

8

*Sector Theorists Should Be Wary
of the Nonprofit Industrial Complex*

ANA CLARISSA ROJAS DURAZO

I write at the historical crux of a pandemic moment, an escalating climate crisis, and a post–George Floyd turn toward abolitionist thought and action. The tragedies of this moment in time have come alongside unforeseen changes to our social and daily lives, leading to a heightened time of collective and self-reflection. The unpredictability of our safety and well-being amidst tragic consequences marked by an inordinate loss of life in the material and social sense have insisted we take stock and assess what is most important – we want to keep ourselves and our loved ones safer as we move forward, building the future we want to live in.

The casualties of this historic moment have arrived differently on different bodies and peoples. Black, Brown, and Indigenous peoples – in particular, those most marginalized racially and economically – have suffered the greatest consequences. I am writing in California, where a startlingly high rate of those dying from COVID-19 are Latinx of working age. In California, 73% of people aged 35–49 who have died of COVID-19 are Latino (Romero, 2021). I am writing in the city of Oakland, where fury over centuries of police violence has led to powerful social movements that are causing people to imagine and organize societies in which Black lives matter. The unceded Ohlone lands where I write are also known as Huichin, the ancestral homeland of the Confederated Villages of Lisjan. Indigenous women here have organized a land trust called Sogorae Te’ to heal and transform the genocidal and patriarchal legacies of colonization. Indigenous women are leading the work of rematriation, that is, working to restore the sacred relationship between Indigenous peoples and their ancestral lands while honoring their matrilineal ancestral languages and cultural ways.

In this chapter I invite us to consider the layout of the social landscape, its organizational forms, and institutional actors from the perspective of those most marginalized in our society. In particular,

I invite us to think about the nonprofit sector in its complex relationship to the state, to the market, and to those most disenfranchised and their relevant social movements for just and decolonial futures. This is a potent time to study, interrogate, and engage in a much-needed assessment that considers what is and is not working about this societal layout for Black, Indigenous, and people of color. I invite readers to ask what is contributing to continued disenfranchisement and death and to engage in fruitful dialogue that sparks a creative imagining of decolonial, antiracist social worlds and futures that are more just.

Many scholars have written about the historic entanglements of the state and the nonprofit sector. In its most recent history, the nonprofit sector in the United States was formalized in 1969 through the Tax Reform Act, a law that produced Section 501(c)3 in the Internal Revenue Service Code that grants tax-exempt status to charitable organizations (Internal Revenue Service, 2023). Because nonprofits are typically dependent on the state for financial and other resources, many scholars have raised concerns about the impact the state has on the nonprofit sector. Less attention has been focused on the state-driven shaping of the nonprofit sector and its effects on marginalized communities and the social movements that many of them are ostensibly designed to serve. This chapter addresses some of the understudied ways in which the deep intertwining of the state, the market, and nonprofit organizations have produced harmful consequences for Indigenous peoples, people of color, and their related social movements.

Ruth Wilson Gilmore discusses the term “shadow state” to signal the expansion of nonprofit service delivery organizations amid the neoliberal state’s social abandonment in the 1970s (Gilmore, 2017). Referencing Wolch’s (1990) notion of the shadow state, Gilmore (2017) speaks to the wide-scale withdrawal of government services in the 1970s and the rise of the nonprofit service-oriented industry in the 1980s. According to Gilmore, the shrinking of state social services amplified the idea and structure that uplifts the market as the most efficient to capably meet the people’s needs.

Under neoliberal economic arrangements, the state’s primary accountability shifts from the *people* to the *economic sector*. The nonprofit industry, which has also been labeled the third sector, stepped in to absorb what it could of the remaining unmet need, but its capacity and structural arrangements limit both its ability to do so and its work. This shift

marks the third sector's turn away from political organizing toward social-service delivery. As its 501(c)(3) structure implies, the form of the nonprofit necessitates constant engagement with the state and the market; these entanglements set up the possibilities for its existence.

Amid professionalizing and fiduciary responsibilities, the nonprofit structure is principally accountable to its funders and the state, a turn that subordinates if not outrightly exterminates political organizing. As movement leader and elder Madonna Thunder Hawk (Oohenumpa Lakota from the Cheyenne River Sioux) observes, "The focus turned to raising money to keep the organization going, while the actual work of activism became secondary and watered down. And when the money disappeared, the work did too. Before we focused on how to organize to make change, but now most people will only work within funding parameters" (Thunder Hawk, 2017, p. 105).

