. Claribel will have to go to the office and re-type the letter with that information.

While we drive back and forth, I catch up on the latest community gossip. The school director and the director of the Housing Department told Claribel that Tito el Gallero installed a series of swings in the community's baseball park in an area that the Housing Department had ceded to the school for them to build six new classrooms. This created an angry controversy between the principal and Tito el Gallero. The principal told Claribel to keep a close eye on Tito, since apparently he is claiming that he is the organizer of the summer camp.

After finally dropping off the corrected letter, we head towards the offices of another NGO, EduDeportes (SportsEducation). Claribel learned about this organization from the Executive Director, Alma Aponte, who called ASPRI to introduce her organization and its services a couple of years ago. It was founded in 1990 by Luis A. Gómez Monagas, a business man and former owner of the local professional baseball team, the Mayagüez Indians. This NGO uses sports as an educational tool to combat drug and alcohol use among youth. Its programs emphasize discipline and personal

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responsibility and promote healthy self-esteem among adolescents. It offers workshops,
conferences and talks, all delivered by either famous sports figures, such as professional
baseball players, or psychologists and social workers. Its funding comes primarily from
Gómez's company, Gómez Holdings, but it also receives funds from the national
legislature, Fundación Comunitaria and United Ways as well as from contract with the
Departments of Education and Family.

Claribel came to drop off a letter requesting a conference on bullying and drug
prevention for the summer camp. Last year, ASPRI submitted a similar request for its
summer camp in el Mani, another low-income sector in Mayagüez and they delivered a
conference free of charge. Claribel hands the letter to the director, who asks her if the
letter specifies the date in which she wants the conference. Claribel clarifies she has not
finalized the camps calendar, but that whatever date works for them would do. Before
leaving, Claribel asks the director to sign a form required by ASPRI to document official
business and after doing so, the director asks Claribel to sign the visitor's log.
Documenting every activity is part of the nonprofit practices of accountability to funders.

Claribel gets a call from the office that a resident of com. Castillo is waiting for
her there to enroll his kid in the camp. We arrive and Claribel asks him how he found out
about the camp, to which the man replied that Tito el Gallero visited him and informed
him of this summer opportunity for his kid. Unfortunately, the man did not bring the
appropriate income evidence to qualify his kid for the camp. Claribel informs him that
ASPRI works with federal funds that require her to document the need (low-income) of
all participants. She asks him to gather all documents that evidence his income and come
back.

When he leaves, we head to the community. We go to the basketball court, where Claribel informed the community she would be receiving anyone interested in signing up their kids for the camp. Two young girls are waiting for Claribel. They ask her for the necessary paperwork. Claribel hands them a sheet specifying the documents she needs to qualify them. There are other kids playing in the court, which seems like it has been recently painted. Claribel asks inquires about that and a couple of the kids tell her that the physical education teacher got the municipal government to clean and paint the court. Interestingly, they add that Tito el Gallero does not take care of the court. He maintains the baseball park because his kids play baseball. They criticize him further because he thinks he is in charge of the recreational facilities just because he put a couple of swings in the park.

Claribel looks at me and tells me that people from the community do not like Tito very much. As she finishes, one of the kids tells us that Tito is planning a summer camp. Claribel stops him angrily and clarifies that he is only helping her and ASPRI put the camp together. She looks at me again, but this time she does not say anything. She does not have to. It begins to rain. The ceiling has not been repaired so the court gets all wet. We watch it get flooded. I hope that July does not bring a lot of rainy days.

Discussion:

Castillo's summer camp is one of those social activities promoted by ASPRI that fits within their general framework of community development. The summer camp serves to mobilize the community, contributes to the formation of a community identity, offers recreational activities free of charge to children and youth, and allows ASPRI a unique opportunity to offer a variety of seminars and workshops on the topics of drug

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prevention, interpersonal violence and arts and crafts, which furthers their agenda of molding these youth into more capable, democratic and responsible citizens. Yet, Castillo's summer camp opens up for discussion a number of issues related to the delivery of grassroots support by nongovernmental organizations, particularly their financial capacity to deliver them and the political negotiations involved in acquiring needed resources.

Every summer ASPRI offers some of the communities in which they work a summer camp. In order to materialize such an offering, they coordinate resources with public and private agencies. In the case of Castillo's summer camp, Claribel leveraged resources, such as food, facilities, conferences, personnel and promotional assistance, from the following agencies and individuals: the Department of Education, the municipal government's Sports and Recreation Office, the federal government's WIA office, the state's Housing Department, school administrators, community leaders, a local nongovernmental organization called EduDeportes, and the local Pentecostal church. Claribel visited each of these agencies and organizations, met with directors and other personnel, and requested goods and services for a community project. In so doing, she served as an intermediary between these agencies and the community with which she was working, Castillo.

The pursuit of GSO mediated collaborative agreements between communities and public and private agencies seem like a logical and necessary component of any grassroots support model. However, the expectations of what these mediations can and should produce often collide with the entrenched institutional practices and political processes of public agencies. Castillo's case study revealed how ASPRI's intermediary

role entailed getting involved in political negotiations that exceeded the specificity of the request or demand being made. For example, Claribel's attempt to get the basketball court in optimum conditions not only for playing ball, but also for other uses, such as an improvised cafeteria, was consistently sidetracked because municipal and state agencies were unwilling to assume responsibility for the problem. This example points not only to a lack of inter-agency coordination, but also to institutional inefficiency resulting from policy decisions, such as devolution. Since the 1990s, the Puerto Rican state government has transferred a series of powers and responsibilities to lower administrative levels, including municipal governments. As a result, city agencies are now in charge of facilities formerly administered by state agencies. In this case, the state's Housing Department transferred 32 courts to Mayagüez's municipal government. Yet, this transfer of power and responsibility has not been clearly articulated into a set of institutional practices in which employees know who controls what and to what extent. In fact, there seemed to be a dual authority over the court: the municipal government maintained it, but the state retained responsibility over authorizing its use. The ambiguous response received by Claribel from the Sports and Recreation employee and the physical education teacher's multiple letters over a span of four or five years proves that the transfer of power and responsibility has served to confuse and even paralyze government services rather than to increase its effectiveness.

The same thing happened with Claribel's petition to use the school's classrooms for the summer camp. Claribel's petition was bounced back and forth between the school's administrators and the regional district office. Paradoxically, government employees working for the same agency, the Department of Education, were uncertain

who was responsible for giving such an authorization. Beyond individual incompetence, this uncertainty exemplifies administrative deficiencies that hamper the capacity of the government to respond to the demands of citizens and organizations. Although Claribel eventually got authorization for the school's classrooms, she saw her intermediary role frustrated with regards to the basketball court. How was she supposed to serve as a mediator if it was not clear to her or government employees with whom she should negotiate?

Tito el Gallero offered Claribel a solution to this administrative impasse of government agencies: Get her request authorized by the mayor or agency's director and then pursuit its execution by employees. Unfortunately, government authority is highly centralized in Puerto Rico at all levels. Government services are delivered more quickly, if at all, if they are put in motion from the top down, rather than vice versa. Claribel's continued insistence on meeting with agency directors shows that she had already incorporated that practice into her repertoire. Yet, this practice serves to reproduce the kind of centralized, clientelistic politics that ASPRI's community development program claims to be transforming. It legitimizes the personification of the political process in agency directors and mayors, rather than strengthening or consolidating administrative processes that are based on citizen's rights. Thus, ASPRI's implementation of its intermediary role defeated the overall mission to which it was committed: the broadening of a participatory democracy.

Besides having to navigate the complex political scenario of Puerto Rico's government agencies, Claribel faced another pressing challenge: financial strain. Claribel repeated over and over again that ASPRI had no money with which to plan and

implement the camp. Oddly enough, ASPRI promises communities a series of services and programming, such as summer camps, which they know they cannot deliver without the assistance of the public and private sector. Moreover, they make that promise before securing the needed assistance. If, for some reason, the government cannot provide food and personnel or fix the facilities, and the private sector cannot contribute money or conferences, ASPRI cannot offer its summer camp and the community is left with an empty promise.

How come ASPRI does not have the financial resources with which to fund its summer camps? Where does ASPRI spend its ten million dollar budget? ASPRI's federal financial records for 2008 indicated it operated with a $10,817,316 budget of which it spent $10,724,030, all from CSBG funds.[64] It itemized its expenses as follows:

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[64] I obtained copy of ASPRI's federal 990 form, the federal tax return form required of nonprofit organizations by the Internal Revenue Service (IRS), through Guidestar.org. This is a nonprofit organization that compiles information about nonprofit agencies in order to promote them and help donors, funders, researchers, educators, professional service providers, governing agencies, and the media evaluate them. Their website address is: http://www2.guidestar.org/. ASPRI also receives contracts from local public agencies. The income from those contracts is not disclosed in the 990 form. I was unable to track the income generated from those contracts.

Table V.I. ASPRI's Detailed Financial Expenses FY 2008		
	Program Services	**Management and General**
Compensation of current officers, directors, etc.		$173,100
Salaries and wages of employees	$5,184,401	$719,744
Payroll taxes	$1,109,822	$158,551
Accounting fees		$13,400
Legal Fees		$27,494
Supplies	$154,666	$25,131
Occupancy	$210,661	$258,363
Travel	$136,238	$37,161
Nutrition	$577,495	
Equipment Rental	$35,854	$18,006
Vehicle Repair and Maintenance	$136,705	$3,080
Building and Centers Repairs	$9,985	$1,331
Other	$1,651,687	$81,155
Total	**$9,207,514**	**$1,516,516**

Table V.II. Program Service Expenses	
Employment program	$1,097,234
Tutorial program - Community development	$1,711,462
Adult care programs	$5,758,055
Emergency Assistance	$640,763
Total	$9,207,514

An analysis of ASPRI's operational budget reveals very clearly why ASPRI does not have the financial resources to cover even minimal program expenses. ASPRI spends $7,345,618 on salaries, compensations and payroll taxes of its over four hundred employees, which represents 68% of its total budget. The remaining $3,378,412 is spent on legal fees, supplies, rent, equipment rental, etc. In other words, ASPRI does not

budget for program expenses that are not strictly necessary. Moreover, ASPRI's spends the majority of its funds in its adult day care program. In fact, ASPRI is known throughout the island much more for its work with elderly populations than for its community development program. The operating costs of the community development program are not even listed independently, but rather are consolidated with the tutorial program entry, which together total about $1.7 million dollars. Although it is not clear how much is spent on it, the total amount must be a fraction of $1.7 million dollars.

This spending pattern questions the effectiveness of delegating federal CSBG funds to ASPRI since most of it is spent on employee salaries not on goods and services for low-income people. To be sure, ASPRI employees provide direct services to low-income populations and communities, but they have little to offer besides showing up with the disposition to assist. Even employees took note of this imbalance in the distribution of finances. María, for example, complained that ASPRI received millions of dollars to carry out community services and programs not for other services. Although important, the tutoring and music programs are not community-oriented programs and, therefore, should not be a priority. According to her, community development should be ASPRI's main program, since the financial resources received by the agency from the federal government are earmarked precisely for communities. Yet, ASPRI's spending priorities leaves this program underfunded year after year.

This budget suggests that salary-related costs drain ASPRI's funds. Sadly, ASPRI's spending pattern reproduces a tendency identified by many NGO critics, such as Gill (1997): NGOs seek funding for development projects in the name of the poor only to use that money to finance middle-class salaries and lifestyles. Despite the services

provided, ASPRI invests most of the CSBG funds it receives in employee salaries. Moreover, within the organization, salaries are not equitably distributed. The three main administrative positions, Executive Director, Sub-Director and Comptroller have very good salaries: $63,600, $54,000 and $54,000, respectively. This contrasts with the salary figures offered to me by community workers. María informed me she made $1,500 a month, which translates to roughly $18,000 a year. Yet, other community workers told me they made as little as $1,100 a month, which barely exceeds $13,000 a year. Thus, the top administrators are making three to five times more than regular employees, which suggests that ASPRI is not much different than most private for profit businesses. Being a mission-driven organization ends up not playing much of a role when it comes to its compensation practices.

Besides revealing spending practices that seem to not match its do-good image, ASPRI's lack of financial resources to fund its activities, not just its employees, also questions a number of the fundamental tenets of the nonprofit sector in the island. First, Estudios Técnicos (2008) study on the sector argued that nongovernmental organizations spent less of their financial resources in payroll, which suggests that more money is spent on clients and program resources. The study found that nonprofits spent 43 cents of each dollar on operational costs, while the government's (executive branch) payroll cost about 65 cents of every dollar. Yet, ASPRI's payroll costs (68% of the total budget spent) are not much different from that of the Puerto Rican government. ASPRI is not doing a better job than the government in directing its resources to clients rather than to employees.

Second, the same study suggested that the nongovernmental sector is able to deliver services at a cheaper rate, which suggests NGOs are more efficient, less

bureaucratic, more flexible and closer to clients. According to the study, for every $1 that the government transfers to a nonprofit to provide health services, it would have to invest $7 to provide that same service. In the field of education, this proportion increases even more: for every $1 that the government transfers, it would have to invest $11 to provide the service. Yet, as the case study of com. Castillo's summer camp suggests, the savings associated with ASPRI's services are possible precisely because it pays employees meager salaries and offers few benefits. Also, it asks the government and private sector to assume the costs of the activities it promotes. ASPRI covered the cost associated with Claribel's salary, the salary of a recreational leader and the insurance policy. Aside from that, ASPRI asked the local and state government to cover the costs of feeding and transporting the children and offering facilities free of charge and fixing them. Moreover, ASPRI reached out to another NGO and the federal government for additional resources, such as speakers and camp personnel. Thus, ASPRI alleges that it reduces the cost of its summer camp by seeking donations from other agencies, but in reality they are transferring a significant amount of the cost of the camp to the government. It seems ironic that ASPRI can later turn that around to argue that it can implement summer camps with much less resources than the state.

Claribel tried to secure as many resources as possible from other agencies in order to reduce or eliminate the costs of summer camp for ASPRI. This was not her individual choice, but rather an unwritten agency policy. Idaliz used to pride herself on carrying out community activities in which ASPRI did not have to invest any money. Maria recalled that during her job interview she was asked the following hypothetical question: What would you do if you wanted to do a community activity and did not have the resources

for it? How would you make it happen? According to María, ASPRI employees have always been encouraged to carry out their activities without the agency's financial support.

The example of com. Castillo's summer camp demonstrates that there is a significant cost associated with community development work, even with activities as simple as a summer camp. Someone has to assume that cost. As a society, Puerto Rican residents have increasingly devolved that responsibility to nongovernmental organizations, like ASPRI, who claim to deliver their services with volunteers and at a reduced cost. Yet, GSOs like ASPRI finance their work by means of government funds. Thus, in ASPRI's case the government is still assuming the cost of investing in community development, but it sub-contracts the service delivery part. On top of that, ASPRI asks the government—local, state and federal—to assume further costs of its community development activities. It hides these costs under the label of donations and agency to agency collaborations. At the end, agencies like ASPRI harvest the benefits of socially responsible community work, when in reality they would not be able to carry out that work without the continued financial investment of the U.S. and Puerto Rican government.

Conclusion

This chapter offered a detailed, ethnographic look at a series of techniques used and roles played by ASPRI as part of their grassroots support strategy. I pursued this ethnographic encounter with a grassroots support program in response to the call made by scholars, like Tania Murray Li and David Mosse, for a greater focus on the accomplishments of development interventions, rather than just on the claims and aims of

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policies and project models (Mosse, 2004, p. 645). This call for research on accomplishments is based on the notion that development schemes "may be secure on paper, but are fragile in practice" (Li, 1999, p. 298). This fragility results from the encounter in the field with a set of social relations, cultural logics and political practices that shape development projects and determine what they can accomplish (Mosse, 2004, p. 651). Following this research agenda, my study of ASPRI's community development program extended beyond interrogating the political motivations and intentions of policies and models to examine how it works and what it accomplishes once implemented.

Each of the ethnographic case studies discussed highlighted how the political and socio-economic logic of the field itself imposed conditions of possibility which exceeded or undermined the prescriptions of models and theory. These case studies suggest that the practice of grassroots support is shaped by the relationship established among the actors involved and the interplay of social forces in the context in which it is implemented. For example, the needs assessment produced knowledge about the communities whose quality and veracity was predicated not only on logistics, such as time of the day and sampling methodology, but, more importantly, on the complexities associated with the encounter between the community worker and community residents. This encounter generated a series of evaluations and counter-evaluation, performances and political negotiations that accounted for the kinds of answers given by residents and the truth value given to it by community workers.

The practice of grassroots support was also influenced and determined by the larger political and socio-economic context in which the community is immersed.

Holding community meetings required negotiating residents' religious commitments and planning around various work and social schedules. Moreover, community leaders like Tito el Gallero and Hector manifested the tensions and contradictions involved in managing the dual objectives driving their community involvement. Both were acknowledged leaders who worked for their respective communities. However, there were moments when their participation and involvement was driven by "the potential of acquiring resources through the initiative that could be used to meet their own needs and goals," a phenomenon encountered by Hannah in his research on community anti-poverty initiatives (Hannah, 2006, p. 12). Moreover, they were also immersed in and proponents of Puerto Rico's system of gender power imbalance and patronage political dynamics. Tito's chauvinistic attitudes eventually undermined his contribution to the success of ASPRI's collaboration with the community. By contrast, Hector's personal political aspirations motivated him to work for the community and to successfully carry out a series of initiatives with the mayor's support. Yet, both community leaders depart significantly from the kind of subject envisioned and aspired to by ASPRI's participatory democracy model: democratic, exercising their rights as citizens, open to collaborative enterprises, respectful of the community's will, etc.

The issue of the political subject encountered by ASPRI is also part of how the broader context delimits the possibilities of grassroots support's practices. Community after community, we encountered residents whose political behavior was attuned to Puerto Rico's paternalistic state politics. ASPRI offered them a different political space in which to operate, but did not invest time and resources in transforming their political behavior in order for them to take advantage of that alternative space and its political

possibilities. The divergence between the political subjects encountered in the communities and the political project ASPRI tried to promote expressed itself as a series of frustrating encounters between residents and community workers. ASPRI's invitation to residents to participate, engage in discussion and take control of their community's destiny were consistently rejected by residents, who constantly demanded ASPRI to deliver goods and services in a manner similar to that of the welfare state. In other words, ASPRI's community development model assumed a disposition in community residents that they resisted and which ASPRI spent very little time cultivating.

Politics also impinged on ASPRI's grassroots support practices by forcing ASPRI to participate in and engage precisely what they aspire to overcome: Puerto Rico's clientelistic and paternalistic political practices. City administrators often imbricate party politics with the process of community selection, leading ASPRI to deliver resources and services to their political followers. Moreover, ASPRI's intermediary role often required it to accept the institutional practices prevalent in government agencies. These examples question the notion, promulgated by the nongovernmental sector, that NGOs are unencumbered by politics and its perils, and, therefore, the state should delegate greater responsibilities to them. My research on ASPRI showed that NGOs are part of the political field, operate in it, depend on the state, and often have to play by the established rules.

Finally, the ethnographic case studies also question the notion that the nongovernmental sector is more professional, efficient and knowledgeable than state agencies with similar responsibilities or communities themselves. ASPRI's work schedule actually thwarted its effectiveness because it did not allow community workers

the flexibility required to visit communities when residents were able to participate: night and weekends. Also, ASPRI at times used educational and communication strategies that did not account for the lack of education of low-income community residents. Ironically, they were too professional. By contrast, there were moments when ASPRI did not have the knowledge or experience required to facilitate the development of a community, which undermined the logic supporting the need for grassroots support organizations. Lastly, ASPRI did not have the resources to deliver most of the services it claimed to be able to deliver. In sum, ASPRI does not present itself necessarily as a more efficient and professional alternative to state actors.

Chapter VI

Empowering Subjects or the Subjects of Empowerment?:

Sila M. Calderón Foundation's Capacity-Building Program for Community Leaders

Introduction

> *...I began to think profoundly about poverty, the different elements that constitute it and ways to approach it, and reached the following conclusions. First, poverty must be approached from multiple points of view. It requires a multifaceted approach. Second, the citizen has to be the center of development and the center of ideas and the plans that are developed for his/her sector. And third, there has to be a partnership, an alliance, among the community, the private sector and public sector.*

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Hon. Sila M. Calderón
Ex-Governor of Puerto Rico
Founder of the Sila M. Calderón Foundation
Personal Interview, March 25, 2008

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Sila M. Calderón began her reflections on poverty and its causes in the early 1990s when she re-visited La Península de Cantera, an impoverished sector of the island's capital, San Juan. She first visited Cantera in 1989 on official business, when as Secretary of State she inspected the damages caused by Hurricane Hugo, a category 4 hurricane considered one of the costliest natural disasters in Puerto Rico's history. In 1990, Mrs. Calderón returned to Cantera as a private citizen, having just quit her government position. In that visit, Mrs. Calderón was deeply impacted by the magnitude of the problems faced by Cantera residents due to the persistence of poverty. She was particularly struck by the stark contrast between this impoverished area and the opulence of its adjacent district, La Milla de Oro, Puerto Rico's primary banking and financial

district. The impact caused by her visit to Cantera motivated Mrs. Calderón to embark on a lifelong project of combating poverty.[65]

Mrs. Calderón's reflections on poverty concur with and reproduce the main tenets of the dominant, progressive anti-poverty approaches of the early 1990s: participatory development and grassroots support.[66] By the 1990s, the limitations of centralized planning models that dominated post-WWII development thinking in Puerto Rico and elsewhere, with their emphasis on macro-economic reforms, large infrastructure development projects and top-down policy making, had become all too obvious. While it promoted a better life for some, it also intensified existing socio-economic inequalities and excluded many from the promises of economic growth. In developing countries, like Puerto Rico during the mid-twentieth century, these exclusions and inequalities resulted from dependent economic models that conditioned the growth of local economies to the production and consumption needs of developed countries (Guardiola, 1998). Moreover, central state planning models proved unable to channel those resources that were available to impoverished or marginalized populations due to the lack of state institutional capacity, political will, corruption and/or inefficiencies in the implementation of social welfare policies (Fisher, 1998, p. 47).

In response to these failures, development agencies, progressive governments and development NGOs began promoting by the late 1980s an alternative model that emphasized citizen participation in the development process. This model inverted the logic of development: "Once the question was 'how can development agencies reach the poor?', now it is 'how can the poor majority reach the makers of public policy?'" (Clark,

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[65] This information is taken from my personal interview with Mrs. Sila Calderón on March 25, 2008.
[66] For a relevant discussion on participatory development see Chapter 1, pp. 10-16.

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1995, p. 595). Participatory development promoted a bottom-up development model which supported people in their process of designing and implementing their own projects. This reflected a movement away from 'supply driven' notions of development, in which the states defined needs and prescribe solutions, to a 'demand-driven' model, in which development institutions, particularly development NGOs, helped communities "articulate their preferences and concerns so as to become active participants in the development process" (ibid., p. 593). This approach sought not only the satisfaction of needs, but the stimulation of a process through which citizens would apply the knowledge of their circumstances and learn how to become effective advocates for their different demands. Furthermore, it called for the formation of partnerships or grassroots support initiatives between development agencies, such as NGOs, and grassroots actors on the basis of mutual respect and equality.

