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Social Justice Philanthropy as Poverty Politics:  
A Relational Poverty Analysis of Alternative Philanthropic Practices

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A dissertation  
submitted in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

University of Washington

2017

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Program Authorized to Offer Degree:

Geography

University of Washington

**Abstract**

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In the current era of deepened inequality and poverty in the U.S., philanthropy plays an increasing role in funding and governing the possible range of poverty action. Philanthropy acts upon poverty in three ways: funding poverty research, providing grants to anti-poverty nonprofit programs, and governing classed subjects who are the subject of/in philanthropy. While critical scholars criticize philanthropy for (re)producing wealth inequality and privileged classed subjects, there is a niche of philanthropic practices that purport to do things different, and tackle the root causes which produce and sustain impoverishment.

This dissertation examines the possibilities and limitations to transforming processes of impoverishment through *social justice philanthropy*, the leading edge of alternative contemporary philanthropic practice in the U.S. I use a relational poverty analysis to consider

social justice philanthropy as poverty politics. In this analysis, I explore the ways that social justice philanthropy understands and conceptualizes poverty, and grounds this through their grant-making practices. My research emphasizes the challenges in enacting a transformative poverty politics on the ground, largely because of the geohistorical processes of colonialism, exploitative labor relations, and decades of concentrated state devolution.

This dissertation also considers the ways in which social justice philanthropy impacts and transforms the actors involved in philanthropy. I explore the constitution of *social justice philanthropists*, an imagined actor who is supposed to take critical learning about race, class and privilege and internalize this into a reflexive practice. However, I identify two primary challenges to individual level transformation. First, the fundraising process of social justice philanthropy largely leaves the material experiences of privilege unexamined as they present in philanthropy. Second, the language and tools used to develop a critical dialogue on race and class become markers for performing (middle) class distinction, and as such, the more privileged actors of social justice philanthropy secure class privilege through their philanthropic participation.

This dissertation contributes to philanthropic studies by deepening theorization about the structural processes of impoverishment in the philanthropic process. Further, it extends existing debates in relational poverty and critical geographic studies that consider the ways that state restructuring affect the management and governance of poverty, poorer persons and impoverished places. Finally, this dissertation speaks to practitioners and activists engaged in reimagining the nonprofit and philanthropic sector, and how existing institutions engage and act upon the root causes of impoverishment.

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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

To say that this dissertation was a community effort would be an understatement. I have said countless times that the quality of my work is only as strong as the community that holds me up.

On a formal level, I would like to thank the Urban Geography Specialty Group of the Association of American Geographers, the Center for the Study of the Pacific Northwest, and the Association of Pacific Geographers for their financial support of this project.

To my co-conspirators at UW and beyond, thank you for your brilliant insight, radical hopefulness, belief in community, and resilience: Skye Naslund, Jesse McClelland, Kristy Copeland, Chris Lizotte, Katie Gillespie, Amy Piedalue, Ryan Burns, Joe Eckert, Tish Lopez, Magie Ramirez, Austin Crane, Will McKeithen, Emma Slager, Jessa Loomis (UK), Alice Pedersen, and Andrew Shmuelly (UBC).

Sarah Elwood, you are my champion, mentor, advisor, advocate, friend, and role model. I am not the first to say it and I will not be the last: it has been an absolute honor to work alongside you throughout this journey. Thank you for your attention, patience, honesty and precious time.

To Vicky Lawson, you were one of the first people to believe in me in this department. Thank you for giving me a chance to help build the Relational Poverty Network, and for pushing me to think deeply about my place in this world. To Steve Herbert, thank you for taking a leap and working with me. Your attention to method and ethnography is an inspiration, and I'm honored to have your input in this journey.

To Ben Gardner, Jin-Kyu Jung and Christian Anderson, thank you for supporting and guiding me as a geographer, an educator, and a researcher.

To everyone (all 42 of you!) who contributed to my 'funding alliance' in 2014-15 - thank you! Your involvement in this project helped me, and supported FTN. To those who anonymously contributed as respondents, thank you for sharing your knowledge and experience.

To Mijo: you have made space for me to dream and imagine into this project, to learn from you and grow, and to offer back my insights. Your leadership and ferocity are inspirations for my future career, for my potential future motherhood, and for my day to day life as a grassroots fundraiser.

To my PAGE family: You've had my back, held my tears, pushed my ideas, and valued me for more than my academic productivity. You gave me space to lead, to organize, to facilitate and to step back. Here's to wine and google hangouts. Alex Agloro, Josh Franco, Johanna Taylor, Alyssa Greenberg, Kush Patel and Janeke Thumbran, you have my heart. You are my people.

My chosen Seattle family: I literally could not have done this dissertation without you. Eva Conner, you reminded me that my relationship to the dissertation is like any other relationship: I get to opt in every day. Candace Faber, thank you for getting pho with me two years ago as I stumbled through my fieldwork. Sophie Glass and Giulia Pasciuto, you have been co-conspirators with me in so many ways. Thank you for pushing me to be kind, just and patient as I continuously unlearn oppressive tendencies. Juju Aldaer, Kori Linn, Gina Phillips, Sol Villarreal, thank you for feeding me, dancing with me, sharing resources, and being part of the fabric of a community I'm ever grateful for. Mollie Wolf and Ruth Sawyer, thank you for being my co-thinkers in all things queer, social justice and activism. Thank you to everyone who helped me transcribe my interviews, and to those who cooked me meals in the final weeks of writing. And, finally, to my #1 most loyal friend and comrade, Rachel Kudrna: thank you for your endless support, giggles, adventures, hugs, cry-fests, and for taking time to heal with me.

To Allison Metz and Amy Coddington: you've been my PhD partners in crime all the way across the country. Thank you both for your phone calls, venting to each other, asking silly quandaries, and being along for the journey from day one. I'm so proud to be finishing this season with both of you.

To my beautiful partner, Sunni Campbell, I have so many thanks. You met me as I was in the final stages of this dissertation, and you never wavered. Thank you for helping me imagine a big life for myself, reminding me to choose joy, keeping things in perspective, and shining your light and love on all that I do.

To my family, I know it is a cliché to say, "you've been so supportive of me", but truly, I couldn't have asked for more. Dad, thank you for reading David Harvey and wanting to *understand* what it is I'm doing in graduate school. Mom, thank you for letting me gush when I got good feedback, and for letting me cry when anxiety was at its worst. You've accepted me, granted me financial support when possible, and allowed me space to grow and heal. I'm so proud you get to be here in the room with me, and get to see me share this work.

Aunt Blanche: in so many ways, this is for you. You are my biggest fan, role model, and part of my heart. Thank you for reminding me to always dance, and to let things be good.

A last note: thank you to my therapist. Grad school is no joke, and the institution sets us up for mental health issues. Making it through this final year would have been miserable without. Shout out to health insurance that values mental health care.

*“Philanthropy is commendable, but it must not cause the philanthropist to overlook the circumstances of economic injustice which make philanthropy necessary.” - Martin Luther King, Jr.*

*“I resolved to stop accumulating and begin the infinitely more serious and difficult task of wise distribution.” -- Andrew Carnegie*

## **Chapter 1: Social Justice Philanthropy An Introduction**

### ***1.1 Poverty amidst plenty: the rise of poverty and inequality in the US and the imagined role of philanthropy***

We live in an era of unprecedented poverty: in which 46 million Americans were deemed impoverished in 2012, the largest amount since the US began counting in 1959 (Edelman 2012; Associated Press 2012). Inequality has deepened, as well, leading some to deem that the US has entered a second ‘Gilded Age’ (Krugman 2014): a mere 400 Americans hold the vast majority of the nation’s wealth. A growing public discourse about wealth inequality has become mainstream, if not altogether popular, with the vestiges of the Occupy movement framing public consciousness.

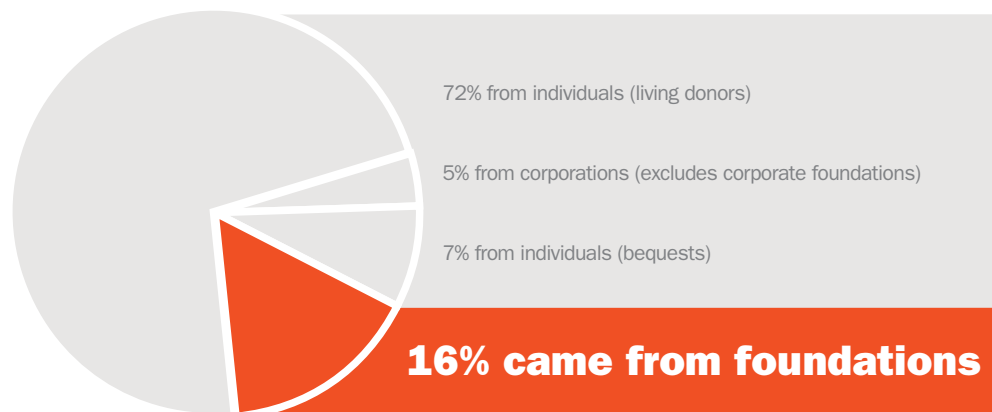
Amidst this backdrop, processes of impoverishment have deepened. The continued retrenchment of social safety net programs paired with extreme rents in city centers has created a new geography of poverty in the U.S. (Lees 2012; Peck 2012; Hidden Poverty 2014, Poverty’s Changing Profile in the U.S. 2011; Roy and Crane 2015). Changes to the global political economy mean that many new jobs are either high-end technology jobs, or low-wage service jobs (Lowrey 2014; Holzer 2015; Street et al. 2016). The privatization of resources and services, from prisons to water to transportation infrastructure, has concentrated profits while fracturing communities. This is not a hopeful landscape.

Yet, many see *philanthropy* as a means to ameliorate experiences of poverty.

Philanthropy, the act of giving away one's resources for the well-being of others, has long combined altruism, charity, personal benefit and tax incentives (Schrift 1997; Zunz 2012). In the U.S., philanthropy takes the form of individual gifts, foundation grants, bequests and corporate donations. Such gifts are most often cash or money, but might also be time, expertise, in-kind services, stocks or material goods. In 2012, 85% of American households made some level of philanthropic contribution (Foundation Center 2014). Many, though not all, of these individual gifts are fueled by a belief in minimizing suffering, in caring for others, and for supporting one's community (Zunz 2012). Since the 1950s, philanthropy has been channeled through the nonprofit or voluntary sector: donations go through 'third sector' organizations, which provide care, services, advocacy and resources to citizens and communities as part of a contemporary social contract (Staeheli et al. 1997; Wolch and Dinh 2001; Burnett 2013).

Philanthropy plays a significant for its role in the national economy. In 2014, philanthropic contributions in the US totaled over \$358 billion (Giving USA: 2015)<sup>1</sup>. Of this \$358 billion, 72%

of the total  
donation dollars  
came from  
individuals or  
households,  
another 16% came



Source: Figures for 2012 from Giving USA Foundation, *Giving USA*, 2013.

<sup>1</sup> Additionally, the nonprofit sector itself comprised 4% of the US GDP in 2012 (Solomon 2012).

from foundations, 7% from bequests, and 5% from corporations under corporate social responsibility (CSR) initiatives (see above, from the Foundation Center's *Key Facts on U.S. Foundations* 2014).

In other words, individual households donated roughly \$257 billion to the nonprofit and voluntary sector. These donations support a massive range of programming: the “nonprofit sector” is in fact, a multi-faceted set of organizations, including research hospitals and small grassroots arts programs; environmental advocacy groups and low-cost mental health services; homelessness support and independent journalism, and a huge range of additional programming that touches on nearly any imaginable aspect of civil society.

Despite the diversity of this sector, philanthropic dollars are overrepresented in large institutions. The Giving Pledge, a platform for the wealthiest individuals in the U.S. and abroad to commit to donating the majority of their wealth, currently has 158 members. Of the stated recipients of their pledged donations, large institutions such as *museums, hospitals and universities* feature prominently. In other words, while \$250 billion comes from individual donors, the vast majority goes to institutions which have little direct involvement with impoverishment (The Giving Pledge, 2016). The remainder of donations, coming from individuals making more modest gifts, is dispersed to the organizations closest to impoverishment: food banks and temporary shelters; low-cost mental health coverage; affordable housing organizations; free or low-cost health clinics; literacy programs in low-income neighborhoods; environmental justice organizing; prisoner re-entry or prison abolition organizations; immigration services; after-school arts programs; environmental adventures for ‘at-risk youth’; college access and success programs; job-training and English courses; refugee relief organizations; faith-based charities and missions; transit justice organizing; food desert

organizations; farmworker services; Native services; community centers, and other community-based initiatives (Lyon-Callo 2008; Salamon 2012). Such programs interface directly with those experiencing poverty, create spaces of encounter, and provide desperately needed resources to help individuals navigate the material realities of impoverishment (Martin 2004; Ferguson 2007; Valentine 2008; Allard 2009; Leitner 2012; Aufseeser 2013; Roy 2016a).

Philanthropy acts upon poverty in two other key ways that remain relatively invisible in the public eye. First, it contributes to poverty research and policy by funding universities, research centers, foundation-led initiatives, and think-tanks (O'Connor 2001; Hall 2006; Zunz 2012). Philanthropists' efforts to fund and support research universities and poverty research has created a cadre of 'best-practices' about poverty policy that begin in the U.S. but spread out across the Majority world through the World Bank and IMF programs (O'Connor and Russell Sage Foundation. 2007; Roy 2010) Philanthropy actively makes, remakes and circulates knowledge and policies about appropriate causes and solutions to poverty that shape poverty interventions across the world.

Secondly, and more important for this research, *philanthropy shapes poverty interventions by nonprofit and non-governmental organizations* (Wolch 1990; Kingfisher 2008; Trudeau 2008). Nonprofit organizations are on the front-line of poverty intervention and poverty management. Philanthropy institutions set conditions on the ways in which nonprofits use their funds. Through strict conditionalities outlined in grant criteria (Martin 2004) to more subtle language around program-based funding or alignment with particular foundations' values (Fisher 1983; Faber and McCarthy 2005) large-scale foundation grants curtail what nonprofits do, how they do it, and which recipients are deemed deserving of grants.

Within this broader nonprofit context, new institutions and practices of philanthropy are emerging that purport to be making very different poverty interventions. In this dissertation, I focus on one such alternative practice: *social justice philanthropy*, a lesser-known but theoretically and societally significant form of philanthropic practice. Social justice philanthropy (hereafter SJP) sees itself as the radical leading-edge of philanthropy. Borne out of a mainstream philanthropy founded on wealth disparity, capital accumulation, and European Protestant values, social justice philanthropy attempts to distinguish itself from its philanthropic forebears in as many ways as possible. SJP is structured around a set of institutions and practices, oriented toward making lasting changes on the ‘root causes’ of poverty through strategic, reflexive and democratized giving. Given that this form of alternative philanthropy is comparatively new and under-studied there is much we do not know about social justice philanthropy. This research asks how social justice philanthropy shapes impoverishment and how and whether it acts upon root causes of poverty, as it claims to do.

This dissertation traces social justice philanthropy’s mechanisms, priorities, and assumptions as they are expressed by key actors in SJP. These actors include nonprofit organizations who facilitate SJP, the grantee groups and organizations who receive funding, and the individual SJP participants. Throughout, my analysis emphasizes expressions of poverty, privilege and identity, particularly how these processes are mutually constituted even amidst a philanthropic form that intentionally seeks to disrupt poverty and privilege. I follow social justice philanthropy through the multiple places it reaches: offices, meeting rooms, large events, rural communities and cities. I explore how social justice philanthropy gets grounded through its grant-making and institutional practices. I show how SJP’s priorities and politics are expressed

through philanthropic institutions, through the actions taken up by grantees, and through the potential for individual transformation for social justice philanthropy participants.

### ***1.2 Scholarly debates about philanthropy and poverty***

This dissertation is in most immediate conversation with existing critical scholarship on the relationship between philanthropy and poverty (as well as broader literatures taken up in Chapter 2). This existing work on philanthropy and poverty argues that philanthropy reproduces the structures and mechanisms of wealth extraction and inequality (Gilmore 2007; Kohl-Arenas 2015; Mitchell and Sparke 2015). Indeed, many critical scholars have already foreclosed any transformative potential through philanthropy, writing it off as an extension of racial capitalism and a means to secure class privilege for its participants (Silver 1998; Incite! 2007; Mananzala and Spade 2008; Karen Ferguson 2013).

Within this literature, there are key debates which suggest possibilities for transformation within the philanthropic apparatus. Alice O'Connor (2001) was one of the first to take a critical approach to philanthropic institutions. She argues that philanthropy shapes poverty by funding particular kinds of research on poverty which translate into policy and best practices. Exploring the ways that the Ford Foundation contributed to poverty research throughout the 20th Century, O'Connor set out the concept of 'poverty knowledge'. Poverty knowledge refers to the ways in which institutions develop institutional knowledge and shared frameworks about the causes, and thus the solutions to, poverty. Her work suggests it is important to look at how poverty knowledge travels outside of poverty research, through all levels of the philanthropic apparatus, such as grant-making, outreach, grantee actions and individual engagements with impoverishment. My research explores additional pathways by which philanthropy influences poverty, as well as looking at new sites of poverty knowledge.

Kohl-Arenas (2011, 2014, 2015) reveals more about the interface between philanthropy and specific anti-poverty programming. Her research considers the ways in which foundations attempt to fund organizations and initiatives aiming at those experiencing poverty directly. This suggests that the types of organizations and programs that *do* get funded shape poverty interventions and politics. In more recent research (2015), she also looks at staff members “in the middle” and how they participate in poverty governance and subject formation. Kohl-Arenas helps animate how poverty itself is not an object, but a site of contestation (Lawson and Elwood 2017), and thus requires attention to the types of subjects enrolled in and produced through the process. I build on these debates to explore how involvement in the processes of philanthropy shape actors within the process and ask, what are the strategic moments within an organization or an organization’s contact with who and what it supports? Specifically, I think about identity and the enrollment of multiple subjects and actors in decision-making in social justice philanthropy.

Three additional studies are foundational for my analysis of how philanthropy produces and transforms impoverishment - specifically through subject formation and governance of classed subjects. Adams (2013) looks at post-Katrina New Orleans as a site of disaster capitalism and a staging ground for private philanthropic investment. In particular, she looks at the involvement of faith-based actors in the re-making of the region through donations of money and time. In this process, individuals (re)make their identities and subjectivities through their philanthropic participation. I build these out in additional ways, by exploring the types of middle class actors and philanthropists produced and constituted through social justice philanthropy. Roy (2010) applies a similar critique to how millennials construct a ‘do-gooder’ identity through supporting micro-finance programs. They practice conspicuous philanthropy, in which their participation hails them as responsible, and visible, global citizens. This helps me see and

articulate how and whether participation in social justice philanthropy becomes. I extend this research by illuminating the ways that participants' language and familiarity with a critical and relational analysis may contribute to the production of philanthropic actors and classed subjects.

Finally, while Mitchell and Sparke's (2015) analysis of what they call 'philanthro-capitalism is centered upon a very different form of philanthropy (public private partnership and conspicuous leadership by famous and wealthy people), it nonetheless offers a key intervention for thinking about subjects within philanthropy. Specifically, Mitchell and Sparke argue that philanthropy produces market-ready subjects. This gives me additional nuance for how class subjects and class identities are formed through philanthropic institutions. I extend this framing to consider the types of subject formation happening at the margins of philanthropic practice.

Taken together, these debates guide my effort to detail the *form, structure and permutations* of social justice philanthropy, because the apparatus and priorities of philanthropy shapes the possibilities for poverty action and politics. This literature highlights the need to pay greater attention to the types of subjects who are constituted through their involvement with philanthropy. Such actors are not only philanthropists. They are social actors who enact their own poverty politics - not just in their participation in social justice philanthropy but in all aspects of their lives - as voters, neighbors, family members, and so on. Finally, while all of these studies are attentive to the mechanisms and subjects of philanthropy, there is further room to investigate how philanthropy operationalizes poverty, and how this is inculcated into its subjects. In particular, more work is needed to understand the limitations and possibilities for that philanthropy which sees itself as 'alternative', suggesting the types of subjects and possibilities for poverty action that can emerge through even the leading edge of philanthropy.

