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# Local Realities of Philanthrocapitalism

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## **Abstract**

In this analysis of interviews with nine not-for-profit employees, I argue that fear and tradition in the funding priorities of private foundations has the long-term result of limiting the local social service sector substantially. Particularly, the effect of philanthrocapitalism is felt within those topics that are deemed by the foundations to be too unstable or new to provide monetary assistance. Exasperating these realities is the missing stability of government funding for new organizations. In the Quad Cities, the main segments currently feeling the most significant financial strain are immigrants and refugees. In this ethnographic interview study of nonprofit employees, I examine the financial contrasts between established and immigration organizations. Additionally, I reflect on my experiences within the sector as an intern between April and September of 2014.

## **Introduction**

Research for this project focused on qualitative research methods with not-for-profit employees concentrating primarily on semi-structured interviews with nine participants and participant observation at a local immigrant nonprofit for six months in 2014. By using this combination, the disparities and limitations of social services, especially for “new” issues such as immigration, will be presented for education of local nonprofit organizations of the structure of the systems they operate within. Most importantly, this will shed light on the negative effects on the immigrant

and refugee communities as nonprofit organizations, and the organizations that fund them, remain unfocused in their assistance.

The structure of financial assistance of the nonprofit sector, abroad and in the United States, is philanthrocapitalism, wherein elite donors, largely private but also public, use charity to drive neoliberal business ethic and interests.<sup>1</sup> While it is often discussed within the global non governmental sphere, its effects on social services are more pervasive and apparent in local contexts than generally acknowledged by academics. Furthermore, the focus of these studies often is on large international public and private organizations creating far-reaching policies in “other” contexts. An example of this is the alliance between The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation and the Monsanto Corporation to distribute GMO farm products to farmers in Africa.

Another factor of this research is the context of the changing atmosphere of the Midwestern small postindustrial city. Similar to other cities such as Minneapolis-St. Paul, MN, the Quad City area is faced with an increasing number of foreign-born people either migrating here from other American cities or relocating from their native countries. The Twin Cities are a good example of a non profit sector that has mostly bounced back in support of migrants, immigrants and refugees, as the sector was funded primarily before the social welfare reform of the 1990s,<sup>2</sup> but the Quad City community is still reeling from the shifting demographics.

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<sup>1</sup> Matthew Bishop and Michael Green, *Philanthrocapitalism: How the Rich Can Save The World* (Bloomsberry Press: New York, 2008).

<sup>2</sup> Dan Trudeau, “Junior Partner or Empowered Community? The Role of Non-profit Social Service Providers amidst State Restructuring in the US.” *Urban Studies* 45:13 (2008).

Finally, in their research with foundation board members, Milleson and Martin present the intertwined factors of fear and tradition as the main issues that affect the outcomes of funding decisions. Board members feared alienating their current donors and the uncertainty of taking risks on untested topics. Tradition, on the other hand, was described the “rationalizing power” of maintaining the status quo. In the Quad Cities, this correlates to a tendency of foundations to give, especially larger, amounts to established organizations they have been funding for years. This continues the entrenchment of fear of innovation and failure, disadvantaging new immigrant organizations further. In this setting, nonprofit employees have a variety of ways of creating and denouncing the factors of fear and tradition.

With these issues in mind, I underscore the following questions as pivotal for this research: How does this struggle for funding affect the grassroots organizations, especially for employees? What differences arise between these organizations because of the disparities in funding? How do employees understand the competition for funds? I would argue that employees have a firm sense of the lack of opportunities for certain organizations, and have coincided many of their responses to the trends of fear and tradition within foundations.

There will be four sections to this research paper: First, a literature review of relevant academic work on philanthrocapitalism, the nonprofit industrial complex and context of migration in the Midwest. Secondly, there is a brief discussion of the case study of the Quad Cities area, including the connections to the global and national philanthropic patterns. Then an analysis of the methodology, theories and original

research conducted. Finally, there is a reflection about the experiences that put this research into motion during my internship at a small immigrant and refugee nonprofit organization.

## **Section I: Literature Review**

*Philanthrocapitalism* is a relatively new term created by Matthew Bishop to describe the global phenomenon of elite donors using charity to drive neoliberal business ethics and interests.<sup>3</sup> While Bishop thinks positively of this phenomenon, other scholars argue that philanthropy, due to its inherent capitalistic nature, dictates specific policies that can limit and often contradict the social good accomplished.<sup>4</sup> Unlike government social services, these scholars claim that philanthrocapitalism focuses on economic maintenance before improving social conditions.

Philanthropy is usually discussed by scholars in the context of neoliberal power struggles between the Global North and South. Behrooz Morvaridi, for example, points to the relationships between the huge international foundation The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, the agribusiness corporation Monsanto and Sub-Saharan Africa, in which GMO products were disbursed to farmers in a program called Water

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<sup>3</sup> Matthew Bishop and Michael Green, *Philanthrocapitalism: How the Rich Can Save The World* (Bloomsberry Press: New York, 2008).

<sup>4</sup> Behrooz Morvaridi, "Capitalist Philanthropy and Hegemonic Partnerships," *Third World Quarterly* 33:7 (2012); Andrea Smith, "Chapter 6: The Revolution Won't Be Funded: The Nonprofit Industrial Complex," in *The Global Industrial Complex* (Lexington Books: Plymouth, United Kingdom, 2011); Jennifer Ceema Samimi, "Funding America's Nonprofits: The Nonprofit Industrial Complex's Hold on Social Justice," *Columbia Social Work Review* 1 (2005); Iain Hay and Samantha Muller, "Questioning generosity in the golden age of philanthropy: Towards critical geographies of super-philanthropy," *Progress in Human Geography* 38:5 (2014); Lenore T. Ealy, "The Intellectual Crisis of Philanthropy," *Culture and Society* 51 (2014);

Efficient Maize for Africa (WEMA).<sup>5</sup> Using Gramscian theory, Morvaridi argues that philanthropy promotes hegemony to reduce state interventions and responsibilities in non-state actors' behavior.<sup>6</sup>