Under tax laws and public- and foundation-grant guidelines, political nonprofit work (organizing and/or political activity) is at best belittled and underfunded; at worst it is banned. Yet, in the twenty-first century, the nonprofit model has become the dominant organizational form for social movements.

Some activists express dismay for the ways nonprofitization removes social, political, and financial power from the most marginalized communities and their efforts for social change (INCITE!, 2017). As concerns grew over the nonprofit structure's growing impact on social movements, activists in the early 2000s started using the term *nonprofit industrial complex* to describe how the structuring and expansion of the nonprofit sector reflects the interests of the state and economic sectors while also curtailing social movements concerned with social, political, and economic injustice. The INCITE! movement and affiliated scholar-activists at the University of California, Santa Barbara hosted a conference entitled, "The Revolution Will Not Be Funded: The Non-Profit Industrial Complex" in 2004. The term "nonprofit industrial complex" stems from prior activist engagement with the phrase *prison industrial complex*, which gained popularity in the late 1990s and references the ways the interests of the state and the economy converge through policing, surveillance, and imprisonment instead of addressing the social, political, and economic issues that undergird heightened police violence and the incarceration of communities of color. (This term, in turn, is a reference to Eisenhower's use of the *military industrial complex*, which he used

to describe the intertwining of the state and the warfare industry that were gaining dominance in determining the country's political goals.) The term "prison industrial complex" gained popularity at the 1998 conference held at the University of California, Berkeley, "Critical Resistance: Beyond the Prison Industrial Complex." According to Critical Resistance, an organization that was created at the conference, the term "prison industrial complex" speaks to the ways the interests of the state and the economy converge through policing, surveillance, and imprisonment instead of addressing the social, political, and economic issues that undergird heightened police violence and incarceration of Black, Brown and Indigenous communities. The term "nonprofit industrial complex" builds on these prior concepts to express how state and economic sector interests converge through the structuring and expansion of the nonprofit sector and how this convergence curtails social movements concerned with social, political, and economic injustice.

Among the concerns encapsulated in the concept of the nonprofit industrial complex is a situation in which nonprofit organizations that purport to address social problems are ideologically moved to secure consistent streams of funding first instead of organizing for social change. Worse yet, in the process some nonprofits perpetuate and even exacerbate the social justice issues they claim to address. The nonprofitization of social movements strips them of efficacy, making them look like the white Western capitalist markets from whence nonprofit corporate forms emerged. This marketization, monetization, and professionalization of the nonprofit sector creates a system in which often well-meaning individuals and organizations profit from the misfortunes of others (e.g., by monetizing their pain in the form of stories sold to funders). They do so without making systematic change and often while entrenching and exacerbating the authority structures that are to blame for the problems in the first place. In other words, the nonprofit structure becomes a path to maintaining an unjust status quo and legitimating unequal social orders alongside the state and economic interests that produce such unjust arrangements and outcomes. Rather than creating a space that protects people from the overreach of both the state and the market, the nonprofit structure urges organizations toward participating in the same mechanisms that have entrenched social problems deep into the fabric of our society.

8.1 The Nonprofit Industrial Complex: Three Critiques

By partnering with the public and private sectors, the nonprofit sector extends interests that continue to subjugate Indigenous peoples, women, people of color, and other minority groups. This is particularly problematic because one rationale for the nonprofit sector is its role in remedying flaws – particularly those affecting marginalized communities – in the market and in government systems. This dissonance between the purported purpose of the sector and its actual institutional structure and sociocultural results merits deeper examination.

This section of the chapter examines three aspects of this issue in particular. The first is the state-marketization of the nonprofit sector through the corporate model, grantmaking, and state activity. These factors ensure that the interests of the state and the economy structurally reflect dominant, economic interests and ignore or exacerbate harms to marginalized communities. The second is the nonprofitization of social movements. Organizations gain dominant priority in terms of their economic survival (funding), identity, and economic structuring, while attention to social-movement work is subordinated if not left by the wayside. The third is the state's authority to use coercion and force – including policing – to address what it perceives to be social problems and issues. When the nonprofit sector is intertwined with the state in addressing social problems, it becomes complicit in the process of engaging policing and coercion to meet the state's – rather than the people's – objectives. Overall, these three points, addressed in turn below, examine the ways in which white supremacy is promoted through the state and capitalist structuring of the nonprofit sector, disadvantaging the interests and voices of communities of color and the voices of Black, Indigenous, and people of color.