### ***1.3. Bringing relational poverty theory to social justice philanthropy***

My research begins from the foundational proposition that philanthropy is a form of poverty politics. Poverty politics involves the actions, alliances and policies that govern classed subjects and places, as well as the representations, assumptions and frameworks about poverty's causes and solutions (Schram 2000; Elwood, Lawson, and Nowak 2015). In other words, poverty politics refers to the ways that *institutions and individuals make sense of and act upon poverty*. To theorize social justice philanthropy as poverty politics, I use a relational poverty analysis.

Three core theoretical interventions guide my analysis. First, that poverty is not an ontological condition, but produced through material and social relations (Piven and Cloward 1977; Hickey 2009; Mosse 2010). Relational poverty theory recognizes the ways in which poverty and privilege are “mutually constituted” (Wood 1998). This suggests that rather than poverty being a discrete phenomenon only experienced by poor people and places, that it is constituted through relations of power, privilege and wealth. Second, relational poverty theory proposes that impoverishment results from multiple overlapping political economic and socio-cultural processes (Ferguson 1994; Hart 2002; J.K. Gibson-Graham 2006). In other words, poverty is not the result of individual failings or a singular process, but rather the “multi-dimensional economic, political and cultural processes, and social relations producing impoverishment” (Lawson, Elwood and Sheppard 2016). Third, relational poverty theory proposes that the production and application of poverty knowledge is significant in shaping impoverishment (O'Connor 2001, Roy 2010). In other words, to act *upon* poverty, an institution must first be able to delineate and demarcate what ‘counts’ as poverty. Taken together, these theoretical claims require exploring how poverty is understood, ‘fixed’ and transformed on the

ground as well as how individuals situate themselves in relationship to impoverishment, class identity, and privilege.

This framing prompts the theoretical questions about philanthropy as an institution, and social justice philanthropy specifically, that guide this dissertation: How does social justice philanthropy conceptualize poverty? How does social justice philanthropy seek to act upon the processes of impoverishment? How, if at all, does it transform meanings about poverty, privilege and identity for those involved? Is social justice philanthropy able to transform class identities, and if so, are they able to inculcate a relational poverty politics for their subjects? Said differently, these questions as a whole ask: *what types of poverty politics does social justice philanthropy express and what does this mean for people, places and institutions experiencing and combatting impoverishment?*

#### ***1.4. Funding Together Northwest: the extended case study***

I explore these questions through case study research conducted with Funding Together Northwest<sup>2</sup>, a leading organization of social justice philanthropy, based in the Northwest. I used the *extended case method* (Burawoy 1998) to design my research, and used my time with Funding Together Northwest (hereafter FTN), to make theoretical propositions about social justice philanthropy and its poverty politics. I relied on participant observation, semi-structured interviews, and archival analysis to understand FTN's unique approach to collective fundraising and grant making. My analysis is attentive to the mechanisms and practices that delimit the institutional logics of social justice philanthropy. My interests as a participant and as an observer are deeply connected: after years of working with nonprofits addressing social and economic inequalities, I wanted to understand what it meant to envision a different philanthropic model.

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<sup>2</sup> A pseudonym for the organization I worked with, will be used throughout.

What implications does this have for poverty, for the individuals involved in philanthropy, and for philanthropy as a whole?

Social justice philanthropy is a small, but growing, field of alternative philanthropy. Derived out of a belief that massive resource redistribution is necessary to address persistent inequalities, social justice philanthropy uses many of the same mechanisms of conventional philanthropy, but adapted to more democratic and redistributive measures. As point of clarification, there are multiple approaches to fundraising that claim to take a ‘social justice’ approach to philanthropy. The most common of these would be a branch of a larger foundation which explicitly funds small-scale grassroots organizations, (as in the Seattle Foundation or Marguerite Casey Foundation). For this research, when I refer to *social justice philanthropy*, I explicitly mean specific organizations with a dedicated mission to social justice philanthropy, whose organizational structure and practices fully support this mission. Funding Together Northwest is a leader in the field of social justice philanthropy, and their funding model is currently being piloted by four organizations across the US.

Funding Together Northwest operates in the five state region of Washington, Oregon, Idaho, Wyoming and Montana, an expansive area comprising two smaller geographic regions: the ‘Mountain West’ (western Montana, Wyoming, Idaho and eastern Washington) and the ‘Pacific Northwest’ (Oregon and western Washington). The experiences of FTN’s grantees are shaped by national level processes of impoverishment as well as regional and local political economies and geohistories of racialization and settler colonialism. Most significantly, these regions are navigating diminished public budgets for social services and safety net programs (Fraser and Gordon 1994; Austin 2003; Allard 2009; Staeheli 2012). Across the region, faith-based charitable programs have replaced public welfare. Idaho and Wyoming both voted to deny

Medicaid expansion under the Affordable Care Act (Idaho Senate debates, rejects Medicaid expansion 2017; Wyoming Senate defeats Medicaid Expansion, 2016). These are also both largely agricultural regions, facing consolidation of land for industrial private agriculture while also seeking investment from private industries (Castle 1995; Ramsey and Smit 2002; Lawson, Jarosz, and Bonds 2008; Nelson 2008). Finally, the Northwest has two distinct trends that inform relations between Native populations and the state. The first being the Western Oregon Indian Termination Act of 1954 which gave Oregon the authority to repeal federal recognition of tribes (Miller and Riding In 2011). This left a host of tribes in Oregon<sup>3</sup> without federal recognition, access to land rights and economic benefits, or resources for cultural preservation. The second is that particularly in Montana and Wyoming, there is a lasting distrust between indigenous groups and White settlers, which requires long-lasting relations of care and intentionality by white progressive groups in these states to build bridges and alliances with Native organizations (Sluyter 2014). This brief overview paints the backdrop against which many grantees in my case study operate and attempt to act on root causes of impoverishment.

### ***1.5. Limitations and possibilities for social justice philanthropy's poverty politics***

My research offers two key insights about social justice philanthropy and poverty politics. First, I argue that social justice philanthropy emphasizes a relational analysis of poverty through its poverty knowledge and practices. SJP is able to inculcate this analysis in their members, and ground it in their grant-making processes and practices. However, this relational analysis of impoverishment encounters two challenges to meaningful transformation of processes of impoverishment. Individual participants in social justice philanthropy struggle to fully understand and internalize the contexts in which grantees operate. Next, grantees struggle to

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<sup>3</sup> And, earlier, across Washington and California as well through House Concurrent Resolution 108.

apply their own relational analyses of impoverishment on the ground. The scale and severity of geo-historical processes of impoverishment position individuals and places at a systematic disadvantage such that social justice philanthropic investment cannot make substantive material progress despite organizational analyses which suggest otherwise.

Secondly, I show how social justice philanthropy produces and transforms philanthropic actors positioned at the nexus of philanthropy and poverty politics. SJP produces *social justice philanthropists*, (largely) middle-class subjects trained in a critical analysis of race and class formation, and able to critique the systematic inequalities within the philanthropic sector. They are likely to continue their philanthropic giving with a critical analysis and extend this to other institutions and organizations. However, I find that these social justice philanthropists struggle to fully internalize a reflexive analysis of class privilege. As a result, many reproduce poverty governance mechanisms through their judgement of grant-seekers. The training which allows social justice philanthropists to engage in critical discussions of race, class and structural inequalities also reproduces class privilege. My analysis reveals that performing this ‘enlightened’ form of philanthropy is a form of class distinction, which helps secure middle class privilege for the very actors seeking to disrupt relations of race and class privilege which produce and sustain impoverishment.

This project contributes to four important areas of scholarship. First, I bring a relational poverty theorization to philanthropic studies. This has significant implications for more thorough and rich analysis of anti-poverty philanthropy ventures. To date, research on social justice philanthropy has been largely descriptive and/or in the form of practical white papers. This project serves as a benchmark against which new theory can be compared, refined and tested. As social justice values become more prominent in large-scale philanthropic efforts, this research

reveals how and why practices might reach their limitations, and where they stand to be transformative.

Second, this research speaks to relational poverty scholars who are interested in the institutions that govern poverty, as well as scholars interested in the shifting relations between state, market and civil society. Philanthropy is an active site of poverty governance, and SJP specifically represents a new nexus for how classed subjects are governed. Social justice philanthropy reproduces the ways that (middle) class subjects are governed, and as philanthropists go on and sometimes enact poverty governance through their grant-making. I also show that these processes contain openings that help us think beyond an only/always framework for poverty governance and class difference. I show that SJP holds possibilities for processes beyond a stigmatized poor Other/grant recipient and the normatively good/responsible middle class donor.

Third, this dissertation contributes to critical scholarship on the relationship between activist goals, power structures and tactic. The research offers a theoretical and empirically rich perspective on where resistance strategies meet their limitations, in this case, against ensuring reflexive class awareness among activists, the massive scale of conservative resistance, including from other philanthropists, and the difficulty to ground analysis into meaningful and targeted action. This adds to a long-standing literature exploring social movements and resistance, as well as the ongoing interest in the *processes* that make and constrain politics.

Finally, this research is meant for people like me, who have a sense of healthy skepticism about the nonprofit sector, and about philanthropy in general, but who believe that philanthropic institutions can play a role in creating a more equitable and just world. For those involved with social justice philanthropy here in the Northwest, I hope this research speaks to you: those that

have dreamed, debated, challenged and fundraised because they believe that ‘philanthropy’ can be reimagined. I hope, in particular, that my recommendations in section 6.4 will appeal and provide more questions to be considered in our practices.

This research enriches our understanding and theorization of one set of practices aimed at mitigating poverty and empowering those fighting for a different world. Philanthropy touches almost every person’s life in the U.S., whether as donor, recipient or volunteer, and reaches across vast spaces and social differences. Rather than accepting charitable giving as a purely benevolent act, we must be critically attentive to the ways it transforms our relationships, reifies our institutions, and/or supports a politics of possibility. This research is a vital intervention in both critical philanthropic studies and relational poverty studies.

Throughout the rest of the dissertation, I weave together my theoretical framework, methodology and research design, and my key findings in order to examine how social justice philanthropy enacts poverty politics. In Chapter Two, I trace the theoretical and empirical framings of philanthropy and poverty, respectively. I present the ways in which conventional philanthropic scholarship conceptualizes philanthropy’s relationship to poverty. I also examine how critical poverty scholars have begun to study philanthropy as an empirical object. Chapter Three explains my research design and methodology, beginning with an in-depth explanation of social justice philanthropy and background on my case site. In Chapter Four, I explore social justice philanthropy’s poverty knowledge and how this poverty knowledge informs grant-making practices and grounds through the multiple sites of poverty intervention. In Chapter Five, I consider the types of actors produced through social justice philanthropy, how these actors embrace a critical analysis of race, class and philanthropy, and how this analysis serves as a form

of distinction. In Chapter Six, I conclude with the implications of my research findings and contributions of the fields of philanthropy studies and relational poverty studies.

## **Chapter 2: Intersections of Philanthropy and Poverty Studies: Establishing a Framework for a Relational Poverty Theorization of Social Justice Philanthropy**

This dissertation analyses the role of social justice philanthropy in the production and/or disruption of poverty. I expand existing scholarship on philanthropy to theorize how philanthropy articulates and expresses poverty politics. Philanthropy, the giving away of one's resources for the well-being of others, has been theorized as a set of social practices involving resource exchange among institutions, communities and individuals (Van Til 1990; Ostrander 1995; Zunz 2012). Social scientists and historians have shown that philanthropy is deeply embedded in the social and economic rationalities of particular times and places (Magat 1989; Roelofs 2003; Faber and Auriffeille 2005). It tracks to dominant assumptions about what "problems" need solving, and how society should address those problems (Nagai 1994; Schrift 1997; Hammack and Anheier 2013). Philanthropy also takes multiple forms, and these forms are contingent on the geo-historical contexts in which philanthropy occurs (O'Connor and Russell Sage Foundation. 2007; Payton and Moody 2008; Anheier and Hammack 2010). Philanthropic giving in the U.S., for instance, looks quite different than social democracies of northern Europe, where the consensus for a strong welfare state supports basic human needs and services, instead of relying so heavily on private philanthropy and individual donations (Kuhnle 2003, Bekkers 2016). Studying philanthropy requires being specific about the time and place of inquiry. In this dissertation, my focus is contemporary U.S.-centric philanthropic initiatives.

Contemporary philanthropy in the U.S. has evolved through a series of permutations in assumptions and form. In the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, individuals made charitable donations to a 'deserving' poor (Odendahl 1990; Wagner 2000; Friedman and McGarvie 2003; Zunz 2012). In the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century, propertied, largely white men with excess resources sought out voluntary

associations as a space for camaraderie and identity (Dobkin Hall, in Powell and Steinberg 2006). Following industrial capitalism of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, elites channeled their wealth into the first large-scale foundations, doling grants to organizations of varying scope and size. This trend continues today, with over 86,000 foundations in the U.S. in 2012 (Foundation Center 2014). Since the mid 20<sup>th</sup> century, charitable giving has been central to the U.S. welfare state model. The formalization of nonprofits through the 1954 tax code changes incentivized individuals to give (Salamon 2012; Zunz 2012), while processes of state devolution have required the nonprofit and philanthropic sectors to provide ever more cultural and social services to communities in need (Staeheli et al. 1997; Evans, Richmond, and Shields 2005; Smith and Lipsky 2009). Social and health services now rely heavily on philanthropic contributions to support their work (Eikenberry and Kluver 2004), and there are currently over 1.4 million registered nonprofits in the US to provide care and social services (McKeever 2016).

This brief overview of philanthropic trends makes clear that when discussing ‘philanthropy’, there is neither one consistent practice nor formation (Magat 1989). Every philanthropic formulation approaches a different focus area. For instance, the ways in which a philanthropist decides to ‘make the world better’ can extend from supporting the regional opera, to buying a brick in the development of a local park, to funding a local political initiative. When one says that they are a ‘philanthropist’, there is no unifying narrative around which issue, area, or community to which resources should be directed. Instead, it is more revealing to identify the *mechanisms* of giving (i.e. through a foundation bequest, or through a grassroots small-scale gift), as well as the *target* of the resources (i.e. environmental conservation, local theater, homeless youth services, etc). A critical analysis of philanthropy begins with these questions because it exposes how the decisions and actions of philanthropy express its poverty politics.

Building on the work of critical poverty studies, I focus on *philanthropy that aims to reduce poverty and inequality*. Throughout this chapter, I trace how scholars have theorized and measured philanthropy, and build a conceptual framework from critical philanthropic and relational poverty scholarship. In section 2.1, I explore different ways in which philanthropy has been theorized to address poverty, particularly the ways in which it is deemed ‘effective’ in anti-poverty interventions. I close with critical and feminist interventions on philanthropic studies, to show where critical perspectives illuminate the interplay of power, economism and identity. Section 2.2 theorizes the practices and limitations of philanthropy through ideas from critical poverty studies. Section 2.3 explores how relational theorizations of poverty pave a way toward analysis of how philanthropy (re)produces or challenges poverty. Section 2.4 outlines my conceptual framework, which brings a relational theorization of poverty to better understand social justice philanthropy.

### ***2.1 Mechanisms of philanthropic practice, or: how does philanthropy intervene in impoverishment?***

Philanthropy occurs in the spaces between the state, the market and civil society (Arnove 1980; O’Connor and Russell Sage Foundation. 2007; Payton and Moody 2008). The interdisciplinary literature on philanthropic studies has explored how philanthropy intervenes in social and economic inequality, through efforts to alleviate poverty and improve quality of life. Scholars identify three ways that philanthropy seeks to address poverty through economic redistribution, through reconfiguring state and civil society, and by mediating social relations.

#### *2.1.1 Alleviating poverty through economic redistribution*

Much scholarship theorizes philanthropy as a channel for economic redistribution (Parmar 2012; Hammack and Anheier 2013). Early 20<sup>th</sup> century philanthropists in the U.S.

understood their role in this way. Contemporary mainstream scholarship focuses on economic redistribution within a capitalist political economy (Schrift 1997; Gaudiani 2003; Hess 2005; Jung, Phillips, and Harrow 2016). This framework assumes that philanthropy ameliorates poverty and inequality created by capitalism by directing resources to institutions and activities that meet needs of the poorest individuals. Andrew Carnegie, whom many deem the founder of modern philanthropy, articulated this assumption when he established the first major foundation in the United States in 1905 (Hall 2006). In his *Treatise on Wealth*, Carnegie explained that wealth inequality was an unfortunate, but necessary, outcome of capitalism, and that to avoid social unrest and disruption, wealthy men needed to redistribute their resources to the rest of the population (Carnegie 1889).

Early philanthropists approached redistribution not directly through transfer of assets to poorer people, but indirectly, through underwriting institutions they felt would benefit poorer people through imagined benefits of education, enculturation, health care, etc. The social consensus among wealthy elites was that poverty would be alleviated through individual “improvements” of poorer people. Carnegie and his contemporaries established foundations to fund the creation of large institutions, such as libraries, universities and hospitals: institutions that indirectly supported individuals experiencing poverty while leaving political economic structures in place. Throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century, as the United States experimented with various public welfare and social assistance, foundations redistributed excess wealth to fund social programs aimed at educating and ‘improving’ poorer individuals. Indeed, large foundations were positioned as a virtuous component of a healthy capitalist society (Dowie 2001; Anheier and Hammack 2010; Parmar 2012; Hammack and Anheier 2013).

Early U.S. philanthropy was structured around the idea that wealthy people could ameliorate the foundational inequalities of capitalism by giving, without altering capitalism's structures. This assumption continues today in many philanthropic circles. Mainstream scholarship on philanthropy reflects these same capitalist priorities, analyzing philanthropy in terms of efficiency and financial return, and arguing that philanthropists can alleviate poverty through indirect economic redistribution (Martin 2008; Gordon 2011). Mainstream scholars of philanthropy argue that society expects those who have done well financially to be altruistic with their wealth. These scholars suggest that successful business-people should dictate the efficient use of their philanthropic funds, claiming authority as experts on poverty alleviation because of their 'success' in accumulating wealth (Gaudiani 2003; Brest and Harvey 2010; Jensen 2013). In the last 15 years, the rise of "smart" philanthropy<sup>4</sup> reflects this commitment to capitalist political economic logics. Smart philanthropy encourages donors to take calculated risks and invest strategically in programs that the state might find too unpredictable. Proponents argue that such philanthropy should calculate and disperse available resources based on econometric measurements about return on investment (Nagai 1994; Lagemann 1999; Parmar 2012).

The capitalist logic of "doing good" while maintaining existing political economic structures is strongly present in other philanthropic practices, as evidenced by the rise of "corporate social responsibility" (CSR). This practice emerged as a financial tactic for large corporations to disperse excess profits in a way that is assumed to account for the social and environmental cost of doing business (Moore et al. 2002; Baur and Schmitz 2012). In other words, corporations make charitable contributions to ease their taxable income, and to redistribute corporate profits to

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<sup>4</sup> For more on 'smart philanthropy' and its connection to corporate giving, see (Brest and Harvey 2010; Tierney and Fleishman 2011; Weeden 2011).

nonprofit organizations.<sup>5</sup> CSR expresses capitalist and calculative logics: it is designed to maximize financial benefit through tax breaks, increase a company's positive social value, maintain structures of power and political economy, and in principle, still reduce poverty and inequality (Hall 2006). Other contemporary forms of philanthropy show similar logics, directing extremes of capitalist wealth accumulation towards perceived social good. This logic lauds wealth accumulation, treating it as an avenue for greater levels of charitable giving to non-governmental anti-poverty initiatives (Morvaridi 2012). For instance, the Gates Foundation's 'small schools' charter school initiative supports privatized education via massive investment of wealth<sup>6</sup>. This practice reflects a continuing assumption that investment in new institutions, rather than, for example, direct distribution to poorer people, is the most effective way to ameliorate poverty.

This line of thinking focuses on philanthropy mainly as a practice for ameliorating inevitable poverty and inequality that result from capitalism. The approaches above reflect the very capitalist logics that this ameliorative orientation leaves un-challenged. Mainstream philanthropy scholars assert that strategic resource investment into large institutions provides the greatest social good (Gaudiani 2003; Sawaya 2008; Brest and Harvey 2010). These researchers believe that large foundations and investments directing their resources toward institutions that address the consequences of poverty and inequality is a sufficient solution (Roelofs 2003; Fleishman 2009; Hammack and Anheier 2013). This understanding of philanthropy relies heavily on an

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<sup>5</sup> The extent of this supposed economic redistribution is questionable, as corporate social responsibility (or CSR) makes up only about 7% of the total private giving within the United States (Foundation Center 2014) compared to 16% from foundations.