This example emerged from an agreement among the elite of American millionaires and billionaires. In 2010, arising from "The Giving Pledge"<sup>7</sup>, the "California Consensus" was created. This consensus of the wealthy was that by "applying innovation, technology and modern management to poor people's problems,"<sup>8</sup> global poverty could be greatly reduced. David Bosworth points out that the major difference between this consensus and the philanthropic influences of the past is that the "same techniques, management style and value system that helped to generate the excessive income that is funding this pledge can also correct the social defects historically associated with income inequality."<sup>9</sup>

Nationally in the United States, this consensus has had a variety of outcomes. Again, scholars have focused on The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation for its huge endowment and affect. Bosworth points out that the foundations' name became equivalent with national educational reform, and influenced education specialists and scholars widely. Researchers for the majority of education journals depended on the

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<sup>5</sup> Behrooz Morvaridi, "Capitalist Philanthropy and Hegemonic Partnerships," *Third World Quarterly* 33:7 (2012), 1196.

<sup>6</sup> Behrooz Morvaridi, "Capitalist Philanthropy and Hegemonic Partnerships," *Third World Quarterly* 33:7 (2012), 1194.

<sup>7</sup> 40 USA billionaires promised to donate at least half of their wealth to philanthropic foundations in 2011.

<sup>8</sup> Behrooz Morvaridi, "Capitalist Philanthropy and Hegemonic Partnerships," *Third World Quarterly* 33:7 (2012), 1192.

<sup>9</sup> David Bosworth, "The Cultural Contradictions of Philanthrocapitalism," *Society* 48 (2011), 383.

foundation for funding, while local districts could not resist easily the non-local suggestions of wealthy donors.<sup>10</sup>

For the purposes of this paper, literature pertaining to funding of the typical not-for-profit sector specifically in the agenda-setting powers of local foundations is more immediately national. Daniel Trudeau aptly points out that the nonprofit sector emerged from a restructuring in the 1980s that shifted the responsibilities of social services from the state to the local level through individual organizations. This restructuring comes in three stages: “dismantling public programs; devolving public responsibility to lower levels of government; and privatizing responsibility for public service.”<sup>11</sup> This shift has the potential to be deliver highly “democratic” social services, or to allow the effect of government be more pervasive in the daily lives of citizens.<sup>12</sup>

“Privatization proponents” argue that this system allows for organizational capacity and connections to the local community to solidify while also allowing partnerships to flourish with the government.<sup>13</sup> Critiques tend to be more persuasive and grounded in reality. The shift has led to nonprofits becoming more corporatized and professionalized, as well as more fragmented and unable to replace fully government services.<sup>14</sup> Most important for this research, nonprofits are unable to

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<sup>10</sup> David Bosworth, “The Cultural Contradictions of Philanthrocapitalism,” *Society* 48 (2011), 384.

<sup>11</sup> Dan Trudeau, “Junior Partner or Empowered Community? The Role of Non-profit Social Service Providers amidst State Restructuring in the US.” *Urban Studies* 45:13 (2008), 2807.

<sup>12</sup> Dan Trudeau, “Junior Partner or Empowered Community? The Role of Non-profit Social Service Providers amidst State Restructuring in the US.” *Urban Studies* 45:13 (2008), 2805.

<sup>13</sup> Dan Trudeau, “Junior Partner or Empowered Community? The Role of Non-profit Social Service Providers amidst State Restructuring in the US.” *Urban Studies* 45:13 (2008), 2806.

<sup>14</sup> Dan Trudeau, “Junior Partner or Empowered Community? The Role of Non-profit Social Service Providers amidst State Restructuring in the US.” *Urban Studies* 45:13 (2008), 2807.

address localized needs and problems, as programs are poorly integrated by the categorical priorities of funding organizations.<sup>15</sup>

Andrea Smith argues that in the not-for-profit sector, foundational grants provide American organizations funding but only under the pretenses of the elite's own interests and priorities. This plays into what scholars have termed the nonprofit industrial complex, in which private and public actors, especially in relation to social movements, attempt to use the sector to:<sup>16</sup>

- Monitor and set priorities for not-for-profits
- Divert wealth usually put into the public tax system into private foundations
- Redirect activist energies to career-based organizational modes instead of mass-organization
- Allow corporations to pursue their interests through philanthropy

Furthermore, Smith points to Christina Ahn in her reimagination of foundations as being targets for accountability due to their tax-exempt status and tendency to support causes that support wealthy interests.<sup>17</sup> Milsen and Martin have shown that foundation boards tend to decide giving based on environmental factors in addition to concepts such as fear and tradition.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Dan Trudeau, "Junior Partner or Empowered Community? The Role of Non-profit Social Service Providers amidst State Restructuring in the US." *Urban Studies* 45:13 (2008), 2807.

<sup>16</sup> Andrea Smith, "Chapter 6: The Revolution Won't Be Funded: The Nonprofit Industrial Complex," in *The Global Industrial Complex* (Lexington Books: Plymouth, United Kingdom, 2011), 163.

<sup>17</sup> Andrea Smith, "Chapter 6: The Revolution Won't Be Funded: The Nonprofit Industrial Complex," in *The Global Industrial Complex* (Lexington Books: Plymouth, United Kingdom, 2011).

<sup>18</sup> Judith L. Millesen and Eric C. Martin, "Community Foundation Strategy: Doing Good and Monitoring the Effects of Fear, Tradition, and Serendipity," *Nonprofit and Voluntary Quarterly* 43(2014): 840.



According to these authors, there are two types of fear: alienation of existing or potential donors and uncertainty about how to distribute funds accurately. Alienation, foundation board members believed, came out of choosing controversial topics to fund. Politically, this could isolate boards from future sources of revenue. As one participant stated, “We could be viewed as anti-growth, pro-growth or something bad and it would damage our young reputation, our future ability (to raise money). We can’t afford that.”<sup>19</sup>

The other type of fear, the uncertainty of giving, is perhaps expressed most pragmatically by the comment that, “We give lip service and say we want to be an organization that has impact in the community, but if all we’re doing is writing small checks at donor’s requests to various things we’re not impacting the community. We’re just providing a service and not making a difference in the community whatsoever, and I think we as a board need to come to grips with what do we want to be.”<sup>20</sup> Plainly, it’s the fear that there won’t be a considerable impact by the money given, or that the money will fail to make a difference.