As summarized in the opening quote, Mrs. Calderón's thinking reproduced some of the key tenents of participatory development and grassroots support. She conceived of the citizen as having a leading role in the development process and stressed the need for partnerships between impoverished communities and the public and private sectors. Later in this interview, Mrs. Calderón even acknowledged the coincidences of her thinking with these development models. She maintained that her reflections manifested ideas "whose time had come and sprouted everywhere at the same time."[67] In other words, her ideas evolved in line with, or perhaps as an expression of, the hegemonic notions of development circulating internationally and domestically at the time.

Mrs. Calderón began translating her thoughts on poverty into actual interventions in the island as Director of the Peninsula de Cantera's revitalization project between

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[67] Personal interview, Mrs. Sila M. Calderón, 25 March 2008, my translation.

1992-1995. She later used that experience to build a municipal program, the Special Needs Communities Program, to impact impoverished communities during her term as mayor of San Juan between 1996-2000. Mrs. Calderón subsequently expanded this local initiative into a national program with the same name during her tenure as governor between 2000-2004. This expansion of her anti-poverty program was accompanied by the formulation of a model of *apoderamiento* (empowerment) and *autogestión comunitaria* (community self-management) that would be promoted intensively during her administration as a solution to the problems of poverty, unemployment and inequality in Puerto Rico (Oficina para el Financiamiento Socioeconómico y la Autogestión, 2003).[68] After leaving public office, Mrs. Calderón carried her anti-poverty commitment and apoderamiento and autogestión model over to the nongovernmental sector where in 2005 she established an NGO, the Sila M. Calderón Foundation.

This chapter will offer an ethnographic analysis of the former governor's most recent anti-poverty project, the Sila M. Calderón Foundation's Capacity-Building Program for the Development of Community Initiatives. It will study the program's first every annual capacity-building cycle, which ran between September 2008 and May 2009 and trained about 200 participants. From among those participants, I chose to work closely with the members of the Hospedería Cooperativa Bosque Río Abajo (Rio Abajo Forest Cooperative Hostelry) or RIOCOOP, a cooperative founded by the leaders of three special needs communities for the purpose of developing an eco-touristic hostelry in the Rio Abajo forest located between the municipalities of Arecibo and Utuado. Therefore, the chapter will document and analyze the capacity-building process based primarily, although not exclusively, on the experience of RIOCOOP members.

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[68] For a relevant discussion on the program and its model, see Chapter III, pp. 36-42.

The analysis will attempt to explain and make sense of the difficulties faced by both the Sila M. Calderón Foundation and RIOCOOP members in developing the cooperative's proposed community economic development project. It will do so by examining the politics of grassroots support as manifested during the capacity-building process and by RIOCOOP's internal group dynamics during their training sessions and group activities.

The focus on capacity-building practices responds to the recent call made by Everett, Homestead & Drisko (2007) for researchers to analyze the process of empowerment in the actual context of its implementation by frontline workers. They argue that this type of research captures the contradictions inherent in the process as a result of "the limits placed on empowerment within the practice environment, the setting, and the competence levels of clients [as well as the] contradictions of empowerment practice that relate more directly to the exercise of power in the client-worker relationship" (ibid., p 163). Moreover, the attention to specific practice scenarios, such as RIOCOOP's board meetings, seeks to expose the gap between the training received and the socio-political reality in which its members operate as community leaders and incipient social entrepreneurs. According to Li (2007), development schemes that claim to empower communities by forging new citizens that are able to "plan their own projects, manage conflicts and reform the state from below" often exclude political and economic considerations from the program's domain that, ironically, shape what becomes of the program (pp. 230-231). Therefore, this chapter will examine the interplay of interests, competencies and power dynamics between RIOCOOP members and Foundation staff during the capacity-building process as well as during RIOCOOP's

individual work sessions. The interplay of contextual factors constitutes a complex political field that shaped the process of grassroots support and conditioned the degree to which the Sila M. Calderón Foundation accomplished its goal of transforming community leaders into successful social entrepreneurs.

Finally, this chapter will examine the Foundation's empowerment aspirations in relation to recent critiques of the collusion of participatory initiatives and empowerment programs with new strategies of government associated with neoliberalism today. Although neoliberalism is characterized by the retrenchment of the public sector, through privatizations and disinvestments in social programs, Nikolas Rose (1996) reminds us that this does not imply the renunciation of the "will to govern": "Neo-liberalism does not abandon the 'will to govern': it maintains the view that failure of government to achieve its objectives is to be overcome by inventing new strategies of government that will succeed" (p. 53). According to Susan B. Hyatt (2001), empowerment programs constitute one of those new strategies:

> What *has* changed is the way in which neoliberal social policies have defined the role of the state, away from its older stance of providing 'a safety net' for the poor and basic services for the citizenry at large and towards the notion that it is now the primary job of the state to 'empower' the poor, and other citizens as well, to provide for themselves and for their communities' own needs. (p. 207).

In other words, some critics of liberal democracies today consider social interventions that encourage impoverished populations to be self-managing and entrepreneurial as examples of neoliberalism's governance strategies.

Certainly, the program analyzed here was not proposed or carried out by a state agency, although there are important continuities with Mrs. Calderón's former state program, the Special Needs Communities Program, including agency personnel,

intervention models and participants. However, the literature on neoliberalism, governmentality and development argue that governance, understood as the "aim to shape, guide, manage or regulate the conduct of persons," is not an exclusive project of states, but rather is shared with, and often is delegated to, NGOs (Rose, 1996, p. 41). For example, Michel-Rolph Trouillot (2001) argues that "statelike processes and practices also obtain increasingly in nongovernmental sites such as NGOs or trans-state institutions such as the World Bank" (p. 130). Thus, my examination of RIOCOOP within the context of its participation in a capacity-building program will serve to re-think the limits of specific neoliberal governmental schemes as carried out by NGOs. In doing so, I will document how RIOCOOP members experience, resist or construct new possibilities out of their role as subjects of an empowerment program.

The Sila M. Calderón Foundation and its Community Leader's Capacity-Building Program for the Development of Community Initiatives

> *People conceive of projects as things that can be seen, o.k.? But, sometimes the most important projects are those that are not seen and take place in people's interior. This is not to deny the investment in special needs communities, which exist, in infrastructure, housing, and others. But, for me, the biggest investment and the biggest project is the project of personal transformation and that project of personal transformation is invisible. You see the results in people's attitudes, in the way people assume responsibilities, standing on their own feet, achieving their own dignity. This is a human project, essentially human, which is the most important work we can do.*

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Hon. Sila M. Calderón
Personal Interview, March 25, 2008, my translation

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The original purpose for establishing the Sila M. Calderón Foundation was to create a repository for the documents pertaining to Mrs. Calderón's work as a public servant. However, the concept of the Foundation soon expanded to include the implementation of development programs in areas prioritized during her years in public

service, mainly improving the socio-economic conditions of women and impoverished communities. Interestingly, this expansion ended up defining the purpose and mission of the Foundation (Sila M. Calderón Foundation, n.d.):[69]

> The mission of the Sila M. Calderón Foundation is to establish a nonprofit, nonpartisan Center in Puerto Rico to undertake actions, services, programs and projects primarily on the issues of poverty and the role of women in society; and secondarily, on urban revitalization and ethical values. In order to achieve this mission, the following objectives have been established:
> - Reduce poverty and inequality
> - Advance the role of women in society
> - Promote urban revitalization and balance
> - Strengthen ethical values and social responsibility

The Foundation, then, was conceived as a private organization through which Mrs. Calderón could pursue her personal commitments developed while in public office. It serves as a vehicle through which she can continue her life's work, only now from the nongovernmental sector.

The Foundation does house Mrs. Calderón's public documents, but it also administers four programmatic areas responsible for fulfilling the organization's four social change objectives: Poverty, Role of Women in Society, Urban Revitalization, and Ethical Values and Social Responsibility. Each of these programmatic areas has a well-defined, ambitious and comprehensive work proposal that cover educational offerings, support services and economic development schemes. They are supervised and guided by separate advisory boards, which include some of the island's most distinguished academics, community leaders and private sector professionals in each area of intervention.

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[69] For further information on the Foundation, visit its website: http://www.centroparapuertorico.org.

Overall, these programmatic areas were charged with sponsoring activities and projects that educate, capacitate and empower by promoting opportunities and incentives for individual action, sustainable change and human development (ibid.). For example, the two main programmatic areas, Poverty and Advancing Women's role in Society, are committed to implementing "initiatives that will increase these groups' ability to obtain support, resolve issues, increase their opportunities, gain empowerment and attain economic independence" (ibid., n.p.). These programmatic areas and their empowerment approach define the Foundation as a grassroots support organization; that is, an organization geared towards the promotion of human development through multiple programs that emphasize education, capacity-building and self-sufficiency.

The common thread that runs through the Foundation's four objectives and gives coherence to its grassroots support programs is the emphasis on personal transformation, which Mrs. Calderón so eloquently articulates in the section's opening quote. For her, apoderamiento (empowerment) consists primarily in changes in attitudes and personal/collective dispositions that enable residents of impoverished communities to become politically active and economically productive; women to claim their just place in society; and citizens to assume a greater sense of personal and collective responsibility towards the management of public resources, including state finances and the environment. Mrs. Calderón developed and employed this notion of empowerment in her Special Needs Communities Program, primarily through its model of apoderamiento. This program represented, using James Scott's (1998) famous phrase, a state-sponsored "scheme to improve the human condition" that consisted in reforming the conduct of impoverished community residents in order to help them optimize their well-being

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through active political participation and community self-management. As such, the Special Needs Community Program functioned as a strategy of governance that deployed the language of empowerment to produce new entrepreneurial subjects that could "maximize their quality of life through acts of choice, according their life meaning and value to the extent that it can be rationalized as the outcome of choices made or choices to be made" (Rose, 1996, p. 57).

Mrs. Calderón transferred that rationality of socio-economic improvement to the nongovernmental sector by insisting on projects of personal transformation as one of the fundamental aims of her Foundation. That governmental rationality, which in essence promotes the formation of self-sufficient individuals and communities, materialized in the Foundation's first initiative: The Community Leader's Capacity-Building Program for the Development of Community Initiatives. The program was implemented under the Poverty programmatic area and sought to *capacitar* citizens, primarily those who had emerged as community leaders under the Special Needs Community Program. The goal of the *capacitación* was to provide these leaders the knowledge and skills necessary to develop sustainable community-based economic development projects that would contribute to alleviate or overcome poverty in their communities. These competencies were to be delivered through an adult education program that included a structured educational experience complemented by a practical component: the development of an actual community-based entrepreneurial project. Thus, the program pursued it purpose of personal transformation through a combination of classroom education and practical application.

As the Foundation's initial development project, the capacity-building program reveals much about the organization's orientation and approach to solving the island's problem with poverty. To begin, it engages poverty as an economic problem that can be curtailed through socially-committed enterprises that can help impoverished communities generate income and bridge the economic gap with the rest of the population. Also, for Mrs. Calderón and her Foundation, poverty is associated with welfare dependence and its corollary undermining of self-esteem and the drive for self-sufficiency. This program seeks to help groups of impoverished community residents break their dependence on government aid by assisting them in the creation of a local economic initiative from which they could earn their livelihood. Finally, the program builds on at least two lessons learned by Mrs. Calderón from her previous experience with the Special Needs Communities Program.[70] First, community leaders have a difficult time organizing work plans and bringing them to fruition. Second, self-esteem issues need to be addressed: people have to re-envision themselves as change agents capable of refashioning their lives as well as the lives of their fellow community residents. Thus, the capacity-building program is geared to address perceived skills deficits and strengthen the self-esteem of community leaders by solidifying their belief in themselves as potential social change agents.

The Foundation itself did not develop the program, but rather opened a call for proposals in May of 2008 requesting an innovative program design that met the following guidelines: Developed a five-year training plan divided into yearly cycles in which new cohorts were added, had an educational/theoretical component, and included the

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[70] Prof. Margarita Moscoso, personal interview, March 29, 2009. Prof. Mosocos was part of the team of professionals who created the capacity-building program. She was also the Foundation's program evaluator.

concurrent development of an economic community initiative. That summer, the Foundation evaluated and accepted the proposal submitted by the Education Department of the University of Puerto Rico, Río Piedras Campus.[71]

According to the UPR proposal, the capacity-building program was built relying on a constructivist approach, based on a problem-based learning methodology and included an built-in participatory evaluation model.[72] The program planned to train about 200 hundred participants selected from the four quadrants into which it divided the island—North, South, East and West. Logistically, the program consisted of seven educational activities divided into five workshops and two *encuentros de participantes* (participant general gatherings), all of which were to take place on Saturdays over a seven month period beginning in September of 2008 and ending in March of 2009. Additionally, the program assigned two facilitators per quadrant to work directly with the communities in the development of their micro-enterprises. The facilitators were supposed to be experienced community workers, one of which was to be a volunteer community leader and the other a doctoral student/graduate from the UPR. These facilitators were supposed to visit the groups in their quadrant after each workshop to provide continuity to the educational material offered and guide, support and counsel the community leaders in the process of creating a local business.

The workshops were conceived as an integrated cycle that would move participants from the conceptualization of their project and the setting of work plan to its eventual evaluation:

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[71] Representatives from the Social Science Department were part of the initial project proposal process, but withdrew from the project before it began for reasons that remain unclear, but are related to Mrs. Calderón's former political career.

[72] Executive Summary, July 31, 2008, The Community Leader's Capacity-Building Program for the Development of Community Initiatives.

Table VI.I. Community Leaders' Capacity-Building Program for the Development of Community Initiatives	
Workshops	**Purpose**
Perception vs. the reality of what I want to accomplish I: Dialogue and discussion about the initiatives	Facilitate a process through which participants conceptualized and contextualized their community initiatives, including writing a group history or profile, and establish the initiative's mission, vision, goals and objectives.
Perception vs. the reality of what I want to accomplish II: Creating work plans	Facilitate a process through which participants develop their initiative's work plan, including activities, resources and time tables
Community entrepreneurial development and private sector alliances	Train participants in entrepreneurial strategies and promote alliances with other communities and the private sector that can be sustained beyond the program
Decision-making power and legal aspects	Train participants in problem-solving strategies, how to access the media, and in the identification of legal resources available for underprivileged communities
Sustainability and program evaluation principles	Train participants in grant-writing, fund identification and program evaluation.

The workshops were to be created and delivered by academics or professionals with experience in community work. Each workshop was created by two lecturers who developed its content, which included the PowerPoint presentation and any additional material or exercises. Each lecturer delivered the workshop to two of the four quadrants. All of the workshops were structured in the following manner:

- Reflexive diary – each workshop begins with a candid discussion among participants about the state of their initiative or the tasks accomplished during the last two weeks.

- Educational session – participants receive the content of the workshop

- Evaluation session – participants assess the workshop

- Future planning – participants and their assigned facilitators plan their visits and work schedule for the next two weeks.

This structure tied each workshop to the previous one and established its relevance to the next one. Also, it turned each workshop into an active work space in which participants not only acquired relevant information and knowledge, but also participated in structured dialogues in which they reflected on their projects, were held accountable to their work plans and planned future visits and events.

The *encuentros de participantes* were constructed as spaces in which all of the participants could meet, get to know each other, exchange impressions and showcase their initiatives. In this sense, the Foundation exhibited another function of grassroots support organizations: serving as a bridging organization that promotes social capital formation through the strengthening of horizontal relations among an active sector of Puerto Rico's impoverished communities.[73] The first encounter served to inaugurate the program and welcome the participants to the Foundation. The second encounter was to take place half way through the capacity building program in December. The purpose of this encounter was to showcase each community initiative and, therefore, demonstrate the progress being made.

All of the participants from the first capacity-building cycle were recruited by the Foundation from among residents of special needs communities and/or public housing units who were interested in developing a local income-generating project. Interested

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[73] Popularized in the 1990s by Robert Putnam (1995), social capital is a concept used to claim that social relationships and civic ties are productive, in the economic sense of the term. As Midgley & Livermore (1998) argue, "economic development is more likely to occur in social systems with strong social networks, well developed associations, and a high degree of civic engagement" (p. 31). Thus, development practices, such as grassroots support, promote social capital formation—i.e. associational life—as an anti-poverty strategy.

community boards were supposed to fill an application in which, among other things, they nominated between five and ten members to the program based on the personal qualifications and previous community experience. A panel constituted by the Foundation was responsible for evaluating the applications and selecting the participants based on a set of pre-determined qualification criteria.[74] Selected participants were required to contribute $10.00 to cover the cost of the program. The Foundation estimated the cost of this program to be $1,184.00 per participant, of which the Foundation covered 67% and the UPR-Education Department contributed 33%.

The Ethnographic Research Agenda

As the above description suggests, the Foundation's capacity-building program was very well conceptualized and elaborated in numerous proposals, executive summaries, tables, and program itineraries. The workshops were highly structured, with standardized PowerPoint presentations and delivered by highly qualified personnel. Also, the program called for the practical application of its educational offering through the development of an actual microenterprise. In other words, the Foundation had a very clear notion of what they wanted to accomplish and how they were going to accomplish it. However, as demonstrated by the analysis of ASPRI's community development program, models do not transfer neatly to the field. The actual work of empowerment through grassroots support eventually confronts the socio-political complexities of the field it seeks to impact. It is at this level, at the level of the practice and politics of grassroots support, that this ethnographic examination of the capacity-building process takes place.

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[74] The criteria were not laid out in any of the official documents and no one in the Foundation was able to offer them to me.

The ethnographic research of the Foundation's capacity-building program and RIOCOOP's local economic development initiative was carried out between January and August of 2009. Since the Foundation's program began in September of 2008, my research captured the second half of the program. Consequently, I missed the first three workshops along with the visits by the Foundation personnel to RIOCOOP. However, I interviewed participants and Foundation personnel in order to gather information about those events I missed. Moreover, since I am interested in effects and impacts, missing the first part of the capacity-building program was not as crucial as being there towards the end of the process, which is when participants would be expected to have internalized the training offered. Nevertheless, beginnings do set the tone for how a process unfolds, and that is a gap in my research.

RIOCOOP was incorporated in August 9, 2007, so at the time of my research the cooperative had been operating for close to a year and a half. However, RIOCOOP gained administrative control over the old Peace Corps facilities they wanted to rebuild into a hostelry in September of 2008, which meant the project was in its initial stages when my research began.

During the eight month research period, I attended, observed and participated in all of the Foundation events programmed for the North quadrant, to which RIOCOOP belonged: three workshops, an evaluation session, and the program's graduation, which was national in scope. I was also present for the five RIOCOOP meetings ran by the Foundation's North quadrant facilitators, including an internal evaluation session. Finally, I was part of the general evaluation session carried out by the program's external evaluator.

During that time, I also participated in almost all of RIOCOOP's meetings and events. I attended seven board meetings as well as ten meetings in which RIOCOOP's board sought assistance from or negotiated resources with public and private agencies, which included:

- Other GSOs, such as the Organización para la Promoción del Desarrollo Humano (OPDH), the Special Needs Communities Program office, and the Workshop for Community Design, Architecture School, University of Puerto Rico, Río Piedras Campus

- State agencies and/or public corporations, such Puerto Rico's Tourism Company, P.R.'s Economic Development Bank, the North-Central Consortium, and the Commission for Cooperative Development

- Federal agencies/programs, such the Department of Agriculture, specifically its Rural Development program

- Private corporations, such Girasol Developer's Cooperative

Finally, I participated in four activities planned or attended by RIOCOOP: Two fundraising events—a bingo and a food sale during a visit to the forest by public school students from all over the island—; a planned walk through the facilities with board members and visitors to examine and showcase the project; and a workshop offered to RIOCOOP and other local organizations by P.R.'s Tourism Company.

Besides attending and participating in events, I also conducted a series of in-depth interviews to gather information about the history and current socio-economic situation of the communities that formed part of the RIOCOOP alliance; the history of the facilities they were trying to develop; the personal histories and understanding of community work

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of the main volunteers involved; and RIOCOOP's participation in the Foundation's capacity-building program. I conducted a total of eighteen interviews, of which nine were with RIOCOOP members and seven with Foundation staff, including its founder, Mrs. Sila Calderón, the North quadrant facilitators, and the program's internal and external evaluators. I also interviewed the Regional Director and field technician of the other GSO working with RIOCOOP, the Commission for Cooperative Development.

The information gathered from these interviews was enriched by informal conversations during workshops, meetings and events with participants and volunteers from the communities. I also complemented my knowledge of the project, RIOCOOP's history and the Foundation's program by reading and analyzing available documents, such as the program's and project's proposals, contracts, permits, meeting minutes, and other literature facilitated by public and private agencies to the board.

This ambitious research agenda meant that I spent much of my eight months of research in weekly meetings, conducting interviews in people's houses, attending Foundation workshops or meetings, participating in RIOCOOP's activities, and exchanging ideas with civil servants and employees of private corporations that visited the project. This intensive immersion with RIOCOOP and the Foundation offered me a unique access to the complex dynamics of the capacity-building process and its role in advancing RIOCOOP's efforts to open an eco-touristic hostelry. However, like all qualitative research, my research was limited by the scope of interactions in which I was able to participate. Clearly, I did not witness every meeting nor was privy to every phone call. Nonetheless, this research experience allowed me to develop a rich understanding the practice of grassroots support and its project of empowerment. In the section that

follows, I present a selection of the material gathered through my ethnographic research. This material captures the main insights and findings of my research which are relevant to the theoretical framework of this chapter: the project of empowerment through capacity-building.

Empowering Community Leaders: Capacity-Building in Practice

A. Building Human Resources and Institutional Base: Capacity-Building Workshop #4 - Decision-Making Power and Legal Aspects

Saturday, January 24, 2009

I arrive at El Jobo community at 7:40 a.m. where I was to meet the rest of the RIOCOOP members who were attending the Foundation's fourth workshop. El Jobo is located in the premises of the Rio Abajo Forest, a spectacular mountainous area part of Puerto Rico's Cordillera Central (central mountainous corridor) located between the municipalities of Arecibo and Utuado. El Jobo itself is partially segmented by a small creek that establishes the city limits separating Arecibo from Utuado. This community is home to an old Peace Corps training camp built in the early 1960s where the U.S. prepared hundreds of volunteers to carry out development work in neighboring Caribbean and Latin American countries. Since 2005 El Jobo community leaders formed an alliance with leaders from two nearby communities, La Planta and Jácanas, with the goal of developing the existent camp facilities into an eco-touristic hostelry. The alliance was constituted with high hopes that this project could contribute to overcome the problems of poverty, unemployment and public disinvestment experienced by these three special needs communities. In 2007, the alliance was formalized into a cooperative named RIOCOOP, a composite name that attempts to capture the location and corporate form of organization.