<sup>6</sup> Critics of this model of philanthropy refer to it as *philanthro-capitalism*. Much has been written critiquing philanthro-capitalism through a feminist and Marxist lens. See 2.1.4 for more on these critiques.

econometric reading of well-being, and neglects a more robust political-economic or social reading of philanthropy's significance.

### *2.1.2 Managing poverty by reconfiguring state and civil society*

Critical scholarship on the state also addresses philanthropy, identifying it as a key element in state / civil society relations and state restructuring (Wolch 1990; Eikenberry and Kluver 2004; Evans, Richmond, and Shields 2005; Hwang and Powell 2009). These scholars theorize philanthropy as a mechanism by which the state has removed itself from social welfare and poverty reduction programs, and simultaneously legitimized this withdrawal by the justification that philanthropic resources enable privatized care provisioning. The re-positioning of philanthropy as an intermediary between welfare state and citizens has been accompanied by key transformations, including privatization and the social logic of self-sufficiency (Clarke 2004; Trudeau 2008).

Political theorists identify state devolution as a key turning point for contemporary philanthropy and the nonprofit sector in the U.S. (Fraser and Gordon 1994; Staeheli et al. 1997; Alexander 2000; Schram 2000; Brenner 2002; Peck 2002; Harvey 2005; Kingfisher 2008; Baines 2010). In the 1980s and 90s, states and local municipalities became responsible for managing poverty with fewer federal budget dollars. The shrinking welfare state reflected a shift in national and state priorities about how care and services were to be administered, not a decrease in need (Austin 2003). Under welfare state retrenchment, poverty and inequality actually deepened, which placed a greater burden on private and nonprofit services (Schram et al. 2010a; Burnett 2013). The nonprofit sector tried to fill the gap left in services by a shrinking public sphere, growing ever-reliant on philanthropic contributions (Smith and Lipsky 2009; Baines 2010; Trudeau 2012). Individual giving and the privatization of care rose during this era of state

devolution. Indeed, when George Bush Sr. coined “A Thousand Points of Light”, his rhetoric pointed to and legitimized the rise of the nonprofit and philanthropic sector in this period (George Bush: Inaugural Address 1988). This call for individuals and faith groups to mobilize for care provision reinforced an expectation that individuals, not the state, should be responsible for care and poverty programs.

These conversations highlight the emergent dominant assumption in the contemporary U.S. that the nonprofit and faith-based sectors should manage poverty rather than the state (Wolch 1990). As well, these scholars have detailed the kinds of poverty politics that emerge from these positionings of philanthropy as a ‘substitute’ for the state as a lead actor in alleviating poverty. First, it frames poverty as a private problem, rather than a public responsibility. That is, an individual or community needing assistance needs care because of their own failings to navigate the market (Rose 1999; Schram et al. 2010a). As such, this approach argues that interventions be made through service-oriented nonprofit and welfare initiatives, rather than attending to the structures and larger context that contributed to an unequal landscape of opportunity and marginalization (Raco 2003; Bosworth 2011; Kohl-Arenas 2015).

Secondly, participation in philanthropy is seen to be an individual’s choice, and up to their own financial calculations. This positioning of philanthropy as an intermediary for a diminished welfare state has gone hand in hand with an ever-deepening individualism in the social contract. Individuals are responsabilized to be active in giving and philanthropic work (Hall 1996; Lake 2002; Ostrander 2013). The philanthropic sector is seen to represent a space for individuals to express their own full participation by taking care of issues with which they resonate. In other words, the donor’s participation in the nonprofit and philanthropic sector is a way of executing their individual responsibility for themselves and others. In the absence of a

strong central welfare state, civil society relies on philanthropic participation to provide services and basic needs. Thus, philanthropy becomes part of the social contract and full participation in civil society (Lake and Newman 2002; Ilcan and Basok 2004; Eikenberry 2007, 2009; Ostrander 2013).

From these perspectives, philanthropy functions as a bridge between a diminished welfare state and a fractured and individualized civil society. This literature reveals how the political and institutional logics of contemporary philanthropy rely on an assumption that privatized care is the appropriate mechanism to ameliorate poverty and inequality, and that the institutions tasked with anti-poverty programs reflect this logic. Critical scholarship on the state reveals that the contemporary social contract expects individuals to shore up the gaps in the state, which further legitimizes state devolution (Staheli et al. 1997; Apinunmahakul and Devlin 2008; Baines 2010). These literatures emphasize how philanthropy is legitimized and maintained through its relationship between state, market and civil society, but is limited in how it engages in philanthropy's understandings of poverty and/or how philanthropy can promote alternative consensus about the appropriate role in poverty alleviation.

### *2.1.3 Philanthropy, identity and social practices*

Philanthropy has also been theorized as a set of social practices that are consequential for poverty and inequality because of their effects on donor/recipient identities and relations. These perspectives focus attention on the kinds of actors produced through philanthropy and the kinds of relations that are set up among these actors through their roles in philanthropic practice. Ostrander (2007) argues that philanthropy is a realm of social practice characterized by unequal power dynamics between donor and recipient (an individual service recipient *or* an organization that works with impoverished individuals). Control and decision making is skewed towards the

donor, (an individual, a foundation, or a corporation). As a result, Ostrander argues that philanthropic practice has to be understood through the lens of social position, identity and access to resources. This framework of social practice helps analyze the types of relations among actors that flow from philanthropic practices.

Within these discussions of philanthropy as social practice, one conceptual argument is that individuals' identities dictate their motivations to give. Literature on gift theory has been used to explain the asymmetrical relations between donors and recipients, and scholars suggest that charitable donations are never fully altruistic (Schrift 1997; Silk 2004; Card, Hallock, and Moretti 2010). Instead, a donor's altruistic tendencies might inform *part* of their philanthropic contribution, along with multiple other motivations (Rose-Ackerman 1996; Wright 2001; Barnett and Land 2007; Jakubiak 2011; Jung, Phillips, and Harrow 2016). For instance, donors might feel affinity to a place or organization, and donate out of a feeling of nostalgia, reciprocity, or obligation. Donors are most likely to make contributions to institutions that reflect their social background or identity, such as the well-documented trend of wealthy individuals giving vast sums to large educational, medical and cultural institutions (Odendahl 1990; Ostrower 2004). Additionally, research on philanthropy as social practice suggests that wealthy people are more likely to use philanthropy as a calculating move to benefit their social and financial position (Spierenburg and Wels 2010).

Others in this literature have used the idea of social capital to theorize how and why philanthropy concentrates and/or disperses power and status. These scholars argue that philanthropy channels social capital through institutions, networks and causes that continue to concentrate social power and opportunities around existing power geometries (Brown and Ferris 2007; Bryce 2012). Some argue that community development can disperse social resources of

opportunity and connection, thereby building up social capital in disenfranchised communities (Gittell and Vidal 1998). Extending Carnegie's logic to the social sphere, social capital proponents laud philanthropy's investment in large institutions that develop social capital and access to those who are marginalized (Svendsen and Svendsen 2004; Brown and Ferris 2007; Apinunmahakul and Devlin 2008; Chan 2014).

The literature on philanthropy as social practice also sees philanthropic giving as motivated and shaped by processes that include faith based affiliations, diaspora and responsabilization. Scholars look at the role of faith in motivating and fueling philanthropic giving, such as the practice of tithing and faith-based forms of charitable giving, which comprise a vast proportion of philanthropic donations (Center on Philanthropy 2007). Charitable giving represents a primary practice and cornerstone of multiple faith communities (Atia 2013; Drezner 2013), with 65% of religious households making donations each year, compared to 56% of non-religious households (Connected to Give, 2014). Other work has shown that *diaspora* plays an influential role in motivating philanthropic practices. Diasporic communities contribute a great deal of resources to both their local communities as well as their communities of origin (Baker and Mascitelli 2011; Flanigan 2016). Finally, scholars identify that the transformation of the social contract, discussed in the previous section, responsabilizes individuals to play an active role in social welfare. This produces desires for actors to see themselves as moral and responsible individuals involved in 'doing good' (Kass 2008; Roy 2010). Scholars argue that this desire to be seen as a moral actor is a strong influence on why individual giving spiked with the parallel shrinking of the welfare state (Ilcan and Basok 2004; Ashley 2007; Nichols 2013).

These literatures on philanthropy as social practice explore the ways in which philanthropy produces social actors who engage efforts to promote social welfare and ameliorate

poverty and inequality through giving. This body of scholarship focuses on the relations between donors and recipients that emerge through philanthropic practice, particularly how philanthropy is motivated by individual identities and institutional relationships. Scholars argue that power asymmetries shape the relations between individuals and organizations, and that understanding the relationships between philanthropic actors is a necessary step to understanding philanthropy's role in shaping poverty and inequality. However, this literature doesn't fully theorize the ways in which donor and recipient subjectivity is shaped through philanthropic practices. To understand philanthropy's relationship to poverty, we must also theorize the classed subjects and power relations formed in and through philanthropic practices.

The preceding three subsections trace key aspects of philanthropy scholars' efforts to conceptualize philanthropy and how it may affect poverty and inequality: by way of its underlying economic logics and goals; by way of its role in a changing social contract between welfare state and citizens; and as a set of social practices that set up philanthropic actors and relations among them. These three conceptualizations reflect the dominant frameworks about philanthropy within interdisciplinary nonprofit studies, organizational management, and political theory. They help explain the ways in which mainstream scholars from a range of fields conceptualize contemporary philanthropy's impacts on poverty and inequality. However, these literatures largely fail to directly theorize poverty or address how philanthropy actually intervenes in poverty. Particularly relevant for this research, they offer few conceptual tools to analyze social justice philanthropy's claim to address the root causes of poverty, or theorize whether and how they do so. I develop my own critical analysis of philanthropy, by exploring existing scholarship from critical poverty and feminist social scholars.

#### 2.1.4 Critical and feminist scholars' analyses of philanthropy

There is a small body of literature that offers more critical perspectives on philanthropy, especially on the limits to its potential to ameliorate poverty. Cultural critics explore the discourses and imagined subjects of contemporary philanthropy (Silver 1998; Wernick 2009). Feminist and Marxist political economists critique philanthropic practices rooted in the ideology of technocratic governance, individualism and marketization, particularly its reliance on and encouragement of greater wealth inequality (Eikenberry 2009; Suárez 2012). These scholars expose how contemporary philanthropy reproduces the individual and entrepreneurial market subject, and fails to disrupt the structural processes which *produce* the very wealth inequality that undergirds contemporary philanthropy.

For instance, Mitchell and Sparke (2015) argue that while philanthropy has long deployed market practices and business values to inform programming, the new practice of “philanthro-capitalism”<sup>7</sup> actively *benefits* businesses in the process of ‘doing good’. Philanthro-capitalism frames social, economic and environmental inequalities as ‘market failures’, and thus understands the solutions through market-based techniques such as impact investments, tech-based anti-poverty programs, privatized charter schools, or profiting from biodiversity conservation (Spierenburg and Wels 2010; Bosworth 2011; Mitchell and Lizotte 2014). Though philanthro-capitalism mimics the same pro-business ethic that Carnegie championed, contemporary scholars argue that it is unique in its insistence on producing market-ready subjects to navigate and advocate for themselves within privatized and marketed systems (Mitchell and Sparke 2015).

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<sup>7</sup> “Philanthro-capitalism” is a term used by critics to signal the intersections of philanthropy with explicitly capitalist interests. These practices often make use of capitalist mechanisms, such as venture-capital, high powered investments, speculation and/or privatization of public institutions. For more, see: *Society*, volume 48, issue 5, (2011).

Adams (2013) offers another critical analysis of philanthropy, exploring how pro-business investments by philanthropists provide disproportionate power and resources to business and real estate developers in the (re)making of space. In her ethnography of New Orleans following Hurricane Katrina, Adams details how private philanthropic ‘investments’ in the New Orleans infrastructure privileged business interests in rebuilding efforts. This critique of philanthropy challenges the supposedly beneficent nature of post-disaster investment, and argues that spaces are (re)constituted in the image of the philanthropists who fund them. A state which relies on private and philanthropic investment produces spaces, institutions and policies which are imbued with the same values as that of private philanthropists.

These critiques of philanthropy emphasize the problematic nature of resource distribution when philanthropic dollars are removed from public circulation and redirected through private channels. Charitable donations are tax-deductible, so money going through the philanthropic sector further reduces funding for public goods and services. Rather than tax dollars being allocated through democratic representation, donation dollars have no public accountability and are at the discretion of their donor and boards (Gilmore 2007; Adams 2013; LaMarche 2014). As Adams identified in New Orleans, this means that access to social welfare and services is not part of a social contract, but has to be accessed through programs and organizations funded by philanthropists.

These analyses also reveal that contemporary philanthropy promotes pro-market discourse as the assumed solution to social and economic inequality. In particular, in impact investing and venture philanthropy, greater wealth generation *supposedly* means more money to be invested in the pool of social welfare (Frumkin 2003). However, critics argue, three important effects are obscured in the process: that capitalist wealth accumulation in the hands of the super-rich is

actually *strengthened*; that in promoting such 'success', wealth inequality is removed from view as a problem worth interrogating; and finally, the state is dissolved of accountability as the market and its individual figureheads position themselves as the arbiters of social welfare (Ramdas 2011; Farrell 2012; Hay and Muller 2014; Mitchell and Lizotte 2014). Similarly, contemporary philanthropy that relies on the uber-rich limits democratic participation (Hay 2013a, 2013b). Philanthropic decision-making is often limited to those with access to wealth, be that individual wealthy donors, or foundation staff and board members with advanced degrees and professional credentials to be on grant-review boards (Robert F. Arnove 1980; Bryce 2012; Box 2015).

The preceding critiques of philanthropy reveal the problematic co-mingling of capitalist logics and techniques with anti-poverty programming, which deepen poverty and promote greater wealth generation. Socio-cultural critics emphasize the ways in which philanthropy produces entrepreneurial, market-ready subjects. These studies begin to highlight the limitations of conventional mechanisms of philanthropy. They suggest the need to theorize philanthropy in different ways to fully understand how it produces and/or disrupts poverty. In the next section, I turn to thinking how ideas from critical poverty studies can be used to theorize how and whether philanthropy produces and disrupts poverty, and to decenter assumptions about appropriate solutions to poverty.

## ***2.2 Critical poverty scholarship and critiques of philanthropy***

Critical poverty studies offers different and more critical ways of theorizing the practices and implications of philanthropy than the mainstream literature on philanthropy and the nonprofit sector. In this section, I detail the origins of critical poverty studies and its major critiques of conventional poverty scholarship. I also explore critical poverty studies' attention to

philanthropy. This section reveals the theoretical limitations to conventional understandings about poverty within philanthropy. Further, critical poverty scholarship reveals the role philanthropic institutions play in constructing and circulating discourses and norms about poverty. Critical poverty studies allow us to see how *mainstream studies about philanthropy neglect the structural processes of impoverishment*. When these processes are invisible within philanthropic research, it is impossible to theorize whether and how philanthropy intervenes and acts upon these structural processes. A critical poverty studies lens allows me to better theorize whether and how social justice philanthropy intervenes and acts upon the root causes of poverty as it purports to do.

Critical poverty studies emerged over the last two decades in response to conventional social scientific studies of poverty. At the intersections of development studies, geography and cultural studies, it critiques the ways in which poverty is understood, framed, and acted upon (Lawson, 2012). Critical poverty studies aim to re-politicize poverty, by making explicit how poverty is produced by “market triumphalism, political demobilization and economic polarization” (Goode and Maskovsky, 2001). This field of study creates counter-narratives to conventional public policy narratives about poverty, and contributes to a growing field of literature that investigates *processes* of impoverishment rather than *objects* of dispossession and exploitation.

For instance, in their work *The New Poverty Studies* (2001), Goode and Maskovsky explain that this approach “treats poverty not as a static ‘moral’ *condition* but as a dynamic historically and geographically contingent *process*” (16). This perspective challenges the assumption that poverty is a failing of individuals or particular places. Indeed, critical poverty studies reveals how much of social scientific poverty research and public policies perpetuate

discourses of individualism, by framing poverty as a failure of individual people or places. Anti-poverty programs approach ‘solutions’ by supporting and/or serving discrete communities or individuals experiencing poverty. Such programs and policies fail to understand that poverty is produced by structural processes and the ways in which poverty itself is imagined, articulated and acted upon as a problem (Goode and Maskovsky 2001; Roy 2003; Lawson, Jarosz, and Bonds 2008; Du Toit 2009).

This literature also traces how conventional poverty scholarship understands poverty through the lens of economism, focusing on profit maximization and economic efficiency. Poverty is made legible as a distinct, economic category to be acted upon. For instance, conventional poverty studies and policy define poverty through metrics such as the poverty line (Schram 2000; Goode and Maskovsky 2001; Devine 2006; Addison, Hulme, and Kanbur 2009; Hulme 2010). In both international development circles and the Western nonprofit sector, practitioners use a version of the ‘poverty line’ to assess which places and communities should receive anti-poverty interventions by governments, NGOs and charitable organizations. Anti-poverty programs further assess eligibility based on individualized income data, or geographic areas based on census data. Such programs direct funds towards individuals’ material experiences of poverty, giving rise to, for example, workfare programs, job training, financial literacy training, and free or reduced cost social and health services (Schram, Soss, and Houser 2009; Smith and Lipsky 2009; Burnett 2013). These programs are examples of the kinds of anti-poverty practices that flow from these individualized and market orientations.

When poverty is framed as a purely individualized, economic problem, ‘solutions’ to poverty follow the same logics. Anti-poverty interventions tend to focus on perceived individual or community economic deficiencies by encouraging economic development investments,

opening borders for unhindered markets, strengthening social ties and networks, and/or providing better geographic access to health care and services (Maskovsky 2000; Kohl-Arenas 2011; Adams 2013). Such programs try to reform and change the individual poor people or place(s) rather than addressing exploitative relations of capital accumulation, unequal political power geometries, or social categorizations which marginalize the poor (Schram, Fording, and Soss 2008; Lawson 2012; Kohl-Arenas, Nateras, and Taylor 2014).

Critical poverty studies argues that poverty is not a discrete entity that can be isolated and acted upon in the ways that such programs and policies do. As Mosse (2010) explains, conventional poverty scholarship falls into “the habit of thinking of poverty as a ‘condition’ understood by focusing on the characteristics of ‘the poor’ ... rather than on the wider economic and social systems of which they are a part, and consequently of equating the study of poverty with studying poor people” (1158). This is perhaps the most significant contribution from critical poverty studies: that poverty cannot be adequately understood by looking at it as a discrete condition, devoid of its political economic and socio-cultural context.

Critical poverty studies offers two key insights into the study of philanthropy and philanthropic research. First, some research has shown that some forms of *philanthropy actively reinforce the mainstream understandings of poverty* that critical poverty studies critiques. Second, other scholars show that much of the *conventional scholarship on philanthropy perpetuates individualism and economism* through its framing of poverty, its assessment of philanthropy and its recommendations for best practices to ameliorate poverty and inequality. This second critique pertains most explicitly to philanthropic research organizations, who sponsor research on poverty. These are constituted by foundations, research centers, universities and government institutions working in tandem.

One of the most well-established critiques of philanthropy comes from Alice O'Connor's work on the Ford Foundation (2001). She argues that philanthropic research institutions co-author and circulate dominant ideologies about poverty through the kinds of research proposals and practices they support. This 'poverty knowledge', as she calls it, is institutionally codified, a way for institutions to make an idea like 'poverty' legible and actionable. In other words, a philanthropic institution cannot act upon poverty until it is identified, delineated, and explained. For the better part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the Ford Foundation and its contemporaries understood poverty as an individual failing, rather than as a consequence of a capitalist political economy (Roelofs 2003; O'Connor and Russell Sage Foundation. 2007; Parmar 2012). O'Connor's work establishes that poverty knowledge is inherently political: philanthropic institutions articulate a vision for how the state and civil society should address poverty and inequality. Dominant poverty knowledge is, "an exercise of power, in this instance of an educated elite to categorize, stigmatize, but above all to neutralize the poor and disadvantaged through analysis that obscures the political nature of social and economic inequality" (2001, 12). Philanthropic institutions are political actors involved in the production of poverty.