Tradition, as defined by Millesen and Martin, is a response to the fear of giving funds inappropriately or to heated topics. This created sometimes “stagnated efforts at meaningful change,” and resulting in maintenance of the status quo.<sup>21</sup> Ultimately this

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<sup>19</sup> Judith L. Millesen and Eric C. Martin, “Community Foundation Strategy: Doing Good and Monitoring the Effects of Fear, Tradition, and Serendipity,” *Nonprofit and Voluntary Quarterly* 43(2014): 840

<sup>20</sup> Judith L. Millesen and Eric C. Martin, “Community Foundation Strategy: Doing Good and Monitoring the Effects of Fear, Tradition, and Serendipity,” *Nonprofit and Voluntary Quarterly* 43(2014): 841.

<sup>21</sup> Judith L. Millesen and Eric C. Martin, “Community Foundation Strategy: Doing Good and Monitoring the Effects of Fear, Tradition, and Serendipity,” *Nonprofit and Voluntary Quarterly* 43(2014): 842.

created a sense that foundations were not self-reflective of their funding priorities, rarely made changes in these priorities and therefore were hesitant to pursue radical transformations within their community.<sup>22</sup> Arguably, and of pivotal concern for this research, foundations tend to give to traditional organizations versus adaptive organizations.

It is interesting to note that foundation leaders understood that these “traditions” were halting innovation and growth within their local sectors, and limited the amount of impact that these foundations were having.<sup>23</sup> Another factor was serendipity in creating innovative solutions.<sup>24</sup> Foundations claimed that solutions were sometimes simply a reality of connections and events, rather than direct planning on the part of the board.<sup>25</sup>

Foundations with less than \$50 million in endowments or with less than ten years of history were more likely to be focused on maintaining their donor relationships at the cost of innovative techniques. One CEO within the study stated that, “We have been so focused on our own growth and sustainability, that we have not shifted to facilitating collaborative initiatives to address community problems. I think we all agree that we would like to get to that point, but right now, we are challenged

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<sup>22</sup> Judith L. Millesen and Eric C. Martin, “Community Foundation Strategy: Doing Good and Monitoring the Effects of Fear, Tradition, and Serendipity,” *Nonprofit and Voluntary Quarterly* 43(2014): 841.

<sup>23</sup> Judith L. Millesen and Eric C. Martin, “Community Foundation Strategy: Doing Good and Monitoring the Effects of Fear, Tradition, and Serendipity,” *Nonprofit and Voluntary Quarterly* 43(2014): 840

<sup>24</sup> Serendipity was not researched due to the combination of time restraint and the lack of application to the rest of the study.

<sup>25</sup> Judith L. Millesen and Eric C. Martin, “Community Foundation Strategy: Doing Good and Monitoring the Effects of Fear, Tradition, and Serendipity,” *Nonprofit and Voluntary Quarterly* 43(2014): 844

with raising enough money to keep the organization running.”<sup>26</sup> They focused, therefore, on developing the funds within their own organization rather than providing funds in a responsive way to the community.

## **Section II: Explanation of the Case Study**

In comparison to heavily populated areas such as Chicago or Des Moines, the Quad City area of Rock Island, IL, Moline, IL, Davenport, IA, and Bettendorf, IA has undergone similar effects of deindustrialization as many Midwestern cities. Many major employers have taken valuable jobs overseas, leaving gaps of unemployment. Due to these limited employment opportunities, there is incredible need of public services in the area: 34.1% of the population described themselves as “poor or struggling” financially, with the rest of the two thirds claiming to be doing “okay”.<sup>27</sup> It maintains a fairly active nonprofit sector, claiming about 6.4% of the male employment sector and doubles to 14.4% of the female employment sector.<sup>28</sup> Economically, black populations are struggling the most severely; however it is unclear what percentage are of African heritage.<sup>29</sup>

In the last fifteen years, a huge shift has occurred in the populations of the Quad City area. The city most affected by the recent influx of immigrants and refugees is Rock Island, with the Rock Island-Milan school district experiencing a huge influx

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<sup>26</sup> Judith L. Millesen and Eric C. Martin, “Community Foundation Strategy: Doing Good and Monitoring the Effects of Fear, Tradition, and Serendipity,” *Nonprofit and Voluntary Quarterly* 43(2014): 842.

<sup>27</sup> U.S. Census Bureau, “Quad City Poverty Rates,” 2013.

<sup>28</sup> U.S. Census Bureau, “Quad City Employment Data,” 2013.

<sup>29</sup> Census data only tracks the terms “black or African American,” but does not account for individuals of African descent who have immigrated to the United States from Africa.

of foreign-born students between 2005 and 2013, rising from only 100 students to 678 students.<sup>30</sup> Approximately 12% of the Rock Island county population is foreign-born, with about one third of that total arriving between 2000 and 2009.<sup>31</sup> Although this demographic change has deeply changed the dynamics of the city, especially for public services, there is already a well-established need for other social services as well.

Social services in the Quad Cities area were subject to the restructuring discussed in depth by Trudeau, with many “government partnerships” established in privatization of services. Government involvement was decreased,<sup>32</sup> as the sector grew to respond to the growing needs of the population, taking on a code of “assisted self-reliance.”<sup>33</sup> The nonprofit sector, that operates social services exclusively through funding from private and public sources, was created primarily in order to minimize federal programs. The effectiveness of this shift underlies most of this research.

