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Service versus Advocacy? A Comparison of Two Latino Community-Based Organizations in Chelsea, Massachusetts

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Take Back the Power

Latino men passing the time in 1974 on Pembroke Street, part of the site where the Villa Victoria (Victory Village) housing complex was later developed by the Emergency Tenants Council Inc. The legend on the mural says of the patron, or boss, at right, "and he makes himself rich with our work." Inquilinos Boricuas en Acción (Puerto Rican Tenants in Action), commonly known as IBA, provides services to 3,000 residents to ensure community control is maintained. The construction of Villa Victoria is considered a landmark event in the empowerment of Latinos in Boston. © 1974 by Carlota Duarte. Reprinted by permission.

They added a new level, the deputy directors. Now it is like there are more people up and less people down. It was like a real pyramid and now it's kind of backwards....The upper part has grown and this [pointing to the lower part on the organization chart] has shrunk. The difference that I see is that now I don't have time to meet with the executive director anymore.

—Flora Vasquez, Program Director, Centro
Latino (Interview, June 10, 2009)

Any time we're in doubt on an issue, I tell my organizers, "Go to the street, ask the community. Why are we sitting around a table saying, 'We need to do this, we need to do that'? Have we checked out the community?"

—Gladys Vega, Executive Director of the Chelsea
Collaborative (Interview, July 28, 2009)

Anyone walking down Chelsea's main drag, Broadway, would be struck by its raucous cacophony of sights and sounds, a panoply of foreign languages spoken by women (many mothers with young children and infants), children, teenagers, and men of a variety of physiognomies and skin tones; a collage of small specialty shops selling jewelry, clothing, religious statues, CDs, and mobile phones; and restaurants and eateries serving El Salvadoran, Vietnamese, Mexican, and Chinese food; pawnshops, check-cashing places, bakeries, and coffee shops, with occasional rectangles of negative visual space occupied by the post office and chain drug and convenience stores. It is a new twist on Mondrian's polychromatic painting *Broadway Boogie Woogie*, vibrating with the sounds of reggaeton, norteño, salsa, or punta instead of jazz. For almost two decades, I have been fascinated by this tiny city, which, due to its compactness, induces its highly heterogeneous population, perennially fed by an inflow of poor immigrants, to rub shoulders socially and civically. This has produced a remarkable kind of working-class cosmopolitanism that has, for example, occasionally been noticed elsewhere and described in social scientific writing on multiethnic neighborhoods in early–twentieth-century Los Angeles and in late- twentieth-century New York (Wild, 2005; Sanjeck, 1998).

My earlier work on Chelsea is a link to the present. There, I closely examined the Latino community's struggle with Boston University over the privatization of its schools from 1989 to 1995 and its participation in the formation and enactment of educational policy, resulting in the election of the first Latina/o to public office (see Jacobs, 1993; Jacobs, 1994; Jacobs, 2002). The study demonstrated how intertwined the realities of social and political citizenship could be. The newly exercised *social* citizenship achieved by Chelsea's Latinos provided a basis of legitimacy for the struggles of a continuing stream of immigrants facing the successors to the oppressive forces their forebears grappled with. In 2002, I mused that "one might speculate on how Chelsea's Latino leadership will evolve and which stimuli will shape its development," and concluded that for Latino political representation to keep in step with its own increasing diversity and the immigration of other national groups, cosmopolitan organizational building would need to occur in order to secure educational and other gains (Jacobs, 2002, pp. 44–45). That, indeed, has occurred.

Chelsea's overall population and its Latino contingent have grown, and Latinos continue to serve in public office and are employed in local municipal jobs. Chelsea's Latino organizations, now steered by those schooled in the earlier struggle, have indeed matured and diversified. The two foremost Latino community-based organizations (CBOs), Centro Latino and the Chelsea Collaborative, both created in 1988, are the focus of the research reported on here. Both have impressively developed and undergone organizational transformation, with annual budgets surpassing one million dollars. Centro Latino, a leading provider of education (ESL, computer), health (HIV testing, case management, support), and community services (after-school youth, immigration), has just completed a merger with an established and reputed Cambridge organization, Concilio Hispano, with a similar service roster. The Collaborative is a leading activist organization comprising seven programs: immigrant and immigrant worker rights, housing rights, the Somali Bantu Shambaro Community, environmental justice, summer youth employment, popular education, and educational rights.

The following analysis utilizes a portion of a total of 30 semistructured interviews of administrators, staff, and members, or fifteen in each, to compare the two leading CBOs with respect to their organizational

structures, administrations, and their styles and methods of immigrant social and political incorporation. I accomplish this by using my interview data as it bears on two different key features and events in each organization. For Centro Latino I first examine a watershed event that occurred in 2004 and resulted in an important change in its service roster and in its total organization structure. Then I examine the way that a work ethic, reflecting this change, has surfaced in its key educational programs. In the case of the Collaborative, I focus on the way boundaries are drawn and maintained in an organization in which the multivalent roles of member, employee, and citizen run the risk of running into conflict, possibly jeopardizing the organization yet creating intimacy and organizational solidarity. Following this, I take a close look at how in one case the membership in the Collaborative of a community organizer living outside Chelsea and representing an activist organization in Roxbury has affected the respective mission enactments of both organizations.

