



Governing Poverty Amidst Plenty: Participatory Development and Private Philanthropy

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Abstract

This paper explores the current debates surrounding how large-scale poverty programs structure the actions and strategies of regional community-based institutions. I specifically interrogate how processes of professionalization and ‘participatory’ ideas promoted through public and private funders are negotiated by institutional ‘grantees’, and ultimately structure the ways in which historic social movement organizations build institutions and organizing strategies. A review of the major debates surrounding ‘participatory development’ in the fields of critical development studies and American poverty scholarship is approached through a specific case study in California’s Central Valley. By highlighting the case of the historic Farm Worker Movement and its’ legacy institutions I show how social movement actors negotiate theories of participation, institutional structures, and regional alliances promoted through public and private funding. It is argued that organizing the poor through participatory philanthropic initiatives provides a certain range of opportunities as well as firm limits to changing the political-economic relationships that produce regional poverty. Both the consensus based approach popular with the most recent philanthropic initiatives and the self-help model of the 1960s bring a certain range of political openings and firm limits proscribed by what funders will and won’t do in the context of funding social movement institutions to confront structures of economic inequality produced through industrial capital.

Introduction

With the intensified focus on global poverty since the unveiling of the Millennium Development Goals (2000) and the campaigns of poverty warrior celebrities like Bono and Angelina Jolie, it is easy for some to forget that poverty in the USA is deeply entrenched and growing. This is perhaps more true for California’s Central Valley than anywhere else. With concentrated poverty levels higher than in New Orleans, Detroit, or across Appalachia (Berube 2008, Berube and Katz 2005) many of the towns dotting California’s main agricultural valley resemble the migrant ‘Oakie’ settlements of the Great Depression. With substandard housing, often without heat or running water, conditions for the mostly Mexican, and increasingly indigenous Oaxacan, migrant field workers have improved very little since before the historic Farm Worker Movement (CIRS 2000, NCFH 2010). Drought and financial crisis have worsened an already dire situation. In many agricultural towns and nearby urban hubs such as Modesto, Merced, Fresno, and Bakersfield migrant families rely on food banks and donation centers to feed and clothe their children. Many field workers who planted roots, established community, and maintained a meager sense of security in the 1990s are now hitting the road and reinventing the migrant harvest trail from California, to Oregon, Washington, and the Southwest.

The Central Valley, a region defined by the historic predominance of large-scale industrial agriculture that produces migrant poverty, has attracted multiple anti-poverty and

farmworker organizing initiatives over the course of the 20th century. Each decade saw a new incarnation of 'participatory community action' as the way to address deepening migrant poverty. From the Works Progress Administration (WPA) migrant women support centers, to the diverse mobilizations of the Farm Worker Movement of the 1960s, to privately funded philanthropic initiatives in the 1990–2000s, converging relationships between powerful institutions such as private foundations, public projects, and grassroots social movements, constitute and transform the ways in which migrant poverty is defined and addressed across the region. At the nexus of these relationships predominantly 'participatory action' models have been theorized, attempted, and retooled through farmworker organizing projects and institutions. While these participatory models and philanthropic investments have not themselves altered the terrain of farmworker organizing, they have promoted institutional arrangements and theoretical frameworks that constrain the work of historic farmworker organizations and advocates. In other words, as Julie Guthman shows in her study of the Roots of Change philanthropic collaborative to build a sustainable food system in California (Guthman 2008), philanthropic frameworks and management techniques proscribe organizational and activist behaviors around a limited sense of what is thinkable.

This paper explores current debates around how large-scale poverty programs structure the actions and strategies of regional community-based institutions. Questions of professionalization, institutionalization and 'the rule of expertise' through private charities and philanthropy have become common in the field of international development; yet very few critical studies have focused on domestic poverty alleviation initiatives in the USA. While these two fields seldom speak directly to one another I argue that connecting the American history of individualistic participatory approaches to current practices in global development is essential to understanding the opportunities and limits they present. In this paper both American poverty studies and critical development studies literature are reviewed through the case of farmworker organizing across California's Central Valley. I specifically interrogate how processes of professionalization and 'participatory' ideas promoted through public and private funders are negotiated by institutional 'grantees', and ultimately structure the ways in which historic movement organizations build institutions and organizing strategies. By highlighting one specific case where the strategies and actions of social movement institutions interact with public and private funders (the historic Farm Worker Movement and its legacy institutions) I show how social movement actors negotiate theories of participation, institutional structures, and regional alliances promoted through philanthropic initiatives.