In other contexts, such as Minneapolis-St. Paul, services have been funded primarily by the government, similar to those established organizations within the Quad City area. Even with these funding options, there are many restrictions due to legislative reform of social welfare to the aid the foreign-born. “Non-naturalized immigrants are no longer eligible to receive many services,”<sup>34</sup> while refugees are

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<sup>30</sup> Annette Moreno – District Translator Coordinator for Rock Island/Milan school district – email correspondence

<sup>31</sup> U.S. Census Bureau, “Foreign-born individuals, Quad Cities” 2013

<sup>32</sup> “Ronald Reagan on Welfare & Poverty President of the U.S., 1981-1989; Republican Governor (CA),” accessed on January 23, 2015, [http://www.ontheissues.org/celeb/Ronald\\_Reagan\\_Welfare+\\_Poverty.htm](http://www.ontheissues.org/celeb/Ronald_Reagan_Welfare+_Poverty.htm)

<sup>33</sup> Lester M. Salamon, “The Rise of the Nonprofit Sector,” *Foreign Affairs* 73:4 (1994), 116.

<sup>34</sup> Dan Trudeau, “Junior Partner or Empowered Community? The Role of Non-profit Social Service Providers amidst State Restructuring in the US.” *Urban Studies* 45:13 (2008), 2809.

guaranteed access to some services while they adjust into American life. For the purposes of this paper, it is important to note that “nonprofits that work with immigrants and refugees are thus a good case to explore the more general challenges of empowering local communities and maintaining autonomy in the context of contemporary restructuring.”<sup>35</sup>

Originally this research was aimed at understanding specifically foundations impact, but in light of interview and research data it is clear that a more general discussion of where and how a successful nonprofit organization is funded is more appropriate for the research. In many ways, the data and research revealed that the social services of the Quad City area was too complex to simply untangle the threads haphazardly to focus on a factor that only revealed part of the truth.

### **Section III: Evaluation of Methodology, Theory and Analysis**

#### **Methodology**

In this research project, I chose to use ethnographic methods to gather data, primarily through semi-structured interviews with employees of the nonprofit sector and six months of participant observation at a nonprofit organization in 2014.

Ethnographic methods, although not uncommon to anthropology, are not widely used within the political science discipline, and so I feel it is necessary to elaborate on what

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<sup>35</sup> Dan Trudeau, “Junior Partner or Empowered Community? The Role of Non-profit Social Service Providers amidst State Restructuring in the US.” *Urban Studies* 45:13 (2008), 2809.

constitutes an ethnographic study, including the more in-depth understanding of the use of rapport, and often friendship, within this research.

The main goal of ethnographic research is “to understand and (perhaps) explain how a specific set of people experience and interpret their social and cultural environments.”<sup>36</sup> In this study, there were several benefits to using ethnographic methods. Primarily, my participant observation as an intern at a small immigrant and refugee nonprofit organization allowed me to develop an understanding of the stresses related to funding within the community, and improve the quality of the conversations for data.

Secondly, interview data was especially revealing due to the intimacy involved in the relationships with participants. While every interaction is unique, in this research project many of the participants were not only colleagues but also friends. Although this is not typical of all ethnographic research, my particular role as a colleague and friend allowed me to interact with participants with relatively few power struggles. Owten and Collinson “contend that emotional involvement and emotional reflexivity can provide a rich resource for the ethnographic researcher, rather than necessarily constituting a methodological ‘problem’ to be avoided at all costs.”<sup>37</sup>

Interview data was collected at a variety of coffee shops during the months of November and December 2014. Actual questions and discussions that occurred varied based on my rapport with the individual participant and their understanding of my

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<sup>36</sup> W. Penn Handwerker, “The Evolution Of Ethnographic Research Methods: Curiosities And Contradictions In The Qualitative Research Literature,” *Reviews In Anthropology*, 35 (2006): 106.

<sup>37</sup> Helen Owton and Jacquelyn Allen-Collinson, “Close But Not Too Close: Friendship as Method(ology) in Ethnographic Research Encounters” *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography* 43:3 (2014): 284.

project. Some participants and I just had discussions loosely tied to predetermined questions, and other interviews were very structured. The topic of funding was fairly easily discussed, as it is a common issue within the sector, although at some points nonprofit employees were more reserved and guarded in their responses. The interview guide and questions were:

### **Organizational**

1. What is the mission of your nonprofit?
  - How many individuals do you serve a month?
  - What is your official job title within the organization?
  - How many paid staff does your organization have?
2. What are the biggest obstacles that your organization faces?
  - Is funding a considerable obstacle to your organization?
  - What kinds of funding does the organization usually seek?
3. What kind of programs does your organization write grants for?
  - How large of grants do you usually apply for and receive?
  - Are these grants usually private or public?
4. Is your organization's financial stability sustainable at the moment?
  - Or, is funding an immediate concern for your organization?
5. How many individuals within your organization focus primarily on funding?
  - How many individuals focus primarily on services?
6. Do you think that your organization has a fair amount of financial security for the upcoming year?

### **Work and Personal Experiences**

7. How long have you been employed within the nonprofit sector?
  - What led you to this sector?
8. How do you personally feel about funding within the nonprofit sector?
  - Do you think that funding is distributed fairly?
  - How generous are foundations and governmental organizations with funding?
  - What affect does your organization's mission have on funding?
  - (QCAIR/Araceli): What role does ethnicity and class play in funding?
9. How often do you attend events or meetings related to funding priorities?
  - Are these comparable with those you attend for services?
10. Do you think that you are compensated competitively for your job?
11. How often do co-workers, acquaintances and friends within the nonprofit sector discuss funding?
12. Has there been times when funding has been a stressful reality for maintaining your employment or current economic status?

- Do you feel comfortable sharing with me some examples?
13. Have any of these concerns created poor conditions for your personal life?
- Can you share with me some examples?