Methods

The data reported here comprise semistructured interviews ranging from one hour to an hour and a half in length each. I employed a digital voice recorder, with detailed notes taken during the interviews. I also have kept a field diary containing memoirs of the interviews and observations of the subjects and events transpiring during periods spent in Chelsea. My field notes include memos comprising thoughts, ideas, and theoretical speculations as they have occurred to me. With the exceptions of the two CBOs' executive directors and Centro's director of organizational development, pseudonyms are used throughout.

Centro's Trial by Fire

The following close-up look at a point in Centro's history details a decision in 2004 that might have resulted in disaster and ruin but turned out to be a salubrious one, leaving the organization stronger. It comprises the ingredients of a fateful decision of Centro executives to sacrifice a program that delivered one-fourth of the agency's funding and to change the organizational profile and program roster into a more effective and streamlined one. Here the agency's story is that of its navigation through the shoals of inadequate funds, the culling of programs, and the risks of

organizational development and transformation. This streamlining, resulting in a layered organizational structure, while effective, was debatably one that also created an administrative stratum some think actually did not produce efficiency but buffers and inhibits communication between the executive and lower-level personnel. This account of events and issues surrounding that fateful climax was given to the author by Centro executives Juan Vega and Monique Puig-Antich in a joint interview on December 4, 2008. Quoted material from that interview will be attributed to them by name.

Centro's planning and creation in 1988 occurred at the hands of local foundations and progressive state representatives and planners who had initially produced a feasibility study resulting in a five-year plan for the development of four other Latino community-based agencies in Chelsea, including the Collaborative. Centro Latino (originally called Centro Hispano, a name kept for seven years) was incorporated in 1989. During its first year, it "began in a back room of the Chelsea Human Services Collaborative [now the Chelsea Collaborative], and then moved to an office suite" (Juan Vega).

In 1998, when Juan Vega came on board, the agency had been running deficits for several years. A new finance director and deputy director of programs were needed, and programs needed to be eliminated. By the time of Juan Vega's arrival, things seemed chaotic. As he put it, "People were passing through. You could feel the impact of foundations ready to fund [but] the agency was spread very thin," meaning that Centro had accumulated "a lot of tiny little programs: domestic violence, family emergency assistance, etc." Many would eventually be jettisoned because of the excessive effort and too little funding to maintain them. (Juan Vega). As a result, in 1999–2000 "the dominoes started to topple and people began to leave: it was just about changing the culture of the organization. We hadn't yet thinned out our priorities; it was just about reinventing and professionalizing services...." (Juan Vega) Changing the culture meant, for example, that as Vega put it, you didn't have to be poor to have integrity in serving the community. Something had to be done both to stabilize the agency and to make it economically more viable. The agency had to become more financially viable. Thus, "2002–2003 was a time of transition, and of weeding out, streamlining and assessment. What does the

community need and what do we do best? [We had to] to tell staff and clients that we can't do certain programs anymore," largely due to chronically inadequate funding. (Monique Puig-Antich)

The deputy program director, chief financial officer, and Vega conferred and the shock came when it was decided to sacrifice a big Department of Public Health contract—AIDS Prevention Education—that brought in $250,000 a year "that dictated what we did every year, and whatever else we did we had to consider its impact on this program....The big one was the one that had to go." (Juan Vega) "It had a lot of staff and a separate site across the street....It paid for everything; it was one quarter of the agency's revenue (we were at the one million dollar mark). It was the time Bush was coming in and we knew that the tide against it was coming in, a la *abstinence*." (Monique Puig-Antich) "We gave three to four months advance notice. DPH was in disbelief because it was unheard of, but it was the agency's saving grace." (Juan Vega)

Things were bound to get worse before they got better. "We ran out of cash. We hit the brick wall and couldn't make payroll." (Juan Vega) In March 2004, Juan and the chief financial officer looked down the road and saw the agency was heading toward a $100,000 deficit. Something had to be done. They had gambled and, without some kind of bailout, stood to have the agency scuttled. They went to their local foundation funders with a plan for turning the agency around, and with $25,000 in pledges from local businesspeople, laid their cards on the table: It was a choice of either amputating the state-funded program or hemorrhaging out of existence. "We developed a plan, a test of our thinking on how we would turn the agency around, where we saw the funding gap, the downfall, detailed financials, and when we expected the worst part to come. We laid it out in front." (Juan Vega) The foundations came through. "Centro developed a media campaign, *El Mundo* had articles, Univision responded, there was a poverty march dedicated to Centro. We asked all the staff to take a pay reduction and closed the agency on Fridays, and the staff cooperated and went a week without pay and the majority stayed put. For three months we instituted a four day work week." (Juan Vega)

In a focus group I conducted with four representatives of some of Centro's foundation funders, two of whom reminisced about that episode, I was told that at that juncture the local funding foundations, some of

whom created Centro, took a close look at the agency and its chief executive officer in order to decide upon the soundness of leadership and the agency's economic and administrative viability. As one said, the circumstances "required a full-fledged review. Where is Centro situated as a community-based organization? It's an anchor organization, and what I got was that Juan was solid and forthright [by] leveling with us. We met with some of his board members and got a snapshot of their level of confidence—that they were going to stick with it." Another remarked, "We were in constant contact with them and they had support from the community. They were in serious trouble and they stuck with what they were trying to do." (Focus group interview, December 10, 2008) In referring to it as an anchor organization, the foundations were alluding to Centro's foothold in the community and the stability it contributed to the nonprofit service provider's role in giving stable support to the city's needy population. The funders clearly were confident that this decision, while risky, was not irresponsible or rash.