It is argued that organizing the poor through participatory poverty alleviation initiatives provides a certain range of opportunities as well as firm limits to changing the political-economic relationships that produce regional poverty. Additionally, I argue that while critical development scholars are often overly keen to jump to conclusions of participation as a guise for relatively new or 'neoliberal' restructuring, the American context reveals that poverty alleviation initiatives often have deep historical lineages of repeated attempts to alleviate poverty by holding the poor accountable and ignoring the very political and economic relationships that produces entrenched poverty. Thus as few development scholars recognize, not every 'self-help' effort to hold the poor accountable for their own suffering has neoliberal origins.

I begin by reviewing recent discussions within American poverty and critical development studies, in terms of 'participatory action' as a form of governance. I then show how these debates apply across different historical moments through the case of farmworker organizing across California's Central Valley. The first moment is the emergence of the

historic Farm Worker Movement with an eye to how the participatory programs of its early funders created specific openings as well as certain limits for the movement. Next the case of a \$50 million foundation initiative, The Farm Worker Community Building Initiative¹ (CBI) is presented as a more recent moment of the intersections of community organizing, participatory programming, and philanthropic institutional alliances. The consensus-based model popular with contemporary foundation initiatives facilitate processes that identify where industry and workers can collaborate, with the goal of developing regional change that improves both conditions for workers and the bottom line for industry. Operating under this model, program managers are more reluctant to address the enduring problems faced by the poor. I conclude by suggesting that scholarship on philanthropic approaches to addressing poverty and inequality in the USA take up the questions of critical development and global poverty scholars ask of projects in the global south: how development program frameworks contain forms of governance (Ghertner 2010; Li 2000), how expertise and professionalism can have a de-politicizing effect (Ferguson 1994; Goldman 2005; Mitchell 2002), and how 'grassroots' institutions negotiate and are sometimes complicit in processes of professionalization, depoliticization, and financialization (Roy 2010).

The Will to Empower: A Review of the Literature on Participation as Governance

It has been argued that 'participatory development', or projects that solicit community participation as a central component of combating entrenched poverty, is a relatively new and neoliberal form of governance (Cruikshank 1999; Bryn Hyatt 2001; Cook and Kotahari 2001). I argue that this form of governance is neither new nor particularly neoliberal. While development and poverty scholars have shown how projects throughout the 1990s adopted participatory processes in order to gain buy-in from the poor in the face of neoliberal privatization (Goldman 2005, Weber 2002), participatory processes have been embraced by planners and funders as early as the 19th century poorhouse movement, and perhaps well before. These early efforts aimed to alleviate the new poverty experienced by recent immigrant industrial workers through socialization, integration, and community engagement. Turn of the century philanthropic poverty initiatives also depoliticized the collective struggles of the poor through projects and institutional relationships that incorporate and replace other forms of organization such as mass resistance, unionization and other cooperative or syndicalist approaches to organizing social change (Coon 1938; O'Connor 2001; Robbins 2006).

The 'self-help' model in particular has a long history and has experienced many different incarnations since the Settlement House movement led by the legendary Jane Adams in Chicago at the turn of the 20th Century. While by most accounts Adams' residential and educational approach to 'self-help' was a training ground for collective action (Knight 2005), her early funders, including the John D. Rockefeller Foundation, promoted the idea that motivated the immigrant poor to 'help-themselves' pull up their proverbial bootstraps served two purposes: to alleviate poverty and to protect industrialists from political unrest in the increasingly impoverished American city (Adams 1893). Nearly half a century later, inspired by the popular 'culture of poverty' scholarship (Cloward and Ohlin 1966; Harrington 1963; Lewis 1959) the 'self-help' of the 1960s took on new meaning and reflected the community action spirit of the growing Civil Rights Movement as represented in the War on Poverty's call for *maximum feasible participation*. The poor were encouraged to join Community Action Programs (CAPs) to assess and confront the root problems of persistent poverty, including emerging from hopelessness through civic participation *and* challenging responsible institutions and societal structures.