When I arrive, RIOCOOP's treasurer, Luz María Pérez, better known in the community as Yiyi, was already waiting in her car in front of Salvador Rivera's house. Salvador has been El Jobo's community leader for decades now, since he was a teenager in the late '50s and early '60s. At his 68 years of age, he presides over El Jobo's special needs community board as well as of over RIOCOOP's Board of Directors. Salvador is an extremely active leader involved in both social and political organizations, which besides the community board and RIOCOOP include the local Catholic Church, the local Neighborhood Watch Council, the Arecibo district Legal Services Program, and the Popular Democratic Party. Salvador was the original proponent of the idea of transforming the old Peace Corps facilities into a hostelry. He holds a strong emotional attachment to those facilities because he has lived all of his life right in front of them and they were the source and site of his first employment when he graduated high school. The idea of directing the organization that will administer a hotel in those facilities fills him with great pride since it would culminate a life journey that began as an assistant cook for the Peace Corps fifty years earlier.

I park and approach Yiyi to introduce myself since we have not formally met. She tells me that she grew up in the community, but left in the late '50s for New York. Like hundreds of thousands of Puerto Ricans of her generation, Yiyi migrated from her rural community to Manhattan in search of a better life. She lived there for 29 years before moving back in the late '80s when her husband, a Dominican, passed away. She adds that Salvador is her cousin and she is currently planning RIOCOOP's latest fundraising activity: a St. Valentine's Day bingo. While we spoke, Salvador pulls out his pick-up

truck and we get in. Apparently, it is just us and Dilia, another one of Salvador's cousins

and member of RIOCOOP's board, who we pick up on the way out of the community.

The workshop will take place at the Utuado Campus of the University of Puerto

Rico. The university has partnered with the Sila M. Calderón Foundation in this project

and, besides developing and implementing the program, they also have made available

their facilities for the workshops. During the car drive, Salvador informs us of a recent

dispute he had with the personnel from the Special Needs Communities Program.

Apparently, they wanted to remove five tables and twenty five chairs from their

community center to furnish another center. The community center stands as the

emblematic infrastructure investment made by that state program in El Jobo. It is a

beautiful, well equipped structure used by community residents and people from nearby

communities for their wedding receptions, birthdays and other social events. In his

capacity as community board president, Salvador defended the right to retain those

valuable resources which were once transferred to his community in recognition of their

new capacity for self-management.

We arrive at about 8:05 a.m. after only a ten or fifteen minute drive. We walk up a

steep set of stairs to the open-air salon where the workshop was to take place. We

immediately see other community leaders from the North quadrant. I spot Mr. Ernesto

Villarini, the Foundation's Executive Director, who would be observing and evaluating

today's workshop. We sign in and join the rest of the participants in the breakfast line.

During breakfast, other RIOCOOP Board members arrive and join us at the table. Pedro

Méndez is a farmer and representative from Jácanas. Rigoberto Barlucea is the president

of La Planta's community board. He is retired, has an infectious sense of humor and is

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full of witty comments. Yolanda is a teacher of alternative tourism in Utuado's vocational school and has been an important volunteer for RIOCOOP since its inception. Yolanda is accompanied by one of her former students, Ed, a college student interested in developing a tour guide company to promote excursions in his home town of Utuado.

I take time during breakfast to introduce myself to members from other community groups. I meet a group of farmers from Utuado who want to develop a compost project. I also meet Lucy, a young community leader from Ciales who is trying to develop a sofrito[75] microenterprise in her community. Finally, I meet a group of women from El Vigia, a coastal community in Arecibo, who are interested in developing a restaurant whose earnings would be used to finance a health center in their community. I also speak with some of the staff. I say hello to Tito Figueroa, one of the North quadrant facilitators. Tito is a very well known community leader in Puerto Rico who is part of the Community Leader's Alliance, a national organization that groups special needs community leaders for the purpose of defending their program, lobbying for greater resources, and serving as a voice for residents of impoverished communities. He introduces me to the other facilitator, Lorna Torres, a community psychologist who holds a Ph.D. from the University of Puerto Rico.

At about ten past nine a.m. we all take our places around a 'U'-shaped table setting to begin the workshop. There are about 36 people present, including community leaders, Foundation staff and guests. Today's workshop, entitled "Decision-Making Power and Legal Aspects," will be delivered by Mrs. Hadessa Santini Colberg, a lawyer and acting manager of the Community Work division of Legal Services, a federally-

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[75] Sofrito is a sautéed mixture of chopped vegetables, such as tomato, onion, pepper and garlic, used as a base for many of Puerto Rico's primary dishes.

funded nonprofit organization that offers legal services to low income populations. Mrs. Santini begins by explaining that this workshop was included in the capacity-building cycle in response to specific gaps identified in the Special Needs Communities Program's capacity-building offering. One of those gaps was that the program did not offer adequate orientation on the fiscal and administrative responsibilities assumed once communities incorporated themselves as a nonprofit corporation. This bit of information, besides justifying the workshop, also establishes a clear connection between Mrs. Sila Calderón's previous anti-poverty project, of which most, if not all, of today's participants were a part, and her current work through the Foundation. In that sense, this program not only builds on, but also redresses some of the shortcomings of her state program.

While Mrs. Santini speaks, the Foundation staff hands out today's powerpoint presentation and a directory of nongovernmental organizations compiled by another nonprofit, Non-profit Evaluation and Resource Center, Inc. (NPERCI). As a grassroots support organization, the Foundation serves as an information-sharing agent, that is, it disseminates information relevant to the grassroots groups and their projects. The purpose for facilitating this directory to the participating groups is to promote intra-sector networking among new and established nonprofits in the island. The promotion of these horizontal linkages contributes to combat a structural feature of impoverished or marginalized communities: isolation from other grassroots groups and from public and private institutions.

Mrs. Santini emphasizes today's general objective, which is to 'capacitar,' that is, provide certain tools necessary to develop a community economic initiative. As she speaks I look around to observe the participants. Some are listening to her and taking

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notes in the powerpoint handout. Others listen but do not refer to the handout. Others take notes in their own notebooks. However, everyone is paying close attention.

Mrs. Santini's presentation moves into highlighting the importance of diagnosing community problems as part of the planning process of community projects. The diagnosis consists of not only creating a socio-economic profile of the community, but also gathering specific information that identifies community problems, explains their causes and leads to the formulation of solutions. For that, the groups must develop clear criteria that allow them to compile relevant information. Suddenly, she interrupts her lecture and interjects a question to the audience: How many of you know what a variable is? No one answers. I think she caught them off-guard, but it makes me wonder how much people understand from her presentation. Although the concepts being discussed are not extremely complicated, they are articulated in a technical language, like 'variable,' that does require prior exposure to it to manage it effectively. The information offered is relevant, but I begin to wonder whether the groups are assimilating it and how it will impact their projects.

Mrs. Santini discusses corporate structures: for-profit, nonprofit, worker's cooperatives, etc. She states that nonprofit organizations differ from others in that they cannot generate profits. I immediately look around to see if anyone was going to correct her. Tito interrupts her and clarifies that nonprofits can make profits, but cannot distribute those profits among their members. He continues saying that nonprofits can pay salaries, but cannot share the year-ends winnings among those who work or sponsor the organization. This is an important clarification and Tito knows it. It addresses the generalized misinterpretation that nonprofits cannot make money. Most seemingly 'do-

good' ventures in Puerto Rico, whether they be social, political or economic in purpose, adopt a nonprofit corporate form not because of its legal advantages, but rather because of its moral capital: it signals charitable and altruistic intentions inconsistent with the generation of income and profits. This misinterpretation is particularly acute among community organizations motivated as they are by the ethics of volunteerism. The Foundation intends to overcome that error by promoting the notion that communities can and should develop income-generating initiatives using precisely this corporate form. This is a main objective of this capacity-building workshop. Thus, Tito was particularly emphatic in correcting Mrs. Santini.

Tito further clarifies that nonprofits qualify for tax exemptions, but they are not automatic; they must be claimed. This point is also important because it touches another common misconception: nonprofits do not have to file tax returns because they are exempt. Tito shares that in his experience the communities that incorporate a nonprofit corporation never ask for the tax exemption, and, even worse, do not file tax returns, which is illegal. Everyone has to file even if you do not generate any income. The government can and will fine the nonprofit's administrators if they do not file their tax return.

Tito's comment goes to the heart of this workshop. It addresses those grey areas left by the capacity-building efforts of the Special Needs Communities Program that trained these participants and helped incorporate hundreds of community nonprofit organizations. Tito's intervention is motivated by his experience as a community leader, not as a legal expert. In fact, he corrects the legal expert because of her lack of conceptual clarity that has led community groups to overlook legal requirements. His

awareness of these subtle conceptual differences comes from the numerous cases he has come across in his organizing ventures throughout the island. This is precisely the knowledge the Foundation sought when they included experienced community leaders as facilitators advising emerging community ventures. With his intervention, Tito has extended his advisory function to the workshops. As a community leader himself, he knows firsthand what information needs clarification and/or greater emphasis.

Once Tito finishes, Lucy, who is sitting right next to me, tells me with some indifference that the community organization over which she presides does not file tax returns. They do not even have a bank account. She did not know about all these requirements. She adds, jokingly, that she is going to jail. It becomes apparent to me that Lucy is precisely the type of community leader Tito was, simultaneously, referring to and indirectly addressing in his comments. She has broken the law and is delinquent with the government due to her lack of knowledge. Her comments validate the workshop, or the need for it, although her nonchalant attitude raises doubts as to whether this information will move her to correct her administrative oversight.

Rigoberto, from RIOCOOP, tells Mrs. Santini that their project was built out of an alliance among three special needs communities. However, when they incorporated their group as a cooperative one of the key members of their alliance, Pedro Matos, Jacana's community board president, was not allowed to form part of the incorporating group because he was Salvador's brother-in-law. Apparently, Puerto Rico's cooperative law prohibits family members from being in the same board to avoid conflicts of interests. This led to Pedro's withdrawal from the project, which dealt a huge blow to the alliance and the initiative. Mrs. Santini responds that Pedro could still form part of the

cooperative, just not form part of the group of incorporators. RIOCOOP's current board is proof of what she is saying. Dilia and Yiyi are Salvado's cousins and members of the board. However, Mrs. Santini had not yet finished her sentence when Pedro Matos stood up and told us that he is not one to be part of an organization in which he does not have voice or vote. He likes to work and is not willing to sit in meetings looking up at the roof.

An uncomfortable silence filled the room. After a minute, David, a member of the Utuado group, breaks the silence by shifting the conversation back to the issue at hand. He mentions the importance of knowing the responsibilities assumed by community members who join nonprofit boards. People need to know that quitting the board requires much more than just ending their volunteer commitment to the organization. Mrs. Santini acknowledges his comment and adds that she knows of organizations that have been operating for three years and still had not written their by-laws, which define the rules and responsibilities of board members.

Lucy's, Rigoberto's and David's comments express individual concerns about the nonprofit corporate model that exposes important differences between community groups and nonprofit corporations. Community groups are constituted by volunteers who are often not only neighbors, but also family related. They are bonded by shared interests, history and life experiences as a result of a living in the same geographical area.[76] These groups mobilize people by tapping into personal networks of friends and family. They are informal and are governed by the volunteers' adherence to the common goal of improving their collective well-being. Even when they entrust authority to an individual

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[76] I am aware that community is not always geographically defined. However, the Foundation operates with such a definition.

or a sub-group, the rights transferred and the responsibilities delegated last as long as people want to acknowledge or assume them.

By contrast, a nonprofit is a formal corporation codified by state law. As such, it requires an administrative structure with different positions of authority and binding documents, like by-laws, that define very clearly each member's role and responsibility. This administrative structure is legally regulated to secure fiscal transparency. However, these regulations can enter into contradictions with the logic of community groups, such as the prohibiting family members from sharing responsibility in a board. Instead of solidifying initiatives, this misfit between legal requirements and community dynamics can break local synergies and even cause people to withdraw from projects, as was the case with RIOCOOP. Moreover, the legal responsibilities assumed by incorporating members also run counter to the logic of volunteerism that shapes the community group experience, in which people join when they can and abandon the initiative without having to submit any formal paperwork. Furthermore, the requirements to file tax returns and submit financial records to the State Department introduce external accountability mechanisms that are foreign to informal community groups, as Lucy's case aptly exemplifies. Therefore, by incorporating as a nonprofit, community groups assume a set of legal responsibilities and are subject to legal regulations that extend beyond the type of commitments they have hitherto held. Thus, becoming a nonprofit demands that community groups abandon certain informal practices and learn a new set of skills. The refusal to make this transition entails legal consequences that are foreign to volunteer community groups.

The Foundation's capacity-building program has as one of its main purposes assisting community groups in their transition to operating as nonprofits administering community economic projects. The objective of its workshops, like today's, is not only to inform community groups of their responsibility to submit financial reports, approve by-laws, and dissolve inactive corporations, but, more importantly, to teach them how to go about actually doing it. In so doing, the program exposes its governmental rationality. The transference of new skills and information to these groups has the intention of facilitating a process in which they abandon certain group practices which are not fit for state-accountable programs. In a sense, the Foundation's capacity-building program is charged with reconfiguring existing patterns of community organization, including its leadership structure, informal authority mechanisms and non-binding volunteer commitment. Its underlying purpose is re-directing the groups' communal ways of relating and operating into forms that fit the legal prescriptions of the state regulated corporate models. For example, their training seeks to substitute informal financial exchanges with a new discipline of fiscal accountability.

Rigoberto's and David's comments opened the floodgates and collective anxiety is now flowing. Maria, a member of another community group from Utuado, shares her case. Her community group was incorporated as a nonprofit, but the previous board members defaulted on certain debts. She asks the presenter if the new board, of which she is a member, is responsible for those debts. Mrs. Santini invites her to read the organizations by-laws, but if they do not have them, it is very probable that the new board is responsible. She suggests buying insurance against administrative negligence. Lucy looks my way and restates that they are all going to jail.

At this point, Lorna, the other quadrant's facilitator, asks for permission to make a comment. She reminds the community groups that their initiatives have to contribute to a culture of transparency. This sector should be exemplar on this issue in part to counteract the corrupt practices we see in the public sector. Their initiatives should help the general population regain confidence in people once again in order move them to contribute to projects and initiatives such as the ones being proposed here.

Maria's and Lorna's contributions highlight an underlying tension present in the nongovernmental sector. On the one hand, the sector claims, as Lorna reminds us, to be an alternative to state corruption, inefficiency and lack of transparency. It seeks to re-establish confidence by involving the people themselves in the planning and implementation of initiatives. This is precisely what theoretical writing on the sector point to in their analysis: the contrast between independent citizen actions and bureaucratic civil servants. However, as Maria tells us, the nongovernmental sector is not exempt from the same corrupt or inefficient conduct found in the public sector. Citizens in nonprofit boards default on their administrative and financial responsibilities leaving behind debts and unfulfilled tasks that mar the reputation of the organization and the sector.

Lucy tells me that she prefers to find an accountant to manage the organization's finances. She does not want to deal with that aspect, in part because of the risk associated with it, but also because of the technical knowledge it requires. I understand Lucy's concern. Today we have learned that assuming responsibility for a community project entails great personal risks. Lucy is interested and committed to working in her community, but feels a bit overwhelmed by what it requires of her: knowledge of a

number of laws with which she has to comply, of how to become a tax exempt corporation, and of how to prepare a budgets, financial reports, tax returns, etc. The irony of this is that these community groups are here because they were sold on the idea that they can develop their own community initiatives if they have the will to do so and go through a short capacity-building program. Yet, Lucy's call for the intervention of an accountant undermines that claim. Specific areas of these initiatives require professional assistance and it seems unfair to expect anyone to be able to cover those areas after only a couple of workshops. The need to recruit professionals, like accountants and maybe even lawyers, questions whether these initiatives can or should be posed as community-planned and community-run projects. Is this where the romance of community finally meets its irresolvable contradiction? Maybe not. Community leaders like Lucy can play central roles in bringing to fruition their projects if they receive assistance in key areas from professionals. However, this formulation requires rethinking some of the main tenants of community-based development in order to expand the role of outsiders and the investment in grassroots support efforts.

After Lorna's comment, Mrs. Santini finishes up her last slide and asks for any final questions or comments. David, the farmer who spoke earlier, tells her: "Please tell us something 'que nos quite el susto que tenemos' (that helps us overcome how scared we are). This is more complicated than we thought." His commentary is telling because it suggests that the information presented has been overwhelming and intimidating, which defeats the purpose of any capacity-building workshop. Regardless of the truth-value of the knowledge transferred, its efficacy in helping groups move forward with their initiatives seems to be questioned by David's comment. As he stated, the presentation

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paralyzed him with fear rather than invigorate him to incorporate and develop his initiative. However, Pedro Matos, Jacana's leader, stands up and in a firm voice states they have nothing to fear. They have the required documents and only need the assistance and support of organizations like the Foundation. Pedro's comments close out the first part of the workshop. As he sits down, Mrs. Santini declares a break.

As I stand up to stretch, Lucy expresses how much she values this educational experience: "You see why a community leader needs to be constantly educating [him]/herself? You learn something new every day." She tells me that the Special Needs Communities Program organized community groups, helped them get incorporated, but did not follow up on them. Now there are hundreds of nonprofits throughout the island, all of them with debt. She tells me that she dissolved the nonprofit originally incorporated in her community with the help of the program because of its debts and created a new one. It is not clear whether she paid the debts. Regardless of whether she did, the act of dissolving the corporation and creating a new one points to two things. First, the failure of the previous development initiative. A model of apoderamiento was implemented that included organizing people into corporate forms that would enable them to carry out project, but ended with the dissolution of those corporations. What failed? The educational part? Were people given the right tools and simply did not take advantage of them? That experience needs to be examined in light of these results.

Second, there is a learning curve. Lucy incorporated a new nonprofit, which means she still found value in the proposition of having a nonprofit organization to carry out community projects. Moreover, this time around she is paying closer attention to finances. She told that the municipal government wanted to give her ten thousand dollars,

but she has yet to accept because she does not have a bank account or an accountant. That shows some maturity in her trajectory from community leader to nonprofit administrator. Ironically, the maturity came not as a result of capacity-building workshops, but out of an old experiential learning method: trial and error.

As I walk around I hear stories similar to Lucy's. I hear Rigoberto saying that his community has a nonprofit corporation that has never filed any tax returns or financial statements. He says he will contact a lawyer to have it dissolved and pay whatever fines it has. This is yet another example of the need to duplicate previous efforts. David comments that the for-profit model is much better than the nonprofit one. For example, you just file taxes once a year and that is it. The nonprofit corporate model has numerous restrictions on the handling of money, how it can be used and for what. Moreover, it also requires submitting other paper work to government agencies. For-profit corporations are understood to be profit-seeking ventures and, therefore, have fewer regulations on the handling and use of money.

David's comment suggests that the workshop is not having the intended effect. The Foundation proposes the use of the nonprofit corporate model for community-based initiatives, which is why it had such a central place in the discussion. Yet, after being presented with the model, David seems to reject it. Interestingly, he seems disillusioned with it precisely because of the safeguards it has in place to ensure that services or enterprises carried out under it do not exploit social causes to benefit a few investors. In contrasting the non- and for-profit models, David chooses the latter because it is less demanding and frees the entrepreneurs to handle the money without much government accountability.

Besides not being fully accurate—for-profits are also very intensely regulated—, David's comment also distance him from the bigger enterprise being pushed by the Foundation: economic enterprises that privilege the well-being of the community, not just the entrepreneurial group that develops it. It seems like David feels much more comfortable and interested in pursuing a for-profit business that has a community component. Although it is too soon to say, David comments point to a disruption in the intended effects of the Foundation's subject-formation efforts: he is definitely transitioning from community leader to business man, but not along the lines espoused by the Foundation.

After these discussions die down and the light refreshments are consumed, the workshop renews once again. The second part consists of a set of practical exercises in which the community groups are asked to apply the information acquired during the first part. After all, the point of these workshops are not just to teach information to produce more informed individuals, but rather to facilitate a process in which participants transfer the knowledge acquired to the development of their projects.

The first exercise asks participants to break into their groups and identify problems in the development of their projects that require legal counseling or advice. I join the RIOCOOP group and participate in their group discussion. Salvador begins by mentioning they need assistance from an accountant and a lawyer to manage their finances and fill out the 501c3 federal tax form. Rigoberto adds they need help obtaining government permits for the project, such as permits to use the facilities and reconstruct buildings. Salvador disagrees because those permits should be obtained by the construction agent that is contracted to help with the rebuilding. Other ideas are tossed

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around. Eventually, Rigoberto poses another problem. He mentions that the community's electricity is not apt for the project. Salvador once again contradicts Rigoberto, by asserting that there is no such problem in the community. Rigoberto complains that this is the second idea he has proposed and has been rejected. Salvador's response to Rigoberto begins a minor argument between the two that lasts for some while.

Salvador and Rigoberto are older men, over sixty, with strong personalities. Both are seasoned local political and community leaders, who preside over their respective community's board. Moreover, they have been formed in the mold of centralized, authoritarian male leadership practices and are used to defining the terms of the discussion and imposing ideas and line of actions. They are used to having their ideas and contributions being accepted and followed. Thus, they are constantly butting heads in project meetings. Since Salvador is the president of RIOCOOP's board of directors, he usually has the last word, which is why Rigoberto experiences greater frustration in these exchanges. As a result of their discussion, the time for completing the exercise runs out without the group accomplishing much. Many of the group members did not contribute and some even lost interest in the discussion. Yiyi, the note taker, was forced to jot down a couple of her own ideas in order to show some work.

Regardless of who imposes their views, these exchanges undermine the purpose and goals of participatory development initiatives. While the model of community participation has brought them together, the assumptions of free exchange of ideas and deliberations that prioritize the community's or project's well-being are not borne out. Both Salvador and Rigoberto have told me they have taken workshops on community leadership, conflict resolution and participatory development in general during their

participation in the Special Needs Communities Program's capacity-building cycle. The Foundation's own workshops have also emphasized these concepts. Despite efforts to modify their leadership practices, Salvador and Rigoberto continue exercising their imposing leadership practices, which not only conflict with ideals of participatory development, but, more importantly, stall the development of their initiative. In their cases, the investment by previous and current capacity-building programs in the molding of a more democratic, less hierarchical citizenry, who is open to debating ideas, has failed to overcome engrained gender and leadership practices that emerge and are deployed in moments of power struggle, such as in group sessions in which lines of actions are adopted by the organization. Their persistence in spite of efforts to break those molds reveals another limit to the capacity-building program's attempt to redirect their behavioral predisposition. In this case, the socio-political dynamics that frame the exchange of community leaders involved in the same development initiative overwhelms the efforts to shape Rigoberto's and Salvador's leadership practices.

After each group presents the results of their brainstorming sessions, Ernesto Villarini, the Foundation's Executive Director, takes over the closing of the workshop. He reiterates its main points. Later, he asks the participants what they learned about the benefits of incorporating their community group as a nonprofit. No one answers. After a minute or two, he goes over them. He tells them that incorporation helps protect participants against certain risks; is required to obtain donations or bank loans; it adds credibility to the initiative; it offers legal guarantees to people who wish to collaborate; and it commits people to follow a set of legal requirements that regulate the duties, responsibilities and activities carried out by each individual and the group as a whole.