O'Connor's work provides a starting point for understanding the ways in which philanthropic institutions might perpetuate mainstream understandings of poverty. Others have looked at how progressive or alternative philanthropic organizations construct poverty knowledge. In her work on farmworker organizing in California's Central Valley, Kohl-Arenas (2015) argues that despite well-intentioned progressive philanthropic campaigns and program officers, foundation support for farmworker organizations is skewed towards an individualized narrative about poverty. It fails to consider and account for the exploitative conditions of industrial agriculture. Kohl-Arenas reveals how philanthropy reproduces individualism and economism through its granting

procedures, even when the intentions and aims of its programs claim to be more committed to long-term social change.

These critiques challenge the narrative of philanthropy as a purely benevolent practice and call attention to the ways in which philanthropy reproduces beliefs in which those with resources know best about how to ‘solve’ poverty. This orientation is longstanding: Carnegie’s Gospel of Wealth, arguably the founding document of contemporary philanthropy, called for a “responsible” redistribution of wealth during a wealthy man’s lifetime in order to provide for those experiencing poverty while maintaining the status quo. Carnegie challenged the dominant practice of individual donations to the poor of his time, as he writes:

... the surplus wealth of the few will become, in the best sense the property of the many, because administered for the common good, and **this wealth, passing through the hands of the few, can be made a much more potent force for the elevation of our race than if it had been distributed in small sums to the people themselves.** Even the poorest can be made to see this, and to agree that great sums gathered by some of their fellow-citizens and spent for public purposes, from which the masses reap the principal benefit, are more valuable to them than if scattered among them through the course of many years in trifling amounts (Gospel of Wealth, 1889 – emphasis added).

Insights from critical poverty studies reveal that such dispersal and administering of wealth rests on a presumption of *paternalism*, in which wealthy, primarily white, propertied men know best for society. Carnegie writes that the wealthy man is *responsible* for administering surplus wealth to his “poorer brethren”, by using his “superior wisdom”, “doing for them better than they would or could do for themselves” (Carnegie 1889.). Deeming what ‘counts’ as appropriate ways to distribute surplus wealth, Carnegie envisions institutions that are “ladders” for men who do not need assistance, just pathways to self-improvement. Indeed, those who *need* assistance are positioned as already undeserving. Giving charitably to “the slothful, the drunken, the unworthy”, Carnegie argues, perpetuates the “very evils which it proposes to mitigate or cure.” Large foundations such as Rockefeller, Ford and Carnegie incorporated these assumptions into

their institutional poverty knowledge, perpetuating the belief that poverty was best addressed through indirect funding and support rather than direct economic redistribution to poor persons, or to addressing the conditions which produced impoverishment in the first instance. And, they believed that individuals' actions could deem them undeserving of charity and aid. Such assumptions continue to inform the practices and funding priorities of conventional philanthropy, with a core belief that philanthropy is a critical tool in adjusting for the ills of capitalism (Ács and Desai 2007).

Critical poverty scholarship allows us to see what kinds of anti-poverty programs flow out of mainstream philanthropy and its beliefs. Many studies of philanthropy rely on quantification and measurement to evaluate a program or foundation's perceived success in acting on poverty (O'Connor 2001, Goode and Maskovksy 2001, Roy 2010, Incite! 2007). Such programs evaluate philanthropy's effect on poverty by measuring whether or not households were able to move above the poverty line; whether total numbers of welfare claims fell; whether geographic areas experienced a net rise of income; whether a school district had better graduation rates; whether recidivism rates fell, etc. These programs rely on dominant understandings of poverty that were first championed under Carnegie and his contemporaries.

For instance, the Lilly School of Philanthropy, one of the leading professionalized schools for philanthropic studies in the US, assesses levels of anti-poverty philanthropy based on how much of individuals' charitable gifts help "people meet their basic needs". A narrow lens on 'basic needs' thus categories and delimits what is considered effectively acting on poverty (Center on Philanthropy 2007)<sup>8</sup>. Such categorization reflects the ways in which poverty is

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<sup>8</sup> The report determines that organizations targeting 'the poor' are represented by the following categories: at-risk youth, seniors, basic needs, disaster relief, arts/culture, ex-offenders, and economic self-sufficiency. The follow

parsed into discrete social categories. If a program or person does not fit neatly in these categories, they may not qualify for funding and/or be considered part of an anti-poverty philanthropic apparatus. This discrete categorization reflects long-held beliefs about poverty which undergird much of philanthropic policy and research.

Mainstream philanthropy's anti-poverty programs continue to rely on individualized understandings of poverty. For instance, Share our Strength, a nonprofit anti-hunger organization which regularly receives praise for its 'big picture' approach to reducing childhood hunger, measures childhood need based on numbers of students enrolled in free-or reduced cost meal programs at local schools. They measure success based on how many students are able to access existing nutrition programs, to close the 'hunger gap', and they highlight that every \$1 donation leverages 10 meals for hungry students. In this way, philanthropic contributions to Share our Strength, and programs like it, support a belief in the power to eradicate hunger via charity, rather than, say, reducing food waste or pushing for a more equitable industrial food system (When Good Is Not Good Enough 2013; Perry 2014).

Finally, mainstream philanthropy's anti-poverty programs are held to economic standards by individual donors, government entities and independent research centers. In the New York Times, director and founder of Innovations for Poverty Action explain that anti-poverty charities need to be assessed by rigorous data that measures whether individuals are *moving out of poverty*, an idea which assumes that poverty is a discrete phenomenon which can be quantified and 'left behind'. In their primary example, they argue that micro-finance efforts, a frequent practice of mainstream anti-poverty programming, produce powerful stories of empowerment and access to credit, but do little to advance individuals' *average income*, thus making them

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categories were considered "uncertain", and deemed "1/2 poverty" - education, civil rights, people with disabilities, and health programs (table 15).

ineffective at addressing poverty (Duflo and Karlan 2016). Mainstream philanthropic anti-poverty programs are deemed successful or failing if the organizations do/not advance people's incomes or move them above the poverty line. These judgements, made by institutions like the Urban Institute and the Lilly School of Philanthropy, are meant to measure and establish norms about philanthropic 'efficacy'. Such norms and metrics are frequently taken up by wealthy foundation donors and board members as well as government grant agencies (Ramos 2015). A critical poverty analysis of mainstream philanthropy allows us to see the ways in which philanthropy circulates dominant poverty knowledge about the perceived best practices and institutional norms that are assumed to address poverty.

Thus, critical poverty studies reveals the limits to conventional philanthropic practices and the institutional poverty knowledge to which it is linked. Poverty research funded by philanthropic organizations is framed in ways that reproduce the very limits that critical poverty studies identifies: that philanthropy is too individualist, economic, and focuses on poverty as a discrete measurable phenomenon. As a result, much philanthropy research cannot theorize how philanthropy affects *processes of impoverishment*, which social justice philanthropy claims to address. In the next section, I turn to relational theorizations of poverty and how prior scholars have brought these to critiques of philanthropy.

### ***2.3 Relational theorizations of poverty and impoverishment***

Relational theorizations of poverty pave the way to better analyses of how philanthropy (re)produces and/or challenges poverty. Relational theorizations look at the multiple processes that produce and sustain impoverishment, including structural processes like land dispossession, labor exploitation and mass incarceration as well as socio-cultural processes such as racialization, gendered violence, xenophobia, and class identity formation. A relational approach

to poverty is “one that first views persistent poverty as the consequence of *historically developed economic and political relations*, and second, that emphasizes poverty and inequality as an *effect of social categorization and identity*” (Mosse 2010, 1157, emphasis added).

These theorizations of poverty draw from feminist and Marxist scholarship on capital accumulation, from critical development studies on the social production of poverty, and from cultural studies which recognizes how ideology, discourse and class shape the political possibilities of the poor and middle classes (Bourdieu 1977, 1987; Foucault 1980; Gramsci 1992; Chen and Morley 1996; Hart 2002, 2007; Gibson-Graham 2006). I explore two dominant strands of relational theorizations of poverty here: the first, how poverty is produced through material and political economic processes of impoverishment; and second, how poverty is produced through social relations and cultural politics.

### *2.3.1 Material and structural processes of impoverishment*

A focus on relational processes of impoverishment exposes the ways in which poverty and privilege are mutually constituted through structural relations of wealth accumulation, land dispossession, historical exploitation, and social exclusion. This proposition draws heavily on Marxist and feminist theory of political economy and capital accumulation (Marx 1992; Hart 2002; Harvey 2005). These scholars situate the structural processes of impoverishment within larger geohistories, rejecting ‘poverty’ as the fault of individuals, or discretely contained in particular places (Hickey 2009; Mosse 2010), to instead see impoverishment as constituted by multiple intersecting processes (Hart 2007). First, these scholars recognize that poverty cannot be understood outside of the relations of capitalism (Goode and Maskovksy 2001; Lawson, Jarosz and Bonds 2010; Roy 2010). Capitalism contributes to a stratified class system and individual alienation through: primitive accumulation of land for profit; extracting surplus labor value;

making individuals reliant on purchasing their basic needs; and penalizing weaknesses as signs of personal failure (Harvey 2005; Harriss-White 2006). Second, relational poverty theorists argue that racialization and white supremacy further marginalize black and brown communities, which contributes to material experiences of impoverishment and assumptions about deservingness and implicit bias (Hill Collins 2000; Pulido 2006, 2017; Gilbert 2010; Bonds 2013). Hickey and Mosse demonstrate how impoverishment results from such structural processes. As Hickey (2009) writes, “poverty [is] caused by the insertion of such [poor] people and places into *broader economic, political and social formations*” (1, emphasis added).

Similarly, Mosse (2010) argues that:

persisting poverty can be viewed as a consequence of the exclusionary and expropriating aspects of *long-term processes of capitalist transformation*... the social processes that make poverty and inequality durable including boundary marking and exclusion... persisting poverty has to be analyzed as an *effect of political systems, their discourses and the terms of inclusion or exclusion* (1156-7, emphasis added).

Both of these scholars use a structural relational analysis to trace processes of impoverishment in particular places. Further, they show how social relations and discourses deepen and amplify these effects. Hickey (2009) explores how conventional poverty research in northern Uganda ignored or neglected the ideological relationships between northern Uganda, other parts of the country, and other nations. While powerful development and government institutions scripted a narrative of a northern Uganda ‘left behind’, a relational approach emphasizes the “adverse incorporation of the region and its people into broader economic and political formations, and the impacts that this has on processes of deprivation, livelihood responses and political culture” (10). Hickey argues that it is impossible to address impoverishment in northern Uganda without addressing the legacy of colonialism and exploitation by Europeans that set up these interlocking material and discursive processes. Along similar lines, Mosse (2010) considers how social

categories and exclusion intersect with political economic processes to shape material relations and access to resources. Mosse emphasizes how power and historical conditions translate and embed themselves deeper into the very categories which keep people marginalized. In particular, he highlights how in rural and urban places, there is stark differentiation between those with resource access and those without. Access to resources differs based on location, social position and class.

Relational poverty theory and perspective allow us to better understand and theorize the ways in which social justice philanthropy acts upon and intervenes against the structural processes and cultural politics which produce and sustain poverty. That is, this theory suggests how to conceptualize the ‘root causes’ of poverty and social justice philanthropy purports to address. Such a theorization of root causes considers the geohistories of particular places, particularly vis-a-vis capitalist transformation and extractive processes. Further, it conceptualizes poverty as produced through ideological relationships between state, market and civil society, through which discourse, policy and anti-poverty programs intersect.

### *2.3.2 Impoverishment through social relations and cultural processes*

As well, relational poverty theory offers a theoretically rich way to think about how individuals are produced as subjects in/of anti-poverty work without reducing to individualized understandings of poverty (Bourdieu 1984; Foucault et al. 1991; Gramsci 1992; Comaroff and Comaroff 2001; Lawson 2010; Elwood, Lawson, and Sheppard 2016). Further, these ideas can be used to think about the subjects produced in/of *anti-poverty philanthropy*, specifically social justice philanthropy. Such theorists argue that cultural norms and imaginaries about poverty and poor subjects are established and maintained through institutional relationships and discourses (Hall 1996). Poverty emerges as a classification and social marker through relations between

differently positioned subjects across identities like race, class and gender (Adamovsky 2012; Elwood, Lawson, and Nowak 2015; Roy 2016). These scholars see impoverishment as co-produced by cultural and social processes, rather than existing as an a priori category, with material consequences for how people understand themselves, how they access resources, and how they navigate the world around them.

Relational theorizations of poverty rely heavily on Gramscian theories of consensus and hegemony. According to Gramsci (1992), ideas, norms and practices that support the ruling classes become enacted through the practices and language of everyday life, determined through a broad-based set of cultural agreements and contestations. Ideas and norms about poverty form and circulate through these daily practices and contestations. For instance, in the U.S. over the last 30 or more years, consensus has been established through cultural norms and discourses about ‘the poor’. Schram (2000) for instance, traces how cultural anxieties about economy, family, work and class leave their mark on social welfare policies. Anti-poverty policies reflect dominant cultural norms about the imagined ‘poor subject’. Relational theorizations of poverty reveal how and where entrenched beliefs about social categories are brought into material reality through policies and anti-poverty initiatives. A relational poverty analysis reveals how cultural consensus about poverty and poor subjects translates to material realities of policies and institutional arrangements. It also shows that poverty policy and action are sites of contestation and conflict, a terrain for reworking and contesting cultural and political values about poverty and poor subjects.

Relational poverty research draws on several ideas from Foucault to theorize how impoverishment is maintained through discursive and disciplinary power. In particular, theories of *power* and *governmentality* reveal how impoverishment is produced and maintained through

institutions, norms and power dynamics that shape the range of actions and understandings for poor subjects (Rose 1999; Schram 2000, Burnett 2013, Lawson and Elwood 2014). Relational poverty research focuses on the relations between differently positioned subjects: across class and racial difference, through alliances, and between those seen as ‘deserving’ and those offering support (Schram, Fording, and Soss 2008; Blokland 2012). Further, scholars look to the cultural norms about poverty and how these translate to the governance of impoverishment (Foucault et al. 1991). Within a culture that frames poverty as a personal failing, relational theorizations of poverty argue that individuals must repeatedly prove their deservingness of safety net support programs (Bonds 2009; Schram et al. 2010a; Burnett 2013). Whether through demonstrating workforce viability, expressing ‘respectability’, or succumbing to state surveillance of drug and alcohol consumption, the state has long policed the deservingness of poor subjects (Will 1993; Schram 2000; Schram, Soss, and Houser 2009; Gordon 2013; Chauvin and Garcés-Mascreñas 2014). Discourses of personal responsibility, economic self-sufficiency and entrepreneurialism pervade the cultural imaginary. In the last three decades, cultural theorists identify that the successful and ideal cultural subject embodies market ideals and skills (Rose 1999). This ‘entrepreneurial’ subject is one who seeks their own opportunities, incorporates language of self-sufficiency, and is on track to be, theoretically, free of public support.

In other words, the imagined ‘poor subject’ is expected to strive towards market incorporation and economic self-sufficiency. Relational poverty scholars trace how this discourse articulates within the nonprofit and NGO sectors: many anti-poverty programs encourage individuals to be market-ready, employable and financially savvy through microcredit programs, financial literacy training, or job training programs (Maskovsky 2000; Evans, Richmond, and Shields 2005; Guthman 2008; Lyon-Callo 2008; Dolhinow 2010; Roy 2010,

2012). The framework of governmentality helps explain how mainstream philanthropic anti-poverty programs encourage individuals to self-regulate towards these ideals, regardless of participation in formal programs or policies. Relational poverty theorization helps explain how individual subjects are produced through anti-poverty programs, yet does so in a way that does not fall back on individualizing narratives.

Finally, relational poverty theory offers a way to understand subject formation as central to processes of impoverishment, and allows us to further theorize how subject formation happens in and through anti-poverty philanthropic programs. Individuals take on particular subject positions vis-a-vis their activities, identities, cultural formation, and representation (Hall 1996; Cruikshank 1999; McLaren 2002). Impoverishment is then experienced at the intersections of identities such as race, class and gender (hooks 2000; Goode and Maskovsky 2001; Roy 2003). Relational poverty scholars have examined how socio-cultural constructions of class impact how class subjects are disciplined, managed, counted, controlled or advantaged and privileged. This strand of relational poverty scholarship relies heavily on Gramsci's theory of class and Bourdieu's concept of class distinction. Gramsci (1992) argues that these class positions are not pre-determined, but produced through contestation and negotiation over ideology and hegemony. Scholars have employed this conceptual framework to consider how class subjects articulate their position and claims through cultural and political institutions (Robson and Butler 2001; Fernandes and Heller 2006). Geographical relational poverty scholarship extends this theory to focus on socio-spatial processes such as place-making, national belonging and boundary-making in subject formation (Comaroff and Comaroff 2001; Glassman 2011; Adamovsky 2012; Elwood, Lawson, and Sheppard 2016).

Bourdieu's theorization of class formation (1984) recognizes additional ways in which social practice defines and delineates social class, rather than class being an *a priori* set of categories defined by income or labor position. Instead, Bourdieu uses the idea of *distinction* to theorize class formation, arguing that the action and habits of class subjects operate in service of distinguishing and differentiating themselves from others. These processes secure class position and privilege, through educational practices, institutional affiliations, vocabulary, financial practices, and, I add, philanthropic giving. In particular, Bourdieu is interested in how middle class subjects are constituted through actions, choices and performances aimed at creating distinction from differently classed subjects. For instance, middle class actors make political and economic choices about consumption, the arts and lifestyle offer to separate them from poorer classes. Elites, on the other hand, distinguish themselves from middle classes through their education level and access to exclusive services (Bourdieu 1984; Ostrower 1995; Reay 1997; Swartz 1997; Holt 2008).

A handful of studies have examined subject formation through philanthropy, with particular emphasis on giving as relational. In other words, giving effects the recipient *and* the donor subject, and this is consequential for class identities. Within countries of the global North, for instance, scholars have examined philanthropy amidst the privatization of care and the responsabilization of individuals (Roy 2010; Schram et al. 2010a). Roy examines micro-finance as a site of subject formation for millennials and 'do-gooders'. These subjects cultivate a public identity as 'global citizens' which they practice and perform identity through their donations and charitable contributions to the micro-finance industry. Roy also highlights how micro-finance always produces a *recipient* subject, also, one who is market-ready, entrepreneurial and deserving. Silver (2007) and Wernick (2012) explore the potential for philanthropy to disrupt

relations of class privilege, focusing on alternative philanthropic practices such as engaged, reflexive philanthropy with wealthy young people. Wernick argues that this has transformative potential to creating long-lasting radicalized donors who actively dismantle their own class privilege through philanthropy. However, Silver argues that this type of philanthropic engagement is constrained by larger structural relations of power, and that even well-intentioned wealthy individuals use participation in 'alternative' philanthropy to promote their position as an enlightened donor-subject, rather than actively disrupting class privilege or identity. This strand of research suggests that relational poverty theory can help us understand the significance and effects of social justice philanthropy.

Relational poverty theorization highlights the need to extend analyses away from only those deemed 'impoverished' and towards those in positions of power, privilege and wealth to better understand the ways that middle-class and more powerful actors are constituted through their relation *to* poor subjects and impoverished places (Fernandes 2006; Elwood, Lawson, and Nowak 2015; Lawson et al. 2015). These scholars argue that to fully understand impoverishment, one has to look at those whose experience is defined *in contrast to* poverty (Tilly 1998; Green 2006). It is often these more powerful actors who create and manage anti-poverty programs and policies, and who contribute to dominant discourses and poverty knowledge. In particular, this theory allows us to understand how subjects are constituted in and of their social practices, such as philanthropic anti-poverty programs. Relational theorizations of class and poverty show how class is constituted as a set of relational practices, rather than fixed categories. Impoverishment is understood through the relationships between different classed subjects, the practices and discourses of different classes, and the governance practices enacted upon poorer subjects by middle class subjects and other more privileged actors. Such theory

allows me to build an analysis of the types of subjects produced *in* social justice philanthropy, as well as the subjects *of* social justice philanthropy. Relational poverty theory helps me read the kinds of relational poverty politics that are part of social justice philanthropy, through the kinds of class subjects produced through the practices. It also allows me to see the ways that actors in social justice philanthropy understand and act upon poverty through their work.