During the neoliberal turn of the 1980s 'self-help' took yet another form as conservative politicians and public intellectuals put forth the now well-worn argument that a bloated welfare state (as a result of the public programming and legislation from the New Deal era, to the War on Poverty) has created deep dependency among the poor (Murray 1984). With the election of Ronald Reagan in 1980, and the defunding of many public programs for the poor, the new self-help emphasized individual-reliance, entrepreneurialism, and market strategies, replacing the social action and systemic change tone of the 1960s. A more recent iteration includes global poverty initiatives that feature the 'third world woman' (see: One Campaign and Self Employed Women's Association) as an entrepreneurial economic developer and change agent (Roy 2010).

Instead of engaging an already defined and unitary poor subject, each 'self-help' approach proscribes a certain kind of citizen. The poor involved in the self-help projects of the 1960s through the War on Poverty were conceived of as leaders or volunteers. The poor engaged in the welfare reform movement launched in the 1980s were negatively represented as 'welfare moms' or 'absentee fathers.' The third world woman becomes a financial asset in the fight against global poverty. Thus, the self-help model itself draws our attention to a specifically defined poor as the central and self-motivated agent of social change, masking the role of philanthropists, state programs, and the ideologies that shape poverty programming. By tracing 'genealogies' of the representation of the poor through social programming, poverty scholars show how real and identifiable state and private actors actively craft ideologies and institutions that attract attention to the weaknesses and responsibilities of the poor and *away from* the capitalist process that create poverty (Fraser and Gordon 1994; O'Connor 2001).

In this context, participatory framings of outside funders and programs can be understood as 'technologies of citizenship' as coined by Barbara Cruikshank (1999). Drawing from Michel Foucault's concept of 'governmentality', or the forms of knowledge production and techniques that shape human behavior (Foucault 1966), technologies of citizenship organize relations of power as expressed through ideas, institutions, discourses, or programs (as opposed to force, violence or direct threat) that alter the way people internalize how they should act. Social programs that promote empowerment for example,

'operate according to a political rationality for governing people in ways that promote their autonomy, self-sufficiency, and political engagement; in the classic phrase of early philanthropists, they are intended to, "help people, help themselves"'. (Cruikshank, pp. 12–13)

Through a converging set of ideas, institutional structures, and programs people come to believe that governing themselves, as opposed to challenging, claiming, or relying upon private and state structures of governance, makes them legitimate deserving citizens. Beyond 'participation', frameworks of 'community' (Joseph 2002; Rose 1999), health (Foucault 1966; Horton and Barker 2009), and urban improvement (Ghertner 2010) have been similarly conceptualized as structuring the 'conduct of conduct' through constructed knowledges and corresponding institutional relationships. A new range of studies looks specifically at the 'micro-practices' or management techniques that create certain forms of governance. One example is the use of 'indicators' as a technology of global governance, such as the way international college ratings indicators govern the behavior of institutions of higher education (Davis et al. 2010). Or the ways in which the indicators identified within the Millennium Development Goals governs the work of foreign aid agencies (Hulme 2010).

While 'governmentality' is a useful framework for analyzing enduring participatory frameworks promoted as an approach to alleviating poverty that mask and normalize