## Theory

Forming the backbone of this research is the concept that in our increasingly globalized world, the local is global.<sup>38</sup> This implies that global systems and narratives have more local forms that occur as well. In particular this theory highlights, especially in feminism, the importance of “being more inclusive, by operating in a different climate, by emphasizing personal narratives, responsible choices and individual-level political activism, and by being comfortable with an uncertainty of knowledge.”<sup>39</sup>

In my research, this translates to an acknowledgement of the national and global social service sector’s regular affect on the funding realities for small nonprofit organizations in poor communities. As well, this theory emphasizes the necessity of personal narratives to confirm and counteract global and national narratives. Finally, and most importantly for my research, it recognizes that through qualitative methods, no definitive conclusion is offered to the issue discussed, as there may not be a single “answer.” Instead, research intends to describe the complexity of the interactions and highlight the variety of responses.

There are two more direct theories that are applied to this research: fear and tradition. Milson and Martin point out that fear in private foundations comes in two

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<sup>38</sup> Jonathon Xiaver Inda and Renato Rosaldo. *Anthropology and Globalization*. Blackwell Publishing: London (2003).

<sup>39</sup> Amber Lynn Zimmermana, M. Joan McDermottb and Christina M. Gould “The local is global: third wave feminism, peace, and social justice.” *Contemporary Justice Review* 12:1 (2009), 77.



forms: alienation, in which a foundation is afraid of causing controversy in supporting certain projects; and uncertainty, in which a foundation is concerned about the effect that funding will cause overall.<sup>40</sup> Tradition does not simply translate to restriction of causes, but also a lack of self-reflection within the foundation's priorities.<sup>41</sup> In this research, the exact realities of tradition and fear expressed themselves in different ways because nonprofit employees are reacting to these factors, not necessarily always expressing them.

## **Analysis**

It is difficult to explain accurately the ways that fear and tradition affect nonprofit organizations in this area because these two themes are extremely intertwined in the stresses of the organizations. The ways that these two factors relate to each other may not be exactly clear at first but this research aims to shed light on the implicitly complicated nature of them. The most common thread within the not-for-profit sector is the factor of funding an organization adequately. No participant failed to mention funding as a major concern for their organization, and all stressed common and different factors in the challenge.

For newer organizations, it is difficult to establish the funds for salaries, office spaces and expenses, and technological equipment. As one participant quoted a leader

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<sup>40</sup> Judith L. Millesen and Eric C. Martin, "Community Foundation Strategy: Doing Good and Monitoring the Effects of Fear, Tradition, and Serendipity," *Nonprofit and Voluntary Quarterly* 43(2014): 844.

<sup>41</sup> Judith L. Millesen and Eric C. Martin, "Community Foundation Strategy: Doing Good and Monitoring the Effects of Fear, Tradition, and Serendipity," *Nonprofit and Voluntary Quarterly* 43(2014): 841.

of a larger not-for-profit, “It’s like trying to ride a bicycle while you build it.” Who are the builders of these bicycles, these fledgling organizations? How do these organizations make decisions regarding the funding of organizations, and what can we predict to be the result of these choices?

Primarily, not-for-profits must seek a variety of sources for funding. Some are able to receive funding from more consistent sources, such as the state or federal government, that guarantee staff. Throughout the sector, the largest areas of funding from private sources (an individual, foundations, etc.) are religious, educational and human services, in that order.<sup>42</sup> Only 16% of this private funding came from foundations,<sup>43</sup> despite the large percentage of funds available within the organizations. Foundations hold about \$715 billion in assets, distributing approximately \$51 billion in 2012 in grants.<sup>44</sup> In the local sector, new organizations were unable to gain financial footing as most of their funding came from private organizations, not through the government, and only provided for programs.

The ties from the national and state are very clear in priorities and distribution of assets. For example, the areas of health and education, both certainly safe, high priorities for foundations, receive about \$5 billion in grants from foundations, while human services receives about \$3 billion.<sup>45</sup> This creates a large gap in funding for not

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<sup>42</sup> The Foundation Center, “Quick Facts about Nonprofits,” 2013, accessed December 20, 2015, <http://nccs.urban.org/statistics/quickfacts.cfm>

<sup>43</sup> The Foundation Center, “Quick Facts about Nonprofits,” 2013, accessed December 20, 2015, <http://nccs.urban.org/statistics/quickfacts.cfm>

<sup>44</sup> The Foundation Center, “Grantmaking Foundations,” 2012, accessed December 20, 2015, <http://data.foundationcenter.org/#!/foundations/all/nationwide/total/list/2012>

<sup>45</sup> The Foundation Center, “Grantmaking Foundations,” 2012, accessed December 20, 2015, <http://data.foundationcenter.org/#!/foundations/all/nationwide/total/list/2012>

only current human services but emerging local needs. In the Quad Cities, incoming foreign-born immigrants and refugees is the emerging issue that is having large effects on the community at large. In 2011, Neighborhood Partners of Rock Island<sup>46</sup> partnered with Everyday Democracy to form “study circles” to create a report detailing the current demographic shifts of the Quad Cities.

The “Changing Faces: Refugees and Immigrants in Rock Island” report brought together people of a variety of socioeconomic statuses, ethnic backgrounds and genders to discuss the influx of immigrants and refugees. The document explains that this influx is due to “affordable housing, job opportunities, successful resettlement programs, and responsive social services.”<sup>47</sup> Out of the “Action Forum,” the organization Quad City Alliance of Immigrants and Refugees, where I was an intern for six months, was created to tackle the issue. It is especially important to recognize the importance of immigrant organizing for tackling labor, housing and other issues that are fundamental for their survival.<sup>48</sup>

Before going any further into current immigrant nonprofit organizations, I will introduce the reader to the participants, who are identified with pseudonyms. Within this study, four of the nine participants worked within established medical and education medium sized nonprofit organizations. There are demographic commonalities between these individuals working within established mid-sized

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<sup>46</sup> Unique to Rock Island, the Neighborhood Partners is a collaborative of all the neighborhoods of the city to tackle important issues. The public dialogue that took place to create this report also included the Rock Island City Council, Community Caring Conference and Doris and Victor Day Foundation.