In describing the benefits of incorporation, Villarini indirectly emphasizes the main objectives of the Foundation. They promote the financial sustainability of these initiatives as well as honest administrative practices. In order to achieve that, community groups have to make important adjustments to the manner in which they have conducted their community affairs and organizations. Facilitating that process of adjustment is what the capacity-building workshops are all about. At one level, then, Villarini's review of the workshop's main points serves as an informal evaluation. At another level, it aims to reiterate the areas around which they want to see significant change among participants.

Villarini surprises the participants by saying that the Foundation has decided to postpone the next workshop, which was programmed for next month. I suspected that his presence here today had some ulterior motive. The Foundation's team has met and the general evaluation is that there is a lag between the workshops and the community initiatives. Apparently, the community initiatives have been developing rather slowly. Villarini informs the participants that the next workshop will take place in March, two months from now. The Foundation expects that the extra month will allow the initiatives to catch up to the workshops. He insists that the Foundation is constantly evaluating the program and addressing the participants' needs. In this case, they saw no reason to continue with the program as designed and ignore the level of progress being made. Finally, he comments that the Foundation is considering adding some workshops they feel are needed in light of what they have seen from the initiative's development. They are considering workshops on the following topics: marketing, fiduciary responsibility, another workshop on corporations and one on self-esteem.

The workshop's postponement indicates that capacity-building program, as planned, has not meshed well with the reality of developing community initiatives. Although well thought out in paper, the program has apparently been stalled by the complex dynamics determining the progress of each individual community project. Today, I witnessed a couple of those dynamics: the misfit between Puerto Rico's corporate law and the composition of community groups; the duplication of efforts created by lack of knowledge; internal conflicts between community leaders; and the questioning of some of the Foundation's main propositions, such as the nonprofit corporate model. In other words, the politics of grassroots support—the clash of political interests, the divergent views of participants and the Foundation, and the different aspirations of community leaders—has disrupted and interrupted the program. What Villarini posits as a gap between the workshops and the development of community initiatives is in fact the most pressing manifestation of contradictions and dynamics that exceed the capacity building program itself.

B. Grassroots Support in the Context of Community Practice: Facilitators Assisting Community Initiatives

Wednesday, January 28, 2009

I arrive to El Jobo at 5:07 p.m. for a RIOCOOP board meeting that was supposed to start at 5:00 p.m. The meeting is being held in El Jobo's community center, which is right across the street from the old Peace Corps facilities RIOCOOP wants to develop into an eco-tourism hostelry. The meeting is held in the community center in part because the old Peace Corp facilities are not apt for the group to meet, but also because Salvador presides over both El Jobo's and RIOCOOP's boards and often lends the community's resources to the cooperative. The official purpose of this meeting is to report on recent

actions and tasks carried out to develop the project and establish new tasks and goals. The Foundation's facilitators, Tito and Lorna, will participate of this meeting in order to assist the group in their efforts to advance their work agenda.

As I enter the community center, I greet Rigoberto, Yiyi, Pedro, Yolanda and Dilia. I also meet members who were not present in the last Foundation workshop. I see Isabel, who is a field technician for the Commission for Cooperative Development, a government agency whose main role is incorporating and developing cooperatives in the island. Besides receiving support from the Foundation, RIOCOOP also receives parallel grassroots support services from the Commission, specifically on the development of the cooperative's administrative structure and practices. Isabel is an advisor to the board and was the driving force behind RIOCOOP's decision to incorporate as a cooperative. She sold the cooperative model to RIOCOOP members based on all of its benefits, including tax exemptions. However, this corporate model has brought more contention and problems than benefits. RIOCOOP has yet to use the tax exemptions and has lost Jacana's president, Pedro Matos, and, with him, the involvement of the majority of Jacana residents in the project.

I also meet Ramón, a resident of Jácanas who is RIOCOOP's secretary. Ramón and Pedro Méndez are the only two Jacana residents truly involved in the cooperative. Lastly, I meet Tomás, who is not a resident of any of the three communities, but grew up close by and has known many of El Jobo's residents for decades, particularly Salvador, Dilia and Yiyi. Salvador invited Tomás to form part of RIOCOOP's board because before retiring a couple of years ago he was a regional director for Puerto Rico's Power Company, which is the most important public corporation in the island. Salvador found

in Tomás the perfect combination of administrative experience and political contacts in an individual with some historical connection with the community.

As I sit down besides Yiyi, she hands me the attendance sheet. While I sign it Isabel hands me a copy of the reflection with which she will start the meeting. As people start joining me at the table, Salvador informs them of a change in tomorrow's meeting with Prensa Comunitaria (Community Press), a nonprofit interested in organizing and empowering impoverished communities through the use of various mediums of communication: written press, radio, T.V. and film. Currently, Prensa Communitaria is pushing a project called, Un solo movimiento, (One sole movement), in which it is trying to unite residents of special needs communities with public housing residents to expand and solidify the community-based movement in Puerto Rico. Their project consists of making a film in which these two sectors discuss their problems through individual vignettes that are then woven together to create the sense that they are implicated in the same problems and are united in the search of common solutions. RIOCOOP is involved in this project and has filmed a vignette that will form part of cinematographic project.

Salvador informs everyone that the meeting has been moved to Saturday. Pedro questions him saying that he heard it had been kept for tomorrow, but had been changed from 4 p.m. to 10 a.m. Others begin to speculate as to the time and date of the meeting. General confusion ensues. This is in part because Pedro, like others, confuses Prensa Comunitaria's meeting with another meeting scheduled for tomorrow. His confusion springs from the numerous meetings to which this group is committed on a weekly basis. RIOCOOP members belong not only to this organization, but also to their respective community boards and neighborhood watch councils. Moreover, they are involved in

various initiatives, one of which is the Foundation's capacity-building program. In any given week, each member attends two or three meetings and/or special events. In fact, Pedro and Ramón have already informed Salvador they must leave by 7 p.m. in order to attend Jacana's community board meeting.

Their incredibly busy schedules speak to the vibrancy of the community-based sector in Puerto Rico today. This sector has emerged in this decade as an important civil society actor involved in political decision-making, economic initiatives and even cultural production, as in the case of Prensa Comunitaria. However, the different initiatives of the community-based movement are not well coordinated leading to scheduling conflicts among them that often undermines the success of the different initiatives. This includes grassroots support organizations like the Foundation. They do not coordinate well their support with the other activities carried out by the community-based movement. In fact, to my knowledge, the Foundation did not have a formal meeting with administrators from the Commission for Cooperative Development prior to getting involved with RIOCOOP in order to coordinate each other's role in supporting their initiative. Each organization has simply established its own calendar of activities without any consideration for events already in place. If anything, today's confusion over the time and date of a meeting reveals a lack of integration within the community-based movement as well as between that movement and the support organizations with which it works.

The other issue brought up by the confusion is that residents of impoverished communities involved in this movement are overtaxed and overworked. Some even complain about the number of meetings and events they are asked to attend. Besides

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impinging on their family time, they often have to leave one meeting for another, as Pedro and Ramón today, or they have to choose one over another. Their busy schedules also indicate something very interesting about the community-based movement: although there are a number of organizations and activities, they are mostly run and attended by the same group of people. Thus, members of RIOCOOP are part of special needs communities organizations; created another organization to develop an economic project; participate in Prensa Comunitaria's film and the Foundation's capacity-building workshop, etc. They are the people behind the different manifestations of the community-based movement in the island. Thus, the vibrancy of the sector in terms of its visible activities might be veiling the limited scope of the population it encompasses or that sustains it.

Pedro attempts to calm down the confusion he started by insisting that the meeting start since, as he reminds everyone, he has to leave for another meeting soon. Isabel interjects that she brought with her a book in which to record the meeting's minutes. She insists, as is her responsibility, they should take notes of the issues discussed in their meetings. She complains they have not been doing so, indirectly blaming Ramón, the secretary, for it. Isabel's criticism is telling not just because she identifies an area of administrative weakness, but also because she has told them about the importance of taking minutes over and over again. As a cooperative, they are subject to yearly external reviews to determine their 'good standing' and minutes are one of the items considered. As the field technician charged with assisting this cooperative develop good administrative practices, this issue of minute-taking is particularly important to her.

The recurrent problem with minute-taking, although a seemingly minor one, does expose once again the failure of support organizations to get this community group to modify the manner in which they conduct business. Salvador has been an active community leader for decades, yet he never takes notes during meetings nor do the majority of the other volunteers. They simply discuss issues, reach agreements and establish dates for events without any formal collective recording mechanism. Although they might get them confused on occasion, they never forget scheduled events or agreements. Yet, the kind of record keeping demanded by Isabel is not linked to reminding people of dates and events. It is an administrative and legal requirement of cooperatives in Puerto Rico associated with administrative best-practices, such as accountability and transparency. Isabel reminds RIOCOOP's board that by not generating minutes from their meetings they are violating their own by-laws and the laws regulating cooperatives in P.R.

Isabel's complaint about this issue a year and a half into the coop's existence suggests that she is still struggling to get RIOCOOP members to abandon their practices developed as community groups in favor of accountability practices required of cooperative organizations. RIOCOOP's members disregard for note-taking reflects their resistance to new work patterns, specifically ones that add very little value to their work and which are geared towards meeting requirements that are not a priority to them. It also shows the absence of certain basic language skills which Isabel wrongly assumes exist in the group. Note-taking requires not only writing skills, but also the ability to summarize people's thoughts. This is particularly challenging for Ramón, who lived most of his life in Bristol, Pennsylvania and learned Spanish when he moved to P.R. a couple

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of years ago. Ramón complained to me that people accused him of being irresponsible, but he just could not keep up with the speed of the conversation and had trouble summarizing people's ideas in Spanish. Although everyone knows Ramón is from the U.S. and does not manage Spanish as well as they do, no one has ever made that relevant to his role of secretary. This oversight is the result of the persistent insensitivity shown by Puerto Ricans to the life circumstances of the returning members of our diaspora.

The discussion is interrupted by the arrival of Tito and Lorna. Everyone looks at their watches. The facilitators were not supposed to arrive until 6:00 p.m. I look at my watch and it is 5:50 p.m. The discussion of meeting schedules, minutes and other procedural issues took up the hour during which the board was supposed to have its meeting. Salvador asks Tito and Lorna to give them an extra ten or fifteen minutes in order to wrap up their session. As soon as they agree, Salvador asks Yolanda to provide the board with a brief update on the actions she has carried out on its behalf. Yolanda informs that has spoken with the fire department, the government's permit agency (ARPE) and visited PathStone, a federal assistance program for rural areas. All of a sudden, Tomás interrupts her and says that he does not know Yolanda. Yiyi murmurs, "this is crazy." Visually upset, Yolanda tells him she has been part of this group for three or four years. It makes no sense for him not to know her. Salvador intervenes and apologizes for not introducing them. Tomás is fairly new to the group and had not met Yolanda yet.

The fact that Tomás did not know Yolanda should surprise no one. As Yiyi told me, this board has seen its fair share of people come and go. Salvador has brought a lot people to be part of the board in his desperate attempt to find a critical mass who can

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help him develop this project. The consequence? There has been great turnover in the core group since it began less than 4 years ago. Yiyi claims I will meet someone new every other meeting. This high turnover has brought about important consequences, not the least of which is the uncomfortable exchange that took place between Tomás and Yolanda. Yolanda voices those consequences by stating to the board that the constant addition of new members has killed this project. The work done by and with one group is often lost and has to be duplicated by the new group. She recommends that RIOCOOP not incorporate anyone else.

The high turnover rate also points to the lack of involvement of residents from El Jobo, Jácanas and La Planta in RIOCOOP. Salvador's need to constantly find people to contribute to the project, especially people from outside, is due to the fact that local residents are not that interested or committed to the project. Salvador claims to have approached community residents on numerous occasions, but they seem disinterested. According to him and others, when the community was chosen to form part of the Special Needs Community Program eight years ago, community meetings were attended by fifty to sixty people. However, the attendance began to wane when the major infrastructure projects were completed and people had their individual problems resolved (or not). Today, after years of community meetings, few if any community residents attend.

Many community residents, including Yiyi, claim that people do not attend the meetings and activities because they are no longer invited and/or consulted. In other words, Salvador has stopped doing the legwork of informing people and incorporating them in the decision-making processes. Angel, a community resident and sporadic collaborator with RIOCOOP, stated that this project is not so much a community-driven

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initiative as a board driven one. Salvador's response to those comments is that he got tired of inviting residents who were always giving excuses for not showing up. Ramón claims that people left due to differences over whether the group should have become a cooperative and whether the facilities should be transformed into an eco-touristic hostelry. According to him, a series of differences over the vision of the project has led people to leave. Rigoberto believes that people from his community do not come because they have gotten used to the state providing everything for them. Welfare dependence, according to him, has sapped away impoverished peoples' interest in finding work and participating in the creation of their own means to improve their livelihood. Moreover, he argues that people's self-interest is greater than their commitment to volunteer work for a collective project. Today, people are only interested in their immediate well-being and find little value in volunteer work.

In contrast to Rigoberto's emphasis on individual responsibility, Yolanda points out that people do not participate because there is nothing in which to participate. RIOCOOP has not delivered anything concrete since it began promoting the project three or four years ago. The promises of jobs and renovated facilities have withered with time, as has residents' enthusiasm over the idea itself. The project's delay has led many residents to feel betrayed, in a sense, by unfulfilled promises. Moreover, the multiple allusions to the preponderance of self-interest as a motivating force and the lack of altruistic commitment to the community point to a possible mismatch between the ideal organizing model under which RIOCOOP board members expect residents to operate and the demands of local residents as a precondition for participation. The current framing of community development with a self-less volunteerism does not correspond

with the actual motivating factors that move people to activism or, at least, community-level involvement. Thus, the 'do-good' formulation of community development might be leading RIOCOOP board members to overlook the political calculations being made by residents and, on which RIOCOOP could build its organizing campaigns.[77] Yet, regardless of the reasons given for the lack of community integration to the project, everyone seems to believe that as soon as the project gets going and jobs are created, people will flock back to the meetings, just like eight years ago.

After the awkward introduction, Yolanda finishes her report and Salvador adjourns the meeting in light of the fact that the Foundation's facilitators are waiting. He calls Tito and Lorna in at 6:05 p.m. As they are getting settled, Salvador tells Tito that he say him on T.V. as he came out of the meeting with the Consejo Asesor de Reconstrucción Económica y Fiscal (CAREF), a panel of local businessmen, accountants and former state officials charged with making recommendations to the newly elected governor, Luis Fortuño, on matters of fiscal and economic reforms. Tito met with them as a leading member of La Alianza de Lideres Comunitarios and in representation of the island's community-based leadership. Tito shares with us his discussions with CAREF's panel. He told them they cannot leave a significant part of the country without the benefits of economic growth. If the government is in a difficult financial situation, as it claims to be, then it should promote the economic initiatives being developed by community-based groups, such as RIOCOOP. He called for them to assist them in unleashing their potential to create jobs with local level initiatives.

His audience with them solidifies the claim that the community-based movement in P.R. is an established civil society actor with which the government and private sector

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[77] I want to thank Prof. Paley for insistently pointing out the connection between organizing and interest.

must negotiate. Moreover, Tito's statement before what is widely acknowledged to be a neoliberal reform body questioned the notion that current development paradigms in Puerto Rico and elsewhere can lift all boats. The experience of residents of impoverished communities has been such that development initiatives have come and gone over the last fifty years with little positive impact on their lives. Finally, Tito brought a fresh point of view to the discussion. He did not ask them for further welfare assistance or for the protection of their rights to welfare benefits in light of imminent financial reforms. Instead, he was asking them to not obstruct their efforts at self-development. He claims that this message was well-received by the CAREF. I wonder if it was for the same reason's driving Tito or because it resonates with their neoliberal philosophy.

Tito begins the meeting. After we do introductions, Tito explains that they are here to follow up on what the group is doing and help move the project along. He wants to focus today's meeting on the discussion of four important project documents: The Rio Abajo Forest management plan, RIOCOOP's project proposal to the government, the contract by which the government gave RIOCOOP control of the facilities, and the map of the facilities. He selected these documents because they define the terms by which RIOCOOP has to abide in the development of their initiative.

Lorna interrupts Tito and asks if anyone wants to share their thoughts on the last Foundation workshop, "Decision-Making Power and Legal Aspects." This evaluation process is part of the structure of the facilitator meetings in which they assess the workshop's effectiveness. Rigoberto responds that he liked the workshop because it allowed him easy access to necessary concepts. He considers the workshops to be well structured and useful. Salvador adds that the workshops allowed him to refresh his

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knowledge of concepts and ideas he already knew. He took away the notion that there are certain requirements with which they must comply. Isabel, who did not attend the workshop, but was informed of its content, told Lorna that she looked for and brought along with her the documents associated with RIOCOOP's corporate status: permits, insurance policy, the incorporation documents, etc. Yiyi tells me, "Isabel is extremely necessary here."

I concur with her because although Isabel did not attend the workshop, she translated the concepts discussed in it into concrete actions: she gathered RIOCOOP's available documents to examine them and identify which ones are missing. This is main difference between her response and Salvador's and Rigoberto's. The latter repeat their appreciation for the knowledge obtained, but neither showed up today with documents or with a work agenda influenced by that knowledge. Their evaluation demonstrated satisfaction with the workshop, but their actions revealed minimal impact in their practices. This is one of the greatest challenges facing capacity-building programs: success in transmitting concepts and knowledge does not translate into changes in practices and work agendas. This gap is present in the Foundation's program in spite of the fact that the capacity-building workshops are linked intentionally to the concrete demands of developing a project. True, Isabel did bridge the gap, but Isabel is a field technician for another GSO, not a community volunteer.

The existence of this gap is even more perplexing given Salvador's comment. For him, the workshop was a bit repetitive. This has been an informal critique of the program offered by community residents and volunteers. The Foundation included a number of issues and topics in their capacity-building cycle that these community leaders had

already learned during their training sessions in the Special Needs Communities Program. This issue is another example of how efforts are duplicated in the community-based movement. The lack of coordination among grassroots support organizations leads to the investment of resources in programs that often duplicate other efforts.

On the other hand, this duplication of efforts overcomes one of the basic critiques of capacity-building efforts: one-time interventions to improve skills and transfer knowledge have proven to be insufficient (Hannah, 2006, p. 13). Gordon Hannah's research on capacity-building focused on leadership development found that "residents of disadvantaged communities require substantial and prolonged support to participate effectively in community leadership" (ibid., p. 13) In other words, capacity-building requires a sustained engagement with community residents in order to ensure its success. Ironically, the duplication and repetition of similar workshops by different capacity-building programs offers community residents, like Salvador, multiple opportunities to develop the same basic skills.

However, Salvador still has not incorporated the knowledge re-visited in the workshop into a set of administrative practices. This is one of the limits of the workshop as a capacity-building tool: It provides a context of knowledge transfer disconnected from the context in which that knowledge is relevant. Yolanda seemed to have identified that problem. During a personal interview she told me that RIOCOOP members already knew all of the material offered in the Foundation's workshop. She had even given them some of that information as part of her volunteer contributions to the board. She pointed out, both jokingly and with great irony, that Salvador and the others had received enough workshops to warrant giving them a B.A. in community-work. Yet, they repeat the same

mistakes and continue to adhere to the same practices. To her, it was evident that "Salvador no está para que lo capaciten. El brega a su manera. No va a cambiar por talleres." (Salvador is not open to capacity-building efforts. He has his own way of working. Workshops are not going to change him). According to Yolanda, Salvador and the others had been exposed to the information relevant to the project on numerous occasions. The problem was not lack of knowledge, but rather that they had not transferred that knowledge into useful work tools for the development of their projects. As Yolanda states, they prefer to 'bregar' (to manage, to slog through) as they have always done.[78]

Lorna moved from the evaluation to the discussion of what they had accomplished lately. Salvador informs her that he invited people from the community to come to the meeting because they are looking for volunteers interested in completing a certificate in food management that would allow them to work in the hotel's restaurant once it opens. But, as they can see, no one came. He adds that the community manifests little interest in the project. Tito and Lorna pick up on this issue, which is a recurring one, and decide to troubleshoot it with them. Tito tells Salvador and the rest of the board that there are strategies to attract people. For example, the use of the word 'meeting' scares people because it is associated with long, boring procedures. Tito suggests they substitute the meeting with a social event in which whole families can participate and in which they leave time for the discussion of formal issues.

A bit dismissive of that idea, Salvador responds that he is not that worried about community participation because people will come when jobs are offered. However, Tito

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[78] Bregar is a highly ambiguous verb used in Puerto Rico to allude to multiple strategies of negotiation and action. For a thorough analysis of the term and its multiple significations and possibilities as used in Puerto Rico, see Arcadio Díaz Quiñonez (2003). El Arte de Bregar.

insists that community residents should be integrated into the planning stage. This is an important rebuttal because Tito indirectly questions Salvador's notion of community participation. For Salvador, community participation is reduced to being project employees in part because this is his main reason for developing this project, to generate local employment. Yet, as Tito indirectly suggests, this reproduces limited notions of participation in which the community is conceived as fit only to participate as labor of development initiatives. Tito challenges him by insisting that the community can and should be part of shaping the project through which they will earn a living.

Tito adds that people will soon realize they cannot continue the fruitless search for inexistent jobs and, instead, need to get involved in creating their own. This is Tito's mantra. His reading of the current economic situation in P.R. is that the state and private sector are not capable of generating the jobs required by the general population, especially residents of impoverished sectors. His view, which is the view of the Alianza de Líderes and others in the community-based movement, is that these sectors can no longer afford to wait for big capital to create jobs. They must be proactive in the creation of their own employment. That is why Tito volunteers for the Foundation and serves as a facilitator for projects like this one. For him, what RIOCOOP is doing is part of a greater response of the community-based movement to capitalism's exclusionary tendencies as expressed in P.R.

Salvador agrees, but qualifies Tito's statement by saying that people show up when there is work, but not when there is volunteer work. He mentions that just today he asked a couple of residents if they could volunteer to help clean the facilities on Saturday. No one expressed interest until he mentioned that those who volunteer now will be given

priority when they start hiring once the facilities are up and running. At that point, a couple volunteered to help out. Tito applauds Salvador because he is selling to the community not only the project, but also the idea that community residents need to create their source of employment before they can be employed. He encourages the board to promote volunteer work as the first step in attaining a paid job.

This advice encapsulates the entrepreneurial spirit that the Foundation, and Tito in particular, want to instill on not just RIOCOOP, but impoverished communities in general. Creating an income-generating enterprise requires not only vision and market analysis, but the investment of capital and labor upfront that will pay dividends once the business is up and running. This model is significantly different from the main economic development models that have shaped the island's economy, at least since the Operation Bootstrap model implemented during in the mid-twentieth century. These models have been premised on the idea of attracting foreign businesses that can provide both skilled and unskilled jobs to the local population. Generations of Puerto Ricans have grown up with the notion of being labor for hire; that is, of attaining skills that will make them employable by enterprises established in the island. Thus, Puerto Rico's economic development models have relegated the promotion of entrepreneurialism, or self-generated economic initiatives. The Foundation's community economic development initiative seeks to break with that economic model. People like Tito are aware, however, that in order to achieve that change they must also transform how people envision themselves as economic agents: from job-seeking laborers to job-creating entrepreneurs.