systems that produce structural inequality, 'technologies of citizenship' should not be understood as complete or controlling, or the result of some unitary act of manipulation by the economic and political elite. Instead this form of governance represent combinations of ideas, programs, and funding opportunities that, during specific moments in time, converge to solidify expectations and understandings of what it means to be an engaged citizen. The people 'governed' under certain organizing frameworks often make strategic decisions (and compromises) around what ideas, discourses, programs, and institutions makes sense to ally with in the broader movement to challenge (or maintain) the status quo. The strategic decision to align with certain institutions and organizing models can be understood as Antonio Gramsci's 'War of Position' where temporary alliances among unlikely institutions and interests are made in civil society to further (or limit) a long term agenda (Forgacs 2000). The classic works of Laclau and Mouffe (1982), Stuart Hall (1980) and more recent post-colonial development scholars (Goldman 2005; Li 2000; Tsing 2005) who engage ideas of 'articulation' and strategic alliances provide nuance to a theorization of the relationship between large-scale interventions and the activist organizations that they engage. Building on Gramsci's work, Stuart Hall and scholars who appropriate his theorization of 'articulation' argue that certain positions, identities or interests are never fixed or complete but rather grow contingently, and often strategically, in the course of struggle. Programs framed by large-scale public programs, private foundations or development agencies may control grantees at one moment, yet they may also contain elements of alternatives to the dominant framework they represent, and they may be understood and used differently across organizations and networks at different moments in time. These works bring nuance and a political lens to the specific processes of professionalization, management expertise, and funder-grantee negotiations often left out of the most the recent wave of post-Marxist scholarship on philanthropy and imperialism (Incite! Women of Color Against Violence 2007; Roelofs 2003).

To illustrate how these debates, most commonly applied to international development, play out through regional poverty initiatives over time, the following case shows how the various self-help and empowerment strategies and projects that converged across the Central Valley in the early 1960s structured institutional and leadership development at the start of the Farm Worker Movement, and are re-inscribed in the most recent wave of foundation funded poverty programming. In this most recent moment, the only aspect of 'community participation' that is a new and particularly neoliberal form of governance is that in its current form the publically spoken goals of the program developer, funder, of policy maker who promote participatory approaches are unlikely to challenge or even recognize the conditions or power relationships that produce poverty and inequality. In the current context in which market based and 'entrepreneurial' strategies to social change are embraced and 'confrontational' approaches to addressing structural equality are dismissed as 'unrealistic' or 'outdated' makes the primary purpose of engagement to gain 'buy-in'. While participatory processes of the 1960s were often aimed (at least in language) at confronting and gaining access to unequal power structures, modern day participatory processes are designed primarily to build trust (Fukiyama 1996; Putnam 1993), relationships (Huntington 2004, Putnam 2000), or to 'integrate' once 'isolated' populations into the global marketplace (Pralhad 2004). From a critical perspective participatory processes promote the image of broad based participation as a way to manage how recipients participate in the project of opening new avenues for 'free market' development (Goldman 2005; Jessop 2002). In other words, neoliberal participatory action has been defined as primarily performative (Barry 2002; Guthman 2008).

Participatory Development and the Farm Worker Movement: Then and Now

Between 1960 and 1965 a convergence of people, institutions and ideas fueled the emerging Farm Worker Movement across Tulare County, the Central Valley region containing the densest farmworker population. Dolores Huerta and Cesar Chavez were organizing migrant workers in the fields, churches, and migrant worker camps. The federal War on Poverty founded a large number of Community Action Programs (CAPs) in Tulare County – partly in order to contribute to the emerging Farm Worker Movement, and partially because the Max L. Rosenberg Foundation had already founded innovative ‘Self-Help’ community development and housing programs in migrant worker camps – a model for what the CAPs themselves hoped to achieve.²

The Rosenberg Foundation invested in Central Valley farmworker communities for over five decades. While not an overwhelming amount of funds were spent, Rosenberg investments catalyzed a network of farmworker serving organizations and leaders. Perhaps one of the most significant Rosenberg projects, leading up to the 1960s Farm Worker Movement, was Self Help Enterprise, Inc., a participatory housing and infrastructure development project. A 1965 Rosenberg Foundation annual report describes the work of Self-Help Enterprise Inc. as an innovative self-help community development tool. The goal of Self-Help Enterprise Inc. started but did not end with the financing and construction of homes. After over 20 homes were built in the first few couple years of the project,

‘the children from these homes seemed to have better ‘self-images’ than many other farm labor children, their motivation for education was higher...and their parents became more involved in community activities’.

The work of Rosenberg in Tulare County farmworker housing is described as a part of a new ‘community development’ approach that engages communities in building their own infrastructure, sense of self-worth, leadership, and connections to mainstream institutions in the process of participating in the project.