As part of the plan, Monique Antich-Puig came on that year as the director of organizational development, a job she said she had little actual experience with (she has a master's in educational policy and originally taught English as a Second Language), but which she learned by doing: "I had no development experience at all. I had some early successes that kept me here. I started by writing some grants that came in a couple of months. A few of the first ones I sent out came in with checks." Both she and the organization had survived and proven themselves in trials by fire. Next she tried her hand at planning a "gala" fundraiser that raised $50,000 and became an annual event that most recently more than doubled the initial figure. More than a fundraiser, she was hired as a planner who could visualize the larger picture in terms of understanding and evaluating the agency's internal structure, its complement of programs, and its position and role in the community as a service provider.

At present, along with its chief financial officer and director of organizational development, two operations directors have been added, constituting an administrative layer beneath the executive director—the deputy directors—with a bevy of program directors beneath them. Thus it is developing an organizational line or administrative hierarchy. While this appears to enhance organizational efficiency, it also is an embryonic

bureaucracy, with buffers between an administrative pinnacle, and service providers and clients, creating insularity and the potential for problems of communication between frontline staff and administrators, and the executive. As described in the epigraph, the new added level of administration has buffered relationships and communication with the executive director. Flora Vasquez told me,

> The change that I see lately…is that before the executive director used to be a little bit more involved in the development of the programs and used to be more aware of what was happening with each and every program….He decided to add a new level of administration (Flora Vasquez, Interview, June 10, 2009).

She says that the absence of that communication has resulted in her feeling like she's at sea when it comes to getting feedback and direction: "I don't feel that I get enough supervision, to tell you the truth, or enough support." Thus, with the absence of supervision and support there is a resulting anomie, punctuated by the necessity to quell crises stemming from the lack of communication and contact between levels:

> I feel that even though I am a program director I'm kind of hanging by myself….I don't know if it's that _____ [her supervisor] has more people to supervise or that his attention is somewhere else. I feel that my program stays…and it goes because I think that they have confidence in me, that they trust me and everything but I'm not connected to nobody....I love Centro as an agency but sometimes I wonder. People tend to act only when there are fires. They like to put fires out but they don't like to be involved much in anything.

An individual teaching ESL classes had an interesting and candid take on the organization members' understanding of its clients that speaks to the administrative, ethnic, and status forms of social distance between Centro's administrators and clients: "We sometimes think we know our clients better than we do….[W]e don't always necessarily have a clear idea of the needs of our clients or the needs of Chelsea. We think

we do, but we don't know for sure." When I remarked that a lot of Centro's staff and its administrative leadership, including Juan Vega, is Latino, and asked if this went for them and him as well, she replied, "I think yes, if somebody comes in and is going to do what he has done for himself, it is very different than some of our clientele....Latinos as a whole are not pigeon-holed as one particular group. There's *[sic]* a lot of people from different countries." When I raised Juan Vega being Puerto Rican, and thus a part of the old Latino mainstay of the city, and that not all Latinos in Chelsea are the same, she immediately added, "versus undocumented El Salvadorans who have come from nothing, who have never been to school. Our clientele at times are a little bit different....We have a lot of El Salvadorans, a lot of undocumented learners here who don't have the resources and the status." (Linda Ridgeway, Interview, June 30, 2009) She added that "the people at the top are not a closed door," albeit the administration has to think about the bottom line and that, nonetheless, many things are happening to bridge the social gaps in the population.

In addition, speaking about Centro's program roster, this staff member insightfully remarked that "another interesting thing about our clientele in terms of job placement is, that most clients will come and say, 'I'm taking English to get a better job,' but they don't necessarily want someone to tell them what that job is. They have in their head already what they want to do." She noted that Centro has gotten out of the business of workforce placement, observing that much government employment placement money is earmarked for types of jobs their clients may not want to do, so offering that service would be disrespectful of their clients' own career aims. Thus, "they may be a busboy but they want to be a line order chef....Our learners don't necessarily think there's anything wrong with their job." In this respect, by not lapsing into the official ethnocentric lexicon of workforce development the agency remains in tune with its clientele.