#### ***2.4 Building a relational poverty theorization of social justice philanthropy***

Drawing on the concepts and literatures explored in the previous sections, in this dissertation I carry out a relational poverty analysis of social justice philanthropy. I focus my analysis on multiple arenas of social justice philanthropy: institutional practices and structures, the donors and their beliefs about philanthropy and poverty, the kinds of organizations and activities that get funded, the priorities and rationales by which grant recipients are evaluated, and the practices and politics of the grantee organizations themselves. Such an analysis reveals a full breadth to how social justice philanthropy produces, shapes and intervenes on poverty. My relational poverty analysis builds on and speaks back to existing philanthropic studies literature and the critiques from critical poverty studies.

Drawing from these literatures, I propose that social justice philanthropy stands to influence poverty through its institutional practices. I approach SJP as an institution that produces poverty knowledge. As such, I consider how social justice philanthropy understands and conceptualizes poverty. To do so, I assess the policies, language, metrics and frameworks through which social justice philanthropy operationalizes its poverty politics. My analysis looks for instances in which SJP aims its practices at the *processes* rather than the *characteristics* of poverty, which would represent a major departure from conventional philanthropic practices. In other words, in their policies, language, and frameworks, does social justice philanthropy think about poverty as a

temporary individual circumstance, or an interlocking set of processes which require a different type of institutional practice? Specifically, I explore how SJP conceives of the ‘root causes’ of poverty that it purports to address, and how it goes about trying to act on these root causes.

I take up relational poverty theory’s emphasis on structural processes of impoverishment, asking whether and how social justice philanthropy tries to affect these processes. This plays out in the kinds of anti-poverty actions that social justice philanthropy supports, specifically, the kinds of actions and organizations SJP is aimed at funding. I consider how social justice philanthropy seeks to intervene in structural processes of impoverishment such as land dispossession, capitalist labor relations, racialized employment discrimination, and withdrawal of the housing and health care safety nets from the welfare state. I analyze whether and how grantee practices address these structural processes of impoverishment. For instance, how does institutional poverty knowledge translate to anti-poverty action on the ground? A relational poverty analysis focuses the lens on whether and how grantees act upon processes, such as a lack of affordable housing, processes of settler colonialism, state-sanctioned violence, excessive anti-immigration policing, and labor exploitation.

Finally, drawing on these literatures, I examine how social justice philanthropy works as a socio-cultural process that has implications for the production of social subjects in relation to poverty. I examine social justice philanthropy as a process aimed at creating and establishing social consensus about the appropriate ways to address poverty and inequality through philanthropy. I assess SJP as a mechanism for extending or disrupting dominant practices of poverty governance, judgement, and deservingness. And, I consider SJP as a site for subject formation and the production of philanthropic actors. I analyze how social justice philanthropy exerts *disciplinary* power in its ability to inform and constrain resources, govern poor subjects,

and organize donor practices. I also analyze how SJP establishes *discursive* power by establishing norms about the appropriate relationship between philanthropy and civil society in the production and maintenance of poverty. Through these lenses, I explore the actions, discourses and expectations for SJP participants and grantees, to understand the ways in which SJP transforms social actors understandings of poverty and class while simultaneously leaving some forms of class privilege and distinction undisturbed. A key piece of this work is my effort to theorize social justice philanthropy as a practice of distinction for its largely privileged participants. These conceptual underpinnings drive my analysis of social justice philanthropy as a set of practices that are consequential for poverty because of the kinds of social subjects and relations they set up. These subjects and social relations have implications for the maintenance or disruption of power, privilege and impoverishment.

My research allows a fuller understanding of the range of processes that encompass social justice philanthropy's poverty politics. A relational poverty analysis of social justice philanthropy reveals key insights that existing philanthropic research obscures. First, my analysis contributes to gaps in philanthropic literature that currently view philanthropy through an economistic lens. My research makes visible the limitations and contradictions within social justice philanthropy as they aim to act upon processes of capitalist accumulation, wealth inequality and racial capitalism. Second, my analysis of social justice philanthropy contributes to research on the relationship between the market, civil society and the state in anti-poverty programming, and reveals the ways that alternative philanthropic practices inform anti-poverty programs on the ground. In particular, this research reveals how, even in progressive and self-proclaimed social justice organizations, relational poverty knowledge hits barriers and limitations to grounding into meaningful action on the processes of impoverishment. Finally, my

research fills gaps in existing literature on identity and social relations within philanthropy.

Rather than emphasizing only the subjects of philanthropic aid, or the elite actors at the top of the wealth pyramid, my research explores the subjects and actors constituted through social justice philanthropy, in particular middle class and more privileged actors. Such an approach allows us to better understand the societal significance of social justice philanthropy. More than a niche form of philanthropy, my research highlights the social relations and individual transformations that produce philanthropic actors, who extend their own poverty politics beyond the walls of social justice philanthropy and towards their social and political worlds. This research richly theorizes and conceptualizes impoverishment, which illustrates how social justice philanthropy intervenes on the structural processes of impoverishment and the social actors who act on impoverishment.

### **Chapter 3 – Understanding Social Justice Philanthropy through the Extended Case Method**

This research was guided by the following research questions: (1) How has social justice philanthropy come to understand the causes and conditions of poverty? 2) How does social justice philanthropy enact poverty politics through the programs and interventions it supports and funds? 3) How do individual donors come to understand themselves and other people/places through their involvement in social justice philanthropy programs? 4) How does social justice philanthropy facilitate transformation for individuals and within the philanthropic sector? Currently, there is very little theoretical work that explores social justice philanthropy directly, so I tackle these questions through an inductive, theoretically-driven study of the field of social justice philanthropy.

My work relies on the extended case method (Burawoy 1998) to theorize social justice philanthropy's relationship to the political economic and social relations of impoverishment. My aim was to understand the limitations and possibilities of social justice philanthropy to transform the individual involved, the organizations which promote social justice philanthropy, those actually experiencing impoverishment, and the field of philanthropy as a whole. I investigated the ways in which SJP conceptualizes and operationalizes 'poverty', how its practices reflect these conceptualizations, and whether and how the organization acts upon these causes and processes of impoverishment. Simultaneously, my research explored the kinds of poverty politics grounded by social justice philanthropy through giving and grant-making processes. The extended case method generates theory-driven propositions from inductive analyses of ethnographic evidence, interviews, and archival data collection. In this research, I rely on

theorizations of the political economic and social processes which produce and sustain impoverishment and inequality and the ways in which philanthropy has imagined its role as an institutional intervention into the processes of impoverishment.

In my case study, I gathered evidence from three sources. First, through six months of participant observation with Funding Together Northwest, where I joined the 2014 Economic Justice Funding Alliance. I conducted 35 semi-structured interviews with a mix of participants, donors, staff, board members and grantees. I went on two site visits to long-time grantees for additional observation and interviews. Finally, I analyzed grant applications, memos, emails and event documentation from Funding Together Northwest (FTN) and the grantees I visited directly. My analysis of these data focused on drawing out the concepts, discourses, practices and social relations which comprise social justice philanthropy vis-à-vis Funding Together Northwest.

### ***3.1 The case study: why Funding Together Northwest?***

Funding Together Northwest is a theoretically and analytically significant case site for my research. FTN is one of many philanthropic organizations experimenting with new models for philanthropic engagement that incorporate greater donor membership, participation and relationships to the organization, beyond making donations alone. The organization is seen as a leader in the field of social justice philanthropy, which is a tightly connected network of organizations. For instance, FTN's 'funding alliance' model is currently being piloted by at least four other organizations across the U.S., and is likely to gain popularity among other peer organizations that do social justice philanthropy. While not all organizations who do social justice philanthropy follow the same approach as Funding Together Northwest, the funding alliance model is significant for both how SJP is different from other forms of philanthropy, and

the types of poverty politics advanced through SJP. Most social justice philanthropic organizations are small, with staff under 20 people, budgets under \$1.5 million, and operations targeted to a local or regional context. The leaders of these organizations are in regular contact with one another, and best practices and knowledges are shared openly through conferences, friendly relationships, and through formal channels.<sup>9</sup> My case study serves as a jumping off point for inductive analysis of social justice philanthropy, and proposes new theoretical insights which can shape future research into social justice philanthropy.

Funding Together Northwest is a small nonprofit organization based in the urban hubs of the Northwest, with offices in two different metropolitan areas. Founded in 1971, the organization was largely made up of white progressive people with wealth, who wanted to direct their resources to grassroots and Native led organizing efforts in the Northwest. The program relied on individual donations by these donors, and a collective grant-making process for much of its life cycle as an organization. In the 90s, following a leadership transition, the organization started cultivating a racial justice lens to their work.

Preceding the Great Recession of 2008, FTN relied on funding from members and donors, as well as support from local foundations. In the aftermath of the Recession, when it became clear that large gifts and donations had slowed and the endowment of FTN had suffered, members of the staff envisioned a new model for their work. The funding alliance model, inspired by Kim Klein's grassroots fundraising principles<sup>10</sup>, merged concepts of a 'giving circle'<sup>11</sup> a community philanthropy board, and individual donations. The model takes 15-25 individuals with a shared

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<sup>9</sup> The Funding Exchange was a nonprofit consortium of progressive and social justice philanthropy organizations. It ceased operations in 2012, but many of its member organizations maintain communications and mutual support.

<sup>10</sup> Kim Klein is a leader in grassroots fundraising and offers trainings and resources across the country

<sup>11</sup> For more on Giving Circles, see Angela Eikenberry's extensive research, also cited in Chapter 2.

interest in a social justice area (environment, economy, criminal justice, gender, etc), and teaches them about fundraising, grant making and philanthropy. Funding alliance participants spend six months engaging in workshops about race and class identity, about one-on-one fundraising strategies, about how to assess community organizing, and about histories of the racial wealth divide in the US.

Most of the funding alliance is done solo: with 8-9 meetings spread out over a six-month period, funding alliance participants are largely on their own to read grant proposals, ask individual community members and family members for donations, and research organizations that are being considered for a site visit. At the end of each funding alliance, the group spends one day to select from the organizations who received site visits (usually 10-16), and give out grants to the target number of organizations (usually 8-10). This process happens by consensus during a day-long workshop. Staff facilitators organize each meeting and check in on the team's progress, but in the end, the group is responsible for its own fundraising and decision-making. The grants are either one-year at \$10,000, or two-years at \$20,000 for general operating expenses<sup>12</sup>. In 2014, FTN donated about \$772,000 to organizations across the Northwest, in grant sizes of ~\$10,000 each. With the exception of matching funds given intermittently by major donors or other foundations, all grant-making dollars come through the funding alliance model. FTN relies on donations and grants to their annual fund to support their 13-person staff and general operating expenses; their total operating budget in 2014 was about \$1.4 million. Program expenses come from foundation grants, individual donations to the annual fund, and investment income.

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<sup>12</sup> Since I completed the fieldwork, they have shifted towards significant emphasis on two-year grants, based on responses from grantees about their needs and the utility of multi-year funding.

Compared to other public philanthropic foundations in the Northwest, FTN is minute. In 2015, the Seattle Foundation gave out over \$83 million in grants and the Oregon Community Foundation gave out over \$103 million in grants and scholarship (Seattle Foundation Annual Report 2015; Oregon Community Foundation Annual Report 2015). In 2015, FTN had 117 funding alliance members and 1,083 total donors to the funding alliances, a drop in the bucket compared to the many thousands of donors who give annually to the Foundations listed above. Despite their small size, FTN distinguishes itself from other alternative philanthropic organizations in three key ways. First, they are one of the few grant-making organizations to offer grants explicitly aimed at supporting general operating expenses, a rare practice within philanthropy. Second, FTN does not ask their grantee organizations to ‘report back’ at the end of a grant year with explicit successes or metrics of success. Instead, they ask for a brief annual report which is narrative based (Appendix A). Finally, the grantees funded by FTN tend to be small, and are not required to be certified as 501(c)3 nonprofits. The only requirement is that an organization has a fiscal sponsor to receive funds. These practices mean that grassroots community groups, some of which do not have federal status as nonprofits, can receive seed funds and grant investments that would otherwise be denied through other foundations and grant-making bodies. These factors make FTN an interesting organization through which to understand poverty politics, as they innovate and extend how philanthropy engages with individuals and organizations most directly experiencing impoverishment.

### ***3.2 The extended case method in action: research design and methods***

My fieldwork with FTN began in September 2014, and continued until September 2015, during which time I participated in a funding alliance and conducted 35 semi-structured interviews with staff, funding alliance participants, grantees and board members. At the

beginning of my funding alliance, I was explicitly clear that I had IRB approval to conduct participant observation, and shared my consent documents with each party. If individuals did not wish to be included in my field notes, I gave them opportunity to opt-out; none chose that option. For large-scale public events, I did not disclose my position as a researcher. For the site visits, I disclosed my status, and participated in the visit to understand how the site visit process *operated* as one component of the funding alliance practices rather than to research the mechanics of each organization<sup>13</sup>. During my observation, I paid attention to how participants and staff talked about poverty and inequality; how they talked about philanthropy; how they communicated with one another and what about; what created tensions or disagreements during grant-making processes and how people gauged ‘success’ of both grantee organizations and progressive social movements writ large.

Our Funding alliance ran from September 2014 - February 2015, and during this time I attended six day-long workshops and two evening-only workshops, detailed below, at the Funding Together Northwest office in downtown Seattle. I also participated in two site visits to grantees, one in rural Oregon and one in Boise, Idaho, in January and February 2015. In addition, I attended large events, such as the Annual Grantee Summit, which highlights organizations across the region who have received support from FTN. I also attended the annual celebration and awards dinner, which is both a fundraising dinner for FTN and highlights the work of grantees and members alike. I attended a workshop for FTN board and staff members on ‘class cultures’ in the fall of 2014 hosted by Betsy Leondar-Wright, the founder of Class Action, a

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<sup>13</sup> At the outset of each site visit, I had the accompanying FTN staff person explain my research role: I was studying social justice philanthropy writ large, and part of that was understanding the site visit process. I then added a few words that my observations would be focused on the dynamics of the site visit, the ways that FTN participants asked questions, and the structure of the meeting. I did not be make notes that impacted the grantee evaluation.

nonprofit organization that works to dismantle classism and bring more discussion of class and class identity by the public.

These activities allowed me insight into the daily practices, language, power dynamics and social relations between staff members and funding alliance participants engaged in social justice philanthropy. We (funding alliance participants) went through multiple trainings during the funding alliance: an introduction to social justice philanthropy and the funding alliance process; a two-day race and class analysis training; a day-long fundraising training; an evening grant-making training, a one-on-one meeting with a staff member; a film-screening and discussion event about predatory debt and the criminal justice system; a day-long grant-screening day; a final decision-making meeting, and a celebration party with the whole funding alliance and local grantees. During the site visits, we asked the grantees pre-determined questions to help assess their eligibility and qualifications, and then summarized our observations from the visit to share with all the funding alliance members. Each of us read all other site visits before our final decision meeting in February 2015.

In between the day-long workshops, we reviewed 42 grant applications and assessed them based on the criteria provided by FTN. These criteria are detailed in more depth in Chapter 4.3, and can be explored further in Appendix B. We kept track of our fundraising efforts on a shared database that was visible to all staff and fellow participants. We were provided access to a long list of reading and video resources about economic and racial justice to deepen our individual knowledge. For research purposes, I relied on this list as a source of insight about how FTN constructed its beliefs and values about impoverishment and inequality.

After the Funding Alliance, I conducted 35 semi-structured interviews with funding alliance alumni, first time participants, annual fund donors, FTN staff, board members and grantee staff. I

worked with my staff liaison to develop an email ask for semi-structured interviews. The bulk of these interviews were conducted between March and May 2015, with a handful more in summer 2015, and a final grantee visit in September 2015. Within the ‘donors’, I interviewed four sub-populations which reflected the different positions within FTN: one-time participants who joined a funding alliance but never participated again; those who had done two or more funding alliances and were supportive of the model; those new to a funding alliance; and those who had donated to the annual fund, but never participated in a funding alliance. These four different groups represented a broad spectrum of experiences with FTN, ensuring that my data didn’t rely only on participants who fully supported FTN and their practices. Having respondents who were new to FTN or who had never maintained participation provided a balanced perspective in my data. I conducted purposive sampling to find willing participants for my interviews, by emailing individuals with an IRB-approved script, with the option to reply to me if interested. For staff interviews, I reached out to staff members who represented a cross-section of racial, gender and staff positions at the organization. Board members were also identified purposively: working with the program director, we identified potential respondents who represented a cross-section of racial, gender, socio-economic and age demographics and length of time on the board. Of the initial ask, four individuals responded to participate in an interview. Finally, I worked closely with the FTN staff to identify grantees to interview. Given the power dynamics latent in philanthropy, we tried to select organizations who wouldn’t feel that their participation in my research would negatively impact their eligibility for a grant. As such, we identified organizations that had received FTN grants for more than 5 years (thus representing a longer-term trajectory of social justice philanthropy rather than a snapshot), and have reached the

maximum funding cap per year (\$25,000 per fiscal year). For these organizations, their participation would by definition have no bearing on their eligibility for grants from FTN.

My interviews sought to identify how respondents conceptualized social justice philanthropy; how they understand philanthropy as a process; how they understood ‘success’ of the grantee organizations and philanthropic efforts; how they felt about the site visits; whether and how they fundraised; and what aspects of the process felt the most impactful or transformative. At the end of each interview, I asked participants to think about where they saw FTN in 5-10 years, and if they had any additional anecdotes or stories to share. I also invited participants to self-identify their age, race, gender, sexual orientation, class, and any other demographic information they thought I should know. In my initial round of interviews in March – May 2015, the demographics heavily skewed towards white and middle class identified individuals, reflecting the majority demographics of FTN. I did a second ask and a second round of interviews in summer 2015, with respondents who identified as people of color and/or lower-income.

Working with my staff contact helped me establish trust-worthiness and build collaboration. However, this approach means my sample is skewed towards those who already have a level of ‘buy-in’ to Funding Together Northwest and/or who may feel obligated to contribute back to the organization. As such, evidence gathered from these individuals may tilt towards the positive aspects of social justice philanthropy. To compensate for this, I did a close read *across* different sources of evidence, looking for confirmation and contradictions about what FTN purports to do compared to the ways it grounds these values in practice.

The third and final part of my evidence came from archival and content analysis of documents, memos, websites and event artifacts associated with FTN and their grantees. I collected grant applications, handouts, worksheets, visuals, photographic evidence, event

programs, email announcements and websites. Throughout these documents, I was looking for whether and how poverty is mentioned or obscured, how grantee success is framed, what the predominant techniques are for telling grantee success stories, and how philanthropy is framed and presented. I analyzed textual documents to understand the ways that organizational messaging and practices are developed beyond in-person interactions, but also through memos, articles, artifacts and texts. The archival and content analysis also helped me look for consistencies and inconsistencies with my data.

I approached my evidence iteratively, conducting an inductive analysis of themes, categories, concepts, tensions and tactics across multiple forms of evidence. As I analyzed my archival documents, my interview transcripts and my field notes, I looked for concepts like *success*, for categories such as *middle class*, for themes such as *philanthropic spirit*, or tensions such as *disagreement* (Glaser and Strauss 1967). These concepts connect to and inform the theoretical insights of my research. Taken together, these insights help explain how social justice philanthropy understands and acts upon impoverishment and what this means for the individuals involved.

I developed these themes, concepts and categories using in-vivo and open coding (Seale 2004; Friese 2011; Hay 2016). I coded using Atlas.ti, for its capacity to handle multiple forms of evidence, as well as manual coding of interview transcripts and documents. Many of my codes came from foundational concepts in relational poverty theory, such as “deservingness”, “subject formation” and “racialization”. I used these types of codes when participants used lay language that referred or hinted at larger theoretical concepts. Other times, the codes came from the language of my respondents or archival documents, such as “doing good work”, “the movement”, “donor organizing” and “the racial wealth gap”. I developed larger families of

codes which helped me find consistency across my evidence. These included, “class”, “philanthropy”, “subjects”, “politics”, “race”, “poverty”, “fundraising” “transformation”, and others. I refined and evolved the core concepts driving the analysis as I went. In May 2016, I presented my initial research findings to Funding Together Northwest, giving the organization and its staff to comment on my analysis at that stage.