8.1.1 Ideology for Sale: The State-Marketization of the Nonprofit Sector

While contemporary theories of the nonprofit sector suggest a three-sector system in which markets are distinct from the state and nonprofits are distinct from both markets and the state, a view of financial flows between these three institutions reveals that they are, in fact, part of the same industrial complex. This means that not only does money flow from the market to the state and from the state to nonprofits

(as well as directly from the market to nonprofits), the interests that maintain these financial flows are linked as well.

Many scholars have documented the white colonialist interests that have undergirded American capitalism historically since the time of the founding of the US government and into the current era. Cedric Robinson coined the term *racial capitalism* to examine the ways that racialized exploitation reinforces capital accumulation and vice versa (Robinson, 2019). Put simply by Gilmore (2018), “racial capitalism is all capitalism. There was not one minute in the entire story of capitalism that it was not racial” (p. 14). What is less often acknowledged is that the nonprofit system is rooted – financially and philosophically – in the same market and state institutions, and that despite claims that nonprofits are working to address and resolve social problems, they are funded by the same market and state sources that instantiate racial capitalism, such as grantmaking and funding requirements. For example, grantmakers identify the specific interests, issues, and methodologies they will and will not fund, thus contributing to less democratic control and more centralized, self-interested control in the nonprofit system. As long as the primary funders of nonprofit efforts remain private industry heads (who benefit from the market capitalist system that subjugates women and people of color) and state actors (who are elected and maintain power by support from dominant sectors and capitalist-funded interests), the flow of funding and power to the nonprofit sector will continue to be explicitly shaped by interests that benefit from the continuation of specific power structures and social dynamics that disadvantage women and people of color.

If the sources of nonprofit funding emerge from unequal capitalist and state sources that accumulate power and wealth in the hands of the few, then funding will go toward that which continues such unequal capitalist and state social arrangements. In other words, to paraphrase the title of the book *The Revolution Will Not Be Funded*, the government and the market will not fund movements whose aim is to dismantle injustices. Doing so would cause them to fund the social transformation of racial capitalism, which instantiates the racial inequities and social violence that targets and structurally subordinates Indigenous and people of color in the first place. As I have written before, “Paolo Freire [Brazilian scholar and activist] once said that violence is an instrument of terror intended to immobilize the opponent; it stands then that the non-profit industrial complex is guilty

of deploying the violence of non-profitization, an attempt to sink our movements” (Rojas Durazo, 2017, 126). This chapter builds on activist work since the early 2010s and invites us to consider some of the ways nonprofitization “immobilizes” the movements for justice wielded by marginalized communities.

8.1.2 Pathologizing Social Issues and Social Movements

One way that state and market actors target and disempower women and people of color – as well as their social movements – is by invoking a Western, scientific approach to the diagnosis of social problems. Some pathologize social ills through individualizing a problem instead of occluding the sociopolitical context that, through inequity, is responsible for producing the social problem. This practice creates significant issues that prevent us from holistically viewing and addressing the problems that continue to be pervasive in society – particularly those that affect and disenfranchise peoples of color.

When we presume that the role of the nonprofit sector is to “solve social problems,” we invoke a problem-centric, medical model of diagnosis and treatment. For example, identifying the personal and social dynamics that lead to problems like domestic violence or child abuse could be considered good faith efforts to address and remedy the sources of these problems. However, identifying and classifying social ills within an already racial, capitalist order contributes to the pathologizing and targeting of Indigenous and communities of color. Building on our prior analysis that exposes the ways the state and capitalist economy are principally invested in self-perpetuation, it follows that deflecting the culpability for social ills produced by this social order leads to the pathologizing of Black, Indigenous, and women of color, and even our communities as themselves being responsible for social problems like violence. As a result, instead of rightly identifying these communities as targets of the state and market-perpetrated violence and subjugation, they become the suspect – surveilled, punished, incarcerated, separated, and disappeared – targeted doubly by the imagined ways they are viewed as principally responsible for producing social problems.