With a recent merger with an organization of comparable size, the tendency toward bureaucratization and communicative buffering is likely to intensify, for as Juan Vega said in response to my question concerning the danger of Centro becoming too businesslike, "Our danger is that we won't become businesslike enough!" (December 4, 2008)

Professionalism and the Work Ethic

Along with a businesslike structure comes a work ethic that fits well with it. While this is not explicitly stated as part of the organizational mission, it revealed itself in interviews with several staff, and certainly serves as a component of what might be called an ethic of immigrant incorporation—that is, a kind of acculturative mechanism, shaping relationships with Centro's clients and thereby assisting them to adapt to the new social world many have entered. For the employees, key aspects of the work ethic aid them in interpreting clients' attitudes as they respond to an unfamiliar and occasionally disagreeable reception encountered in the classroom and the world outside. The work ethic is a cultural complex of ideas and values stressing the worth of pursuing a career, deferring gratification of present desires, and investing sustained effort to do so. It is nothing less than the secularized variant of the Protestant Ethic described by Max Weber more than a century ago. (Weber, 1958)

In an interview with Julio Flores, a supervisor, he emphasized how the people now working at Centro are more professional due to the standards and salary levels established in the watershed period described above:

When the three of them [the chief financial officer, deputy director of programs, and Juan Vega] came here they were the ones who really started working hard on the structure, on how people come dressing to work, the attitude at the front desk, with the clients, with the students. You know, those types of professional services; and with time, you know, to be able to get more money to be able to raise [the] salary range, we were able to bring more professional people into Centro (Interview, August 26, 2009).

Clearly, in addition to denoting the skills qualifying one for the job, professionalism has an ideological component connoting impression management (e.g., dress), or one's composure and attitude toward one's work. Thus, as part and parcel of developing a nascent bureaucracy, the watershed period also was responsible for instilling a *sensibility* in the organization. This sensibility's ideological dimension includes as well a propensity for Centro staff both to exhibit and to inculcate attitudes toward work and responsibility in their clients and students, for this also meets the quality standards of the agents who fund the programs they work in.

In this regard, Julio Flores went on to compliment an HIV testing and case-management specialist, Felipe: "You see Felipe is a specialist in what

he does. I mean Felipe can get through *four hundred* HIV tests in a *year* with a 95 percent return rate." He added that "it doesn't matter how many HIV tests we do. Our contract [with the Department of Public Health] requires us to have an 85% return rate." (Interview, August 26, 2009) More to the point, if staff members are evaluated on results, how does Felipe achieve such superlative numbers exceeding the evaluation standard of the program? It is through his dedication and experience, which enable him to motivate clients who come to the agency for testing to return to receive test results. But because Felipe *is* so effective, his workload has become so heavy that, according to discussions I have had with him, he has been prompted to vigorously support the agency hiring an additional tester and case manager, whom he is currently training. By the same token, he lobbied against his immediate supervisor hiring an acquaintance with fewer qualifications, thereby risking some on-the-job dissonance for himself. Thus, professionalism can be a double-edged sword.

When it comes to handling clients, several interviewed staff instructors of ESL and computer courses intimated that, having become accustomed to free educational and other services, a work ethic was wanting among their student clients. Others, in discussing their students' slow progress and/or lack of literacy, remarked on their ignorance of U.S. history and holidays. Some employees remarked on a kind of "freeloading" syndrome among their immigrant clients. A technical education supervisor and teacher, Aristide Colon, directly connected the issue of free services with his students' lack of progress, suggesting that the agency may be coddling its clients:

> We are trying to get people out of the custom of getting everything for free....I work with clients that are very independent but I work with a lot of newcomers in the U.S. that once they see all the help they can get—free healthcare, housing, food, bilingual services—after a while they don't want to move on or up in level. A lot of clients go to Bunker Hill [Community College] after us, and after they get to Bunker Hill they want to come back....They can't but we hear that at the beginning, and they may quit Bunker Hill and fail. I sometimes wonder if we are babysitting too much our students and clients (Interview, July 8, 2009).

This teacher came from South America to Chelsea as a child and participated throughout his teenage years in a number of Centro's programs, eventually going on to Bunker Hill Community College and from there to complete a college degree in computer science. He likened Centro to a family and has returned as a dedicated teacher and program director. It is interesting that he sees getting services for free as a "custom," if not carried by clients from their home countries, perhaps one learned here as a kind of incorporative disability or syndrome fostered by their experiences with service agencies. In addition, he ironically remarked on the facility with which some of his students would enunciate the importance of getting their education for free, while driving nice cars and sporting fancy cellular phones. Similarly, a supervisor, Silvia Negrón, added that it is important to "quite frankly stop the 'Gimme everything for free attitude,'" noting that "I've been accused of sounding like a Republican when I say that, but I really believe we need to help people help themselves." (Interview, August 20, 2009)

Some staff in their narratives connect clients' experiences with free classes with their low levels of literacy, their inability to progress, and their deficiency of knowledge of United States history, as is the case in the following interview excerpt from an ESL teacher initially juxtaposing her students' slow progress with Centro's free classes and their personal problems, and then their provincialism regarding the world outside of Chelsea and their ignorance of U.S. cultural conventions.

When I first came, even though I was familiar with the kind of students that would be here, I was still pretty surprised by them. [Ques.: "How come?"] I know that many of our students have been at Centro for a long time because we have free classes and we don't move people out as quickly due to a lot of personal factors that the students have which inhibit them from studying and improving, but I was a little surprised at their level of education and English considering we have a number of students who've lived in Chelsea the majority of their life. I mean Chelsea is great. You don't have to speak English if you don't want to. You can get any services you need in Spanish, but I know that most all my students work outside of Chelsea

with other immigrants. I'm talking about literacy and knowledge of the world outside of this community. [Ques.: What surprised you, lack of understanding and knowledge of the outside world?] Knowledge of history and events, especially U.S. history and events. You know if you have lived here a long time we celebrate a lot of holidays and make that pretty known to people. (Eva Simmons, Interview, July 6, 2009)

She subsequently added that her pedagogy entailed assisting students to connect classroom processes and reading to their lives: "The students need to make more of a connection on how this is going to help improve their life." She cited Jim Cummins's writing on language learning and identity (e.g., Cummins, 1994) and sincerely tried to bridge the cultural gaps between her students and her professional expectations.