Rosenberg and Self-Help Enterprise, Inc.’s facilitative community development model directly aligned with the new poverty alleviation approaches taking shape in the 1960s. Advancing on Oscar Lewis’ ‘culture of poverty’ theory (1959) Michael Harrington’s widely read *The Other America* (1962, 1968) was one of the central treatises that directly informed the *maximum feasible participation* design of the War on Poverty. Harrington argued that the ‘new poor’ were not at fault for their poverty and were instead ‘left behind’ in the face of industrial change, essentially ‘in the wrong place (wrong industry, wrong neighborhood, wrong ethnic group) at the wrong time’. Once this historical act of dislocation takes place the circumstance of the poor transforms from social circumstance to cultural fate – deepening through an entrenched cycle of poverty. According to Harrington and the poverty policy of the time, the best hope in saving the new American poor from the fate of invisibility and untold suffering would be public programs and leadership to raise awareness, motivate and inspire the poor to become civically engaged, and build institutional connections to interrupt the cycle of poverty. Unlike the unsuccessful ethnic and union organizing attempted in farmworker communities in the 19th and early 20th century (McWilliams 1939), Rosenberg’s Central Valley migrant programs created a new kind of farmworker leader more concerned with empowerment through education, building mainstream institutional relationships, and engaging migrants in infrastructure development. Due to its educational and relational, as opposed to confrontational and systemic, approach the model was the first to garner the mainstream institutional support

that proved invaluable to the public legitimacy of a Farm Worker Movement in the following decade.

However, a 1965 grant to Migrant Ministries revealed the limits to Rosenberg's commitment to farmworker self-help. In late 1965 as tensions were building up to the rent and grape strikes that catapulted the movement onto the national stage Rosenberg Foundation program officer Ruth Chance increased the foundation's funding levels to Central Valley farm labor programming. In the context of intensifying resistance from growers (and the Tax Reform Act debates that scared funders investing in the growing Civil Rights Movement), Chance believed that concentrating farmworker funding through the church might be the most strategic approach. Migrant Ministries, an ecumenical farmworker support organization involved in organizing farmworkers alongside NFWA (UFW), became an obvious organization to fund. The aim of the Migrant Ministries grant was to develop farmworker leadership and institutional connections, and to further concretize the new participatory self-help community development model through a series of regional conferences.

That summer the Tulare County Housing Authority radically increased rents on the metal roofed shacks where many farmworkers lived and NFWA leaders asked Migrant Ministry to assist in a rent strike. By fall, when Migrant Ministry staff officially joined the rent strike and eventual grape picket lines Rosenberg told the organization that the Foundation's grant was not to be used for organizing unions. Chance emphasized that the grants were meant to train leaders and to strengthen 'farmworker communities' but strikes and union organizing were not to be associated with the foundation. Written the same year of the first NFWA strike, the 1965 annual report highlighted the success of the foundation's self-help model while simultaneously warning that, 'Almost everybody approves if farmworkers decide to build houses for themselves; not everybody approves if they decide to go on strike'. Chance discontinued funding to the leadership training work that led to worker organizing.

The relationship between the UFW and The Field Foundation reveals similar openings and closures in its funding to the movement. For example, in response to a Field Foundation program director who became cautious of continued funding to the UFW as it began to formally associate as a major union, Chavez challenged the notion that one can separate social from economic justice,

'Somehow we are not able to draw the same conclusion that you draw, that concerns for labor relations puts us in another "area of interest" outside that of civil rights, human relations, and child welfare'.³

In the case of the Field Foundation, funding to the Union was halted and Chavez was convinced to form a nonprofit 501c3 'service center' which the foundation could funnel funds through. Minutes of a service center board meeting reveal that Chavez originally called the service center 'The Hustling Arm of the Union' referencing its ability to attract large tax deductible grants.⁴ Ultimately, in the face of intense conflict both within the movement leadership and with external competitors and opponents, Chavez retreated from union organizing to the foundation funded 'Hustling' service center.