Lorna asks others what they consider are the reasons why the community has not taken to the project. Rigoberto gives his usual response: people do not come because of

the 'mantengo' (welfare assistance). He adds that if the group wants to attract volunteers they need to put two attractive models in the entrance. Lorna shakes her head in obvious disapproval of Rigoberto's sexist statement, but does not openly challenge him on that. Although not a crucial point, this is what Li alludes to when she argues that development interventions often ignore socio-economic and political considerations that are crucial to the enterprise itself. How can you promote a participatory development initiative in which participant's openly express their sexist views in which they envision an exploitative role for women in the project?

Rigoberto's comment forced me to think about the role of women in this project. Women from the community are part of the board, but they hardly ever speak. For example, Dilia hardly ever contributed to the discussion. Yiyi made comments, but usually in a murmur which were heard by those next to her. To a certain extent, women were there to fill board positions, but were not necessarily conceived of as main contributors, except for non-community volunteers such as Yolanda and Isabel. The Foundation's lack of attention to that gender dynamic missed an important component that needed to be addressed if the initiative was to live up to its claim of advancing the life opportunities of all residents, regardless of gender.

Back on the issue of community participation, Isabel states that the problem lies in the fact that the project has taken too long to materialize. It has been almost two years since RIOCOOP was incorporated and not much has happened. People get discouraged and lose interest. They begin to think the project is permanently stalled. Isabel's comment is not only perceptive, but it also addresses a key issue in the participatory development literature: lack of results decreases community resident's interest in continuing their

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participation in the project (Daley & Marsiglia, 2000, p. 71). Why would residents continue to come if their time investment is not reciprocated with results?

Isabel also suggests that some people come looking for some quick benefit and they leave soon after they realize there are no opportunities for immediate gains in a project like this. Isabel's comment is important because it points out the obvious: projects have long lives, which often exceed people's immediate needs and/or attention span. Those who are not involved in the day to day planning do not appreciate how hard it is to develop even the simplest initiative.

Salvador adds that some residents resent the facilities themselves. He claims that after the Peace Corps left, the community was no longer allowed to use the facilities. During the Peace Corps' tenure of the facilities during the '60s, they employed close to one hundred people from the community and allowed residents to use the facilities, especially the pool and basketball court. Almost everyone from the board has fond memories of their experiences in the facilities during that era. After the Peace Corp transferred their operations elsewhere in the island and the government took over the facilities in 1970, the facilities were locked up, both literally and figuratively. The facilities were used by various government agencies to run vocational and job-training educational programs that catered to people from outside the community and did not employ people primarily from the community. Thus, the agencies administering the facilities turned their backs on the community. Although located in El Jobo, the facilities have not benefitted the community in decades. According to Salvador, the history of the facilities, and I would add the history of development initiatives in the community, has provoked the general indifference exhibited by many community residents.

Tito summarizes all of the explanations given for the lack of community interest in the project. Tito and Lorna are facilitating a very smooth discussion in which RIOCOOP members not only voice their problems, but also search for and pose explanations and solutions. Tito's and Lorna's facilitation has made a difference in this meeting, if one contrasts this part of the meeting with the events that transpired during the first part meeting in which many opinions were voiced, but few decisions were reached. The contrast highlights the value of grassroots support efforts like the one being enacted here in this meeting.

Tito now takes up the challenge of assisting RIOCOOP in finding a way to break that indifference. Ramón suggests they place a big sign in front of the facilities with the project's name, Hospedería Cooperativa Río Abajo (Río Abajo Cooperative Hostelry), and indicate that it is coming soon. Lorna acknowledges Ramón's contribution and asks for other ideas. A minute of silence moves Tito to suggest they could frame the map they have of the facilities and display it where the whole community can see it. Lorna contributes her own idea by proposing they prepare one cabin in order to offer a sample of what the facilities will look like. Tito likes the idea of a model cabin or room and says that developers use that concept.

I notice that Rigoberto and Pedro look at each other and exchange complicit glances. They have been pushing the idea of developing a model cabin for some time now, but the board, mainly Salvador and Isabel, have not taken to the idea. Rigoberto takes the opportunity inadvertently provided by Tito and Lorna to insist on his idea. He says that if they all work together they could prepare one cabin. Isabel responds by saying they need to get someone to donate the wood with which to rebuild the cabin.

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Pedro and Yiyi look at each other with some frustration. They have heard these exchanges before and feel it is more of the same. It is a repeat of the same conversation had meeting after meeting. Tito and Lorna, unknowingly, have steered the conversation into a dead-end alley.

Annoyed with where the conversation is going, Pedro states he feels he is wasting his time here and that they need to focus on doing something. He has insisted that the board move to find funds to cover the reconstruction costs by sending letters to potential donors, but no one has done them. He reiterates himself: We need to get to work. With that, he signals to Ramón and they leave for their other meeting.

Pedro's call to action is embedded in incredible irony, an issue exemplified marvelously by the infamous fundraising letters. Every time the issue of project financing was raised, Pedro, Salvador, Rigoberto and/or Tomás pointed out that the board needed to send letters to solicit monetary support from wealthy individuals and corporations in the region. These letters were the source of much discussion and debate throughout my research because everyone agreed they were a strategy to gain funds, but no one ever committed to writing them. The only person who ever wrote letters was Isabel. Therefore, every time letters were needed, everyone looked to Isabel to write them.

Isabel was always complaining about the fundraising letters, in part because she always ended up with the responsibility for writing them. However, behind the issue of the letters lied a deeper issue: the tendency of RIOCOOP's board to rely on the grassroots support personnel for tasks which were their responsibility. Isabel was asked not only to write these letters, but also the meeting agendas, fill out official documents required by the government and even write proposals to private foundations. Every time

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Isabel was asked to write a letter or any other document she reminded the board that she was there to promote their 'autogestión' and their capacity to carry out the necessary tasks to fulfill their responsibilities as a cooperative. She was willing to assist them, but was adamant that the board had to assume the responsibility for those tasks, which included all administrative aspects of the cooperative, from finances to grant-writing. By always delegating these tasks to her, the board was perpetuating an unhealthy dependence on a support staff, which would eventually leave the project.

The board members responded in two ways. One response was that Isabel was the most capable person to do the tasks because she knew how to write letters and fill out government documents. They would eventually assume responsibility for those tasks, but in the interest of time, she should do them for now. The other common response was that they, especially Salvador and Rigoberto, did not have the capacity to write letters or fill out documents. They insisted that there were areas in which they needed help from outsiders with more knowledge and experience. Tomas went even further in saying that those were tasks that required professional training, which no one in board had and were not to be found among community residents. Pedro once shared that in Jacana they had the same problem and decided to resolve the issue by asking the municipal government for financial aid to hire a secretary.

Both responses reveal a lot about the politics of grassroots support, the project of empowerment and the limits of the community-based movement. At one level, board members felt that the urgency of the task overrode the greater project of autogestión promotion. They were always willing to sacrifice the 'empowerment learning curve' in order to attain the resources they desperately needed. This is one of the greatest

challenges of grassroots support and empowerment: it is a long term learning process constantly being undermined by the short term demands of the tasks through which the empowerment process takes place, the development project.

The responses also exposes the intent on the part of community groups to strategically direct the resources of grassroots support organizations to their benefit, in this case their human resources. Yolanda was always complaining that the board wanted volunteers and support personnel to do everything: run errands, write grants and letters, and visit government offices. She used to point out that a couple potential volunteers left after their first visit because the board dumped on them numerous responsibilities on the first day. The board members were constantly pushing the envelope to see what they could get the support personnel to do for them. In so doing, they prioritized obtaining what they wanted over the GSOs abstract goals of empowerment and self-sufficiency. This evidenced a gap between the expectations of community groups, who wanted assistance from people who could resolve their problems, and those of the GSOs, for whom the project was, among other things, a means through which they could transform these community residents into empowered subjects. Thus, they prioritized the process and not the immediate needs of the project. This gap led community groups to constantly undermine the intended goals of transforming them into self-sufficient subjects, a fact captured by Isabel's and the Foundation's staff constant complaints about the board not doing or wanting to do what was being required of them.

Finally, Rigoberto and Salvador did speak honestly when they claimed that there were certain areas of the project that were beyond their capacity to complete. Fundraising letters might not have been the best example, but grant writing and

corporate tax returns do require not only knowledge, but also a level of professional skills, such as data search and technical vocabulary, that cannot be gained from five or six workshops. Rigoberto was always insisting that their communities were poor for a reason: they do not have professionals living in them. He was aware, as was Tomas, that developing a hostelry required expertise in a number of areas and the community simply did not have the human resource to manage them. While a differently configured community groups might have the human resources to carry out a local project, RIOCOOP's board, as well as other groups in the capacity-building program, were overwhelmed by a set of requirements that exceeded their available and attainable skills. This is not to sell them short, but if a private for-profit company were doing this project the set of responsibilities demanded of this volunteer board would be divided among a team of professionals, which would include lawyers, accountants, administrative assistants and administrators. In the world of participatory, community-based development, this group is substituted by volunteer residents of impoverished communities armed with a year-long capacity-building training.

Isabel moves ahead with the discussion by sharing that she plans to create a museum of the community and the forest as part of the project. Tito encourages her idea, but reminds them they need to consult the four key documents of this project. Their ideas need to fall within the parameters of what they proposed and agreed to in those documents. Breeching those agreements might cost them the project. Although a museum poses little threat to the project, Tito used this example to make a greater point: the board needs to stick to what they proposed or revisit the contract and project proposal if

new ideas are to be pursued. In doing so, Tito is serving as a watchdog to avoid the derailment of the project.

Tito asks for the forest management plan. Yolanda answers that they do not have it, but it can be easily downloaded from the internet. Tito asks for that to be included in today's notes as a pending task. He asks who is taking notes. No one answers. Ramoncito, the secretary, left twenty minutes ago and no one continued taking notes in his place. Isabel must be boiling inside, particularly after the discussion they had earlier today regarding the importance of minutes. These are the administrative lapses that point to logistical oversights and cause important information to be lost. It also exemplifies what Isabel identified as the biggest challenge of grassroots support: "The hardest part of this process is the transition from community leader to entrepreneur; creating the mentality that this is a business not a social club."

Tito asks for someone else to take notes. He summarizes the discussion and proposes two objectives for RIOCOOP's immediate future: begin the rehabilitation of at least one cabin and identify the needed monetary resources. He asks the board which item they would like to focus on first. Tito is really trying to help RIOCOOP move beyond their constant paralyzing debates and develop a concrete work plan that can help them advance the project. Also, he is committed to a participatory approach. He is very respectful of their ideas, allows them to reach their own conclusions, and intervenes only to help them develop and concretize their thoughts.

Rigoberto insists they should join efforts and rehabilitate one cabin. They could rent it and use the money to cover the $1,800 a year they pay on insurance for the facilities. They could also use it as a model cabin to ask donors for money for the project.

Regardless of what they use it for, the point is to move from dreaming about the project to actually doing it. Salvador immediately jumps in saying the facilities do not have basic utilities, such as electricity and water. Moreover, they need government permits to rebuild any structure. Finally, they need money in order to do any of that. Dilia finally speaks, but to express her frustration with the persistence of differences of opinion that never get the project anywhere. Like some of the other members, Dilia seems to be fed up with Salvador's and Rigoberto's differences. They never reach an agreement. Rigoberto wants to start the project now, but Salvador wants to wait until they find the financial resources required.

While an uncomfortable silence sets upon us, I write down my thoughts: "This is the politics of grassroots support. A grassroots support facilitator contending with not just differences of opinion, but conflicting visions of the project emanating from different interests and personalities. Two community leaders clashing over the direction of the project, a board split along those two camps and a community that has rejected their leadership styles and unfulfilled promises by demonstrating indifference to the project. Tito and Lorna have done an excellent job of assisting the board in the development of a work plan that can help them take an organized course of action. However, their assistance is sometimes undermined by the group dynamics. Grassroots support organizations needs either to encompass those dynamics in their assistance strategy or either select groups better suited for the assistance they provide."

Tito and Lorna realize it is close to 8:00 p.m. and they decide to call it a night. Formalizing a concrete plan will require a couple of more hours of discussion, time they do not have tonight. Lorna suggests that they devote the next meeting to finalizing a new

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work plan. The board agrees. Salvador wants us to leave on a positive note. He reminds the group of everything they have achieved over the years. In 2005, they were only dreaming of administering the facilities. Five months ago they finally got they keys. They are still a young initiative. They have survived all sorts of gossip. He emphasizes that people visit him regularly to ask if the facilities are operating yet. There is interest in the project. All they need is to find donors to finance the remodeling of the facilities. Rigoberto adds that the project is there for the taking. All they have to do is improve the facilities they have. They have the Foundation's assistance, which will help them achieve their goal. With that, the meeting ends. I find it fitting that we ended with Rigoberto and Salvador expressing their different visions of the project.

C. Building Human Resources and Institutional Base: Capacity-Building Workshop #5 – Sustainability and Program Evaluation Principles

Saturday, March 14, 2009

I arrive around 8:30 a.m. to the now familiar campus of the University of Puerto Rico in Utuado. Today's workshop is in a regular classroom, which offers a more traditional educational setting. As usual, I go around the room saluting community leaders and Foundation staff. I meet Prof. Marissa Medina, who directs the program, and Prof. Margarita Moscoso, one of the program's architect and the Foundation's internal evaluator. As I look around, one demographic characteristic jumps out at me, age. Young people are mostly absent in these community groups. All of the participants are at least over fifty years old and quite a few of them are over sixty. This is the generation that emerged along with Puerto Rico's development project in the '40s and '50s. They were the first generation to grow up with the promises and contradictions of Muñoz Marín's political and economic project. Instead of retiring to enjoy the benefits of

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the fruits of their labor, they are here today, still active and engaged once again in a project of renewing Puerto Rico, only this time, as they say, from the bottom up.

Today's workshop is on grant writing and project evaluation. The Foundation is preparing these groups to become nonprofits that operate on the basis of grant-writing and project evaluation. Therefore, today's workshop is an extremely important one in the capacity-building cycle. That is why I am struck by how few participants are present. There are only 11 participants, nine men and two women, both of which are from El Vigia community group, which also reveals a gender imbalance in many of the community groups, especially their boards. RIOCOOP only has 2 members present: Rigoberto and Juan, a former tourist guide in Las Cuevas de Camuy, a well-known cave system in Puerto Rico's north region. Rigoberto invited Juan to join the board a couple of months ago. I know the Foundation was not very effective in promoting the event. RIOCOOP was informed of this workshop less than two weeks ago and many of its members had prior commitments that made it impossible for them to come. However, the lack of participants is also evidence of the wear and tear the program and initiatives have had on community groups. For example, the group from Ciales, over which Lucy presides, is absent today. They have had a hard time developing their sofrito project due to problems with business-related aspects of the initiative and lack of community support. There absence here today might signal that they will not finish the training cycle. It seems like the community groups and the Foundation's program have lost some people since the last workshop.

I meet today's presenter, Mr. José Guillama. He tells me he has 22 years of experience working with nonprofits in Puerto Rico. I tell him about my research project

and he volunteers his interpretation of the problems with the community-based nonprofit sector. According to him, its main difficulty is that they do not systematize their work. Community groups are committed and put a lot of effort into their projects, but they lack organization. Moreover, he insists that commitment and good faith efforts are not good enough to develop an initiative. Certain projects require experience and expertise, which many of these groups do not have. His comments do not surprise me because they are echoed somewhat by my research on RIOCOOP and the Foundation's program, especially the second argument. I have witnessed and heard complains about the gap between the group's acknowledged capacity and the knowledge required to carry out the different aspects of their projects. Some, if not all of the initiative promoted by the Foundation, require the intervention and assistance from professionals external to the group, which justifies the need for grassroots support organizations.

However, his first argument emphasizes a set of lacks or absences—a lack of organization and systematization—that faults the organizations themselves for what he considers to be their failures. Yet, my research shows that these groups are organized and function according to a logic consistent with running an informal, task-oriented, volunteer community organization, which is what they have been until now. They only seem disorganized from the perspective of the formal, professional corporate world, with its prescriptive by-laws, abstract mission statements, and long and short term work plans diagramed in complicated flowcharts. The recurring complaints expressed by support professionals, such as Mr. Guillama, Isabel and Foundation staff, that community groups lack systematized work plans and organization reveals as much about them as it does about the community groups. Their frustration is a manifestation of their failed attempts

to bridge the gap between the logic by which community groups operate and the requirements and expectations of formal corporations. These experts have invested time and resources trying to get community groups to adopt new work and administrative practices conducive to constructing the level of systematization and organization required for developing complex economic initiatives. Yet, groups like RIOCOOP continue to resist those efforts to imbue them with the right disposition and practices to succeed. They continue, as Yolanda said, to 'bregar a su manera,' that is, to conduct themselves as the community groups they have been for years, if not decades.

At 9:00 a.m. Lorna begins the workshop with her usual invitation directed at community groups to update their regional partners on the state of their initiatives. Besides fomenting project accountability to the Foundation, this exercise promotes cross-fertilization among the initiatives. Rigoberto speaks on behalf of RIOCOOP. He mentions they are fulfilling the requirements to obtain the yearly good standing certification. He adds that they are planning to develop their hostelry one cabin at a time, which reflects his view much more than the board's official stance. As Rigoberto speaks, Lorna documents what he says by jotting down key ideas in a paper taped to the wall, which is a basic workshop facilitation strategy geared to offer participants the opportunity to reflect upon and comment on other people's ideas or actions.

Representatives from El Vigia and Jacana's compost project also share their achievements. The former group is living up to Foundation's aspiration of autogestión. They have a meeting scheduled with administrators from Puerto Rico's Ports Authority to request the transfer of a plot of land in their community in which they want to develop their restaurant. They also inform that they were granted twenty thousand dollars by the

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Presbyterian Church's Self-Development of People program. A professor from Arecibo's Interamerican University contacted them about the opportunity and helped them obtain the funds by writing the grant proposal. Like RIOCOOP, El Vigia also seeks assistance from other organizations and professionals.

Jacana's president, Don Pedro Matos stands up, as is his custom, and apologizes for his group's absences. He insists that their project is moving forward and community residents are still interested. They have identified a free source of waste material they can compost and are looking for a plot of land in which to locate their business. They also had a workshop by a professor from this university on how to begin the compost process. Like all other initiatives that are moving along, Jacana's group has looked for outside help beyond the Foundation's staff.

As Pedro sits down, a member of his group, David, tells Lorna their initiative is no longer a community project because there are too many external contributors. Lorna responds by saying that this issue has been raised and dealt with before. All the initiatives are community projects because they impact the local residential areas in which they are located. Incorporating external support or assistance is acceptable as long as everyone is clear on their roles. However, Pedro finds that answer unsatisfactory. He tells Lorna that their project is geared towards farmers in Utuado and the region, not just Jacana's residents. The community will benefit, but in order for them to produce the amount of compost they envision they need a larger market and more human resources than the community has to offer.

David has raised a crucial issue that goes to the heart of the Foundation's program. What role does community play in these projects? Are they community-based

projects or simply projects developed by community groups and located in community settings? The issue of outsiders has begun to question the notion of community-based initiatives in the mind of community leaders themselves. All groups realize they need assistance from a series of organizations and professionals, of which the Foundation is just one. What sense does it make to insist on using the community as a referent if in fact the project is larger in scope? Moreover, David insists that there are issues of scale and markets that render the community referent too restrictive. Why not define the project by its regional potential rather than its community base?

The preference for the reference to community has everything to do with the current buzz and cache of things community-oriented in contemporary Puerto Rico. In fact, Lorna's insistence on re-anchoring the projects as community initiatives has more to do with the Foundation's do-good politics than with the nature of the projects themselves, as David aptly exposed. The Foundation's investment in community-level change lies at the heart of its political project for change in contemporary Puerto Rico, one that presents itself as an alternative to state-led development projects. The notion of community not only affords the Foundation its political raison d'être, it is also the source of its social capital, which it uses to solicit funds and advertise their achievements. Without the aura of community, there would be little difference between the Foundation and other agencies/programs sponsoring small businesses like, for example, Puerto Rico's Economic Development Bank's program called La Llave para tu negocio (The Key to Your Business)?[79] David's comment seems to question a core concept of the Foundation's approach to change and, therefore, elicits a quick dismissal by Lorna.

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[79] This government program promotes the creation, development and strengthening of small and medium businesses in the island. It offers financing of up to $50,000 dollars and requires participants to take three

After David's comments, Lorna finishes her intervention and introduces today's presenter, Mr. José Guillama. He begins by telling the group that he wants to have a conversation with them. He wants the participants to share information about their projects in order for him to make his presentation relevant to the specific needs and strengths of their initiatives. Instead of delivering a pre-designed PowerPoint presentation filled with technical concepts, he would like to present his ideas in terms that are relevant to the different projects.

True to his word, Mr. Guillama runs the workshop by formulating a series of questions to stimulate the participants to think about their projects and their financial needs and possibilities. He goes around the room challenging the different groups with provocative questions. He asked RIOCOOP's members, "Why would anyone invest in your project?" After hearing their response, he asked Jacana's group, "Who are you going to ask for money and why?" He confronted the group from El Vigía with the following question, "Who is interested in your project and how do you know it?" These questions were all meant to encourage the groups to think about the process and demands of seeking financial support in the context of their own projects. What ensued after each question was a veritable brainstorming session in which each group elaborated ideas and arguments about the value of their projects, their strengths as a group, and their project's relevance to different potential investors, such as public agencies and private corporations. Their responses moved from identifying specific investors they could approach to establishing the indispensability of their projects by

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workshops: 1. How to establish and write a business plan, 2. Writing a business plan for expanding businesses, and 3. How to establish a business. For more information, visit the following website: http://www.gobierno.pr/G2B/inicio/Emp_MediosFinanciamiento/emp_llaveNegocio

linking them to current problems in the island, such as unemployment, dependence on food importation, agricultural production costs and the government's fiscal crisis.

Mr. Guillama succeeded in translating his knowledge on project sustainability and proposal writing into a set of practical questions that directed community groups to elaborate answers to the particular financial challenges faced by their initiatives, rather than subject them to the struggle of making sense of abstract concepts from the grant-writing field. This format avoided trying to make the participants experts on concepts or ideas and focused instead on facilitating a discussion on sustainability and financing in which the different groups clarified who they were going to ask for funds, why they selected that agency/corporation/individual and what were the project's strengths that would help them sell it to investors. This format contrasted with the previous workshop which focused more on teaching concepts. While the last workshop seemed more like an adult continuing education seminar, this workshop captured the essence of capacity-building: produce people who can do things not just know new information.