In the above narrative witness this instructor's attempt to reconcile the cultural differences between her and her students and her own dismay at their lack of familiarity with, and perhaps even interest in, her nation's history and culture. Some teachers have an easier time with this than others, as in the case of another ESL instructor who grew up in Chelsea and used his own working-class immigrant family background as a way to bridge the ethnic difference between him and his students and to connect with them. "I should be the last person to tell people they're not welcome." (Philip David, Interview, July 14, 2009)

The above material evinces the clear dedication of staff to their educational mission. On the whole they manifest tremendous empathy with their students, and their enunciation of the Protestant Ethic is sympathetically voiced with the aim of enabling their clients and students to make it in an increasingly demanding environment of narrowing employment opportunities that increasingly require specialized training. Many remark on how, on the other hand, students do catch on and apply themselves, matching their students' diligence with a dialogic pedagogy, prompting them to learn through making connections between the subject matter and their lives. Seeing Chelsea as a kind of supportive environment with its relative ease in securing services and with some students' relaxed sense of the necessity to learn English, the staff's voicing of the work ethic is done good-naturedly in the spirit of helping them. Thus it

reflects, in part, the teachers' own experiences in preparing themselves professionally. By the same token, many of the ESL teachers are part-time workers piecing together a living with several jobs, thus facing the same conditions as their underemployed students. One staff member agreed with this analogy and added that this is why she has to come to class well-prepared, since some students may have taken time off from work to attend and she does to want to waste their time. Likewise, in the fee-based programs students want to make progress and get their money's worth. (Jill Hembro, Interview, July 15, 2009)

The Political Risks

As suggested by Gladys Vega's statement in the epigraph, community organizing is a principal method of information gathering as well as implementing the Collaborative's action strategy. Growing out of an organization created in 1988 by the same parties involved in the creation of Centro, the Collaborative originally was an association of executive directors of direct service-providing agencies (i.e., Chelsea Human Services Collaborative). Gladys Vega began work there as a receptionist and simultaneously worked in the community to organize Latino leaders to develop a voice to enunciate their own needs. As she put it, "White people were always making the decisions, and with the existing nonprofits, went and gave the community what they thought was needed." (Gladys Vega, Interview, July 28, 2009) In 2006 she became the Collaborative's executive director. By using a community organizing method of educating its constituents and coupling this method to a direct-action approach to redressing grievances, rectifying injustices, and pressing for social change, the Collaborative, in effect, uses social conflict in a constructive manner, and does so essentially as a two-layered "horizontal" organization whose executives bow to the decisions arrived at by its constituent group members and staff through a democratic process of consensus building.

Social action, even as it creates controversy and strong criticism, gets results and enhances its legitimacy among and for groups that prevailing social forces otherwise tend to repress and marginalize. Moreover, in redressing grievances and forcing an unscrupulous employer who might withhold wages or tips to pay their undocumented employees, in indicting travel agents illegally pilfering immigrants' air ticket deposits,

and check-cashing concerns for not recording immigrants' utility bill deposits or delivering paid-for remittances back home, in getting free legal assistance and back pay for "lumpers" (workers who off-load trucks at a local supermarket chain distribution center), normative precedents are set and lessons taught for, and to, the local community (see Chelsea Collaborative, undated). On a somewhat larger scale, the Collaborative organized local residents, parents, students, and others, using tactics of door-to-door recruiting, testifying at public hearings, data gathering via participatory action research, demonstrating, and disrupting "several high profile demonstrations by the power company" that applied to the city and state regulatory agencies to build a 250-megawatt diesel power plant in a Chelsea neighborhood but scuttled its planned installment (Miranda, Reynoso and Staples, undated, p. 6). While in all of these examples local and outside interests of businesses are thwarted and offended, winning battles of social justice enhances the legitimacy of the groups engaging in them, not to mention reinforcing collective solidarity among those who did the fighting.

When, as in the case of the power plant, larger extra-community forces are thwarted, the publicity accompanying the struggle is used to solidify the sentiments of the rest of the city with those neighborhood residents on whose behalf the struggle has been waged, thus enfolding those who struggled in the city's social as well as its geographic boundaries. This is how incorporation at base encompasses a social phenomenon. Having said this, however, it should be noted that its methods, or *mode of being in the community,* impel the Collaborative's membership and staff to meticulously exercise discretion in the conduct of their and the organization's business.