### ***3.3 Both insider and outsider: my positionality and standpoint***

I came to this project as an insider and an outsider and as a scholar with core methodological commitments to transparency, reciprocity and feminist praxis. With over 10 years of voluntary and professional experience in the nonprofit and voluntary sector, I was intimately aware of the tensions and conflicts experienced by funders and nonprofit organizations they strive to accomplish their work. I am White, highly educated and come from an upper middle class upbringing. I am cisgender female and queer, and have traveled extensively. In many ways, I share identity with the membership of Funding Together Northwest, and my life experience is well-reflected among its more privileged members. In other ways, my academic status marks me as an outsider to many FTN grantees, as someone with immense class privilege, and as someone who has not experienced marginalization as intimately.

An acquaintance introduced me to Funding Together Northwest in the fall of 2013, at which time I met with the program director for a 90-minute long introductory meeting. Upon learning about FTN’s unique model, I realized that the organization’s approach to philanthropy was new to me and many other philanthropic scholars. I spent the next 8 months developing rapport with the program director, attending what events I could as a volunteer, and gaining familiarity with the organization and its work. FTN is predominantly run by women of color and queer people, many of whom have experience doing community organizing throughout the US and specifically

in the Northwest. This community was aware of the legacies of invasive research practices, and I knew that I did not want to enter this research as an outsider - FTN wouldn't support the research if that were the case.

Throughout winter and spring of 2014, I met with my contact at FTN to discuss my desire to build my dissertation research around participation in a Funding Alliance. I explained wanting to use FTN as a case study to better understand social justice philanthropy. During this time, we established that I was committed to a reciprocal relationship in which I gave back to the organization and shared my research findings. They were open to my commitments as a scholar, and eager to hear criticism and feedback through the research process. Knowing my personal commitments and existing relationships, I watched for personal bias throughout my analysis and I strove to excise normalizing language about FTN's beliefs from my writing. I was aware of my own personal transformation through some of the race and class activities, but was careful not to project my own experience onto the words of my respondents. I read my field-notes for signs of over-excitement about processes I witnessed, and tried to go back to the base line observations about *what* I saw and *how* things were enacted in social relations. Regardless of these efforts, there remain three major ways in which my 'insider' role has impacted this research.

First, and most importantly, my participation in a Funding Alliance required me to make a financial gift and to fundraise among my own friends, family and peers. I donated \$250 to our funding alliance, representing the largest single donation I had ever made to one organization. As I fundraised my own community over the course of 6 months, I got 42 individual donations and raised about \$8,000 that contributed to a larger pot of \$107,000 with 15 peers. Through this process, I had to convince people that they should contribute to and invest in community organizing through a gift to Funding Together Northwest. Many of my donors gave as a favor to

me, as their friend or family member. But many of my donors were genuinely intrigued by my “pitch” and shared the values of community organizing and supporting social justice organizations that FTN represented. In trying to convince my own friends and family to be donors to my funding alliance, I blurred the line between my role as a participant and an observer; I had to be impassioned enough to convince folks to make contributions while still observing the fundraising process and dynamics as a researcher. Fundraising is a vital part of the funding alliance process, and full participation allowed me to understand the practices, tensions and capacities or limits to personal transformation through the process. Additionally, being a full participant in the funding alliance allowed me to build rapport with both grantees and fellow participants. They seemed to trust that I was invested in the process, not merely doing extractive research.

As a participant in the funding alliance process, I shaped the outcome of our practices as a group. This means that during the grant-making decisions, I cast my opinion about who should get funding and why; I shared perspectives on terminology when we developed frameworks about our process; I was vocal about my fundraising experience and strategy to help encourage others who struggled to make an ‘ask’. In the end, I really *enjoyed* the process of showing up, meeting peers, practicing my fundraising skills, and learning a lot about local nonprofit and community organizations advocating for a more just and equitable Northwest. It felt great to be able to make grants to organizations, and to know that the monies raised came out of our collective efforts. Recognizing my own very positive associations with the process, during my analysis I triangulated between my own observations and the insights from fellow donors and staff members. In practice this meant reading my own analysis for blind spots about

shortcomings, pitfalls, inconsistencies and contradictions. The inductive process of theoretical development allowed me to cross-check my findings with existing theory.

Second, I am a graduate student enmeshed in academic social networks. When I engaged in fundraising, I was eager to ask those who seemed sympathetic to social justice organizations and who had stable income which they could donate. As such, I asked academic colleagues, mentors and faculty to contribute to the funding alliance. While many of my friends and colleagues made modest gifts, many of the faculty declined or never followed through after a meeting. This highlights the difficulty of navigating my different roles as a researcher, student, friend, colleague, and fundraiser. In addition, I think that faculty members felt tension of donating to something that they would then later have to evaluate as a piece of research. This range of competing and overlapping identities is not unique to me as a researcher, however. Each funding alliance participant negotiates their identities as a family member, colleague, community member, and friend, as they fundraise. Part of the fundraising process for everyone involves uncomfortable moments in which power dynamics are made clear: who are the people that we want to ask, but for whom the ask will highlight our differential capacities?

Finally, my own identity as a queer woman emerged while the research was taking place, and this impacted the lens through which I saw my evidence. It was *through* meeting many people in my funding alliance, as well as realizing that the bulk interview respondents identified as queer, that I began to see a pathway and understanding for my own sexuality that I hadn't experienced before. I share this here to signify and honor that even in writing about my identity and positionality as a researcher, that my professional and personal selves are inter-meshed and always evolving. My identity and politics became more clearly constituted through the relationships I formed through Funding Together Northwest, and so the lens that queerness (both

politically and personally) brings to my life also evolved as I began the analysis of this project. The intersections of my own Whiteness, queerness, upper middle-classness, feminine gender expression, Jewishness, able-bodied-ness, and progressive politics inform how I perceive the analysis of my respondents and my own experiences in the Funding alliance. For instance, I was able to see and recognize how the myth of middle-classness and the formations of the racial wealth gap were more visible to me among other white, middle class respondents. The ways in which people talked about gender and sexuality in the research felt deeply familiar and often went unquestioned. The ease and familiarity with which my respondents refer to FTN terminology and social movement jargon required me to take a step back and question my own assumptions of shared meaning around terms. Finally, I also realize that there are multiple moments of personal transformation that might have been prompted for individuals through FTN, but that never were expressed in my interviews.

As of writing this dissertation, I am still involved with FTN as a member and donor to the annual fund. I regularly recruit friends and peers to participate in funding alliances, I make a monthly donation of \$15 to the annual fund, and I attend events when I can. During academic year 2016-17, I collaborated with FTN through the Community Based Learning and Research Fellowship at University of Washington Bothell. I received \$1,000 from UW Bothell to put towards a collaborative project and activities in my classes that contributed research to FTN that will help them develop strategy and communications for their upcoming annual fund. I plan to remain a regular member of the organization for as long as I stay in Seattle.

## **Chapter 4: “We Fight Root Causes”: Possibilities and Limitations to Grounding Relational Poverty Politics on Structural Processes of Impoverishment**

In this chapter, I explore one of the defining claims of FTN’s approach (and that of social justice philanthropy more broadly): that they support organizations working to address the *root causes of poverty*. This claim, and the specific ways it is understood and acted upon, is a central site where the poverty politics of social justice philanthropy come into being. My analysis suggests that FTN’s conceptualization of root causes is indeed a relational conceptualization of poverty, in its emphasis on structural processes of impoverishment (as opposed to individual characteristics or actions). By emphasizing personal experiences of structural processes of impoverishment, FTN practices a more responsive and less paternalistic approach to philanthropy than in conventional philanthropy. Ultimately, though, I argue that despite having a critical and relational analysis of impoverishment at the organizational level, FTN and its grantees struggle to translate these critical analyses into direct action upon processes of impoverishment. Specifically, meaningful transformation of the root causes of impoverishment are constrained by the very real long-term effects of deep, multidimensional forms of impoverishment and marginalization.

Funding Together Northwest understands ‘poverty’ as a condition produced through capitalism, labor exploitation, white supremacy, land dispossession, resource privatization, segregation and/or cultural ‘othering’. Broadly, Funding Together Northwest approaches poverty as the result of multiple overlapping systems of political, social and economic marginalization. As such, potential and current grantees are identified as those “least well off” economically, politically and socially.

This conceptualization of poverty informs Funding Together Northwest's engagement with impoverishment. In this section, I answer the question of whether and how Funding Together Northwest intervenes on the root causes of impoverishment, by looking at four aspects of FTN's process: the assumptions and discourses within the organization about impoverishment (4.1); the ways in which the organization conceptualizes the role of philanthropy in addressing impoverishment (4.2); the ways these rationalities inform the practices of grant-making (4.3); and the ways in which grantees negotiate the politics of social change and structures of impoverishment (4.4).

#### ***4.1 Establishing relational poverty knowledge: FTN's priorities and institutional understandings of impoverishment***

Funding Together Northwest advances a core belief about poverty that offers an alternative to the dominant practices within mainstream philanthropy, and which they aim to inculcate in their donors and grantees. Namely, FTN adopts a relational understanding of impoverishment that leads them to work on the 'root causes' of poverty. In other words, the organization tries to work on the structural processes of impoverishment, such as political economic arrangements to do with corporate practices, state policies, and economic relations. The organization tries to inculcate this way of thinking about root causes in their individual funding alliance members.

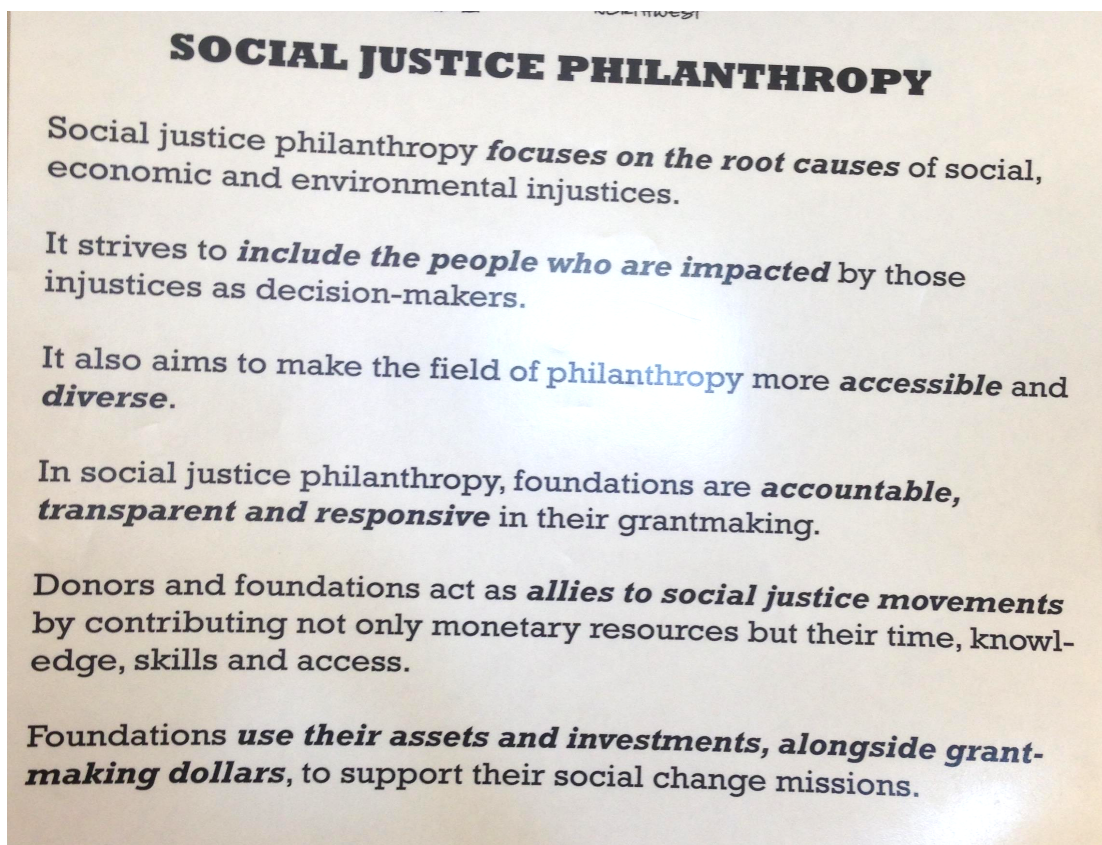
Funding Together Northwest draws their understanding of 'root causes' from the broader field of social justice philanthropy. The Independent Sector, a leader in research on philanthropy and the nonprofit sector, defines social justice philanthropy as "the granting of philanthropic contributions to nonprofit organizations based in the United States and other countries that work for **structural change** in order to increase the opportunity of those who are the least well off

politically, economically, and socially” (Independent Sector report - emphasis added). Resource Generation, another leader in the field, explains that, “Social change philanthropy focuses on the **root causes** of social, economic and environmental injustices. This means that social change philanthropy supports organizations that are getting to the **roots of problems** instead of only addressing the symptoms” (Resource Generation, accessed 12/10/2016). These definitions of SJP point to the structural causes and processes of impoverishment, even though they don’t say ‘poverty’ explicitly. For instance, the invocation of economic and environmental *justice* signals disproportionate power relations, economic inequality, and racial barriers to health and labor. This framing of social justice philanthropy recognizes the multidimensional processes which produce impoverishment.

While FTN’s mission emphasizes working on structural level changes to improve the lives of those with the least political, social and economic power, mission statements alone are insufficient to understanding the day-to-day work of the organization. Their mission translates the material practices and lived experiences of impoverishment through the organization’s internal practices and discourses, such as the trainings throughout the *funding alliance* process. On the very first day of a funding alliance, FTN staff establish a shared framework and consensus about the purpose of social justice philanthropy and the commitment to understanding and addressing the root causes of poverty and inequality. Staff share the organization’s working definition of social justice philanthropy to try and help participants understand that they are part of something unique within philanthropy, that it is bigger than just their own funding alliance, and that there are firm commitments in place beyond the group. This photo shows the core commitments of how Funding Together Northwest translates their commitments to social justice philanthropy:

Figure 1: FTN's definitions of social justice philanthropy, taken by author, 9/14/14

Each of these statements is read aloud by members of the group. There isn't extensive

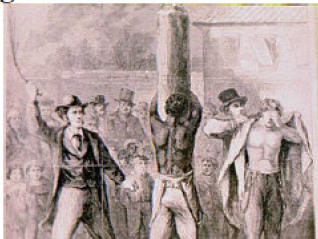


explanation of each one in real time, but reading is followed with a day-long training that provides *tangible examples of what these commitments mean within FTN*.

For example, funding alliance participants establish shared language about root causes of specific colonial and racial injustices and the role of national policy in producing them. In an activity, participants move around the perimeter of the room in pairs, where 8x11 pieces of paper each show a different historical moment within the U.S, beginning with the colonization of the Americas by Christopher Columbus. Staff explain that the activity shows how economic inequality and injustice is *produced*, and that specific policies and racist actions created today's current conditions. The timeline also highlights moments of historical resistance, to show that oppressive policies and actions did not go without dissent. Participants use post-it notes to expand the timeline, by adding personal history or additional knowledge. Some of the 'moments'

of the timeline include: 1619 - beginning of slavery in the U.S., the Indian Removal Act of 1830s, the first 8-hour workday taking effect in 1868, the great migration of 1916-1930 of African Americans to the North and Midwest; internment of Japanese and Japanese-Americans in 1942, 'Operation Wetback' in 1954, which deported millions of Mexican bracero workers; the establishment of the Black Panther Party in WA in 1968; WA state's implementation of the "three strikes" law in 1993; the implementation of NAFTA in 1994, and the signing of Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (aka welfare reform) in 1996<sup>14</sup>. The images below are three examples of timeline snapshots:

### 1844-1927: Oregon Disenfranchisement Laws



1844: Slavery declared illegal in the Oregon Territory, but "Lash Law" requires that blacks "be they free or slave" be whipped twice a year "until he or she shall quit the territory." Soon deemed too harsh, punishment is "reduced" to forced labor.

## 1492

Columbus reportedly the 1<sup>st</sup> European to set foot on the New World.

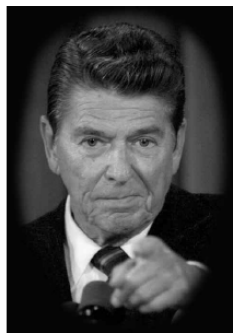
At the time of his arrival, the Northern Hemisphere is populated by 5,000,000+ indigenous people.



Figure 2, 3: Excerpts from FTN timeline activity

<sup>14</sup> This historical timeline adapted from a Western States Center curriculum

## 1980s



**Reaganomics:** policies of supply-side economics—cutting taxes & government spending—spark worsening economic recession; most visible in demise of heavy industry in “rust belt” cities like Pittsburgh.

**War On Drugs:** Began during a time when illicit drug use was on the decline and law enforcement agencies didn't consider illegal drug use an issue, these policies lead to the hyper-militarization of police, mandatory minimum sentencing laws, and to the prison industrial complex we have today.

Figure 4: excerpts from the ‘timeline’ activity at FTN

As funding alliance participants reflected on this activity, their reactions highlight the complex and historical nature of how inequality is sustained: “these things have been happening for a long time - there’s been a concerted effort. The values are engrained, and hard to undo...” and, “...some of the things that happened 200 years ago are still happening, they have no ‘end date’ - some are happening but just look differently now” (adapted from field notes, 9/14/14).

Regarding NAFTA, one participant mentioned, “how do you succinctly show what NAFTA is? It’s easier to understand things that are visually easy to see. Bureaucrats and capitalists make it hard to challenge and fight these policies...” (9/14/14 field notes). Another participant recognized the deeply personal nature relating to historical trauma, family history, and their personal gratitude that they were no longer fighting for their lives, like so many had done, and so many continue to do. This activity and participants’ reflections show that within FTN, poverty must be understood in context of the historical and ongoing political economic processes which sustain power and produce inequality.

Despite taking the time to build out individuals' understandings of the structures which *produce* impoverishment, Funding Together Northwest largely uses language of 'inequality' instead of 'poverty' during their programming. Their use of 'inequality' is meant to bring systemic forms of privilege and the intersecting processes of injustice into view. Indeed, 'inequality' here is not a de-politicized version of poverty, but instead highlights the very real and sustained difference between systems of wealth generation and systems of impoverishment. For instance, during the economic justice funding alliance, participants regularly discussed how economic processes create *inequality*, and identified its primary concerns as: 'economic inequality', 'wealth inequality', 'the racial wealth gap', and 'injustices'. By flagging the 'racial wealth gap' as a priority funding area, this funding alliance reflects FTN's desire to inculcate a relational analysis of impoverishment that sees privilege, poverty, race and class as deeply intertwined.

Of course, 'poverty' isn't completely absent from Funding Together Northwest. FTN notes on their website that one of the many "categories" that they fund might include organizations that are, "Researching root causes of social problems (like **poverty**, its implications, discrimination, lack of access to politics, public policy making and the economy)" (FTN website, accessed 12/10/2016, emphasis added) and that two of the many strategies that organizations might pursue include: "Economic development that increases the socio-economic opportunities of disadvantaged and disenfranchised population" or "Advocacy and lobbying to enact changes in government policies regulations and programs affecting disadvantaged populations." Poverty is one of many targets that FTN aims at, although it is clear in their curriculum and institutional knowledge that they grasp impoverishment as a set of geohistorical processes.

This discursive practice suggests dual implications: first, that Funding Together Northwest has intentionally moved away from naming ‘poverty’, because of the residual nature of anti-poverty programs pervasive in the conventional nonprofit and philanthropic sectors. FTN’s stated commitments warrant a distancing from language imbued with a paternalistic overtone. Instead, their language reflects their recognition of the multiple processes which lead to impoverishment: people experience economic inequality and marginalization due to the intersections of race, class, immigration, gender and geography. When ‘poverty’ is used by conventional philanthropy, it neglects this complexity. Second, FTN’s embrace of ‘inequality’ over poverty is concurrent a broader trend within philanthropy that *depoliticizes* poverty as a set of structural processes requiring urgent political action (Roy 2016b). While FTN’s choice not to name ‘poverty’ can be interpreted as embracing the relational production of impoverishment, it also must be understood as a missed opportunity to explicitly re-politicize the conditions which produce poverty and to name the agency and power of poor-people’s movements and experiences.