The discussion also exposed the notable differences between participants and groups. Not only did some people participate more than others, but there were different levels of engagement with the questions and discussion. Pedro Matos' comments were very articulate and to the point, in part because he is a very well educated man who worked for and retired from the U.S. federal government. Likewise, Rigoberto is a former business owner who demonstrated his business savvy in the manner in which he handled the tough questions. Other participants are not as well educated nor do they have Pedro's or Rigoberto's experience. Some participants did not complete high school, have dedicated their life to farming or being housewives and are learning about the business

world and grant-writing for the first time. Although all participants seem very capable, not everyone is at the same educational level nor do they all have the same background. This fact has escaped the organizers of the capacity-building program, who have not tailored their workshops to accommodate those differences. Even in this format, which was very open to participation, some people remained silent or were left behind in the discussion.

Mr. Guillama moves from asking questions to discussing the different sections of a grant proposal. He goes over very briefly the section in which the groups present their vision, mission, history, strengths and achievements. The tone of the workshop changes from a vibrant discussion to a more passive reception of information by participants. Georgina, one of the members from El Vigia, tells Mr. Guillama that they have someone, the professor from the Interamerican University, who writes their proposals for them. They meet with him, relate their ideas and he writes the formal document. Her comment, made in the context of Mr. Guillama's presentation, is extremely illuminating. It serves to demarcate the areas for which they, as a community group, assume responsibilities and which ones they delegate. As the first part of the workshop showed, the participants are a very productive source of ideas and arguments. They conceptualize their initiatives and define their scope and details. However, the writing of a proposal is a different story. This area is much more technical and requires certain writing skills. Therefore, as Georgina stated, they prefer to delegate that task to professionals willing to assist them. The challenge before not just Mr. Guillama, but the Foundation is to enable community groups to write their own proposals.

Lily, a resident of Utuado who sporadically participates in the Foundation's workshops but is not a member of any group, mentions that the Foundation does not give them money, but gives them these workshops to help them find money. This, she argues, is a very valuable resource. David agrees with her that the Foundation is teaching them how to ask for money, but their impression was that the Foundation also was going to give them money. In that sense, he believes the Foundation created false expectations. Rigoberto responds to David directly by telling him that if the Foundation had given them money prior to these workshops, they would not have known what to do with it. He, like Lily, believes that the capacity-building cycle is the biggest capital being offered by the Foundation.

Awilda Ramos, a Foundation staff member who came in a bit late to the meeting, steps in the conversation to clarify things. She tells everyone that the capacity-building cycle is an investment in them. However, this 'capacitación' will be tested. All groups are expected to write a short proposal to the Foundation to qualify for a $1,500 seed grant. In other words, the Foundation's financial assistance is linked to its capacity-building program: the groups have to demonstrate the skills acquired as a result of their participation in the training cycle. This is a way of not only providing groups with their first grant-writing experience, but also measuring the impact of the training cycle. However, the evaluation could be undermined if other professionals write the proposal, which is what the group from el El Vigia mentioned they already do. To my surprise, the Foundation did not limit in some way the degree of external contributions in the realization of this exercise.

The participant's comments opened up a meta-discussion about the Foundation and the participant's expectations of it: What does it do? What is the value of capacity-building? What do we gain from it? The Foundation is clear that its role is to invest in capacity-building. Participants like Lily and Rigoberto understand that very clearly and appreciate the value of that investment. Rigoberto even consider it a crucial investment without which they would waste other resources, such as money. This awareness demonstrates their gradual transformation as the subjects of empowerment. They have accepted the demands of the development world in which they have embarked their initiatives and are assuming the challenge of the training required to meet those demands.

David, on the other hand, does not disparage the training, but demands much more from the Foundation. He is not alone in his demand. Pedro Matos had mentioned in a previous workshop that they had received enough papers and documents from training cycles like this one to fill up a room; what they need is money to begin their project. Salvador had expressed a similar opinion and has lost interest in the workshops because all they offered was knowledge. Underlying their demands was the notion that capacity-building is a hollow offering if they cannot get their projects running and, for that, they need money. Ironically, the Foundation was attending to that situation. Instead of being just one source of money, they were providing them with skills to solicit funds from different potential sources. Yet, as in other instances, many participants were willing to sacrifice the project of empowerment for immediate access to the resources they sought.

David Mosse (2004) captures, in an ironic tone, this complex dynamic in his

reflections on development practices and the challenges that emerge at the moment of

implementation:

> *people discard the discipline of participation, self-help and project withdrawal by making themselves clients, labourers or employees so as to secure continuing patronage, capital assets, or wage labour from project staff…Unruly objects of development,…they present themselves as our clients and employees when we call them partners, dependent when we insist on their autonomy. (p. 654)*

For Mosse, development initiatives are sites in which different rationalities and

expectations converge. In some cases, much to the dismay and frustration of development

professionals, participants push aside the long term goals of empowerment and

participation and reaffirm rather than challenge the relations of power and patronage

that structure the relationship of assistance. This is the politics of empowerment-oriented

grassroots support: the project of transforming certain individuals and their realities

often does not conform to the way posed by the development institution's model of

assistance. These unruly objects of development, such as David, prefer to make tactical

use of patronage politics rather than follow the development institution's preferred model

of change: learn how to write a proposal, identify grant-giving institutions, submit a

proposal and comply with their conditions and evaluations.

Awilda finishes her intervention and yields the floor once again to Mr. Guillama.

He now discusses the requirements attached to grants: being legally incorporated,

submitting regular reports, presenting a budget and work plan, having some collateral or

in-kind equivalent, etc. Tito intervenes to emphasize that the era in which the

government gave money to everyone for anything is over. Today, you have to

demonstrate an effective and efficient work history. People who want to compete for

grants today have to work on their initiatives, achieve something with them and then ask for money.

Listening to Tito I began to wonder when this notion of merit began mediating between state resources and citizens. The welfare state conditioned its assistance to demonstrating need or fitting into a category. True, some people were deemed worthier of assistance than others due to racial, gender and employment considerations. But, today's neoliberal era has redefined the old worthy/unworthy debate in social welfare history. Being a citizen or having a need is not sufficient to garner state support. Community groups might have a demonstrable need, but if they do not show the capacity to administrate a project or to manage their own finances, they will not be considered grant worthy. Today, you have to demonstrate you are capable of receiving assistance, not just prove you are in need of it.

Mr. Guillama finishes his presentation on proposals. Although he discussed all the relevant parts of a proposal, he did not teach them how to write a proposal. In fact, contrary to the other workshops, this one did not have a practical application component. Mr. Guillama did not give them an assignment nor was there time left for the groups to begin to write their proposals under his supervision. At the end of the day, the workshop was more about what writing a proposal entails rather than how to write a proposal. However, as Awilda already informed the groups, they will be asked to write a proposal, not just explain its parts. I wonder how many groups will be able to produce their proposal with just the information provided here today. I suspect many will follow El Vigia in looking for outside assistance.

D. Grassroots Support in the Context of Community Practice: Facilitators Assisting Community Initiatives

Wednesday, April 22, 2009

I arrive at El Jobo's community center at 5:30 p.m. for a meeting scheduled for 6:00 p.m. To my surprise, the board is already meeting. As I make my way into the center I see Salvador, Yolanda, Tomás, Yiyi, Juan, Isabel and another woman who I would later learn was named Yisel, a young lawyer Tomás invited to the board meeting. Yiyi was right: there is someone new almost every other board meeting. I notice that Dilia and the representatives from the other two communities, Rigoberto, Pedro, and Ramón are not present.

I take a seat next to Juan and try to catch up with the discussion. The board is planning a fundraising event. Apparently, over three hundred public school students from all over the island are coming to visit the forest's camp site as a field trip in three weeks time. The board wants to take advantage of their presence here to sell them lunch as a way to raise much needed funds for the project. When I arrive the board is discussing the menu: hot dogs, hamburgers and other fried goods. They discuss prices, quantities, brand preferences and cheap places from which to buy their stock. Their knowledge on all these issues is impressive. You can tell they have been doing this for years. As community leaders and volunteers, this is the kind of event in which they specialize: social events in which they host visitors and sell food to raise funds.

Salvador suggests asking supermarkets and food companies, such as Frito Lays and Holsum, for donations. He is pretty sure that businesses would be willing to cooperate for this type of event. As soon as the famous fundraising letters are invoked I look at Isabel. Aware that Salvador has alluded indirectly to her, Isabel states that she

has a copy of a letter asking for donations that she can print if Salvador and Tomás commit to personally delivering them. A preventive quid pro quo, I think. Tomás and Salvador agree to deliver them and the planning continues. However, months have gone by and the board still has not assumed the responsibility of writing the letters. I get the feeling that Isabel might have to plan for a more permanent presence in the board, which contradicts the logic of grassroots support: it is a time-limited assistance whose goal is to become unnecessary by building the capacity of the grassroots volunteers to carry out such tasks.

As the planning of this event comes to an end, Tomás informs the board that he invited to the meeting the medical director of the Fondo del Seguro del Estado, a public corporation that provides worker's insurance. Yolanda immediately objects stating that such invitations require previous consultation with the board. Tomás responds by saying that he consulted with Salvador, as he always does. Yolanda clarifies that the board as a whole, not just Salvador, is responsible for making those decisions. Yolanda's objection is noted, but the invitation still stands.

Yolanda's complaint is much bigger than the particular issue of the doctor invited by Tomás. This is another instance of her constant struggle to get the RIOCOOP board to follow the proper parliamentary procedure. Despite years of teaching them the protocol and reminding them of it every time it is breached, the group continues to operate informally: Salvador is the head of the group and makes decisions without consulting the board. Moreover, the board members validate his unilateral exercise of authority by going to Salvador instead of requesting permission from the board. At the end of the day, Salvador's acknowledged leadership overrides all protocols and by-laws.

This issue emerged again when Juan complained that he was summoned for a 6:00 p.m. meeting with the Foundation's facilitators and it is 6:10 p.m. and they are not here. Moreover, the absence of the representatives from the other communities means that the required quorum is not met. Therefore, the board is impeded from making binding decisions. In other words, we are all wasting our time here. A bit upset by the comment, Salvador answers that we are not wasting our time here. A couple of the board members called to excuse themselves from the meeting because they were ill. They relayed to him that they would support any decision taken by those present. I look at Yolanda and she seems uneasy. Juan raises the same issue she did earlier: Salvador's will substitutes protocol and the board's authority once again. The board will hold the meeting with the Foundation despite not meeting the required quorum. As was the case with Yolanda, Juan's objections were noted, but the meeting continued.

Tito and Lorna arrive uncharacteristically late at 6:20 p.m. The board was waiting for them so the meeting begins rather quickly. Lorna notices that there is someone new in the group, Yisel, and introduces herself as well as the Foundation and its projects. Lorna informs the group that today's meeting has two objectives: following up on their work plan and discussing the proposal they will be submitting to the Foundation.

As usual, Lorna begins by asking the group to evaluate the Foundation's last workshop, which focused on the financial aspects of developing a business, and to share what they learned.[80] And as usual, Salvador responds with a vague statement about how much he learned, how he clarified certain doubts and how everything was now clear to him. Contrary to Salvador, Isabel, Tomás and Juan all share concrete ideas they took

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[80] This workshop is not discussed in this chapter. It was added to the capacity-building cycle as part of the evaluation that took place after workshop #4. It took place a couple of weeks after workshop #5, which was discussed above.

away from the workshop. Isabel learned the importance of a solid financial analysis that considers the project's potential, its risks and its competitors. Tomás follows up her comment by adding that they need to analyze their potential costs and prices and have to study tourist visiting patterns in the area. Juan shares that one of the most important points of the workshop was the need to identify a niche as a strategy for success. After their comments, Salvador mentions that he was unaware of how difficult it was going to be to develop this project. "At my age," he added, "if I would have known everything this project entailed, I would have thought it twice before getting involved." Initially he thought this would require painting the facilities, fixing some of the cabins and opening the hostelry. He now realizes the complexity of a project of this nature. He finishes with a sense of being overwhelmed, "this is big."

His final comment reveals more about the way he experienced the last workshop than his initial statement. The last workshop was very complex, covering topics such as prices, cost analysis, viability studies, and business plans. Many, including myself, got lost trying to keep up with the lecturer, a professor in the UPR's Business School. His presentation was fit more for an undergraduate course on business than for a one-time workshop for relatively inexperienced aspiring entrepreneurs. Salvador left the workshop feeling the weight of his inexperience and lack of knowledge on multiple key issues. Similar to the fourth workshop, the information provided seemed to overwhelm some participants rather than stimulate them to realize their projects. Salvador certainly left that workshop questioning his abilities and strength to see the project through.

His response to the workshop contrasted dramatically from the response of other board members, such as Tomás, Isabel and Juan. Their reactions demonstrate not only

that they took away key ideas relevant to the development of their hostelry, but, more significantly, the differences between them and other participants. Tomás, Isabel and Juan are the best educated among the board members, and not coincidentally, they are not residents of any of the three communities. Before this job, Isabel directed a cooperative which had a multi-million dollar budget. Tomás also managed a big budget and hundreds of employees as regional supervisor of P.R.'s main public corporation, the power company. Finally, Juan has a B.A. and knows quite a bit about accounting since he helps his wife, an accountant, fill out tax returns. Thus, contrary to Salvador, they found the workshop useful and stimulating rather than paralyzing and overwhelming. These subtle differences among the members of the community groups they assist are consistently overlooked by the Foundation during their capacity-building workshops.

Tito puts an end to the workshop evaluation by asking the board what they have been doing and accomplishing lately. This is their main reason for being here today. He wants to find out if they are taking the necessary steps to resolve the issues they have been identifying during their visits over the last couple of months. His goal is to put the group on the right track by making them accountable to their work plan and pressing them on the issues they need get done.

Salvador informs him they have received a couple of visits from other cooperatives that want to establish alliances with them. Alliance is one of the new buzz words in Puerto Rico. The community-based movement uses the word to characterize any sort of relationship established between or among sector peers and public or private agencies. Alliance is meant to capture the underlying sense of solidarity behind the motivation for uniting or coming together. However, recent neoliberal governments,

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especially the Anibal Acevedo Vila administration (2002-2008) and the current Fortuño administration (2008-2012), have added another layer of meaning to the concept. Their governments have promoted the most recent strategy in vogue among the North American and European avant-garde countries and institutions that shape global capitalism: las alianzas public-privadas (public-private partnerships). According to the Fortuño administration, those alliances will allow the private sector to invest in, develop and administer needed infrastructure projects that the state is impeded from carrying out due to its fiscal crisis. Despite the specific definition offered, the concept of alliance is deployed to disguise the pursuit of an old, somewhat discredited, neoliberal practice: privatization. Therefore, the word alliance, like participation, empowerment and community, captures the conceptual ambiguity that characterizes our times. They make reference to practices of solidarity among grassroots groups as well as to neoliberal practices of devolution, privatization and free-market reign. The indiscriminate use and circulation today of these concepts has created great uncertainty over the overall result of the practices carried out in their name.

Salvador explains that one of those cooperatives, FIDECOOP, expressed interest in becoming an investor and financing the whole project. The other cooperatives have presented proposals to help install renewable energy sources in the project and serve as tour guides for the tourists visiting the hostelry. Encouraged by what he hears, Tito states that the pieces are finally falling into place for this project. But, he presses on: "What are you missing?" Isabel blurts out that the board still needs a plan. Tito questions the board: "What happens if you have the necessary pieces, but do not have a plan?" Tito is now in full facilitator mode. He is constantly asking the group questions to stimulate

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critical thinking around the project, generate solutions and tie lose ends. His interventions help the group move towards the formulation of solutions to problems. Tito is careful never to offer them the answers. However, this does not mean he is not intentionally guiding the discussion towards some answers, such as the need to produce a work plan. Behind the appearance of neutrality is a subtle agenda of formulating questions that promote the kind of thinking the Foundation wishes to engrain in its program participants.

No one responds, although the answer is obvious. Instead, Salvador tells him about the architects. The University of Puerto Rico's Architecture School runs a pro-bono Workshop for Community Design in which professors and students offer their talent and expertise to community groups needing assistance with the conceptualization and design of their projects. The board contacted the Workshop's director, Prof. Elio Martínez Joffre, who visited the community along with a group of student. They took all the information available on the facilities and in two month's time will design two versions of the project, one in which the existent facilities are remodeled and one in which they are rebuilt and redesigned.

Salvador was relating all of this to Tito when Juan interrupted him to remind everyone that according to the contract the new design will have to be approved by the Department of Natural and Environmental Resources (DRNA), the public agency with whom the board signed the contract to administer the facilities. Salvador replies that he has already spoken with the forest manager. All they need to do is send him a letter informing him of the changes. Yisel jumps in and clarifies that according to what she read in the contract the changes need to be approved by the DRNA. That, she states,

requires much more than just writing a letter to the forest manager. Tito agrees with Yisel: they must comply with the contract at all times.

This is Yisel's first meeting, so she is unaware of the board's internal power struggles. Juan and Salvador lie in different camps. Juan was brought to the board by Rigoberto and sympathizes with him. As I later found out, Rigoberto quit the board's vice-presidency a couple of days prior to this meeting in large part because Salvador ran the project according to his own criteria and was working much closer of late with Tomás, who was not a resident of any of the communities and was not elected to the board. Salvador's leadership style, which tended to limit participation and dismiss ideas and recommendations that ran counter to his own, ended up alienating Rigoberto, who opted to leave the board and the project. Rigoberto's response was not capricious. Research on participation and capacity-building initiatives has shown that participants lose interest and withdraw from projects "when they perceive that their agendas were being sidelined" (Hannah, 2006, p. 13). Nonetheless, Rigoberto's absence is significant because he represented one of the communities, La Planta, in the board. Without him, RIOCOOP loses another important component of the original three community alliance.

Juan assumed Rigoberto's role of being a critic of Salvador's somewhat arbitrary leadership style. With time Juan would also be forced to leave the board as Salvador stopped inviting him to meetings and involving him in project tasks. Despite the training workshops on participatory leadership and conflict resolution offered to him by the Foundation and other public and private agencies, Salvador has not modified his leadership style. He alienated important board members who felt they had no choice but to leave. More importantly, his leadership style foreclosed the possibility of formulating a

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work plan and administrative practices that reflected the diversity of visions and approaches brought to the board by the different community leaders and volunteers.

Yisel, unaware of these sub-plots, sided with Juan because, despite everything else, he was right. As a lawyer, Yisel knew that Salvador's informal agreements with the forest manager were insufficient for a project governed by very well defined contract. After this exchange, Salvador asks Yiyi to prepare and serve some light snacks. Yiyi goes to the kitchen and comes back with sodas and bread for everyone. Once again, the phantom of gender inequalities rears its ugly head. Yiyi misses out on the discussion in order to serve us a snack, a task that Salvador or anyone else could have carried out or could have waited if Yiyi was considered to be an important contributor to the board.

Lorna decides to steer the meeting in a different direction. She asks if FIDECOOP put forth a serious offer to finance the project. Salvador confirms that their interest is serious and adds that the agency's regional director even came to see the project. In order to move forward with them, the board needs to hand them the new design plans. Juan retakes his antagonistic position. He mentions that the contract, which leases the facilities to the board for ten years, might create some skepticism among investors. Who is going to invest in a project whose ownership could be reverted to the government after a couple of years? Isabel corrects Juan. He is oversimplifying the issue. The contract is a binding document and FIDECOOP will analyze it thoroughly before investing. Yisel, once again, serves as the voice of caution: the contract is explicit about a number of requirements that if not met could justify a government take over.

Tito tries to avoid the antagonism and overcome the impasse between Juan and Salvador by focusing the conversation on finding a solution to the constant worries about

the contract. He asks if the board has considered naming someone as the contract administrator, that is, someone who would be charged with monitoring that the contract's dispositions are met. His suggestion is intended to avoid further debate and move the board to concrete actions to address its worries.

Yolanda and Isabel comment that the problem with the board is that it does not comply with its own work plan and does not determine clear deadlines for when tasks need to be done. Tito, who wanted to focus more on actions to address problems than continue to discuss the board's problems, opts to put the problem on the table. He tells the board that he notices they are having problems organizing their work and planning their strategies. He reiterates that he is not here to make decisions on their behalf. They need to take ownership of this project by making the necessary decisions, which need to be informed by an overall plan.

Juan comments that he was recently looking over the project's work plan and the board had not met a number of tasks set out in it. Tomás, who is a staunch supporter of Salvador, concedes that Juan is right, but explains that the board has a grave human resource problem. Board members do not attend the meetings and they have a serious problem with the secretary. Moreover, the cooperative has no money. Every time they plan an activity, board members must cover the costs out of their own pockets. In light of these challenges, they have decided to search for investors or donors to finance the whole project.

Tomás' comments are not surprising, yet no one had ever articulated the board's problems in such a straightforward manner. I guess Salvador's earlier admission that he felt a little bit over his head directing this project might have opened the door for Tomás'

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assertion about the board's human resource problem. Moreover, he captured the current

state of the project: the board members have lost some of their drive and the board has

been unable to secure financial resources to develop the project. It seems that, like the

community, some of the board members are starting to question the viability of the

project given the resources at hand.

Tito thanks Tomás for his honest diagnosis of their current situation. He states

that if the board has established searching for funds as its priority, then it must organize

itself for such a task. For example, do they know what the different investors and donors

require in order for the cooperative to qualify for their funds? Tito once again has re-

directed the conversation away from the recurrent internal debates to the common search

for solutions to the problems posed. He has done this various times during this meeting,

while still allowing the members the freedom to voice their concerns, opinions and

reflections on the state of the cooperative. However, today's meeting has functioned more

as a space of voicing concerns and expressing doubts about Salvador's leadership and

the board's capacity to organize itself than as a space to elucidate obstacles and pose

solutions. The board members have taken advantage of the facilitator's presence to voice

critiques and concerns that otherwise would have been silenced by Salvador or would

have ended in frustrating, sterile debates. Interestingly, Tito's and Lorna's presence has

been used by certain members to help them be heard. Ironically, by constantly steering

the conversation back to the task at hand, Tito overlooked the need to facilitate a meta-

session on the board itself: the different interests represented by different individuals,

Salvador's leadership style, and the role of non-community members in developing this

project.

Tito exhorts the board once again to develop a work plan to organize their fundraising drive. He also clarifies that his role is not to visit them once a month to criticize them or give them orders. Instead, he comes here to offer his assistance. Yet, if they had a plan it would be clearer to both him and the board how he could best assist them. Tito's constant clarifications are part of the education process itself. He wants to instill upon the board the notion that they are responsible for their initiative, including its success or failure. His role is to assist them in the process of fulfilling their responsibilities. For him as well as for the Foundation, constructing and maintaining this kind of relationship with grassroots groups is part of their progressive politics, one that seeks to break with patronage politics in which impoverished groups are tied to either welfare state employees or upper class philanthropists by a series of exchanges in which resources are reciprocated with tacit support for the political and class structure status quo.