Using a scientific or medical lens, the state and market diagnose social problems like violence as originating at the level of the individual, a view that deflects attention from the ways gender and racial violence are structured by the state and the economy into the social

fabric of society. Structuring society by race and gender leads to increased exposure of women to gender-based violence (Heise et al. 2002) and the disproportionate targeting, arresting, imprisoning, and killing of peoples of color (see Rucker and Richeson 2021). These phenomena are even worse for LGBTQ members of these communities (Jones 2021, Truman and Morgan 2022). While it is the state and the economy that structure the conditions that produce social problems, those conditions are rarely – if ever – addressed as a target of analysis, political interrogation, and mobilization (through grants and funding). In other words, when the state or the market invokes the authority of science to direct attention to a problem within a community of color, it misdirects attention away from the actual root cause, which is endemic in the racial capitalist system itself and within the coercive power of the state (to which point we will turn in the next section).

One way this misdirection happens systematically is through non-profitization, a government-controlled process that regulates and prohibits a nonprofit's engagement with politics. Containing the political engagement of nonprofits limits the potential for social transformation, but it also conditions the possibility for the state-based, economic, or institutional violence against targeted groups like women and peoples of color to be relegated outside the scope of nonprofit work. Therefore, this violence is imagined to be disparate or dislodged from the interrelated, interpersonal violence within these targeted communities.

Rather than naming and considering the long history and present-day reality of state-based violence that targets these communities, the racial, capitalist state uses non-profitization to frame *individual* and *interpersonal* issues as legitimate problems to spend time and money addressing, which leads society to ignore the *systemic* problems that the racial, capitalist state itself produces. For example, I have written in a prior essay about migrant women who are violently targeted by the border patrol or the police. Antiviolence organizations are structured toward silencing this type of violence by government agents; they are “paid” to turn their eye solely to what is deemed the legitimate and fundable social problem: women attacked by an intimate partner or domestic violence (Rojas Durazo, 2017). Nonprofits are placed in a precarious relationship to the state and other funders, whose monetary support they ultimately want to secure. This structural precarity functions as a barrier, blocking organizations from taking to task or challenging violence committed by state actors and agencies. This state

of precarity is ultimately a means for co-opting or redirecting the energies of nonprofits, making them organize, behave, and operate in ways that might differ from their intent, and it merits further consideration in the literature.

As stated earlier, the Western medical model of disease deflects the political causation of social problems, instead individualizing the origin of a problem/illness. Likewise, the term *medical industrial complex*, yet another partnering of the state and capitalism by way of medical and pharmaceutical corporations, co-opts social justice issues by taking them under its jurisdiction. Just as the criminalization of violence against women emerged alongside the growth of the prison industrial complex, the medicalization of violence against women is closely linked to the growing privatization and corporatization of health care (Rojas Durazo, 2016). Through policies such as health practitioner mandatory-reporting policies, the medical industrial complex interfaces with the prison industrial complex to support state and economic interests in the criminalization of violence against women. For instance, mandatory-reporting policies require that health-care providers report suspected abuse to law enforcement. But survivor advocates argue that these policies disregard a survivor's choice in the matter of reaching out to law enforcement, especially when the survivor could be revictimized and under increased danger of being arrested or deported (Rojas Durazo, 2016). In a racial, capitalist economy, the medical industrial complex and the prison industrial complex principally promote profit, often at the expense and victimization of the most marginalized members of society, such as women of color.

The medicalization of social problems in communities of color is driven by an agenda to depoliticize our social movements. The racial, hierarchical, and organizational structures of corporations and the state are extended to nonprofit organizations, which are increasingly viewed as the "legitimate" ways to organize ourselves and pursue social change. In this way, our social movements become corporatized mini models of the market economy, driven by funding streams and concerned with survival and success of their organizations instead of social change.