With this framework that identifies structural processes of impoverishment, FTN staff lead funding alliance members to translate their analysis onto the nonprofit sector, the arena through which FTN intervenes. The activity, “falling rocks” asks participants to approach an unjust scenario through three different perspectives. In the scenario, an impoverished village at the bottom of a mountain is victim to falling rocks, which hurt villagers and destroy infrastructure. The rocks fall because a corporation atop the mountain mines and creates structural damage to the mountain. Each group is asked to take a different perspective from within the nonprofit sector about how to address the falling rocks. The first group, representing the corporation, explained that they would take a “social responsibility” approach, bring

stakeholders to the table, and attempt to find an ameliorative solution to the problem; there was little confidence in this approach from the FTN participants. The second team took a more conventional nonprofit approach, which established clinics and treatment centers for the victims of the falling rocks. Group members noted that this approach, while it would help individuals from the symptoms of the rocks, wouldn't stop more people from being hurt. Finally, the third group, of which I was a part, identified that a more "radical" approach would be to put pressure directly on the corporation to stop their mining and rock-throwing in the first place. The group argued that the campaign should appeal to the corporation in their own language, rather than be wholly antagonistic. Upon completion, the facilitators helped the whole group to identify the *root causes* in this scenario: the company's economic need and profit-making agenda, environmental degradation, and the political marginalization of the village community. This activity establishes a shared framework for participants to identify and understand whether and how a nonprofit organization would be addressing the 'root causes' of their impoverishment.

Funding Together Northwest understands impoverishment as the result of complex geo-historical processes, and commits to support and fund organizations which recognize these processes and work to address their root causes. The organizational language and practices attempt to inculcate this same rationality among its participants. Two of my respondents demonstrate this understanding through their description of the 'destructive forces' that FTN tries to address:

...[social justice philanthropy is] able to move money to places where they're really trying to impact **macro-level**. So it's big, bigger changes... working to combat these kind of destructive forces... by redistributing... the most tangible outcome of that privilege, which is money... from places where there are deep pockets. To places where there aren't. [**Noah** and Annette, 3/19/2015, emphasis added]

Noah and Annette's reference to *redistribution* signals a tacit recognition of the fundamental ways that 'destructive forces' concentrate wealth and produce poverty. While they don't go so far as to name 'capitalism' or call for foundational restructuring of how the economy works, they *are* able to diagnose that unequal wealth distribution is a root cause of impoverishment. Arguing for redistribution, particularly in the current anti-tax political culture of the U.S., is notable.

Others offer a deeper analysis. For instance, a longtime participant and board member explains that an organization like FTN is necessary to address the current political economic moment:

...the **absence of most kinds of safety nets** — like we've **destroyed welfare** ...[or] putting money into housing...and we still are living with **institutional racism**, and the basic inequality when it comes to capitalism — well we're always going to need some sort of Funding Together Northwest. [Felix, 8/8/15, emphasis added]

In other words, by recognizing institutional racism, capitalist inequality and the systematic attack on public safety net programs, participants articulate FTN's conceptualization of impoverishment, which goes beyond discrete and individualized metrics. They argue for a philanthropic approach that redistributes resources to nonprofit groups aiming at the structural processes of impoverishment. Understanding organizational contexts vis-à-vis root causes becomes central to the rhetoric and language of what it means to participate in a funding alliance.

Funding Together Northwest understands impoverishment as the result of structural processes such as labor exploitation, land dispossession, violent immigration policing, institutional racism and classism. By using a framework about 'root causes' and processes of impoverishment, FTN talks about poverty without replicating the individualizing and responsabilizing tendencies of much anti-poverty programming, thus avoiding traps of residual poverty thinking. At the same time, by choosing 'inequality' and 'injustice' over language of 'poverty', they are both moving away from residual frameworks while simultaneously missing a potential opportunity to politicize poverty action.

#### ***4.2 Doing philanthropy differently: a politics of non-conventional philanthropy***

Funding Together Northwest's conceptualization of poverty – particularly its emphasis on structural processes of impoverishment – directly informs the processes and priorities of their grant-making efforts. That is, how they conceive of poverty and impoverishment has implications for the ways they practice social justice philanthropy. In this section, I argue that Funding Together Northwest offers a *new rationality and set of priorities for how philanthropy should extend its analyses of poverty towards its actions*. I provide evidence for how FTN rewrites the narrative of how to 'do' philanthropy, and what role philanthropists should have in a relational poverty politics.

Funding Together Northwest disrupts the philanthropic norm of paternalism that asks grantees to specify exactly what they intend to do with their funds. Instead, FTN provides 'general operating expenses' to organizations and grantees<sup>15</sup>, a commitment which signifies trust in an organization to best spend their resources. Contrasted to large-scale grant making, wherein an organization may lose funding if they fail to produce their intended outcomes, FTN's stated goals reflect a desire to reconsider the power dynamic in which funders and philanthropists know what's best for their grantees.

Participants of FTN can critique conventional approaches to philanthropy, and have a critical politics around questions of deservingness, metrics evaluation, etc. Even though they don't use these specific words, they show that they recognize, and are critical of, the ways that residual poverty approaches undergird in mainstream philanthropy. In fact, disillusionment with the paternalistic dynamics of nonprofit-philanthropic funding relationships seems to be a

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<sup>15</sup> This is a trend that is picking up beyond Funding Together Northwest, as nonprofits across the U.S. demand more trust from funders. See: Nonprofit With Balls <http://nonprofitwithballs.com/2016/10/trust-based-grantmaking-what-it-is-and-why-its-critical-to-our-sector/> and The Whitman Institute on their move to trust-based grantmaking (<http://thewhitmaninstitute.org/twi-blog/trust-starting-point/>)

motivating factor for individuals to participate in FTN. One participant reflects on their perception about how traditional philanthropy frames its work, which includes a clear hierarchy of need and value judgements upon those who are deemed ‘poor’:

“...just to put it bluntly. There are people who.... are probably ‘less’ than the rest of us. That’s why they are in this situation of “need”. Those of us who are probably better in some way, who have more, should share, just like adults do with children who are somehow not as good as us. I mean, traditional philanthropy does not use that language, but there’s no way around that that’s how it seems...” [Fletch, 7/10/2015].

Fletch describes traditional philanthropy here as a foil to Funding Together Northwest’s actions and priorities. They critique the assumption that an individual’s need for services signals a lack of deservingness, and that this need should require strict philanthropic accountability. Restricted grant making means that recipients consistently must prove that they are worth investment and funding. This residual framing of poverty, which blames individuals for their own poverty, transfers over from individuals to grantee and nonprofit organizations. In conventional philanthropy framings, for instance, an *organization* which had already been ‘successful’ in its operations would only need minimal philanthropic support if at all. FTN attempts to rewrite this dynamic by having fewer strings attached to their funding. When asked what makes Funding Together Northwest unique, one board member said the type of progressive philanthropy that FTN practices is only unique so long as it doesn’t fall into paternalistic patterns of evaluation:

... everybody’s like, ‘come up with a logic model and this magic formula that’s going to tell you how to do things that you’ve been trying to figure out for your whole life’ ... But to tell people, ‘if you come with an evaluation, we’ll give you this much more money’, right. I think we should stay away from that. [Robel, 5/7/15]

Robel refers to the contemporary tendency among conventional and mainstream funders to demand organizations come up with ‘logic models’ ‘evaluation models’ and other ways of discretely measuring their impact. FTN, in contrast, asks very little of its grantees and treats the philanthropic relationship as a redistributive tool rather than an accountability mechanism.

FTN's conceptualization of poverty, and particularly the emphasis on structural processes of impoverishment, extend to understanding and diagnosing structural inequalities *in the philanthropic process*. Funding alliance participants apply their structural analyses of impoverishment to how they evaluate grant proposals. FTN also builds on this analysis to how they design the grant application processes. For instance, there is a recognition that organizations who are tackling root causes of poverty and inequality are often themselves disadvantaged within philanthropy, because long-term structural-level change is hard to translate into grant applications. This work might take multiple years, and is difficult to 'measure' and document the changes along the way. Most importantly, if structural level change is successful, it threatens systems and structures of power. Two respondents explain that many of FTN grantees are,

rural communities, undocumented folks, folks experiencing homelessness... people who...otherwise don't necessarily have a seat at the table, especially not when it comes to policy change.... And then it's also organizations that are working at a – an upstream level, to impact policy changes that will have systemic impact ... not just having kind of downstream 'we are mitigating the effects of these policies', but 'we are actually working to change the policies directly that are causing all of these systemic problems in the first place.' [Noah and **Annette** 3/19/15].

This couple, longtime contributors to the FTN annual fund, show their understanding of the structural inequalities of the philanthropic sector, and argue that when successful, the FTN funding process will re-distribute power, voice, and participation in policy-making and politics. Another respondent shows her understanding of the systemic inequalities built into conventional philanthropy and systems of wealth creation. She explains that mainstream philanthropy is:

...not intended to change systems of power. Like, Bill Gates ... does not create projects or fund projects that will dismantle his existence. Social justice needs to dismantle the ability to become that wealthy. So, philanthropy doesn't work that way. It's not meant to actually undo itself. Because it's based in wealth. And why, why would somebody very wealthy create, or fund, or support systems that...[unclear word] [Mira 3/13/15]

Mira argues that mainstream philanthropy replicates wealth accumulation and wealth inequality, because it relies on extreme wealth disparities. This dynamic undergirds the frameworks and grant-making decisions in conventional foundations. FTN's approach to philanthropy stems from this critique of mainstream philanthropy and structural processes of unequal wealth distribution implicit within.

These critiques of conventional philanthropy extend to the ways in which philanthropic practices are designed and structured. Joy, who has extensive experience in both conventional and social justice philanthropy, explains that conventional foundations replicate power inequalities in their decision-making processes:

... you have this group of trustees which is usually family members or wealthy people, or people with privilege or influence in the world and they're the ones who are... making the decisions about where money is going. That seems really problematic to me ... if your mission is to address the inequity that exists in our society, you need to have other people at the table in that decision-making process. (Joy, 5/12/15)

Joy applies a structural critique to the philanthropic sector, arguing that conventional philanthropy reifies hierarchies of wealth, knowledge and power. Funding Together Northwest distances itself from these tendencies by shifting their practices to include individuals from across a class spectrum. As part of this process, funding alliance participants can recognize and critique the unequal structural dynamics within philanthropy. Their participation at FTN offers opportunities to put these critiques into action through alternative philanthropic frameworks and priorities.

To conclude, Funding Together Northwest disrupts dominant philanthropic assumptions about the causes and solutions to poverty, develops some fundamentally different priorities and practices of grant-making, and adopts a different stance about philanthropy's role in poverty action. When compared to conventional philanthropic approaches, the contributions of Funding

Together Northwest are indeed dramatically different. They bring their relational poverty politics to philanthropic practices that historically have relied on discrete, punitive and individualized narratives about poverty. FTN offers participants and observers alternative priorities and norms about how to address impoverishment using institutions and philanthropic frameworks. Funding Together Northwest recognizes the structural inequalities within mainstream philanthropy, and designs their practices and priorities to disrupt existing hierarchies which maintain power and knowledge in the hands of wealthy philanthropists. Funding alliance participants adopt these structural critiques – a first step in a larger process of remaking the cultural consensus about philanthropy’s relationship to impoverishment.

#### ***4.C “Are they doing good work?”: grounding relational poverty knowledge into grant-making priorities and practices***

Funding Together Northwest’s recognition of the structural inequalities in mainstream philanthropy guides the organization to design and implement grant-making practices that are meant to correct for power imbalances implicit to conventional philanthropy. In this section, I explore how Funding Together Northwest’s conceptualization of impoverishment is grounded and enacted in their grant-making. The grant-making priorities discussed throughout the section emerge from both explicit priorities of FTN, as well as the ways that funding alliance participants do the work of evaluating proposals. For instance, the organization makes room for diverse forms of ‘expertise’ in philanthropy such as the experiences of those most impacted by impoverishment. Nonetheless, despite promoting new logics of grant-making, participants struggle to *apply* a structural assessment of impoverishment into their practices of decision-making and grantee assessment.

Grant-making is a key arena for enactment of poverty politics in philanthropy, specifically in the priorities and practices it enacts. In other words, the rationalities that infuse grant-making are *how* poverty politics get expressed in philanthropy. Funding Together Northwest states that one of its goals is to make philanthropy more transparent and democratic, as well as to explicitly fund organizations addressing the root causes of injustice and inequality. However, this goal becomes complicated when confronted with the realities of grant-making structures: how, for instance, can one grant application reveal whether an organization has made meaningful inroads against racialized capitalism? This tension is central to FTN's difficulties in integrating their relational conceptualization of poverty into their practices of grant-making.

One way that Funding Together Northwest aims at constructing alternative priorities into their grant-making by prioritizing the knowledge and lived experience of those closest to the processes of impoverishment. Grant applications ask organizations to describe their mission, history and major accomplishments, with a great deal of autonomy given to articulate their experience. Responses run the gamut from loose-flowing narratives of organizational history, to concrete details of the ways that organizations have 'succeeded' throughout the years. In other words, some organizations articulate their narratives in the same terms as conventional grant applications (i.e. 'success'), while others do not. One grantee that works with low-income Latina farmworkers explains their achievements through measurable indicators: monies raised through an artisan market endeavor, members' representation on a local radio station, total collaborations with other organizations, and involvement in four national campaigns. Another grantee, a Native-led organization seeking federal recognition for their tribe, articulates how their mission addresses specific processes of marginalization, such as colonial federal policies and theft of cultural artifacts and lands:

...Our treasured elders continue to pass on every year. Our tribe's artifacts live in the museums but we cannot claim them. Our land, sacred sites and burial grounds are swallowed up by civilization. Our history, songs, language and hearts are not protected like other recognized tribes, yet we strive to stay alive. Our strategy is to gain restoration to keep our people, our culture alive. In 1954, the Western Oregon Termination Act, terminated the rights of Western Oregon Tribes; and since, justice has been restored to 9 tribes. We now are seeking our justice...Once restored, we are eligible to receive federal aid for social, cultural and economic justice. [Rural Oregon grantee application, Nov. 2014]

Organizations are encouraged to narrate their story the best that they see fit, and many articulate the geo-historical and structural processes that most impact them. Rather than fit a specific formula for grant reporting, this additionally validates the perspective and experiences of grantees.

Grantees advance their own analysis of the root causes of poverty and inequality. This means that within FTN, grantee organizations directly articulate how their work combats unequal power relations, or disrupts capitalism. They often shield this analysis or framework from conventional funders. For instance, one respondent, who has been in both a grantee and a staff role, reflected on their experience applying for funding from FTN:

We would talk about root causes... we would explicitly name it. Like **white supremacy, or what other system are at play**. Whereas, if you're going to a foundation that doesn't have that language, you can point out the **consequences**. You can't necessarily put that label on it... I would tell them what our plan is. Why I think it would work and why I think it's effective. It's part of it. And they can get that if they want it. Not in a way that it alienates them – **or in a way that doesn't get us money...** Because sometimes maybe the program officer 'says this is amazing', but the board or whatever says 'this is not what we do'...[Jamie, 4/16/15, emphasis added]

This respondent reflects on the ways in which Funding Together Northwest rewards grantee's naming systems like white supremacy which produce impoverishment. A long-time grantee reflects on how they never have this transparency with conventional foundations:

...we always have to **disguise ourselves** with some of those folks ... The [Foundations] I will tell them, people come in because they want services. And we're very careful...not to politicize them -- even though we're not that careful (laughs) – so, we can't be ourselves, all the time. And I hate that. I *hate* that. Having to reframe things...I would rather just tell them you know, **we're trying to change the workplace conditions, and we're gonna go do it this way, and change the**

**power structure.** Like, when you toss those words at them, it's like...watch out. ... But that's how it is with those funders.... We cannot be totally ourselves...it still bothers the *hell* out of me. That I can't be up front with them. [Raul, 5/6/14, emphasis added]

Grantees feel that Funding Together Northwest allows organizations to be transparent and vocal about their poverty politics. That is, organizations and individuals are encouraged to articulate their understanding about the causes of poverty and this gives them room to foreground structural processes such as historical and ongoing processes of land dispossession, or a lack of collective bargaining. Within conventional philanthropy, grantees rarely articulate their own “analysis”. Instead, they craft their experiences into language that feels unthreatening for the funder, such as a ‘service’ program, as shared above. Funding Together Northwest advances grant application processes that prioritize lived experiences and perspectives of their grantees.

Funding Together Northwest also enacts their poverty politics by prioritizing grantees least likely to get support from large foundations. In other words, they adjust their grant-making rationales to explicitly address the systematic inequalities in most grant-making processes. FTN identifies how organizations are *situated* within the power dynamics of the nonprofit and philanthropic sectors, systems of capitalism, racism and spatial inequality. Secondly, they ask organizations to identify how they *act upon* poverty and inequality.

FTN specifically rewards organizations led by people of color and/or rural organizations. During the grant-making process, these organizations are automatically given extra weight in a point based review process. Staff reiterate that historically these groups are the most impacted by processes of impoverishment and injustice and tend to be systematically disadvantaged in conventional philanthropic practices. Under the broad banner of ‘people of color led organizations’ multiple processes of impoverishment get tackled: settler colonialism of native land; gentrification and lack of affordable housing; environmental racism and pollution; labor

exploitation; police violence and mass incarceration, etc. Funding priority goes to organizations led by, not just serving, those with first-hand experience of these processes.

In the case of rural organizations, many of whom are led by White people, donors are asked to read applications from organizations with White leaders for how they build alliances and accountability to people of color: building boards that include people of color, showing long-term relationships and collaborations with people of color led organizations, or demonstrated evidence within the grant application of how an organization is starting to incorporate a ‘racial justice’ lens onto their work. For instance, in the case of a White-led organization in rural Oregon, when FTN participants expressed concern over whether and how the organization worked on behalf of people of color, FTN staff pointed towards historical evidence of where the organization had started, how it started to build out alliances, and how it brought a Latino advisory board into its mix [field notes, 11/22/14].

Because FTN’s priorities and concepts of impoverishment are different than conventional philanthropy, their notion of success is different as well. This aspect of FTN’s grant-making process emphasizes that ‘success’ must be understood in geo-historical context of grantees and their specific location within political economic and social structures. Evaluating success based on these metrics is not always clear-cut; for instance, a relational understanding of poverty suggests that ‘success’ is different than, say, assessing whether a household or community is no longer below the ‘poverty line’.

Trainings, events and websites reveal how FTN frames ‘success’. These materials emphasize legislative wins that create policies that serve and protect the rights and resources of impoverished communities. A few hallmark pieces of legislative policy often are heralded as beacons of success for FTN grantees: the city of Seattle passing a local hiring ordinance for new

construction contracts; establishing policy that penalized predatory pay-day lending in Idaho; expanding Medicaid access in Montana for low-income residents; passing legislation in Oregon to ban profiling by law enforcement; passing a resolution in Seattle to be a city with no youth incarceration<sup>16</sup> [FTN 2015 progress report].

‘Success’ at FTN is contextual to specific regions and the broad social, political and economic geographies in which a grantee is operating. Broadly speaking, this framework recognizes that ‘success’ is not a universalizing concept, but one tied to a deep analysis of the structures and root causes at work in the geographic locations of each grantee. One way in which funding alliance participants begin to enact this framework is by differentiating ‘success’ based on an urban and rural distinction. For urban grantees, participants recognize ‘success’ as establishing just policies: the local-hire ordinance in Seattle, or dismantling the connection between Portland’s TriMet and Immigration Control and Enforcement. Participants hold urban grantees to a high standard about how transformative and visible their work should be. Rural grantees, on the other hand, are seen by participants as ‘fighting for justice in a sea of red’, and that huge legislative wins are not necessarily the appropriate or realistic scale of poverty action (field notes, 11/22/14). In other words, funding alliance participants reflect a geographic imaginary about the oppressive and impossibility of progressive politics in rural, conservative areas. Many participants imagine organizations working at the intersections of rural and progressive poverty politics to be surviving and working against all odds. In a quote from Grady, they reflect on the difference between their own urban lens and how to understand the grantee’s work in context of their geography and political economy:

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<sup>16</sup> Despite this resolution, in 2016 the City voted to continue construction of a new Youth Detention Center in the City of Seattle. FTN grantees continue to lead the fight against the “New Youth Jail”

...it was an LGBT organization in Montana – they publish[ed] an op-ed about LGBT issues in a kind of small Montana newspaper. And I think maybe had a small queer contingent in a larger parade. And I think I was like, “whatever. That doesn’t seem like a big deal to me...” And I remember [staff] being like, “no, really. Like, you don’t get it. Like, **no one is doing that in Montana**. And just **that level of visibility is a super big deal**.” And that kind of blew my mind. Like, I just had like, no – I mean, in Seattle, that’s just like, that feels like nothing to me, like, whatever, anyone can do that. (laughs)... it just feels like a super achievable thing, whereas it’s totally different in Montana. [Grady, 3/4/15, emphasis added]

This participant reflects their urban perspective onto how ‘successful’ they see this Montana grantee in addressing the root causes of gender inequality and LGBT rights. Upon a staff person providing more geographic context, the participant could understand how ‘success’ cannot be viewed through a universal lens. This practice allows grantee assessment to be based on the transformative politics that happen *in relation to* their specific geographic context.