<sup>47</sup> “Changing Faces,” 4

<sup>48</sup> Joshua Hoyt, “Reflection on the Importance of Immigrant Organizing, and the Universals,” *Social Policy* 37 (2002/2003); William Bolivar, Aaron Dorfman, and Cristina Fundora, and Gerard Pean, “Unleash the Power of Immigrants... Organize!” *Social Policy* 37 (2002/2003).

nonprofits. All participants within these organizations were white, middle class, from the Midwest and had either a bachelor's or master's degree.

Laura, 53, has worked at the same medical nonprofit organization for her entire career. Federal and state Medicaid primarily funded the not-for-profit, with the organization seeking grants for equipment and furniture.<sup>49</sup> The organization did coordinate with foundations, although for larger projects such as the building of their \$7 million endowment or the recently successful capital campaign for \$5 million. Pleasant and mellow, Laura has a classic Midwestern disposition.

Another participant, Margaret, 53, was a CEO of a major medical nonprofit in Rock Island, although this organization was the largest and most complex. Serving 18,000 individuals per year, with about 4000 cases active at a time, this organization was the largest and established of any. Margaret has been working in the nonprofit sector for 26 years, and has the political moxie to show for it. Like many nonprofit employees, particularly those who are distant acquaintances, Margaret was careful in her phrasing of most answers.

A third participant, Larry, is the CEO of a small mental health not-for-profit organization. His organization serves approximately a hundred people a month, focusing on a wide variety of issues in the community. Careful but insightful, Larry has a mixture of experiences during his 30 years within the nonprofit sector. The final participant from this group was Jacob, a twenty-seven year old employee of the United

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<sup>49</sup> 96% - Medicaid; 4% - participant fees; 8% - United Way (from participant interview)

Way, who was extremely expressive in his concerns about the nonprofit sector especially as an employee of a funding organization.

Participants from immigration not-for-profits were from more diverse backgrounds: four women and one man; under the age of 40; from a variety of ethnic backgrounds; and a myriad of educational and socioeconomic opportunities. For example, Sofia is the expressive secretary and “community liaison” of a small Mexican-American ethnic organization of volunteers that serves approximately 50 individuals per month. She also is an immigrant from Spain, has a doctorate in Latin American studies, and teaches Spanish at a local college.

Then there is Esteban, a twenty-four year old from a small immigrant organization that primarily serves Mexican American clients. He is married, has a bachelor’s degree and has been working the nonprofit sector for 2 years. My rapport was minimal with Esteban, although he was very pleasant, and this gave me an opportunity to catch revealing answers often. From the same organization are two former employees, Selena and Alison.

Initially hired as a family advocate, Selena, a recent college graduate, worked primarily as a secretary during her time with the organization. Upset over just being fired, Selena’s interview was rife with critique of her former employer. Alison, also a recent graduate, was an immigration specialist for the organization. Extremely intelligent and insightful, Alison was knowledgeable and educated about the more detailed oriented procedures of the nonprofit organizational sphere. Having just quit

her job at the organization, Alison shared with Selena the stresses of attempting to find employment in the sector after a disappointing experience.

Finally, a participant who prefers the pseudonym “Luta Continua” is the executive director of an organization that serves a diverse clientele of African, Asian and Middle Eastern migrants that is more representative of Rock Island populations. An immigrant from Nigeria, Luta Continua is the only employee at her small nonprofit that serves approximately 50 clients per month. Her organization is primarily made up of volunteers, interns and a board, and is going through a drastic restructuring after an unsuccessful summer grant cycle. Luta Continua tends to air on the dramatic, but is an extremely observant and driven woman.

### *Fear*

Fear expressed itself differently in nonprofit employee interviews than the ways it’s been expressed by foundations. There were two distinct groups: established organizations that were set up before the social welfare reform of the 1990s, and the emerging immigrant organizations that are primarily underfunded. Both organizations had considerable fears about financial instability, but differed in their responses to these stresses.

For those within the established nonprofit community, the main fears were about maintaining their current government funding as the political atmosphere is constantly shifting. Laura commented that, “you’re kind of at the mercy of what they (the state congress) have decided is going to be the focus. It kind of is a pendulum

thing.” It is not uncommon for established organizations to go to great lengths to provide the services that they do.

For example, in Margaret’s organization, she explained that there was a time of great distress recently because of the organization was reaching “critical mass.” She told me that the staff was clear about the issues, “We talked about whether it's cutting back on staff, staff hours, or everyone gets a small cut.” In Laura’s organization, oftentimes the younger, on-the-ground staff was underpaid and undervalued, a very common reality for many nonprofit organizations. It was not uncommon for an employee to have another job, and in both of these ladies’ organizations there was a sense that these employees were “stretched” in their labor responsibilities.

Providing a proper salary to young employees was also a high concern to many in established organizations. Both Laura and Margaret admitted that although salaries may be somewhat competitive, the workloads of staff members were so large that it regularly affected the personal affairs of these individuals. Primarily, both women acknowledged, these employees were younger and temporary, leaving jobs suddenly and with lots of frustration. The two youngest employees, Alison and Selena, expressed similar sentiments about the workloads and expectations of the staff.

When asked about how many cases she worked a month, Alison laughed and stated, “Are you kidding me? I don't know.” Selena, freshly fired from an organization, stated that for her the biggest issue was that she hired and then was not trained for the job that she thought she would be. She was actually fired because her supervisor failed to tell her about an event that she was expected to attend, with her

boss admitting that she wasn't informed because "they didn't think I cared." It seems that frequently the youngest members of the nonprofit sector are undervalued.

Established organizations expressed concerns about spending their money responsibly, similarly to the fears that were expressed by foundations. Laura point out that the board of her organization had determined to not take in more individuals than they could possibly afford. As she put it, "we have always chosen not to dangle a carrot and not be able to provide that service." Margaret stated proudly at one point that she expected foundations to make her prove that every dollar would be put not just to good use, but perfect use. This leaves very little room for failure, creating a pattern of a large untested ideas remaining untested, and halting innovational developments.<sup>50</sup>

Immigrant organizations expressed other concerns, more directed towards fear of being misunderstood. For example, Luta continua told a story about a church that is hosting refugees and a woman that said these communities weren't welcome in the Quad City area. Explaining that if someone sat on the board with this point of view, "obviously my grant is not going to get approved." Later she added, "And that's exactly how immigrants and refugees feel. They don't want us here."