Adopting a corporate structure alters the makeup of grassroots, horizontal movements and organizations into hierarchical, professionalized establishments that have limited power to enact change, and that have CEOs and CFOs to dominate them. In my work during and

since the antiviolenence movement of the 1990s, I have witnessed the development and growth of private and public funding that encourages, or requires, a “system-based” response. The nonprofitization of the antiviolenence movement in the 1990s, for example, led to organizations being coerced to work alongside or within racial, capitalist, and white supremacist structures. Inviting – or even requiring – nonprofits to be at the table within such circumstances extended professionalization and hierarchical structuring to their organizations, redirecting their efforts toward system-supporting activities like social-service delivery. Social services – and the turn toward social servicization as a dominant, fundable aspect of the nonprofit – thus limited the amount of time, energy, and imagination nonprofits could devote to social transformation.

8.1.3 Invoking the Coercive Power of the State: Violence and Criminalization

Charles Tilly (1990) identified the coercive use of force as one of the key distinguishing features of government institutions. Whether this use of force is maintained by democracy or autocracy is almost irrelevant – the point is that one of the ways state power is mobilized is through the use of force against the citizenry in order to enforce its will. As I have discussed in this chapter, many scholars view the nonprofit sector as either deeply entwined with (in terms of interests, finances, and will) or as a direct extension of the state (Gilmore, 2017; Rodriguez, 2017; Thunder Hawk, 2017). The most obvious evidence of this interconnectedness is the granting of specific tax benefits to nonprofit organizations to enhance their ability to receive both legitimacy and funding. Nonprofit organizations enjoy significant tax benefits, and some (those designated as 501(c)(3) charities) also benefit from economic incentives such as tax-deductible donations. This entwining can be considered a symbolic, coercive force through which the state and the economy affect the life and work of a nonprofit. Through the nonprofit structure, a nonprofit’s economic outlook becomes its dominant aspect, while its other work outside of its economic survival and identity becomes a byproduct of its funding. In other words, an organization’s political autonomy from the state, grantmakers, and the economic sector shrinks as their accountability shifts from their prior constituents or *raison d’être* to funding-stream sources.

Not only are the financial connections between the state and the nonprofit sector formal and explicit, in many cases – particularly in situations in which communities or people of color and the state may have discord or opposing interests – the nonprofit structure also links nonprofits with military and policing interests in ways that often disadvantage peoples of color and their voices. The role of policing in peaceful protest and the role of the military and other federal bodies in immigration-related concerns are just a few of the most obvious and high-profile spaces in which nonprofit interests must institutionally align with state interests and state-sanctioned force.

As Angela Davis (2000) astutely observed, violence is not an unexpected aberration in the order of things; rather, violence is the knife that cuts and the thread that sews the racist imperial nation together: thus, violence is the order of things. The state functions not only to deploy violence but to organize it as well. As I wrote in an earlier essay, violence “creates and separates nation-states, slices us into genders and sexes, Global North and South, distances the suburbs from the inner cities, Brown and [B]lack from [w]hite” (Rojas Durazo, 2017, p. 121). The nonprofit industry, with its structural embeddedness in the state, is unavoidably summoned to be complicit with the violence the state fosters. The neoliberal state acts through incorporation, and our task is to assess the fallout.

When antiviolence movements are structured to participate directly in criminal proceedings by way of funded positions in district attorney offices or in police education and engagement opportunities, grassroots organizing and the potential for social transformation is squandered into the role of advocacy within the limits of the criminalization process and the criminal system. Creative solutions and imagination that might lead to the deep transformation of the root causes of domestic violence, for example, are siphoned into programmed responses to “call the cops,” which action exposes Black, Brown, Indigenous and migrant communities to revictimization and potentially the entire criminal and detention response and process at the hands of the police. Through funding streams, the antiviolence movement is entrenched in the prison and detention industrial complex.

As Wolch (1990) described, the nonprofit industrial complex enlists a dynamic of collaboration with the state, constricting a group’s or a movement’s autonomy. Political imagination, one of the most vital nutrients to a social movement, is particularly affected by this

arrangement. In the case of antiviolenence feminist movements, such an entrenchment in practice builds an alliance between the antiviolenence movement and the state. Through this alliance, the state furthers the ideological myth that it is not responsible for violence, thus evading accountability for it. The state is instead imagined and legitimated as an antiviolenence partner to the antiviolenence movement.