Yet, not everyone understands their political project in the same way. I once asked Ramón what he thought about the Foundation's facilitators and he told me he did not understand their purpose. "I'll be honest," he said "I have met with them in Jacanas and El Jobo. Maybe I don't understand something or haven't had their purpose clearly explained. Don Pedro asked them how they could help us with our project. I thought Tito was going to spell out how he was going to help us, but he told us we had to write the proposal ourselves. He told us what we had to do, but not how he was going to help us. I tell you I am not clear what they do besides showing up. They come, tell us we have good ideas, but nothing more. How is that helping us? How is that supporting us? They do not

bring money and do not help us with any tasks. They are there so you do not forget that you have a project."

Ramón's comments are extremely revealing. On the one hand, his main complaint against the Foundation's facilitators is that they do not bring resources. In a way, his comments betray his politics of grassroots support: he expects his relationship with helping agencies and people of other social classes to be built around the transfer of services and material resources. Therefore, he finds the Foundation's support, which is built explicitly on the transfer of knowledge and skills, wanting or pointless. In this sense, Ramón is, as Mosse would say, an unruly subject of development: He prefers concrete resources or help to the Foundation's project of producing him as an empowered, self-sufficient individual.

On the other hand, Ramón's comments carry with them an implicit critique of grassroots support. Even if he appreciated the assistance geared to empower him and his group, the method used by the facilitators seems very limited. What good comes from their monthly visits and their facilitated meetings that help organize their ideas if once they leave the group is left with the same problems of limited human and financial resources? How useful are work plans and strategies if they cannot write a proposal, fill out the tax exemption forms or produce a business viability study? In other words, Ramón's comments suggest that once they know what they need to do they still need assistance doing it. At that point, according to his critique, the facilitators invoke the tenets of participatory development and walk away. Ultimately, his comments question whether that is the best grassroots support has to offer.

Ramón's skepticism notwithstanding, some of RIOCOOP's members did welcome Tito's contribution. In response to Tito's insistence on assisting them in some way, Tomás asked Lorna and him if they could help the board develop a new work plan. He punctuated his request with a deferential acknowledgment: "Ustedes tienen el expertise" (You both have the expertise). Tomás' allusion to expertise serves, at one level, to reiterate his observation about the board's human resource deficit. At another level, Tomás once again brings to the fore elements lingering seemingly unnoticed below the surface. The whole enterprise of grassroots support, as an instance of development practices, is premised on the idea of expertise. In this case, experienced volunteers or professionals transfer and/or share their knowledge on development projects with a captive audience: impoverished community groups trying to succeed in our current neoliberal era through one of its alternative roads: microenterprises. This road is full of obstacles that experts can help them avoid or overcome: corporate structures, grant writing, financial planning, administrative transparency, government contracts, and a set of accountability measures associated with each of the previous items.

However, Tomás' invocation of expertise as the principal mediator of the board's relationship with the facilitators also summons the long standing practice in the development industry of delivering assistance through the structuring of unequal relations. According to James Scott's (1998) analysis on planned social change initiatives, the development industry positions certain individuals as experts who, by virtue of their specialized knowledge, are authorized to diagnose the needs and problems of specific populations, propose an alternative way of life, and devise the interventions through which those populations can improve their well-being. Participatory

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development claims to have overcome that development model by substituting the rule of experts with collaborative relations in which facilitators promote social change without controlling or imposing the change process. Yet, the authority of facilitators committed to participatory development still comes from knowledge and skills differences from their subjects of empowerment, which Tomás aptly characterizes as expertise. In that sense, participatory development has simply re-fashioned the old rule of experts with a more palatable one.

Moreover, Tomás' allusion to expertise exposes the subject-formation project implicit in the facilitators' presence in the board's meeting. Tito and Lorna rely on a series of techniques, such as facilitation, work plans and strategic planning, to help transform RIOCOOP members from community leaders and volunteers to successful entrepreneurs. Their calculated use of these techniques is informed by social science research and theories that explain human behavior and proposes efficient and effective ways to manage it. This is particularly apparent in the Foundation's capacity-building cycle, which was developed and implemented by professors and intellectuals associated with the University of Puerto Rico. Thus, Tito's expertise developing work plans is one example of the assemblages of techniques used by the Foundation to pursue its greater project of producing self-sufficient, empowered individuals and groups that can assume the challenge of carving out a niche in today's neoliberal era.

Salvador offsets Tomás' worries about human resources by stating with some dignity that it is important to note that this group has moved slowly, but steadily. Tito reinforces his comment by sharing once again his view that the country's economic development will not materialize until its impoverished communities join the development

process. Yet, he invites Salvador and the board to look around and create a list of talented volunteers who could assist them in the different areas in which the board has some weaknesses.

Seeing that it is almost 9:00 p.m., Lorna presents what will be the last agenda item for the meeting, the Foundation's seed grant. She explains that this is the last exercise required by the capacity-building cycle: writing a grant in which they integrate the knowledge and skills gained throughout the workshops and facilitated meetings. As she explains this, she hands out the grant's outline. I look at the outline and try to identify the different workshops associated with each part. The first and second part, which asks for a summary of the proposed project and a history of the organization, were worked on the first two workshops, which focused on defining the organization's goals, mission, objectives and history. The third part, which calls for a project description, was worked on the third and fourth workshop, while the last part, submitting a budget, was worked on during the last workshop on business development, which was not part of the original plan. The grant also asks the group to submit a series of supporting documents, such as permits, work plans, certifications and financial documents, which were the kind of things that the facilitators worked on during their assistance developing the initiative. After analyzing it, I think this is the best evaluation the Foundation can do to assess the capacity-building cycles' effectiveness. If a group can produce this grant, it will evidence its capacity to compete with others according to the terms of the development industry and the current capitalist system.

Lorna discusses the grant's parts briefly, emphasizing the simplicity of its format. She informs the group that they still have not set the grant's due date, but will relate that

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information as soon as they have it. Finally, she asks the million dollar question: Who is going to be responsible for writing this grant? Isabel quickly volunteers Juan! Her experience working with this board has engrained in her the need for preventive tactics. Juan seems indifferent to his nomination. He says he does not have time right now to take on the writing of a grant, but can help out in other ways. It seems like he is not committed enough to the project given his marginal status in the board. As a result of his comment, Tito asks me if I could help out with the grant. I am not sure whether I should do this. Writing the grant will defeat the purpose of the exercise: assessing RIOCOOP's growth as a result of their participation in the capacity-building cycle. Moreover, my involvement might affect the very phenomenon I am researching: the capacity of grassroots support efforts to produce the changes they claim to be producing. Yet, I accept because I am convinced that my involvement will ensure that the proposal at least gets written and submitted, which guarantees that RIOCOOP will at least have a chance to qualify for much needed funds. With regards to my research, I decided that contributing to the success of the project outweighed the possibility of documenting another missed opportunity or potential failure. However, I accepted with the condition that someone else works with me. After a minute of silence, Isabel volunteers. An uneasy end to a capacity-building cycle: two external resources are taking up the challenge of proving the cycle was a success for community members.

With that Lorna moves the meeting to a close. She reminds everyone that next Saturday the Foundation will be holding its internal evaluation and every group must be present to contribute to the development of the program for future community leaders.

E. Coda

RIOCOOP graduated from the Sila M. Calderón's first ever capacity-building program for community leaders on May 17, 2009. The event was well attended by the community groups who participated in the program throughout the island. As expected, Mrs. Sila Calderón spoke at the event, which also featured Mr. Federico Hernández Denton, the Chief Justice of Puerto Rico's Supreme Court, as the main orator. Dance groups from the participating communities performed before an audience that saw in them the community-based movement's future. Eventually, all of the participants made it through the stage, getting their diplomas and shaking hands with the Foundation's administrators, many of whom community leaders have shaken hands with during past political campaigns, such as Sila M. Calderón and her personal staff. Everyone left with a sense that they had been part of an important initiative and inspired by the notion that they represent the promise of a better future for Puerto Rico.

The graduation did not signal the end of the Foundation's involvement with these community groups. The Foundation had a post-graduation plan that included follow-up visits and further assistance finding funds for the initiatives. The follow-up visits keep taking place throughout the summer of 2009 and the promises of monetary assistance did not materialize as first advertise. After numerous negotiations in which the terms kept changing, the Foundation offered RIOCOOP the transfer of certain funds acquired on their behalf from Rural Development, but only if they participated in another capacity-building program focusing on business administration. With time, the Foundation has become less relevant to RIOCOOP's board in its continued quest to develop its project.

RIOCOOP continued meeting and looking for support from other organizations and agencies. In May, the board received the new design proposal from the University of Puerto Rico's Architecture School. Their design dazzled the board and motivated them to rebuild the facilities following the architect's suggestions rather than to remodel the existent facilities and retain their current façade. This meant that the board abandoned, once again, its plan to renovate the existent facilities and develop the projects by sections one cabin at a time. However, the university prohibits the architects from signing the plans and making them official. Without that final step, the plans are useful only for selling the idea of the project to interested parties, but not for obtaining financing or government permits since they are not official plans. Some board members questioned the value of a well-intentioned assistance that only went half way. At the end of the day, architecture students who worked on the project gained more experience from the design then the board received benefits from it.

In June, July and August of 2009, the final months of my research with them, the board had a series of meetings with financial institutions, a construction cooperative and even the Special Needs Communities Program personnel. These meetings tried to secure funding, establish construction costs, and solicit further support in the development of work plans and business proposals. The board was able to get a concrete cost proposal from the construction cooperative. Their assessment of the costs of building the project as designed by the architects came out to two million dollars. RIOCOOP was unable to secure the financial resources to cover those costs from their meetings with banking institutions and financiers. The assistance from the Special Needs Communities

Program never materialized due to personnel firings resulting from the Fortuño administration massive layoffs of 2009.

In October of 2010, over a year after my fieldwork ended, RIOCOOP has still not opened its eco-touristic hostelry. The board continued to meet throughout this last year, although it underwent significant changes. The alliance of the three special needs communities from which RIOCOOP emerged no longer exists. La Planta community has no representative in the project since Rigoberto left. The representatives from Jacanas continue to participate in the board, but as a community Jacanas is not involved in the project. Other volunteers have come and gone, including many of those invited by Tomás. Salvador gave up RIOCOOP's presidency to Tomás, who agreed to head the project for a year. Isabel fell victim to the Fortuño administration's massive layoffs of government employees. She now forms part of the board not as an advisor, but as a full-fledge member. In all, this last year has been marked by significant changes, but also by stabilizing continuities.

Many of those who know about RIOCOOP's project, including the Foundation's staff, are baffled by why that project has not opened yet. To be sure, most of the community groups who formed part of the capacity-building program still have not developed their initiatives. So, RIOCOOP is part of the norm, not an exception. However, RIOCOOP had a number of advantages over the other groups. They already had a formal contract with a government agency that gave them the right to administer an existent facility. They also had a core group of seasoned community leaders who had been committed to the project for years. They had the support of public and private agencies, such as the Special Needs Community Program, the Organization for the Promotion of

Human Development and the Commission for Cooperative Development, among others. Finally, they underwent the Foundation's year long capacity-building process that also included the assistance of two facilitators.

So, why has RIOCOOP not been able to open its hostelry? The ethnographic material presented points to areas and issues in which one might begin to find answers to those questions. RIOCOOP's case study illustrates how the socio-economic conditions and political practices that shape the collective life of residents from impoverished communities exceed the ability of capacity-building programs to facilitate their transition from community leaders to social entrepreneurs. The gap between the capacity-building program and the complex social field in which it is inserted once it engages community groups such as RIOCOOP partially accounts for the results thus far: a project still struggling to establish itself.

The Foundation's workshops, for example, reflected the educational and professional gap existent between the professors who developed the program and lecturers who delivered its content and the community groups who participated in the program. The workshops were delivered in an academic setting and used a format, including their technical language, more compatible with university level courses than a continuing education program for adults. The majority of the participants, including RIOCOOP members, were people over fifty years old, many of whom had less than a high school education and did not have the required reading and writing skills for the tasks demanded of them. Although this profile was predictable given the vast experience of Mrs. Sila Calderón and her staff with the island's community-based movement and its leadership, the Foundation overlooked it at the moment of designing its curriculum and

their methodology. According to Prof. Margarita Moscoso the Foundation did not develop a profile of the participants prior to the start of the capacity-building cycle that could help them adjust its format and content to the educational and basic skills levels of its participants. In other words, the workshop's design was not guided by a serious analysis of the demographic and socio-economic particularities that configure the reality of residents and current leadership of impoverished communities in the island.

RIOCOOP's case study also shows how existent forms of politics, such as authoritarian leadership practices and patronage-seeking strategies, undermine the process of community participation and self-management. The capacity-building process, which promotes the pursuit of collaborative and self-sufficient forms of politics, seemed incapable of overcoming those practices, which limit the transformation of community leaders into empowered, participatory subjects who can administer social enterprises. If anything, RIOCOOP's experience demonstrates that capacity-building and empowerment demand a much more profound transformation of the socio-economic and political reality of impoverished communities, including gender inequality, leadership styles and educational deficits, that can be achieved by means of a year-long capacity-building cycle.

What are the implications of these findings for the Foundation's greater political project of empowerment and the formation of self-sufficient community groups? To be sure, the current incapacity of RIOCOOP to develop its economic community development initiative does not mean that their project of empowerment and self-sufficiency has failed. According to Li (2005), the myopic focus on the success or failure of development projects misses their effects on people's lives regardless of the final

outcome. So, what did the Foundation's program accomplish? In the case of RIOCOOP, the Foundation's program opened their eyes to the complexities of the business aspect of their projects, which they had underestimated. It also instilled in them a greater urgency for complying with the requirements and expectations of their legal corporate status. Finally, it made them aware of their personal and collective insufficiencies to comply with everything required by this project. In becoming aware of these issues and acknowledging them as areas in which they need to improve, RIOCOOP members internalized the demands of becoming empowered individuals and assuming the role of being the subjects of empowerment.

However, the Foundation did not always accomplish what it planned or established as its goal. As Mosse argues, many individuals and groups become unruly subjects of development and the program's participants were not the exception. Like Mosse, Li recognizes the "emergence of practices of compromise and collusion to fill the gap between project plans and on-the-ground realities" (Li, 2005, p. 391). Certain participants responded to the Foundation's program by means of such unruly practices of compromise and collusion. Lucy, for example, assimilated the Foundation's urgent call for administrative and fiscal transparency, but delegated such tasks and functions to professional volunteers, such as accountants. She voluntarily passed up the opportunity and responsibility to become self-sufficient by choosing to stick to what she knew best and incorporating volunteers to cover areas in which she did not feel competent. David evaluated the pros and cons of for-profit versus nonprofit corporate formats based on the information provided in one of the workshops and decided for the former, which was not the one being pushed by the Foundation. He opted for what seemed simplest to him,

rather than pursuing, the name of a collective good, the complex process of complying with the nonprofit demands. Finally, despite being skeptical of Foundation's concrete contribution to their project, RIOCOOP kept attending their workshops and accepting their facilitators in the hopes that at some point their presence might translate into financial resources or political connections that could open doors for them.

RIOCOOP's practices during the workshops and facilitated meetings also demonstrate moments of resistance to the Foundation's project of empowerment and self-sufficiency. RIOCOOP members, such as Salvador and Ramón, rejected the demands for behaving like a formal corporation, which implied preparing meeting agendas and producing minutes. They persisted in acting like the community volunteers they had been for years. Their resistance was often based on not on the pursuit of an alternative progressive politics, but rather in the entrenchment of highly problematic practices of gender inequality and the conservation of existing power dynamics in the community, such as Salvador's exercise of authoritarian leadership style and the board's disregard for greater community involvement and improved collaborative and participatory processes.

From the perspective of the practice of grassroots support and empowerment schemes, the Foundation's program produced mixed results, something Li suggests in her analysis of such initiatives: "Thus, improvement schemes are simultaneously destructive and productive of new forms of local knowledge and practices. Rather than attempt to generalize, the effects of planned interventions have to be examined empirically, in the various sites in which they unfold" (ibid.). RIOCOOP members and other program participants do have a different awareness of their capacities, potential, and need to professionalize their groups and initiatives as a result of their participation in the

Foundation's capacity-building cycle. However, they also negotiated the Foundation's demands and offerings with their own political project, which included expectations and demands of their own. In so doing, they also behaved as unruly subjects of empowerment.

<center>**Chapter VII**

Conclusion:

The Politics of Grassroots Support Revisited</center>

Introduction

Puerto Rico underwent significant social, political and economic changes during the mid-twentieth century. According to official accounts, these changes transformed the island from a mostly impoverished, rural, agricultural colony to a mostly urban, industrial democracy, although still politically subordinated to the United States. However, by the 1970s it had become uncomfortably clear that despite the economic and political restructuring of the 1940s and 1950s the island was unable to contend with the new configurations of global capitalism that were increasingly relegating Puerto Rico's economy, particularly its labor force, to the margins of the international economic system. Since then, the gains of modernization and industrialization, including palpable improvements in the quality of life, have co-existed in an uneasy tension with sustained poverty, remedial welfare programs, insufficient jobs for the local labor market, continuous outmigration, and a persistent income gap between local classes as well as between the United States and Puerto Rico.

For the last three decades, Puerto Rico has been in search and need of an alternative approach/model that can help redress the specific conditions of those segments of the population beleaguered by their growing exclusion from the promises of

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social develpment and the formal market economy. Promoting and achieveing economic growth is still probably the most effective response to overcoming unemployment and poverty, and promoting social development, as demonstrated by the impressive strides made in these areas by countries like China and India in recent decades (Karger, Iyiani & Shannon, 2007, p. 74). However, as James Midgley and Michelle Livermore (1998) remind us "economic development does not automatically 'trickle down' to the poor" (p. 38). Thus, in this dissertation, I examined a development model, NGO-promoted grassroots support, whose poverty-focus, community-level approach and capacity-building emphasis claims to offer an alternative for those still waiting for economic growth to trickle down.

In this the concluding chapter of the dissertation, I aim to reflect on my research findings of this model based on my case studies of Social Action of Puerto Rico, Inc. and the Sila M. Calderón Foundation. My reflections focus on establishing the relevance of my findings for the debates surrounding the claims of participatory development, the role of NGO promoted development interventions today and empowerment politics in a neoliberal policy context. My contribution to these debates is based on my theoretical framework, which focused on examining the policy context and models of grassroots support as well as the politics of its practice. Finally, my reflections will consider the role and contributions of this model to community-based social change efforts in contemporary Puerto Rico.

Grassroots Support in a Neoliberal Policy Context

My research project on grassroots support took as its point of departure the ambiguity and political indeterminacy that engulfs this development model due to its

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association with concepts like community, participation, empowerment, volunteerism, and nonprofit. These concepts exude multiple significations and, therefore, have been linked to different and often contradictory political projects, particularly to those pertaining to new modes of governance and pro-market economic reforms. For critics of centralized, state-led development models and capitalism's focalized exclusionary tendencies, NGO promoted grassroots support pursues an alternative politics of partnership and inclusion committed to the formation of an active citizenry based on the principles of democratic participation, community empowerment and social entrepreneurialism. However, critics of participatory development and development NGOs contend that this politics of inclusion has been instrumental in facilitating the co-optation of grassroots groups into the development agenda of national governments and international aid agencies, which have increasingly been driven by neoliberal ideology.

My research assumed the challenge of examining this social intervention model as it inserts itself in the complex and politically polyvalent process of producing this new participatory and empowered citizenry. The results of this examination showed that the ambiguity and political indeterminacy of this model is an effect of the intersection of discourses of community-based empowerment and participation with a neoliberal policy context. To be sure, empowerment-oriented, participatory, community-level anti-poverty initiatives were not created in the 1980s nor are they neoliberal inventions. However, as Aradhana Sharma (2006) argues, their intersection with contemporary neoliberalism has reshaped the logic of government and empowerment politics itself.

This interface or intersection produces what Sue Kenny (2002) calls a "fused discourse" based on her research on the tensions engulfing community development

today. According to her, contemporary community-based interventions draw on "ideas of engagement and self-determination located in the activist framework" as well as on "the individualistic idea of self-determination in the market framework, where competition and leadership are important, and where individuals, left to their own resources, become resilient" (p. 296). In my research, both ASPRI and the Sila M. Calderón Foundation pursued sustainable socio-economic change through community empowerment in the context of a conservative reformist agenda both in the U.S. and Puerto Rico. This intersection infused their grassroots support work with the conceptual tendencies and reformist goals associated with the project of alleviating state spending and devolving the burden of securing the well-being of impoverished communities to NGOs, and through them, to the communities themselves.

Both ASPRI and the Foundation expressed in their mission statements an explicit commitment to combating poverty. Their program designs operationalized that mission through participatory and community-based initiatives that focused exclusively on impoverished communities. ASPRI, for example, conducted needs assessments and community meetings as part of the process of developing a community revitalization agenda that reflected the needs and aspirations of local groups. Moreover, they worked closely with local leaders to implement that agenda. Finally, they served as intermediaries between the community and public and private agencies in attempts to secure valuable resources to strengthen community initiatives.

Similarly, the Sila M. Calderón Foundation focused on developing community economic development initiatives. They offered a sequentially-organized capacity-building workshop cycle delivered by well-trained professionals knowledgeable on each

topic. Moreover, they designated two community organizers to accompany the different groups in their community settings during their work developing their projects. Thus, both organizations exhibited work models that reproduced the basic tenets of grassroots support. They aimed to "to initiate long-term change and increase the capacity of people to meet their own needs" (Lane, 1995, p. 184). Also, they pursued those goals by engaging in the "study, design, execution and assessment of development programmes and projects, in *direct action* with social groups and organizations" (Balbis, 2001, p. 28).

However, their anti-poverty agenda and grassroots support work faced the same challenges identified by Nederveen Pieterse (1998) for so-called alternative, post and reflexive development initiatives today: they were "caught on the horns of a dilemma between the aims of human and social development and the constraints of structural adjustment and global monetarism" (p. 345). In ASPRI's case, this dilemma emanated from its link to the Community Services Block Grant. CSBG was part of President Reagan's conservative and anti-welfare state reform that departed from the liberal political ideology and developmentalist logic that gave rise to and oriented President Johnson's War on Poverty. CSBG was part of a set of policy reforms that sought to contract the reach of the welfare state by cutting public expenditure on social welfare programs, promoting the incursion of for-profit and nonprofit private ventures in public interest areas, decentralizing state functions to lower government levels, and substituting the welfare state's public good principle with a discourse of individual responsibility.

As documented in chapter IV, CSBG was designed as a block grant, which stands as an example the devolution strategy pursued by the Reagan administration. CSBG was also part of the reduction of financial resources to social policies. CSBG was assigned

close to 30% less funds than the program it substituted while being asked to cover a similar programmatic area. This reduction led many community action agencies to compete for new funding sources that could compensate for lost funds. In doing so, many CAAs experienced a mission drift that, according to Enid Opal Cox (2001), ended in changing their orientation from "grassroots community organization, social action and advocacy...to one of social planning and administration" (p. 39). In other words, it resulted in CAAs neglecting their grassroots support and advocacy role and becoming grant managing institutions.