Sofia pointed out that another issue was the way that people understand immigrants as a monolithic group. "They reduce organizations to one profile," she explained, "and they don't see that it's not just immigration. It's the health of a neighborhood, it's a well-being of the adults, the children." Luta continua also noted

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<sup>50</sup> Kevin Jennings, "How Foundations Can Be the Risk Takers They Want to Be," *Chronicle of Philanthropy* 26:4 (2014).



this issue, stating that, “I think that in the Quad Cities, people don't know about immigrants and refugees.”

Jacob thought that this was detrimental for the sector as it added to slow innovation and showed a lack of action. He pointed out that for funders to really see the importance in an issue, they must see the action on the ground, and therefore, “Young staff should be put out there.” Jacob had an interesting perspective as the only participant directly involved in a funding organization. He was not shy about his feelings that the nonprofit sector was lost in fear, tradition and power dynamics. Fear, he felt, stemmed mostly from “taking the brunt of it (a program, agency, etc.) going nowhere.” As well, he felt that fear of losing sight of the importance of the value statement of the organization deeply fed the lack of funding that many small nonprofit organizations felt. Institutional values, he pointed out, changed slowly, “almost to a fault.”

### *Tradition*

Tradition plays an unusual role in how employees conceptualize the limitations placed on them by funders. It seems that there was a double-edged sword in the age of organizations and their ability to maintain financial stability. If an organization was new, it simply did not have access to the resources available in the 1980s when the nonprofit sector was being built. Yet, if the organization was new, foundations saw it as risky because they had not built that relationship yet with it. As Margaret put it, “Now it's at a time where there is no money, and it's hard to become a new

organization that is funded. You have to be in the door, especially with some of those private organizations. Once you get in, you're in. There's really a challenge because they aren't growing, they aren't accepting new.”

Employees from established organizations embraced the idea of the new reckless nonprofit organization, arguably for good reason. Jacob pointed out that United Way was “fiercely protective” of its resources, although it is invested in the organization that Alison and Selena formerly worked for. Alison, an immigration specialist, explained that several times she felt that she was on the edge of legal problems while working on specific cases while there. Although the organization is aware of the difficulties, Jacob argued that the funding organization kept it as a priority because, “There is a huge need to save it so we can grow this thing, and we need to grow it, and we know that.”

Larry thought that these matters depended on the foundation, as some “like to be on the cutting-edge,” but others do not. This was not an opinion shared by other members of the nonprofit community though. Jacob felt that tradition was a huge liability to most organizations, as there was a tendency to be “dangerously conservative” in their funding possibilities. Esteban pointed out that tradition held back organizations because it was viewed through a purely capitalistic lens. Passionately, he exclaimed, “This isn't a business!” He pointed out that nonprofit organizations should not be so competitively poised against each other by foundations.

Regardless, both types of employees were aware of how tradition stagnated the growth and innovation of the sector.

Another angle on the issue of tradition is at first rather obvious: being a minority organization makes immigrant organizations uncomfortable for foundations to address. As Jacob repeatedly stated that organizations such as United Way do not want to get overly involved in “divisive issues.” Sophia admitted that being an immigrant advocacy group meant that “you are kind of floating all the time” politically. When asked to speak more about this, she explained that:

“There are battles, that are difficult to be apart of, when stakes are high it is difficult to be an advocate because you have to measure to what degree you are going to speak with and on behalf of the people who have the most to lose. Because those people that have the most to lose are not the people who are going to be funding you. So, they rarely coincide. So you need to know how to play politics at various levels, and that's a whole other professional profile to have, and it's a very difficult one to have, and in larger cities it's sometimes a little easier. But in small communities it's very complicated.”

#### *Other Issues: Competition, Community Connections, and Stagnation*

In conclusion, I would like to highlight three other factors that were noticed within research, tied strongly to the neoliberal standards placed on nonprofit organizations from both private and public sources of funding: competition, community advocacy and stagnation of developing innovative programs. Each of these factors could be studied more thoroughly by researchers with more resources at their disposal.

Competition between organizations for funding highlights the ways that neoliberal politics act themselves out not only within the foundation's values, but also in the values of the nonprofits and their reactions to each other. For example, Laura stated that “it shouldn't be about competition,” but it often was.

Many statements contained this circular type of argument, even from myself. I stated something similar in my conversation with Jacob. Esteban also pointed out that, “You know it isn’t about the money, but it is about the money.” organizations. Trudeau argues that this sentiment is a common one, “As nonprofits compete with one another for government funding, some organisations attempt to cultivate an entrepreneurial ethos and adopt businesslike practices in order to increase the chances for success.”<sup>51</sup>

Lack of funding in my experience and others also slowed the political action of nonprofits in favor of their communities. In my internship, I had several conversations about not attending certain meetings, protests or even stating with any political tone our objectives for the community. This is a common experience, as Trudeau points out that “attempts to constrain non-profits’ political speech by denying funding have made the nonprofit sector more cautious about engaging in activities that could be construed as political and/or partisan.”<sup>52</sup>

Immigration organizations particularly felt that the stress of funding, and the resulting mishandled situations, distanced them from the communities. Luta continua pointed out that immigrants and refugees were not involved in her organization much at all, with the board consisting primarily of Americans. Sofia explained that because her organization did not have this stress on

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<sup>51</sup>Dan Trudeau, “Junior Partner or Empowered Community? The Role of Non-profit Social Service Providers amidst State Restructuring in the US.” *Urban Studies* 45:13 (2008), 2808.

<sup>52</sup> Dan Trudeau, “Junior Partner or Empowered Community? The Role of Non-profit Social Service Providers amidst State Restructuring in the US.” *Urban Studies* 45:13 (2008), 2808.

funding, it lessened the truly important voices of her organization. Instead, “people from the outside” like her had to serve as “community liaisons.”