Dylan Rodriguez (2017) studied the ways such partnering or collaboration has its roots in the state's conspiratorial practices. He cited the example of COINTELPRO, which launched deliberate strikes to halt the rise of liberation struggles in the United States around the same time that the nonprofit industrial complex was forged. Rodriguez referenced Robert Allen's (1990) *Black awakening in capitalist America*, a pivotal, early, and astute assessment of the role white philanthropic organizations played in facilitating violent attempts to repress Black, Indigenous, Latinx, and other Third World liberation movements in the 1960s and 1970s. Allen argued that philanthropic efforts to absorb moderate Black capitalist or electoral-based Black organizations facilitated the targeting, criminalization, and elimination of more radical elements and leadership, which impeded, altogether eliminated, or literally killed some of the most potent leadership of contemporary social movements.

One of the ways the state moved this agenda forward in the late 1960s is through the Kerner Commission, which framed civil disobedience, riots, and similar public outcry among marginalized communities as violence. The Kerner Commission was a forerunner to the National Commission on the Causes and Prevention of Violence, a federally appointed body assigned to the task of investigating and making policy recommendations on "the problem of 'lawless acts' of violence," such as disrespecting public officials and the law or violently disrupting public order (Reiss, 1993, p. x). By calling violence "lawless," this commission was tasked to create the idea that violence is outside, and in opposition to, the jurisdiction of the state. The commission also labeled resistance strategies as criminal or behavioral issues, relegating them to the prison industrial complex or the medical industrial complex, respectively. Using these frameworks further individualized notions of violence and undergirded the turn toward the social servicization of violence against women, and the state slipped itself out of scrutiny for its role in the production, organization, and deployment of violence.

Gramsci's notion of "common sense" illustrates the ways through which consent among marginalized communities is achieved through the state's education and ideological disciplining (Gramsci, 1971). "Common sense" is a kind of ideological coercion that emerges through culture and an array of social institutions; along with the nonprofit, prison, and medical industrial complexes, "common sense" produces hegemonic rule. In the case of the antiviolence movement, as the state posits itself as an ally in ending violence against women, the antiviolence movement grows its dependence on the state's ideology of violence – in addition to its funding. Through funding and the disbursement of ideology, our society comes to expect and even need prisons, psychiatrists, and medicine as the imagined solution to the elimination of violence against women. This is executed most directly in the front lines of the nonprofit sector.

Physician, cultural, and earth worker Rupa Marya and Raj Patel's (2021) incisive *Inflamed: Deep Medicine and the Anatomy of Injustice* seeks to displace the dominance social institutions wield in their supposed ability to address violence and social problems. Marya and Patel proposed the term *deep medicine* to suggest that if the causes of violence and illness are tied to systemic oppression and target marginalized communities through colonial, racial, and sexual structural inequities, then their true remedies lie outside these institutions. "Practitioners of modern medicine," Marya posited, "are not trained to be healers." Because the causes of illness and harm lie outside the patient, doctors are at a loss: "The healing process must involve restructuring the world to make it a safe place for survivors to flourish – in other words, deep wounds require deep medicine" (p. 70). Deep medicine is a call for courageous action to dismantle/transform the structures that give rise to gross inequities as the very source of harm, violence, and illness. Marya and Patel's work invites us to deeply reckon – to account for the myriad coercive powers of the state and its state violence, and to set forth in implementing practices and structures to guide us toward another way of living.

8.2 An Application

As stated earlier, the United States uses racial capitalism to ensure the continuation of structures that support white supremacy. Although we are taught to think of racism as the expression of overt racist attitudes

(e.g., when politicians express racist attitudes), white supremacy is often structured in ways that might be more subtle and difficult to discern as such, even manifesting in ways that purport to address issues faced by communities of color. White supremacist structures and attitudes are embedded in the nonprofit sector as it derives these structures and attitudes from its state and market counterparts.

While working in the “Latina program” at the Support Network for Battered Women in 1995, I learned that an immigrant Latina had been brutally beaten by “la Migra” (immigration law enforcement). In response, I wrote an op-ed on behalf of the program that opposed all forms of violence against Latinas, including both domestic violence and anti-immigrant state violence. The executive director’s approval was needed prior to publishing anything, and when I approached her with the piece, she told me the organization’s board would never allow such an opinion to represent it because our organization was not allowed to take political stances. Apparently, the INS-ICE beating (but not domestic violence) qualified as a political issue (Rojas Durazo, 2017).