While patterns of cooptation and control during the movements of the 1960s have been sufficiently documented (Allen 1969; Arnove 1980; Garrow 1987; Haines 1984; Rodriguez 2004; Roelofs 2003), the broad theorization of philanthropy as social control often hide the sometimes multi-layered goals and actions of movement leaders and institutions themselves, and their complex relationships with converging public and private

initiatives. While Chavez was angered that funders were unwilling to recognize the deep connection between civil and economic rights or to fund union organizing, he himself was conflicted by the union model (Ganz 2008; Pawel 2009). Chavez ultimately considered unions to be rigid institutions, dependent upon industry to set agendas and unable to address the needs of migrant populations. In other words, Chavez himself was not simply co-opted by outside agencies promoting a participatory engagement model over union organizing. Instead, he envisioned the long-term sustainability of the movement as managed through service and educational institutions. Despite his frustration with foundation's inability to fund labor organizing, the direction of the movement was governed through the convergence of self-help ideologies and institutional relationships including those promoted by Chavez's leadership.

The converging programs and identities promoted through diverse institutions at the start of the movement created a new type of 'government through community' (Rose 1999)

'whose vectors and forces can be mobilized, enrolled, deployed, in novel programmes and techniques which encourage and harness active practices of self-management and identity construction, personal ethics and collective allegiances'. (Rose 1999, pp. 176)

Just as the self-help programs helped fuel and ignite the movement the model also brought clearly defined limits. By structuring the actions of the poor around helping themselves to attack feelings of marginalization and powerlessness through participatory 'technologies of citizenship' attention is drawn away from the industrial relationships that rely on deepening poverty. This framework is especially problematic since enduring poverty across California's Central Valley, and the globe, is not the product of a one-time act of capitalist dispossession that creates the isolated hopeless culture of poverty, as the participatory model suggests and claims to disrupt. Instead, migrant poverty is constantly maintained and remade through the increasing demand for low wage, temporary, (undocumented) migrant labor.

Throughout the 1980s and 1990s the rapid expansion of 'low-wage immigrant-intensive' agriculture (Martin 2003) and the active recruitment of undocumented workers from poor regions in Mexico, with increasingly fewer services and rights in the USA, exacerbated an already impoverished farmworker population across California's Central Valley. With the halting of mechanization research due to the agricultural lobby's analysis that intensified recruitment of low wage immigrant labor was a more profitable strategy, pockets of extreme poverty in farmworker 'colonias' in the Central Valley and poor pueblos in Mexico became inextricably intertwined. At the same time that industrial agriculture expanded its low wage immigrant labor force, anti-immigrant sentiments in the state heated up as exemplified in the 1996 Border Enforcement Act and the 1995 Campaign 187 to deny public services to immigrants. In the early 2000s a small break in the pro versus anti immigration battle emerged. Farmworker advocates and growers gained consensus on an agricultural-farm labor bill, the Agricultural Job Opportunities, Benefits and Security Act (AgJOBS). AgJOBS was designed through an unprecedented compromise between farmworker advocates and major agricultural employers to address labor supply concerns as related to the current immigration crisis. If passed AgJOBS would ensure a legal, stable labor supply and would create pathways to legalization. It also contains a proposal to create a new 'guestworker' program. For the first time in history, historic Farm Worker Movement institutions were working alongside the agricultural industry.

Within this context a new yet familiar ‘participatory’ approach to addressing farm labor poverty emerged. In 2003 a large-scale (\$50million, multiple year) consensus-based farmworker philanthropic initiative was launched across California. The Western Foundation’s Farm Worker Community Building Initiative (CBI) utilized the new grower friendly rhetoric of saving California agriculture from the dangers of global competition. Theoretically there is a ‘win-win’ in this entrepreneurial approach, increasing farm profit and worker wages at once. Embracing the ‘win-win’ moment CBI funded over 20 farmworker serving organizations to engage in process oriented multi-stakeholder planning activities through a detailed institutional governing structure to ideally design regional solutions to poverty and poor health outcomes in farmworker communities. The design of the initiative included consultant and staff led ‘asset-based’ planning with funded farmworker organizations to identify their own strengths and resources, instead of problems, in preparation for coming to the table with growers and service providers for regional planning through collaborative councils. The key theory of the model was that farmworker organizing institutions could increase their capacity to improve conditions for farmworkers if they learned how to look for opportunities and allies instead of problems and opponents. Like Guthman’s study of the Roots of Change philanthropic initiative (2006), CBI’s theoretical framework and corresponding management techniques strictly proscribed what organizing partners could and could not do within the funded program framework.