Since it is a nonprofit corporation, a "501C3," it is legally obliged not to engage in *partisan* politics. Thus, members who are individually running for or occupying public office must not engage in political activities during work time or on the premises of the Collaborative's office, or during the conduct of its activities and programs. In a recent interview, Elise Antonelli, a two-thirds-time employee and ex–city official, discussed how intertwined employment and membership is, and can become with the different sides of a person's life thereby integrating it:

You cannot walk around Chelsea without them mentioning [names three members]....You become a member, you become part of a coalition and things like that, whether it's the tenant's association, whether it's CUDE the parent's group, whether it's Green Space, whether it's the Latino Immigrant Committee, you know, you just become *involved* and you want to help. You become part of a committee, and then if you have kids you might have an issue with the school and you might talk to someone and become part of the parent groups, or if you have a kid that's the age of fourteen they'll apply for the Summer Youth Employment Program. It's all entwined....It becomes almost like a family (Interview, August 25, 2009).

Employment at, and membership in, the Collaborative can become risky if one's outside life includes holding political office or being involved in partisan activity. In our discussion Elise Antonelli mentioned five names of Collaborative *board* members who are now or recently have been City Council members. As a result, employees, members, and the Collaborative occasionally walk a thin line in terms of their interests and roles, as Elise Antonelli suggests, using herself as an example. "I work here from eight to three. I work for the Collaborative, I get paid by the Collaborative, but from 3:30 to whatever is my time. If I want to go and hold signs for _____ , I can do that, but people don't see that." Thus, in referring to a member who is on the City Council:

It's very tricky....I think it gets more tricky for _____ [an employee], because even though she's on the City Council she still fights for her environmental justice issues, and that's one hat that she wears. You have to be very careful because you don't want people to come out and to point fingers saying, "Oh, it's 'cause she works for the Collaborative, and things have come out that hurt us."

She says, "and that's where we all have to be very careful. On Election Day, we should all take it off. That's our personal time." Here one's simultaneous outside political involvement and Collaborative employment can

be seen by both the public and the law as a conflict of interest because the Collaborative is a nonprofit, and even more significantly, as Antonelli states, because of public opinion, which in the compactness and density of Chelsea often courses through interpersonal contacts and relations. Moreover, the risk of negative public opinion is a double-edged sword because it can alienate politicians connected with state funding agencies. As she puts it:

> We have to be very careful with our funders, especially when one of our projects is getting the vote out, the Voter Initiative, you know, registering people. [Interviewer: "Things have come out that, do what, get you in trouble with funders?"] Get us in trouble with funders in the sense that…the negative press. A politician doesn't want, you know, to fund a group that, you know, people are against them.

The Collaborative's activities here get very dicey, especially the Voter Initiative, as Antonelli suggests, because the organization *is* funded to engage the political process, not only in registering voters but in informing voters of their rights, which is, as she puts it, "part of educating people, you know showing them, 'These are your rights.' If there's an issue at the poll, 'These are your rights. They should not turn you away.' I'm telling you, people have learned to speak up and say, 'No, I know I can vote here.'… Some of the poll workers can be *nasty!*" Such are the risks of challenging prejudices and threatening interests.

Finally, the only drawback to the Collaborative's organizational format stems from the very features that comprise its virtues: its lack of an authority-laden hierarchy and the relative autonomy of its members, staff, and groups that result in actions taken that are sometimes not clearly communicated to everyone. While this was not a strong complaint among those I interviewed, some have noted it in passing, mentioning it in conjunction with the need for more advanced program planning, or have simply remarked that they were not informed in this or that case about paperwork that had been completed. On the other hand, many people that I interviewed proudly stated that a key admirable feature of the Collaborative is its capacity to act immediately on an issue when

needed. Thus Alex Soto, whose work with the Collaborative I describe below, noted that after a 2007 raid by the Immigration and Customs Enforcement in New Bedford, Massachusetts, resulting in the flash deportation of a large number of Maya K'iche undocumented workers, leaving many of their children deserted, the Collaborative responded with aid immediately and in two days came up with an emergency plan for dealing with such an eventuality in Chelsea. Perhaps piecemeal communication is a small price to pay for the capacity to respond in a spontaneous and effective manner.

A Case of Cross-Community Collaboration

While the closeness of the Collaborative members' and member-employee relationships can be risky for funding and public opinion, the other side of this issue is its evident virtue, given that the closeness of the Collaborative staff and membership *to* the community is definitely a product of the way it engages the community and the manner it understands its mission as a community-building one. There is little doubt that the integrality of Latino and other immigrants to its mission of social justice speaks to its effectiveness as a social incorporator of immigrants. After all, isn't enabling immigrants to resist exploitation and thereby gain materially tantamount to rendering a service that enhances participation or incorporation in society? Moreover, the solidarity fostered by the Collaborative's modus operandi is an asset and is not based on excluding others. In the case that follows, we learn about partnering between the Collaborative and an organization in Boston. It is an object lesson in how partnering stems from the Collaborative's modus operandi.

Alex Soto is a community organizer for a Boston-based environmental justice organization, Alternatives for Community Development (ACE), and a group within it, the T Riders, created in 1999, that focuses on public transportation equity in the city and surrounding area. The group was started by ACE to deal with the high asthma rates in Roxbury, a predominantly African American community. ACE mapped the hazards in the area, consisting of much truck traffic, an MBTA bus terminal and garage (the Bartley yard) that kept 100 buses constantly running, a trash-transfer site for a company routing refuse to other parts of the state, the Boston Public Schools garage, and a private bus depot. The group started the

Clean Buses for Boston campaign, targeting the MBTA, and soon learned at community meetings that, in addition to the environmental hazards, the public transportation service in the area was poor. The completion of the Big Dig made clear it directly benefited only motorists, and the Conservation Law Foundation sued to compel the state to provide better public transport. This action succeeded in getting the state to fund several urban bus lines and a subway extension, and make several commitments to new MBTA projects.