In this example, my work with Latinas serves as an example of the many ways ethnic or race-specific programs have become a staple in nonprofits and antiviolence programs. These programs are anchored in the logic of the liberalist project of multiculturalism, but this organizational strategy employs and furthers some of the pinnacle logic of white supremacy – the assumption of universal whiteness that structurally others/marginalizes communities of color. In a similar way to how white supremacy is structured in the larger society, the use of multiculturalist ideals permit nonprofits and antiviolence organizations to continue using a hierarchically organized white supremacist structure for distributing resources (e.g., salary, benefits, and travel opportunities). However, this results in giving programs designed to serve communities of color within larger organizations the smallest share of their organization’s economic resources. White supremacy is also structured in organizations through other means, such as decision-making power. Although white supremacist arrangements seem inconsistent with organizational objectives to prioritize diversity in principle and foster and promote relationships with peoples of color inside and outside of organizations, they nonetheless persevere through various aspects of hierarchical organization in nonprofits.

As I have addressed throughout this chapter, the political move to structure violence as a crime created the notion that violence is a crime.

The contemporary vernacular that normatively conflates violence with crime through such terminology as “violent crimes” or “hate crimes” reflects relatively recent iterations emerging through the prison industrial complex. Violence is imagined as a crime to serve the interests of racial capitalism and the racial state. For example, through the criminalization of domestic violence, an individual perpetrator is imagined as the sole party responsible for violence, which buttresses the state’s notion that prisons are the solution to domestic violence. However, the prison industrial complex has been disastrous to the safety of women of color and our communities. The criminalization of domestic violence has, over the last 15 years of social experimentation, grown the prison industrial complex through expansionist criminalization policies for mandatory arrest, third-strike policies, new crime legislation, and steeper sentences.

Long-term antiviolence activist Suzanne Pharr (2004) poignantly addressed some of the concerns that arise with the nonprofitization of the antiviolence movement. When women doing antiviolence work sought tax-exempt status for shelters, organizers were taunted with lesbian and misogynist jokes and funders demanded of the institutions certain policies and practices, including professionalization. Soon funders were expressing their preference for degree-bearing professionals instead of community organizers, organizations were expected to have hierarchical structures, and therapeutic social services were funded over popular education work. Ideologically, violence against women became more and more a behavioral, criminal, and medical phenomenon rather than a social justice issue, and interventions and attempts at prevention became overly reliant on therapy and the courts. These individualized methods of intervention fail to address and combat the social organization of violence against women. These methods are also inextricable from institutional arrangements that carry deep histories of racism like the medical industrial complex and the prison industrial complex; as a result, the revictimization of women of color becomes more likely (Rojas Durazo, 2017).

Yet amidst recognizing, accounting, and grappling with the losses that nonprofitization delivers to social movements, all is not lost. As Rodriguez (2017, p. 31) argued,

As the distance between state authority and civil society collapses, the civic spaces for resistance ... disperse into places unheard, unseen, by the non-profit industry: arguably the most vibrant sites of ... organizing against

racist US state violence ... are condensing among populations that the NPIC [nonprofit industrial complex] cannot easily or fully incorporate. Organized, under-organized, and ad hoc movements of imprisoned, homeless, and undocumented peoples, as well as activists committed to working beneath and relatively autonomous of the NPIC's political apparatus, may well embody the beginnings of an alternative US-based praxis that displaces the NPIC's apparent domination of political discourse and possibility.

Such were the conditions that gave rise to the potent twenty-first-century social movements such as Black Lives Matter, the #NoDAPL movement to stop construction of the Dakota Access Pipeline, and the undocumented-student nationwide walkouts and protests against HR 4437, the Border Protection, Antiterrorism, and Illegal Immigration Control Act of 2005. Indeed, the conditions are always ripe for justice, the arc is always leaning toward decolonization, the path toward radical freedom is daily being imagined anew; and with every instance of attempts to derail it, of moves to absorb insurgencies, new and vibrant life and imagination will persist like the rose or weed growing outside my door on the broken concrete sidewalks that line the Oakland city streets.