Briefly, the first of a series of specific governing techniques that contained the scope of what was possible through the CBI was the engagement of a multi-stakeholder task force to design the initiative. Charged with translating a hard-hitting report with stark findings on the enduring poverty and low health outcomes in California’s farmworker communities into a fundable program, the task force proposed solutions that held every stakeholder, except growers, accountable. Workers could improve their own health through education. Housing could be improved by lobbying the state. Health care services could be improved by providing multi-cultural training to health care providers. Aside from the occasional mention of ‘a few bad actors’ change in the ways in which large-scale industrial farms operate was never mentioned. These findings were made even as the original report recognized that today most large growers find it easier to pay fines to the state than to change bad practices such as the safety, health, pesticide, sexual and financial manipulation and violence and other abuses that endure in the fields today. Thus, in the spirit of consensus the task force report informed a program design shaped around a participatory community building processes and not the enduring problems experienced by workers.

Funded partners were required to engage in the main programmatic technique of ‘asset mapping’ to catalog of the ‘good things’ in the local communities before identifying problems. These processes took well over the one and half years and took a heavy toll on the interest and engagement of project participants trained in direction action organizing. In addition to their frustration with the slow pace of the project, organizer institutions battled with one another for members because the foundation required each organization to bring ‘authentic farmworker’ members to each meeting – intensifying the historic competition and membership battles between the UFW and other farmworker serving agencies. A long story short, the regional coalition never formed. Growers never came to the table as much of the process took place during busy planting and harvest seasons. Workers were not represented since the foundation staff had decided that they needed more ‘leadership training’ before being able to sit as equals at the table. Additionally, in the context of increased Immigration Control and Enforcement (ICE) raids migrant

workers were already reluctant to participate in public processes. Ultimately without workers or growers at the table or specific issues or defined targets to rally around partners disengaged. The foundation attempted to intervene to enforce pesticide organizing to infuse energy into the project but it was too late in the game. When the funding was discontinued by the foundation board of directors due to lack of ‘measurable outcomes’ at the foundation level, partners pulled out one by one as their individual grant contracts ended. The common philanthropic practice of promoting long term community building projects but then critically evaluating them based on short term ‘measurable outcomes’ was the final technique that set the project up to fail.

While this initiative limited or watered down partners’ approaches to farmworker organizing, its consensus-based model was not developed in isolation at the philanthropic level. Today many farmworker organizers and advocates themselves believe that in the current climate of global financial crisis and competition, and the increasingly threatened and policed status of undocumented workers, consensus based partnerships with growers is the only thinkable strategy for improving the lives of farmworkers. So in this sense the consensus building and asset mapping techniques implemented through the foundation initiative do not govern from an imperialist position outside of the current context in which historic movement organizers find themselves. Like in the context of international development, regional movement organizations and philanthropic initiatives alike are engaged in a depoliticized struggle to improve conditions for the poor where regulatory responsibility is shifted away from the state onto private voluntary organizations governed by enduring participatory frameworks (Brenner and Theodore 2002; Jessop 2002; Peck 2004). Yet in the case of the CBI, the last ditch effort to energize anti-pesticide organizing provided perhaps at least one opening. The initiative strengthened relationships among disparate organizations that are now engaged in an environmental justice coalition across the region.

Conclusion

The major difference between the participatory poverty alleviation initiatives across time is that for the projects launched during the 1960s funders originally proposed to catalyze structural change to a farm labor system that perpetuates regional poverty – *until they were confronted with the backlash from growers and the state and requested that project participants retreat from union organizing*. Funders in the modern day participatory initiative also depoliticize the environment of farmworker organizing but believe that market-based and collaborative approaches are the only way forward, *and never intended to change the farm labor system*. Whereas the federal government of the 1960s was active and through a national War on Poverty promoted *maximum feasible participation* of the poor, the ICE state of the 21st century promotes a culture of *minimum feasible participation* among migrant workers. Both cases of participatory social change were born within a historical conjuncture that gave them tangible life. At each moment, intersecting relationships of people, place, power, and ideology structure what is deemed possible.