Finally, financial strains and devolution were coupled with an increased commitment to direct CSBG funds to nongovernmental organizations. CSBG funds both public and nongovernmental agencies, but established a preference for the latter when new agencies had to be added to the CAAs network. According to Aradhana Sharma (2006), the preference for financing nongovernmental organizations is part of a neoliberal strategy that "degovernmentalizes the state and proliferates nodes of governance ouside of its formal structure" (p. 78). The reason behind distancing the state from its governmental function is to disseminate the idea that the state is becoming smaller and cutting its social welfare budget, while still not abandoning its development role (ibid., pp. 78-79). CSBG followed this neoliberal logic. It coupled devolution and significant budget cuts with "the increasing entanglement [of NGOs] within the webs of governance as instruments not just targets of rule" (ibid., p. 78).

Social Action of Puerto Rico, Inc. was one of those NGOs that entered the federal government's web of governance. As such, ASPRI is an example of how political systems and policy contexts matter in defining and orienting social intervention models

as well as in determining their scope and manner of delivery. To begin, Puerto Rico's neocolonial context reduces federal policies and anti-poverty programs to being remedial initiatives intended to make up for the island's broader socio-economic problems for which its political system is partially accountable. In other words, CSBG and ASPRI are part of a neocolonial welfare state that is significantly funded by U.S. social programs and imbues Puerto Rico's current political status with artificial life by amerliorating the social antagonism resulting from poverty and income inequality.

Beyond supporting the status quo, ASPRI is an example of how federal neoliberal reforms have trickled down to the island, accentuating Puerto Rico's neocolonial situation. ASPRI represents the neoliberal shift from publicly financed and implemented program to the gradual divorcing of public financing from its program implementation and outcomes (Canino-Arroyo, 2003). In fact, some of ASPRI's original staff, including its founder Mrs. Flor de María Cacho, embodie this shift since they left a public agency, DIVEDCO, for a nongovernmental agency that pursued a similar mission and set of programs. In her study on Bolivian NGOs, Leslie Gill (1997) associated this personnel shift between public agencies and private nongovernmental organization with the growing entanglement of NGOs with neoliberal strategies of governance today.

ASPRI manifests the social service turn documented for community action agencies. ASPRI's main programmatic area is not its community development program, but rather adult day care centers and emergency assistance programs. Moreover, its community development program has been influenced by a Family Development Model that diminishes the role of community-level interventions and emphasizes social services

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to individual families in need. ASPRI, then, exemplifies the broader shift in the nonprofit sector that has undermined its advocacy role:

> There is broad agreement that in its privatization of public services and contracting with third parties, government has critically impacted the nonprofit sector...The qualitative shift from the advocacy role to service-provision signals a major change...The politics and pressure of social service delivery appear to open the way for political activism to be negatively shaped as contracting enlists voluntary organizations in the attainment of public social objectives. (Canino-Arroyo, 2003, p. 181)

The impact of this shift on community action agencies, like ASPRI, has led at least one scholar, Howard Nemon (2007), to come close to suggesting that these agencies are at risk of becoming irrelevant in the continued war against poverty. My analysis of ASPRI tends to support his assertion. ASPRI's social service tendencies in its model undermine the potential of its grassroots support program to contribute to overcome Puerto Rico's challenging socio-econoimc problems.

The Sila M. Calderón Foundation also is caught on the horns of the dilemma, as Nederveen Pieterse calls it. The Foundation is the continuation of Mrs. Calderón's anti-poverty work begun during her time as a public servant, both as Mayor of San Juan and Governor of Puerto Rico. Her Special Needs Communities Program represented a massive, public commitment to socio-economic development in the mist of a neoliberal cost-cutting and state contracting era. However, her empowerment model was infused with neoliberal overtones, such as the conceptualization of empowerment primarily as self-sufficiency and anti-welfarism. Mrs. Calderón transferred her model from the public to the nongovernmental sector and, along with it, its focus on interventions geared to transform impoverished citizens from political clients of the party in power to pro-active citizens forging their own economic future.

Certainly, the Foundation's emphasis on capacity-building reflects an empowerment-oriented community practice that recognizes the "political nature of the knowledge development process" (Cox, 2001, p. 50). This is important to note because much of the literature on governmentality characterize subject-making interventions as these as driven by a negative relation of power expressed through use of discipline and regulation (Ferguson & Gupta, 2002, p. 989). In doing so, they overlook or de-emphasize their productive dimension, such as their consciousness-raising potential and their production of citizens with new capacities to engage in advocacy and social change.

Nonetheless, other empowerment-oriented practice models, such as proposed by Gutiérrez, Parsons & Cox (1998), have emphasized the need to focus not just on personal consciousness raising and interpersonal dynamics, but also on organizational and political aspects. Here is where the Foundation's (as well as ASPRI's) empowerment model shows its limits and meets the "constraints of structural adjustment" to which Nederveen Pieterse alluded. The Foundation invests its resources in producing empowered subjects, with an increased awareness of their capacities and potential, but not in broadening the public and private institutional structures in which they could operate once empowered. As noted in chapter V, in Puerto Rico citizen participation in the public sector is limited primarily to elections and public hearings. Outside of those there are few, if any, official state mechanisms through which they can participate. There are no participatory budget initiatives and citizen advisory councils are few and far between. Thus, even if these agencies were to produce empowered citizens, they would be left to create their own conditions of possibility for participation.

What is true in the political field is also true in the economic sphere. The Foundation's community economic development program is informed by capitalism's exclusionary phase. It is not a worker re-training or a résumé-building program. Instead, people excluded from the formal sector are urged to create their own enterprise. Nonetheless, the Foundation does not couple their capacity-building cycle with lobbying for public policies that create new corporate structures that fit the community character of the enterprises they promote. As discussed in chapter VI, the current cooperative law in Puerto Rico excludes family members from boards, which in RIOCOOP's case fragmented the unity of community initiatives. Moreover, the grantwriting workshops are not accompanied with efforts to increase microloans from state or private banks as a way to promote investment in or the financing of these community initiaves. Without that, these initiatives continue to be treated as too risky and not lucrative enough by the financial sector.

The absence of an empowerment approach that demands not only more from citizens, but also more from the public and private sectors is what characterizes the politics of empowerment in our neoliberal age. Ultimately, this reduces the work of grassroots support NGOs, like ASPRI and the Foundation, to what Susan B. Hyatt (2001) calls a "rehabilitative strategy:" An intervention "aimed at liberating the poor from their shackles as hapless victims of big government while simultaneously casting the state in the villainous role of 'enemy of the people'" (p. 208). By contrast, a different empowerment project could demand that solutions to poverty include "a commitment to greater public investment" in order to "ensure the kind of stable communities where volunteerism actually flourishes best" (ibid., p. 227).

Finally, the Foundation's promotion of income-generation schemes as a way to overcome poverty is limited in its scope. As stated in chapter II, these schemes treat poverty as an issue of that can be overcome with certain inputs, such as education and financial aid. In that approach, poverty becomes a problem of needs and absences with no reference to the social relations that give rise to those needs and absences (Kamat, 2002). This view was clearly expressed by Mrs. Calderón during a personal interview in which she argued that the problem in Puerto Rico was economic inequality, not social inequality. Following that logic, the Foundation's programs focus on the capacities of the poor rather than on undoing the practices through which certain social groups impoverish others (Murray Li, 2007). In doing so, the Foundation disregards the fact that poverty is the result of conflicts over resources and its solution requires the reorganization of the social relations that produce that conflict.

ASPRI and the Sila M. Calderón Foundation stand as examples of the fused discourse through which neoliberalism has absorbed existent community-based, empowerment programs and re-signified them in order to align them with its anti-welfare state critique and its new forms of governance. Their presence and salience today reflects "not simply the strength of NGOs and grassroots politics but also the 1980s roll-back of the state, the advance of market forces and the breakdown of regulations" (Nederveen Pieterse, 1998, p. 344). Moreover, as part of this fused discourse their empowerment strategies and programs exhibit what Aradhana Sharma typifies as "the dangerous slippage between tactics of subversion and strategies of domination" (p. 79). In other words, they are part of a political moment in which 'do good' institutions and concepts with wide appeal are pursued in the broader context of conservative reforms.

The Politics of Grassroots Support Practice

Although the above analysis of discourses and policy contexts was certainly illuminating, my research aimed to move beyond it because, as the anthropology of development has shown, discourses and models do not usually translate neatly into practice (Garnder & Lewis, 1996). According to David Mosse, this gap results from the fact that "(policy) ideas do not have a life of their own apart from institutions, persons and intentions, but can only be understood in terms of the institutions and social relationships through which they are articulated" (Mosse, 2004, p. 666). Therefore, my research pursued an in-depth ethnographic examination of ASPRI's and the Foundation's institutional practices, their community workers and workshop personnel, and the social, political and economic relations embedded in the context in which their grassroots support work took place.

The ethnographic analysis of the politics of grassroots support practice is particularly relevant in light of Akhil Gupta and Aradhana Sharma's findings in their comparative study of two social development programs in India, one created during the height of the welfare state and the other as part of the more recent neoliberal empowerment agenda. According to Gupta and Sharma, development practices in the field overrode the deep ideological differences separating both programs:

> In the case of the two programs we have examined, a vast gap separated them in terms of institutional design, policy objectives, the ideologies embedded in them, and the global political-economic context in which they were conceived. However much they differed in these important dimensions, they were similar in many of their everyday practices. (Gupta & Sharma, 2006, p. 291)

The similarities exhibited at the moment of practice are significant because it shows that the intervention goals sought by the neoliberal empowerment program were not

accomplished in practice. This is noteworthy because even if one defined the goals of development NGOs today to be the transformation of impoverished community residents into law-abiding, self-sufficient and responsible citizens, one has to consider that that project is also beset by fissues and confronts setbacks at the moment of implementation. As a result, characterizing a social policy or intervention model as neoliberal is insufficient to determine its actual effects on its targeted population. Thus, my analysis of ASPRI's and the Foundation's models and empowerment politics demanded that I examined their effects as a result of their implementation.

My research on ASPRI's and the Foundation's grassroots support practices found a number of "perceptual, procedural and organizational development issues" that hindered the implementation of their programs and affected the quality and even the purpose of citizen participation (Canino-Arroyo, 2003, p. 189). In ASPRI's case, the process of selecting a community and conducting its needs assessment affected who got to participate and how. The inversion of the community selection process—the identification of communities as a result of field visits—, led to series of uncertainties and failed attempts that resulted in the somewhat arbitrary selection and exclusion of communities. This inversion was, in part, a result of institutional procedures that limited the planning time required to identify and select a community. Likewise, the needs assessment constructed a series of performative scenarios in which community residents represented themselves and their situation based on their perception of ASPRI's capacity for facilitate them resources. In this case, participation became a game of deciphering and second guessing that did not live up to the empowerment claims promoted by the agency's mission statement. Finally, community meetings, premised as they were on the

ideals of participatory development, resulted in scant resident participation and, ironically, often transformed themselves in sites of resistance to the call for greater citizen participation and community empowerment.

Similarly, the Foundation's workshops were not regularly attended by all the members of participating groups, which defeated the capacity-building effort and the broader project of subject-formation through knowledge transfer. Technical, perceptual and procedural issues also affected the quality of the capacity-building workshops. The technical language of assessment variables and business plans and the college-like educational setting ignored educational differences among participants that ended up creating a lag between the workshop cycle and the development of the community initiatives. In ASPRI's case, the issue was inverted. Tali, for example, did not have the training to assist local groups in their desire to incorporate as a nonprofit organization. Ironically, the so-called educational gap often identified in development studies included in this case personnel from the grassroots support NGO. Besides the obvious professional deficiencies of the personnel, this educational gap stands also as an indictment of social work educational programs that have neglected the full range of skills needed for community development training.

RIOCOOP experienced high turnover and low resident participation rates, which resulted in the project being associated with a small group of residents rather than with a community-wide effort. These high turnover and low participation rates were linked to some extent to the authoritarian and sexist leadership of prominent board members, like Salvador and Rigoberto. These latter factors point to issues that extend beyond perceptual differences and technical failures. As James Midgley and Michelle Livermore found in

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their study of social capital implementation, limitations "are not only found in the technical challenges of implementing social capital ideas, but also in wider social, political, and economic issues" (Midgley & Livermore, 1998, p. 38). In RIOCOOP's case, participation was limited by expressions of the broader patriarchal system that often reduced women's participation to a token presence in the board or in meetings as well as to volunteer labor in domestic-like activities, such as cooking in fund-raising events. Sexist and authoritarian leadership styles were also present in the community leadership dealt with by ASPRI, specifically Tito el Gallero. Besides inflicting verbal and emotional violence on a female community worker, Tito undermined the whole endeavor of grassroots support: the synergy of working with community leaders.

These broader social, political and economic issues manifested themselves throughout my research. For example, a simple issue like scheduling a community meeting was hampered by the rhythm of family life during weekdays, including people's religious commitments, as well as ASPRI's organizational policies that ignore the flexibility demanded of community organizers. Moreover, the education differences between workshop lecturers and community residents speak to more than inappropriate educational approaches. They expose the connection between poverty and low educational attainment that results in different life opportunities for residents of impoverished communities. Finally, these broader social issues negatively impacted institutional building efforts. Internal community conflicts, as those experienced by residents of La Cuevita, undermined the legitimacy of the community board and led to a family abandoning their participation in board-sponsored events. As discussed in chapter

V, a conflict resolution workshop, which is what Tali was willing to offer, was not fit to deal with the complexity and demands of a long standing neighbor dispute.

David Mosse's reflexions on development practice led him to argue that the implementation phase becomes a densely political field in which the interests of all relevant actors re-emerge:

> Indeed, during the 'implementation phase' all the diverse and contradictory interests that were enrolled in the framing of an ambiguous policy model and project design, all the contests and contradictions that are embedded in policy texts, are brought to life and replayed. (Mosse, 2004, p. 664)

The fact that development efforts appeal to different actors for different reasons should surprise no one. However, the manifestation of those different interests introduces political tensions that often derail the development initiative or resignify its goals. Following Mosse's insight, my ethnography of the politics of grassroots support practice exposed the multiple and often contradictory political interests that intersect and shape community development initiatives.

In ASPRI's case, the process of selecting a community stirred the political interests of municipal administrators. ASPRI called on them in order to tap into their knowledge of local communities, but administrators, including mayors, took advantage of those requests to channel ASPRI's resources into communities in which party followers had a significant presence. These political considerations often violated ASPRI's and CSBG's rules and regulations, leading to the loss of time and effort in the selection process. In other instances, community leaders were the ones who balanced a dual agenda: serving the community and advancing their individual political interests. Hector from La Cuevita expressed very explicitly his awareness of the broader political chess game in which he participated as a community leader.

In RIOCOOP, the internal power struggle between two senior community leaders, Salvador and Rigoberto, intensified as the project advanced and the promises of financial resources neared. The different vision of the project's development eventually forced one of them, Rigoberto, to walk away. Lastly, RIOCOOP's board and the various external agents facilitating their development often clashed over the bounderies of grassroots support. RIOCOOP's board was always pushing for external agents to carry out the tasks for which they were being trained to do. Letters, note-taking and grantwriting became the contested site in which support staff like Isabel and RIOCOOP's leaders debated over the meaning and limits of grassroots support and *autogestión*.

My research on grassroots support practices, then, showed how perceptual, procedural and organizational issues play a significant role in determining the actual effects of grassroots support practice. Likewise, it revealed the relevance of broader social, political and economic issues to understand the dynamics that often hinder the effective participation of community residents and the delivery of capacity-building assistance by NGO staff. Finally, it exposed how different political interests intersect and often get entangled during the process of project implementation. These are all areas to which my research contributed and stand as fruitful topics for future research by scholars interested in grassroots support and development practices in general.

Conclusion

A pessimistic reading of my research would lead me to conclude on a dismissive or skeptical note. For example, my final evaluation of grassroots support NGOs could echo the conclusions of Karger, Iyiani & Shannon (2007): "While the reasons for intractable poverty are complex and cannot be blamed solely on NGOs, it is also true that

their impact on aggregate poverty is minimal" (p. 75). Likewise, I could also minimize

the potential for participatory development initiatives to contribute to overcome poverty,

as did Esther Breitenbach (1997):

> While not denying that there is a political dimension, in the broad sense, to participation, the reality is that what is being fought or negotiated over is a relatively small change in the distribution of power in relation to the allocation of limited resources in areas of poverty and deprivation. (p. 166)

These conclusions would appear to be warranted since poverty rates in Puerto Rico have

remained stagnant, although ASPRI has existed for almost three decades and Mrs. Sila

Calderón's anti-poverty programs have been operating for a decade.

Nevertheless, I believe that these results say more about the current configuration

of policies, NGOs, and community development work in Puerto Rico than about their

overall potential. One of the major conclusions of my research is that policy context

matters for the kinds of social interventions that are possible. Interestingly, Puerto Rico's

policy context is determined to a certain extent by policies formulated in the United

States, which reflect the ideological orientation of the ruling administration and the

political debates defined by the American public. Puerto Rico's neocolonial relation with

the United States affords the island very little influence in the political process, such as

elections, and its broader spheres of public debates. Thus, the island's neocolonial

condition is one of the central problems that needs to be resolved if Puerto Rico is to have

greater control or influence over social policies impacting its population. The attainment

of political soveirgnty would give Puerto Rico the necessary authority to delineate a

policy strategy responsive to local needs and aspirations.

However, political sovereignty alone would not preclude the persistence of

neoliberal policies in the island. In fact, in light of neoliberalism's staying power, at least

in the Puerto Rican context, NGOs could seek to break their financial dependence and administrative accountability to the government. Doing so would afford them a degree of independence from prescriptive social policies. This, in turn, would allow them to construct a more responsive and client-centered relationship with grassroots groups. Attaining this independence would require creative solutions to the problem of financial sustainability, but such solutions exist. For example, NGOs could create an endowment fund through private donations. This fund would generate interests that would be used to finance administrative and program costs. Through sustained capitalization of that fund, NGOs could achieve financial, and consequently, programmatic independence.

Yet, breaking with governments is not the only solution. NGOs could become important change agents by taking a critical stance towards current social policies, including their ideological orientation and funding prescriptions. In other words, NGOs should contribute to the transformation of the current policy context. Although their nonprofit status places restrictions on partisan political advocacy, NGOs could certainly re-negotiate the terms and conceptualization of the social policies themselves. For example, NGOs could demand that anti-poverty policies with an explicit empowerment orientation or goal include the creation or development of the institutional infrastructure required for individuals and/or communities to succeed in their civic, political, or economic endeavors. As suggested above, citizen formation programs should be accompanied by the creation of institutional spaces in the public and private sector, such as social policy consulting councils, in which citizens could participate in decision-making. Economic development initiatives should also assume the task of reforming the existent legal, corporate, and banking systems in such a way that they acknowledge and

serve the particular needs of the new economic agents being developed, such as community-based cooperatives.

Furthermore, NGOs can be crucial actors in the struggle to unglue the neoliberal discourse that has fused the concept of empowerment with notions of individual responsibility, public fiscal austerity and a weakened claims-making citizenship. They can do so by recapturing and redefining concepts like community, empowerment and participation. This project of re-signification could result in the establishment of new goals for empowerment politics, such as questioning poverty not just reducing it. These renewed goals could also include the creation of new corporate forms that re-distribute wealth among workers rather than reproduce the dominant for-profit corporate models, which are premised on unequal risk and compensation for owners and employees. In other words, NGOs can reclaim the concepts of community, empowerment and participation to forge a different political agenda, one in which their educational initiatives and capacity-building programs promote collective forms of agency with the potential to change, not just reform, the current political and economic situation of marginalized groups.

Finally, NGOs have to become aware of the power that comes with being a mediating institution between the state and various marginalized populations. They have to struggle with the consequences of being part of a greater reconfiguration of power in which nongovernmental agencies are now authorized to carry out governmental roles. One way of resolving that political predicament is by re-asserting and living up to their "articles of faith," as Arrellanos-López and Petras (1994) calls them: reaching the poor, promoting processes whereby people take control of their lives, and being more flexible

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and experimental in their programs. In other words, NGOs need to prioritize their relationship with communities or grassroots groups. Understanding the realities of grassroots groups, respecting their goals, and working within their values should weigh more for NGOs than their own corporate accountability to state or private foundations. In so doing, they can become instruments for the development of communities, rather than instruments of normative governance.

From the perspective of communities, the discourse of grassroots empowerment and community-based, participatory development, regardless of its ideological orientation, has legitimized collective forms of agency. Few today argue against the sustained involvement of communities in the issues and problems affecting their lives. All citizens, but particularly grassroots groups, should take advantage of this to pursue new forms of politics that go beyond the stated intentions of neoliberal calls for empowerment and participation. For example, grassroots groups should re-conceptualize empowerment as much more than the ability to implement local projects. The language of empowerment and participation should be used to legitimize their right to contest persistent and emerging forms of marginalization and exclusion. This form of politics based on a renewed sense of agency should not limit itself to critiques of the public and private-for-profit sectors. For example, it can be extended to actively question local forms of power based on gender inequality and age discrimination in community groups. This would lead women, for example, to confront the social, political and economic issues that politicized the field of grassroots support practice.

Moreover, communities should take advantage of capacity-building programs even if NGOs are compromised by their relationship to governments or private

foundations. Communities can opt for a strategic participation in those programs in order to acquire knowledge and practical skills that can be incorporated into a political practice called countergovernmentality by Arjun Appadurai (2002). Communities can use knowledge of corporate forms to propose legal amendments and changes that reflect the social dynamics of their groups. They can use tools such as needs assessments, work plans and program evaluations to document their problems, expose the shortcoming of public and private initiatives and propose alternatives that reflect their goals and aspirations. In other words, they can use the tools given to them by NGOs to generate an alternative vision of their situation and their future.

My research also has implications for scholars interested in the critical analysis of development, neoliberalism, and grassroots anti-poverty initiatives. Any analyses of these phenomena today require untangling the political ambiguity resulting from the interface among NGOs, community development, and neoliberalism. As proposed by my research, this untangling requires detailed attention to the historical trajectory of policies, concepts, and institutions in order to trace changes in meaning and practices. It also requires researching the outcomes of these intersecting concepts and institutions when put into practice.

Finally, scholars should pay close attention to the politics of grassroots support practice. My experience researching grassroots support practices showed that there is a significant gap between claims and accomplishments. This gap is a result of the multiple negotiations by grassroots groups over the capacity-building and empowerment assistance offered. People like Hector from La Cuevita, Foundation participants like Lucy and David, and even Salvador himself have taken the call to participate and innovate in

their community in directions unforeseen by both government agencies and grassroots support NGOs. This gap opens up the possibility for grassroots support and community-based initiatives to become something other than what is currently intended. What becomes of that in practice is still an open question. These community leaders could transform their motivation and skills into initiatives that create a different set of circumstances for current and future residents of impoverished communities. Future research on this area could explore this potential by following those unintended consequences resulting from the politics of grassroots support practice.

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