8.3 Conclusions

The recent pandemic years, marked by heightened economic austerity and political interests that defunded many nonprofits, demonstrated the precarity the nonprofit structure straddles. They also demonstrated that the work of social justice will continue outside of fundable work and/or nonprofit structures. The work to survive and to resist unjust conditions will persist because contesting violence is human nature. The insurrections against police brutality in what some call the Black spring of 2020 taught us that some, if not most, of the effective paths toward social transformation emerge from efforts on the fringes, from movements and forms organized collectively or with horizontal (or even no) leadership structures, like the Zapatistas concept of “mandar obedeciendo [lead by obeying].” Some movements even are nonprofits on paper while they strategically navigate a focused direction toward social transformation that tactically accepts financial resources while rejecting co-opting tendencies.

Social movement leader Paula X. Rojas (2017) postulated that we may not necessarily need to get rid of nonprofits altogether. Cautioning that we must remain vigilant and critical of the risk of being co-opted through nonprofits, she shared that many revolutionary movements in Latin America and around the world use nonprofits strategically. They do not try to do movement work through the nonprofit but rather form nonprofits for strategic purposes, like technical support. They still strive to build social movements, but they do it outside their nonprofits. With these examples in mind, Rojas concluded, “the non-profit does not have the power to determine the course of the movement’s direction. Rather, it is accountable to the movement” (p. 207).

Social movement work has always and will always continue to exist outside of the nonprofit sector. As social movements are successful in attaining their greater goals toward social transformation, they will find a way to keep the corporatist and state influences in check. How? For one, by ensuring that their organizations have accountability structured into their work on a daily basis, especially accountability to the people most affected by the social issues they address. Additionally, organizations should structure self-assessment and evaluation into their work; as the conditions for social change constantly shift, they will need to constantly engage the communities that are most affected to determine their needs. Organizations can also shift fundraising energies to grassroots techniques, which maintain an organization’s proximity to their grassroots.

Some might choose an outright refusal to seek nonprofit status with the state, intentionally becoming part of the “dark matter” of the nonprofit institutional space (Smith, 2017). This means giving up government and corporate grants – which come with the burden of marionette strings – and seeking autonomy by relying on the visions, resourcefulness, and resources of the people in the social movement themselves. Organizations who choose to use these methods will have a better chance at inspiring social justice, though no structure is inherently exempt from co-optation.

Additionally, it is absolutely possible for social movements to challenge and end white supremacy as they organize freely from the violence and coercion of both the state and corporatized market forces. By defining a vision and identifying the ways in which the current institutional landscape fails to meet that vision, movements can create

a lexicon of terms, which can become shared principles of unity. When we name the purveyors of violence, for example, we are that much closer to gathering forces to transform the conditions that give the purveyors the power to dominate. As we name violence against women and peoples of color, profit-centered interests that harm targeted communities, and the various iterations of colonialism, these names help us walk toward articulating a vision and a praxis for a free, decolonial, and just world, gathering the needed forces to help create the conditions that will usher its emergence.

"In a time of rapacious capitalism," long-term activist Suzanne Pharr asked, "what might we do to fund a radical movement?" (Rojas, 2017, 125). As the examples of Communities against Rape and Abuse, INCITE!, Sista ii Sista, and Communities United against Violence reveal, many organizations are leading the way toward disinvesting from the nonprofit industrial complex and the state. They are redirecting precious time, resources, and imagination to grassroots organizing and to mobilizing their communities. And they are emerging victorious!

Ruthie Wilson Gilmore's closing remark sums up much of the insight shared at the Revolution Will Not Be Funded Conference: "organizations will not save us, organizing will" (see Gilmore, 2004). Organizing in this case might mean letting go of organizational structure itself, intentionally trusting that a movement's work for social transformation will continue. We cannot afford to let formal structures become more important than our vision and purpose, and any structural form is at risk of corruption. We can free ourselves from organizational hierarchies (which often reproduce or mirror social hierarchies based on race, sex, class, and gender) and professionalization. We can let go of ideas from funders about doing the work in the "right" way (whether this refers to effectiveness, efficiency, using evidence-based practices, integrating community, etc.). We can instead focus on the community we want to create as we work together toward a shared vision. What would we – and what could that shared vision – create instead? The options are numerous and infinite, yet of this much I am sure, the movement toward social transformation needs us to practice vehemently being the communities we seek to create, through mutual accountability, care, and interdependent living.

That journey may itself be the destination: the creation of a community that emerges as it is practiced.

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