From the perspective of the farmworker organizer, decades of public and private programming has both brought necessary resources to committed advocates and governed the practices of the farmworker ‘leader’, ‘organizer’, and ‘expert’. Still, these definitions and practices are not unitary or completely controlling. Instead they are hotly debated among farmworker organizers and advocates who challenge one another with questions such as: ‘What *is* the farmworker *community* today? Who is an authentic farmworker *leader*? Which institutions are really organizing farmworkers?’ Reflecting upon the long

history of public and private programming across the Central Valley agricultural region, some argue that programs that impose 'self-help' or 'civic participation' frameworks have so closely structured the actions of institutions and participants that there is no room for building a base for a new farmworker movement. Yet, amidst these troubling and weary questions, they are still organizing. And some, including Dolores Huerta, are attempting to start anew – organizing farm labor families door to door – with and without foundation funding, to build a new less professionalized base.

With deepening poverty across America's rural regions and urban centers, and a layered history of public and private 'participatory' interventions that structure relationships between poor people, local advocacy and service organizations, and powerful institutions such as private foundations, future research on American poverty must take up the questions critical development and global poverty scholars ask of projects in the global south: how development program frameworks contain forms of governance (Ghertner 2010; Li 2000), how expertise and professionalism can have a de-politicizing effect (Ferguson 1994; Mitchell 2002), and how 'grassroots' institutions negotiate and are sometimes complicit in processes of professionalization, depoliticization, and financialization (Roy 2010). Additionally, I propose that development scholars recognize the long history of participatory 'self-help' poverty alleviation in the USA. By tracing the deep historical lineages of poverty alleviation initiatives across domestic and global geographic regions we can better distinguish between what is new, what is neoliberal (or post-neoliberal), and what consists of unchanged repeated attempts to alleviate poverty by holding the poor accountable and ignoring the political and economic relationships that create and maintain poverty. In this case, while the appearance of 'neoliberal' ways of thinking undeniably influences the 'win-win' approach to worker-grower collaboration, it was not a neoliberal logic alone that created the current limited terrain for organizing. Instead, farmworker organizers and advocates have simply found themselves institutionally unable to overcome the long-standing powerful alliance between growers and the state. In this context, collaboration around immigration reform and resources attraction (and rebuilding the grassroots base) appears as the only viable spaces of action.

Short Biography

Erica Kohl-Arenas is an Assistant Professor at the Milano The New School for Management and Urban Policy. She recently earned her PhD from the Social and Cultural Studies in Education program at the University of California, Berkeley (2010), and an MS in Community Development from the University of California, Davis (1999). Her doctoral dissertation is a critical study of social change philanthropy, focusing on the history of philanthropic investments in farmworker organizing from the historic Farm Worker Movement to the present. Prior to her graduate studies, Kohl-Arenas worked as a popular educator and community development practitioner in a variety of settings including urban public schools, immigrant nonprofit organizations, coal mining and 'crofting' towns in Appalachia, Scotland, and Wales, and across southern Africa where she studied grassroots citizenship education. Kohl-Arenas is currently working on a manuscript for her book on the history of philanthropic investments in addressing migrant poverty across California's Central Valley. Her primary research areas include critical studies of philanthropy and the nonprofit sector, participatory community development, and the intersection of American and global poverty studies. She currently teaches courses on the theory and practice of nonprofit management, and approaches to participatory development.

Notes

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¹ Ethnographic research on this initiative was conducted between 2007 and 2009. Human subject protocols require that the name of the foundation and participants remain anonymous.

² Historical data was gathered from archival materials including letters, reports, news articles, and meeting minutes found at The United Farm Workers of America archives, Walter P. Reuther Library, Wayne State University, the Field Foundation Archives, Center for American History, University of Texas, Austin, and the Rosenberg Foundation's online archives.

³ Letter from Cesar Chavez to Leslie Dunbar, March 17, 1967, Cesar Chavez File, Field Foundation Archives, University of Texas, Austin, Center for American History.

⁴ National Farm Worker Service Center Meeting Minutes, Service Center file, Field Foundation Archives, University of Texas, Austin, Center for American History.

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