For immigrant organizations, there was a sense of risk involved in heavily pursuing advocacy. This restriction of nonprofit advocacy work has the power to isolate the organization from the community, reducing services provided and individuals served. Selena pointed out that, “I tried to take on two extra outside projects to do outreach, but every time I would report to them they would say that “Just so you know that's not a priority.” In Trudeau’s study, 38-49% of respondents found the government to be constraining in their interactions with communities.<sup>53</sup>

When asked directly if the ties with the community were healthy, Selena said, “Now it's hard to get them to trust us again, and they are lacking connection to the people.” Ultimately, financial stability and autonomy allows “nonprofits to engage in advocacy, community building, group expression and other empowerment activities that are associated with civil society (Salamon, 2002). As entrées to civil society, non-profits may provide local community members with opportunities to claim rights or fulfil obligations of citizenship.”<sup>54</sup>

Both organizations overall felt the profound lack of innovation in the area due to lack of funding. As Larry pointed out ultimately it will take resources to create better social services in the area. “Innovation takes time, and money.” He continued, “A key business precept is that you don't innovate when times are good. You have to

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<sup>53</sup> Organizations also received almost 50% of their funding from government sources within this study. Dan Trudeau, “Junior Partner or Empowered Community? The Role of Non-profit Social Service Providers amidst State Restructuring in the US.” *Urban Studies* 45:13 (2008), 2809.

<sup>54</sup> Dan Trudeau, “Junior Partner or Empowered Community? The Role of Non-profit Social Service Providers amidst State Restructuring in the US.” *Urban Studies* 45:13 (2008), 2809.

innovate when times are good. You have to find a way to change things up.” This stagnating process of innovation is only exacerbated by the challenges of competition and fear of direct advocacy work.

## **Reflection**

It has been almost a year since I first started at Quad City Alliance for Immigrants and Refugees. Hopeful, nervous and youthful, I entered the nonprofit sector like many young employees, reaching out for a meaningful career with which to apply my liberal arts degree. Similar to Jacob, I had already explored the traditional business path, finding that the “daily grind” did not seem worth it. At QCAIR, I worked a desk job, limited in my contact with clients and extremely aware of the precarious situation of our nonprofit as I organized data, finances and grants for six months.

In the end, I felt very similarly to Selena and Alison about the sector. Many times in our interview both girls expressed bitterness about the outcomes of the experience. In particular, Selena experienced an amount of sexist attitude from, surprisingly, her female supervisors who preferred her male counterpart to her. Esteban claimed that some girls simply did not have “the balls” to deal with the situation, but Selena pointed out that part of the problem was her direct attitude. While my boss was luckily a strong female, I experienced treatment from those within and outside of QCAIR that seemed to consider my role to be minimal and my influence to be fleeting. This is a common complaint among highly intelligent, educated and

professional young women in the nonprofit sector, especially as interns and lower level employees.<sup>55</sup>

Perhaps ultimately, doubts about working in the nonprofit sector were well founded. After six months of consistency and professionalism, Jacob's sentiment that, "Nonprofits can't fix systemic inequity - there's no way to nonprofit your way out of systemic inequity" seemed apt. Many times in the summer, I experienced community members making ethnocentric, sexist and classist statements, regardless of the topic their organization was addressing. It was challenging to endure these forms of inequity that haunted my clients.

Misconceptions about immigration issues abound within the Quad Cities area, with particularly recent organizations facing the brunt of misinformation. For example, while I was working at QCAIR, we had a phone call from an older man who was claiming that we were doing illegal activities for participating in discussions about possibly hosting Guatemalan refugee children during the summer. This man was so upset, so misinformed, and so fierce that my boss attempted to take over the conversation before abruptly ending it. In another experience, on the same subject, an older woman felt it was okay to yell loudly in a public coffee shop about how these children just needed to be sent back.

In many ways, I suspect that this misinformation about immigration topics feeds into the issues of fear and tradition that foundations are experiencing: by not knowing definitively about this issue, they let preconceptions guide their decisions.

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<sup>55</sup> Nan Alamilla Boyd and Jillian Sandell, "Unpaid and Critically Engaged: Feminist Interns in the Nonprofit Industrial Complex," *Feminist Teacher* 22:3 (2013).

Boards, as Jacob points out, tend to be “pushed by leaders of their organization, are pushed so hard to look at past precedent, and it becomes a real sticking point.” These boards have been lead to believe that what happened in the past works for the present, and have been unable to adapt.

More directly though, I do not think that foundations can possibly fix this issue alone. In fact, these organizations struggle to maintain their financial stability directly because of the limits of government funding, locally, on the state level, and nationally. Jacob and Luta continua both pointed out that organizations such as QCAIR were created without the proper beginning funds to truly make them successful. These organizations struggle then with a fundamental issue that makes it harder than ever to start a new issue. Without a proper reboot of our current tax system, the success of nonprofit organizations will continue to be static, determined by private interests, and fail to address necessary changing realities of individual communities.

All the same, with current tax code as it is, I would like to leave the nonprofit community with a thought from Jacob. Discussing how foundations are limited in their scope of effective allocation of resources, he noted that United Way did not use all of the resources available to tackle the issue of immigrants and refugees within this area. Speaking about corporations in particular, he expressed that “...we fail to engage with them on a this level, we don't set up these organizations to succeed. But we feel like we've lost out on something, but the money is only there for us when we have a good idea.”



I urge the sector to consider the economic and humanistic costs of not organizing immigrant issues in a more progressive way. Ultimately, a generation of teenagers is under the influence of a new nation, and this can be extremely confusing. Already we have a prevalence of PTSD in the community, with cases arising such as a young refugee man driving his vehicle into a building in Moline. Century Woods Apartments of Rock Island is already challenged to meet the housing demands, and the school system is seeing dramatic changes demographically. In my own experience within this sector, the lack of funding for immigrant and refugee issues directly correlates to the area's greatest economic, political and social issues. It is time for either the private or public sectors, or a pragmatic united front, to acknowledge the positive impact properly equipping nonprofit organizations can have for the future of our community.

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