In 2000 and 2003, transit fares were increased. "During this time somebody in the Chelsea Collaborative…heard about the T Riders union, and he came to one of the meetings and he said, 'Listen, you know, like we live in Chelsea, we're facing the same problems that you guys are facing here in Roxbury: buses are late and dirty, weekend service is really poor, we can't get where we want to go on weekdays. We want to create a committee over there.' So ACE decided to provide the resources to help this group to address some of the issues that Chelsea was facing at that time." (Alex Soto, Interview, July 23, 2009) Through the Collaborative's Green Space program ACE was able to link the environmental justice issue and Chelsea's transportation issues. In 2005 or 2006 Soto came to Chelsea, when the program was already established, and met members of the Collaborative: "I came on board to supply support for what [the leader-organizer] was trying to do with transit justice in the area." ACE also supplied legal support for the aforementioned campaign against the power plant in Chelsea.

As an outsider, Soto sees the Collaborative as "one of the organizations that's truly open to the community. We have many nonprofit organizations in the area—Chelsea, East Boston—and [in contrast to] the usual 9 to 5 open business hours, the Collaborative is trying to go beyond that. It's more a human face….That for me is something very positive I would like to see in other organizations." He related that the previous evening ACE had a once-a-year Game Night in the Collaborative's offices for the T Riders Union members. "We were playing karaoke with the members, you know dominoes, all of those kinds of things, and the organization was comfortable enough to give us the key, and say to us, 'Hey guys make sure everything is closed.' I don't know, I do not know any other organization that is comfortable to do that, like for anyone that is not part of the staff."

(Alex Soto, Interview, July 23, 2009) He went on to say that he and other ACE members participate in the Collaborative's activities, such as demonstrations in front of the aforementioned check-cashing establishment, its march to observe International Workers' Day on May 1, and the Chelsea River Revel, an annual event organized by the Collaborative's Green Space committee on the bridge connecting Chelsea and East Boston.

What is unique is the trust each organization has extended to the other, which has led to almost an immediate sharing of resources. This trust appears to be based on the felt common experiences of both memberships. Also what is interesting is the cross-ethnic and -racial nature of their cooperation. Alex Soto characterized the potential relations of the two organizations' African American and Latino constituencies:

> Here in Roxbury and Dorchester I can say pretty much that ninety percent are African American. One of the reasons I think ACE decides to bring a Latino [i.e., himself] into the staff…was with the idea to create this connection….I think me being the person that is in contact with Chelsea… usually every time we have a meeting over there I try to bring somebody from Roxbury or Dorchester that is African American….[Regarding] this perception that "we're so different, you know like, that you guys have your own way to address issues…and we have our own way,"…at the end of the day, you know, there is so much similarity in these two communities that sometimes the society…tries to divide the communities. (Interview, Alex Soto, July 23, 2009)

Alex's statement underscores the possible motives for ACE having hired him, a Latino, to organize black people around transportation issues, and then demonstrates the advantage for having done so as represented by the potency of the cross-racial and -ethnic coalition he helped create in order to overcome the fictions used to divide Latinos and blacks. In a sense, the proof of coalescing is in the pudding, for the two organizations took to each other on the basis of common need and immediately pooled their resources.

Betwixt and Between Service and Advocacy

While common sense dichotomizes service and activism/advocacy, the literature on immigrant-based nonprofits indicates that the line between them cannot be definitively drawn and that some community-based organizations do both. So, while Centro does seem to fit the mold of an exclusively service-offering nonprofit, and the activist Collaborative engages in strategies of community change, we learn that the former engages in some advocacy and the latter also provides services. In this regard, Els de Graauw, a political scientist at City University of New York, Baruch College, in summarizing some of her findings on forty-five nonprofits catering to immigrants in San Francisco, corrects mistaken conceptions rigidly dichotomizing service and advocacy in such organizations:

> It would be a mistake to characterize them solely as service providers. They are increasingly combining service provision with advocacy campaigns and political activism….With their service provision activities, nonprofits fight the symptoms of a limited public service system. With their advocacy activities, they fight the root causes of the injustices immigrants experience in American society. (2008, pp. 326, 328)

We can bypass the simplistic service-advocacy dichotomy if we frame the issue in terms of the quid pro quos exchanged between the organizations and their clients and members. Some literature on immigrant nonprofits focuses on the extent and kind of "reciprocity" that the organization expects, demands, or persuades clients and members to return. In other words, the organization "communicates to the local resident that some form of return [such as participation in events] to the organization is expected from him or her" in exchange for services rendered. (Marwell, 2004, p. 272; de Graauw, p. 330) With respect to the connection between reciprocity and incorporation, Columbia University sociologist Nicole P. Marwell tells us that sociopolitical participation consists of community-building and organizational strengthening:

When CBOs engage in reciprocal service provision…they move from only providing services to also doing community building work. In this transition there is a qualitative shift in the relationships between CBOs and their clients. CBOs that do community building create stronger relationships with their clients, thereby maintaining client identification with the CBOs, their community programmatic missions, and their staffs. (2004, p. 275)

In the case of the community-organizing Collaborative, such reciprocity actually is its mainstay, although it is not regarded as service returned to the organization but as participation in programs of community change and betterment. Moreover, Gladys Vega's exhortation to go to the street is an organizing principle used to gather information about the immigrant communities' needs, concerns, and problems that is directly fed into the Collaborative's ever-changing recruitment and action agendas and strategies to transform the circumstances of immigrants in Chelsea, and thereby socially incorporate them. In other words, after receiving help, the Collaborative's clients often are recruited into participating in programs targeting social change. While Centro does not require reciprocity from its clients but does do so from its employees, I have heard statements rhetorically exhorting clients to exercise more responsibility to and for the community, as when a supervisor plaintively told me, "We need to do a better job of taking people from where they are and helping, pushing them to take more responsibility for the community." (Silvia Negrón, Interview, August 20, 2009) In addition, while Centro does not have a formal requirement, it does expect a modicum of *employee participation* in off-hours advocacy and job-connected activities.

Because Centro offers fee-driven as well as free services, expectations for client reciprocity are likely to remain somewhat muted, with moral suasion instead exercised on clients, and is channeled pedagogically into the educational and quasi-educational context of its programs. On the other hand, for employees, as one supervisor, Julio Flores, put it, "We encourage staff, clients, and students to attend lobbying days. There's Cinco de Mayo, [and] lobbying days at the State House for immigration reform. We go to those." (Julio Flores, Interview, August 26, 2009) More-

over, this interviewee, underscoring the expectations and formal means of compensation for employees' participation in extracurricular events, informed me:

> When people are hired we talk about these activities, and at staff meetings. Everyone does participate. If someone says, "That's not part of my job description," you can do that but you'll know it's not right to do that. If you talk to your immediate supervisor, we have a comp time policy. We have many activities on a Saturday or Sunday and you get paid for that. (Julio Flores, Interview, August 26, 2009)

When I questioned him about whether some of these activities were actually work-related tasks, such as handing out flyers advertising Centro services, I was told they were. Thus, in the minds of some Centro employees, outside advocacy and work-related participation seem to form a seamless web. It is clear that reciprocity as I have defined it here, as the obligation to repay service (or paid work) with voluntary service to the organization, applies almost exclusively to Centro's employees and not to its clients.

So what is to be concluded about the two organizations' roles in incorporating immigrants—that is, facilitating their social, economic, and political participation, in Chelsea? Centro accomplishes immigrant incorporation through fee-driven or free services provided by an increasingly professional staff. The clear division between Centro's staff, and its students and clients, versus the fluid, murky, and occasionally risky blurring and overlap of the boundaries between the horizontally organized Collaborative staff, members, and civilians, and between itself and the surrounding community, reflects on the very different organizational structures and how these two organizations incorporate immigrants into the surrounding society. The more vertical, verging on bureaucratic, organizational structure of Centro developed out of a calculated attempt to make itself financially more viable and more professional (i.e., to enhance the specialized qualifications of its personnel). In accomplishing this aim, Centro in a sense pays the piper because it risks alienating its employees and developing anomie, or a sense of a loss of purpose among them.

The Collaborative accomplishes incorporation through its method of community organizing, which, although providing services to would-be and actual members, does so for the purpose of recruiting them to participate in a widening circle of participation in social change. Thus, in Centro's case, the line dividing incorporator and incorporatee is more clearly drawn, whereas for the Collaborative the encompassing aims of participation in social action and the blurring or overlap of the roles of staff, members, and citizens obviates the distinction and renders these participants agents of their own incorporation. In this sense, incorporation proceeds through utilization of a more horizontal organizational format based on a consensual teamwork model fostering individual and collective self-reliance. The price paid here, as I have described it, consists of the stresses and strains caused by its very virtues—that is, the internal stress stemming from the necessity of keeping its organizational and role definitional books straight, and externally, in carefully managing its organizational impressions in the face of local public opinion and the perceptions of local and state politicians and funders.

In sum, what does all of this say about the value of the two organizations to their immigrant clientele? Both organizations, with the qualifications noted above, do their jobs well: the nature and extent of services offered by the Collaborative cannot—nor are they intended to—rival those offered by Centro, and the community-organizing and social action agenda (and the benefits therein) of the Collaborative fall far outside Centro's bailiwick. In the final analysis, the two organizations functionally complement each other in this small city where people and problems snug up against each other in comfortable and uncomfortable ways. Ironically, the key problems that their structures and processes cause boil down to those of communication. One then wonders if the remedy to their organizational stumbling blocks might be found, for example, in Centro adopting more of a team approach to counteract the anomie and alienation caused by piling on more administrative strata; and for the Collaborative to put in place a system of communicative centralization in place of the chaotic and unsystematic means of communication currently in place. The trick, I suppose, would lie in the capacity of each to put a brake on these solutions lest they, like the sorcerer's apprentice, become runaway remedies engendering a whole new set of problems and dilemmas.

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