Funding alliance participants evaluate grants based on the guidelines that FTN establishes. The evaluation process and grant-making criteria are explicit expressions of FTN’s poverty politics. Beyond the urban and rural dichotomy that participants adopt, FTN encourages funding alliance participants to consider whether an organization engages in ‘community organizing’ or if they provide ‘services’ to their members. This dichotomy – ‘organizing’ versus ‘services’ - emerges because of the overarching priority to act on systems and structures rather than to serve individuals. This differentiation is complex: staff, participants and grantees struggle to determine whether work aimed at individual capacity building counts as structural change. As a result, many participants end up reverting to abstractions about whether an organization is “doing good work”, a phrase that repeatedly emerged by respondents in my interviews and observation. This is a problem for FTN, because it is a barrier to *grounding* their structural critiques of poverty to their actual practices.

Organizations are consistently rewarded and deemed to be doing “good work” when they use ‘community organizing’ strategies to tackle the processes of impoverishment. During grant-

assessment, FTN participants differentiate between providing services to treat symptoms of impoverishment and strategies used to ‘build power’ and effectively organize those most impacted by impoverishment. Staff consistently reiterate that services and organizing shouldn’t be *seen* in a dichotomy, and that services are indeed a necessary component of anti-poverty work, given that the safety net is drastically insufficient to meet material needs. Despite efforts to frame this as a false dichotomy, FTN participants see these as oppositional, and struggle to understand how serving individuals addresses structural causes of impoverishment.

This difficulty is apparent when a two-time funding alliance member explains their frustration when having been involved with a grant-seeking organization, and how they see the organizing/services distinction falling apart in its utility:

... it **seemed clear to me that what we were doing was community organizing**. And it was like, **largely led by people most affected** – like there were lots of ways that we fit in... And I was just like, *so* frustrated that we couldn’t apply for grants.... I don’t know, I both, like, appreciate the specificity of their definition, because I think it really does help them ... funding exactly the organizations they want to fund, because otherwise ... there’s so many things that could be defined as community organizing. [Grady, 3/4/15, emphasis added]

In practice, prioritizing support for structural approaches becomes messy and difficult to differentiate. For instance, this participant fully believes that this program, led by those ‘most impacted’, *is* acting on oppressive structures which push young, low-income people of color to the margins of the education system. But, others disagreed and the organization was not funded by FTN. This created tension in Grady’s funding alliance, and they continue to be dismayed at how their fellow participants deemed the organization as not doing enough organizing.

During decision-making, participants rely on a breakdown between ‘organizing’ and ‘services’ to determine which organizations get grants. One organization, which is led by and provides support, mentorship and rehabilitation services to Native youth, was deemed ‘too service oriented’, and failed to qualify for a site visit. The recurring debate in the group

circulated around whether providing mentorship to young people counts as addressing a system, or if it is too focused on individuals. Another participant then said that this is maybe a more amorphous form of economic justice, or the early stages of community organizing, but there was little consensus among the group.

A structural anti-racist and de-colonial analysis would argue that mentoring Native youth *is* a structural intervention, in that it addresses ongoing legacies of the damage of settler colonialism, land dispossession and state violence against Native communities. That participants debate at length about whether this is a ‘service’ because it serves individuals suggests that they have a harder time making complex connections to the structural processes that FTN prioritizes. The primary tension is whether it is okay to fund work that acts on the *effects and legacies* of structural processes, or only on the processes themselves, as they play out in the geo-temporal present. When participants defer to ‘organizing versus services’ as their metric, rather than asking deeper questions about structural processes of impoverishment, it suggests that they don’t yet fully understand what a relational, structural analysis of impoverishment entails.

Funding Together Northwest prioritizes the expertise of those closest to impoverishment, funds those most marginalized within conventional philanthropy, and articulates ‘success’ in contextual ways rather than comparing groups to one another in abstracted de-contextualized terms. However, my evidence shows how difficult it is to ground structural analyses of poverty into the actual processes of decision making. FTN can translate their alternative framings of ‘expertise’ and ‘success’ at the level of grant applications. This is more challenging in the process of *evaluating* proposals and grantee organizations, because of the ways participants understand how grantee practices intervene in structural processes of impoverishment. The practice of distinguishing between ‘services’ and ‘community organizing’ blocks a deeper level,

structural analysis by donors, and causes participants to revert to an abstract conceptualization of “good work” rather than a complex analysis of the different ways that organizations are positioned to act upon root causes.

#### ***4.D From critical analysis to poverty action: social justice grant-making amidst structural processes of impoverishment***

Funding Together Northwest’s grantees encounter similar challenges as FTN does when trying to ground and apply their structural analyses of impoverishment into their actual organizational activities and processes. This section illuminates where social justice philanthropy reaches its potential and limitations for transformation by looking at the final site of the grant-making mechanism: grant recipients and how they enact their poverty politics. Throughout the process of social justice philanthropy, there are multiple processes where a relational poverty analysis is articulated. In this section, I show how grantees demonstrate their critical analyses of impoverishment, and how they inculcate this in their broader communities. I also show where grantees are constrained for direct action on the structural processes of impoverishment, specifically because of the multidimensional forms of impoverishment and marginalization facing FTN grantees.

I point to the geo-historical conditions of impoverishment and socio-cultural frameworks that position individuals and places at a systematic disadvantage such that philanthropic investment cannot make substantive material progress. FTN grantees *do* achieve progress against the structures of impoverishment, but the individual members and employees of the grantee orgs are subject to the very systems they fight in ways that limit what the orgs can do. Philanthropy alone cannot stem the momentum and destructive forces of racial capitalism, exploitative labor, and gutted public infrastructure.

Two long-time grantees of Funding Together Northwest highlight these limits. One, which I call Western Justice Network (WJN), is a state-wide organization located in the Mountain West<sup>17</sup>. The bulk of its work focuses on building alliances between Latino and poor and working class Whites to fight for economic and racial justice across its state. This includes campaigns against predatory payday lending, fights for Medicaid access, and pushing for state-level immigration reform measures. The second organization, Cooperativa del Campesinos Progressivo (CCP) located in a farming region of the Pacific Northwest<sup>18</sup>, works with Latino farmworkers and their families through a three-prong strategy of collective bargaining, immigration and social services, and legislative policy and advocacy. Both organizations make use of FM radio to cover the vast distance of their states and connect with constituents.

These groups, like many FTN grantees, act upon the structural processes of impoverishment by trying to develop capacity and critical consciousness in their membership, clients and constituencies. In both CPP and WJN, the constituencies are largely low-income, enmeshed in webs of political economic and socio-cultural disenfranchisement. Members are imbricated in relations of global capitalism and labor relations, legacies of and ongoing institutional racism, punitive immigration policies, and neoliberal state restructuring. Cultivating greater power and possibility among their constituencies is an attempt to create an active public, include voices at the table demanding progressive and just policies, and build leadership within communities. This idea of ‘consciousness raising’, which in CPP is rooted in Cesar Chavez’s activism, threatens state power and institutions (Paulo Freire 1993; Martin 2003; Pawel 2009).

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<sup>17</sup> Again, Idaho, Wyoming and Western Montana

<sup>18</sup> Western Washington and Oregon states

Both WJN and CPP develop a shared ‘analysis’ of power dynamics, policy change, and a just future, which their members carry with them to their workplaces and campaigns.

CPP’s multi-pronged strategy tries to create more power and opportunities for farmworkers, specifically so that families can build wealth, have equal representation in politics, practice dignified work and pursue paths to citizenship. This strategy is grounded in a shared ‘analysis’ that is developed specifically through their collective bargaining and advocacy programming. In fact, the director of the organization explains how he developed his own critical consciousness around power and organizing through CPP:

I didn’t understand that external climate until I got into this work. You know, when I landed [here], and we lived in a 1 bedroom apartment, and, a subsidized apartment, and slept on the carpet, um, we got – my mother had WIC because my younger brother was born here. And I thought, ‘life was great!’ And then you start to see other stuff... maybe it’s not that great. And it’s like, ‘wait a minute’... **How there’s so much resource, and yet that resource is not equally distributed to everybody**, right? I think it’s been sort of a learning curve for me, trying to understand, ‘look, **why is the power in the hands of so, so few?** Why couldn’t it be more, more uh, horizontal? [Raul, 5/6/15, emphasis added]

Raul describes a childhood subject to processes of impoverishment: immigration without formal paperwork, relying on safety net programs to help pay for food and groceries, subsidized housing for low-income families, and exploitative farm working conditions which his parents (and later, he himself), participated in to earn wages. His lived experience reflects unequal resource distribution, unequal power, and an unjust immigration system. Raul’s and others’ awareness of this disparity fuels the work of CPP. Indeed, the organization sees its work as intervening against structural conditions which would, and have continued to, disenfranchise migrant workers and those who lack power through industrialized capitalist agriculture. Grantees build community capacity towards addressing and making long-lasting structural change when their members identify and articulate criticism of the structures shaping their own lives.

Western Justice Network activates its members' lived experiences to build an analysis of the structures and relations of impoverishment which influence and shape individuals' lives. Leanna, formerly a member of WJN, articulates that her organization reflects and serves those most impacted by the structures of impoverishment, and that her own experiences of impoverishment make her exceptionally qualified to lead the organization. She understands the challenges members face in navigating political economic structures of dispossession and inadequate public infrastructure:

... You know what? I've been homeless and pregnant in my life ... We lost our home in the foreclosure crisis; I've had cars repossessed. My God, I've lived without health insurance for 15 years.... You know? I am white trash... This white trash took her ass to college and now I've got \$150,000 in debt... I still live in less than standard housing... **I am WJN, I am WJN. I'm always gonna be WJN.** I'm always gonna represent my members... [Leanna, 9/20/15, emphasis added]

Leanna articulates a critical analysis of the processes of disenfranchisement which shape her day to day life and the lives of her members. This analysis infuses her leadership of WJN, and it informs all of the actions and campaigns the organization develops.

During WJN's annual membership meeting, a significant portion of the morning activity was spent doing a 'power analysis' activity, designed to build these critical analyses among the membership. Members took two issue areas, payday lending and drivers licenses for undocumented immigrants, and thought about where to place different political actors on a matrix. The two axes were *how sympathetic they would be to the issue*, and the other was *how much power they had to exert change on the issue*. In groups of 10-12, members talked about where to place groups such as WJN itself, state senators, house representatives, the governor, unions, other nonprofit groups, etc. Power was defined as strength, ability to use knowledge, and ability to affect change. Power in government, more specifically, meant the power to enforce or the capacity to mobilize for an issue area. In the small group I observed, the 'drivers license'

group, a few members enthusiastically placed the power of WJN on par with some of the senators, reflecting a rhetoric that ‘power is in our community’ that I heard consistently throughout the meeting. One of the few progressive representatives for the state is a WJN member and was present for the activity. They explained that, “well, actually, we don’t have the same power as a senator. But we can put pressure *on* them” (Field notes, 9/19/15). This took the wind out of people’s sails, but it highlighted how WJN believes it can work to affect change. When both groups debriefed, they agreed that whatever power *is* held should be exerted on the people in the “grey area”: in other words, those who are neither pro- or anti- driver’s licenses for undocumented immigrants. It would be a poor use of time and energy to try and convince a right-wing legislator to support undocumented immigrants through access to driver’s licenses. WJN crafts their poverty action through this critical analysis of power and impoverishment.

Indeed, one of the youngest and most active members of the organization explains how the power analysis informs the strategy for individual members and for the whole organization:

[the power analysis] can be a real roadmap on what we need to do... This is how you think it is. But when you review it, you realize that some things aren’t...what they’re supposed to be - like our governor had as much power as WJN (chuckles)...it’s really important to strategize, and, um become really knowledgeable about what we’re part of and what we’re doing... You can see what you need to do, like we have this senator on the far left against something. You can see that. You can put a resource...on that individual and you can see them move ... (José, 9/19/15).

The knowledge about interlocking systems and processes of impoverishment inform the campaigns that WJN enacts: closing the gap in coverage for Medicare, where 78,000 state residents were uninsured at the time of my visit; opposing the privatization of health care and hospitals; ensuring access to DACA and DAPA<sup>19</sup>; fighting for driver’s license cards for undocumented immigrants; protecting progressives against the far-right and neo-Nazi movements; and fighting predatory payday lenders. These are the systematic issues emphasized

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<sup>19</sup> Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals and Deferred Action for Parents of Americans

by WJN membership. Funding Together Northwest grantees build critical consciousness and capacity for individual members of their base that guides strategic campaigns targeted at the structural processes of impoverishment.

Despite building this analysis among members, it is difficult for grantee organizations to move *from* this critical analysis *to* addressing structural causes directly. First, decisive systematic forces prevent full involvement in membership activities. This limits how many individual members are able to develop a strong consciousness about structures of impoverishment. At WJN's membership meeting, for instance, they expected 150 members to arrive from a very large, very rural state. Only 50 people attended: many had children with them, and were in-and-out of activities, and a handful of attendees at WJN spoke Spanish, though translation services were sparse and inconsistent. CPP has a similar dynamic at their annual membership convention, where members vote on the budget and organization priorities. Attendance at CPP is also a fraction of total members: the service center alone serves around 300 people a year, for instance, not including active members in the union or radio programs, and 30-50 people come to the membership convention.

To be clear, lack of participation is not about individuals failing to 'show up'. The barriers for access and participation are deeply rooted in the same processes of impoverishment which FTN seeks to address. Marginalized and low-wage workers rarely have freedom to request time off to attend a membership meeting. In rural areas, cost of gas and the need for lodging are financial barriers to participation. At the WJN meeting, members' health also created barriers: a board member had injured herself during frantic preparations for the Friday dinner, while another member's mental health crisis prevented attendance. Still others had to take family members for

medical attention. Leanna reflects on these challenges and how they impact her as a leader of the organization,

we talk about ‘Do you want quantity at a meeting – or do you want quality at a meeting?’ ... I spend my mornings to my afternoons driving people who don’t have transportation – they all needed rides. For anyone to participate, ‘I need a ride’, right? Oh, and ‘I’m gonna need taking care of, and managed’, like a social worker would throughout the day. And so you think about -- is it worth it? [Leanna, 9/20/15]

Effective participation requires more than showing up to meetings, however, and José explained that getting involved in movement work is *hard* for those already living in precarity:

they’re just struggling with other stuff, like they have too many things on their plate. But it’s easier for us to not care, but the person that they worry about is getting by on a day-to-day basis sort of thing. And I think that’s a factor for everyone. If you don’t have a sustainable living, you can’t be involved in all of these other things. [José, 9/19/15]

José realizes that particularly for some Latinos, there is extreme risk in asking people to stand up and share their story:

... that was the reason why I didn’t want to bring any attention paid to me because if attention was brought to me, it was brought to my family. In a way it could risk everybody’s safety... what if my parents got deported? ...it’s a huge barrier for some individuals, having that fear, of not wanting to be involved in too many ways, because it could lead down a terrifying path. [José, 9/19/15]

The escalation of Immigration Control Enforcement (ICE) raids over the last decade, plus a resurgence of anti-immigrant rhetoric by an enlivened white nationalism movement has stoked fear among many Latinos in the West. Paired with the impact of the Recession, and barriers to participation escalate. Raul explains that,

...during the recession, we know that **our folks struggled a little bit more**. Um, a lot of people lost their homes, lost their jobs. **Had to be extra quiet**. Take extra shit, because, they would lose their jobs...And, obviously, the communication issue impacts people’s economy quite a bit, as far as like, the possibilities for other jobs, higher earnings, educational opportunities, things like that. [Raul, 5/6/15, emphasis added]

The above two quotes reveal the systems at play that limit full participation by grantee organizations’ members: economic precarity, unprotected immigration status, lack of financial

and structural access to education, predatory lending, and workplace exploitation. The effort and resources needed to sustain involvement of a precarious membership base are higher than ever, because of escalating and intensifying impacts of advanced capitalism and deepening anti-immigrant sentiments and policies. The individuals who make up FTN grantees are the most impacted by these systems. Indeed, it is core to the priorities on which FTN is founded. This signifies one of the primary challenges to grantee organizations moving from a critical analysis to action upon the strategic systems they target. Individual members' bodies bear the weight and costs of an unjust and exploitative racial economic system.

Indeed, for those leading the fight against structures of impoverishment, the slow, grinding pace of progress leads to emotional and physical burn out, as well as the health of the organization itself. Raul explains how the scope and scale of “systemic issues” has altered CPP:

It's like, we do a lot, right? We're really, **all things to all people**... – it's because we've had to be that, with the condition that we're serving, or we're working with – and also because of the external climate. The **social, political, economic climate – it formed us, it formed us.**

I think the systemic issues (sigh) – they're so hard to like, -- but that's the problem we face? (body gesture). It sort of catches you off-guard? It's hard to understand that they're working against you? But you can feel it, you can sort of see it ...in the families' examples? I'm still trying to understand more of like ... the external climate a little bit more... [Raul, 5/6/15, emphasis added]

Similarly, Leanna explains how she fears for her staff getting burnt out:

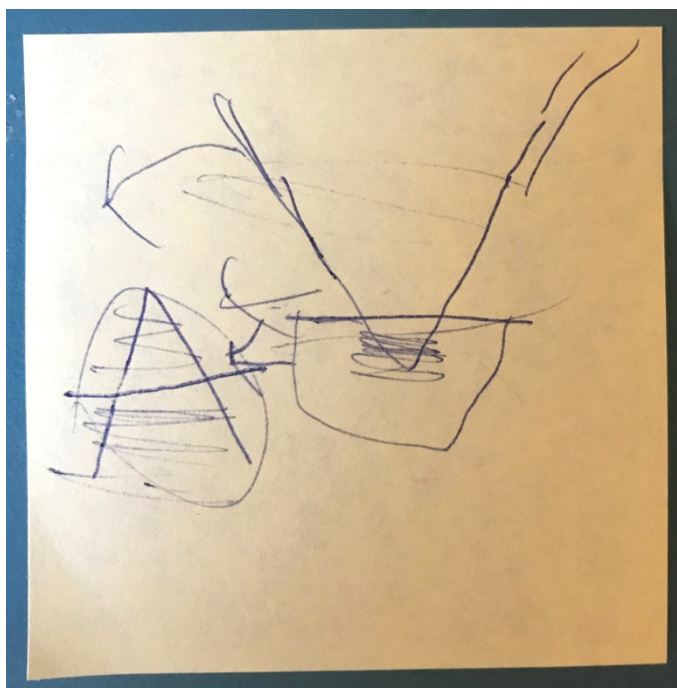
-- a lot of people get burned out. Like it will happen quickly with [Liz] – I know it... I said to her when she first started, “Don't burn yourself out. When you feel overworked, stop and say something. Don't let it happen, please.” That's what happened to the last girl and the girl before... “It's gonna happen to you. Don't, don't. You've got to” – I mean two years ago, Sasha was like ‘you don't have time to wait’. The Immigration Reform Bill was like, *the* push for them. And it stressed everybody out. And it didn't happen. And now they're burnt out. And how long do you keep fighting? [Leanna, 9/20/15]

Raul describes the way that this ‘burn out’ manifests at an organizational level. He feels that CPP is in a great deal of precarity: an outcome of the structural inequalities of the nonprofit and

philanthropic sector paired with the systematic disenfranchisement and exploitation of the largely low-wage and migrant workers he represents:

...we [CPP] have no reserve. We have no reserve. Every year, it's like, 'are we gonna get by next year? And its been like that for *30 years*... then you look at the health of the employees? Also very poor. Jesus is a prime example, and he'll be honest with you about that... it's taking a toll on him... so, we have some work to do. [Raul, 5/6/15]

During our time together, Raul drew me a picture of 2 pyramids (below) , one upside down and one right-side up.



He described that a strong organization has a bigger base, (i.e. infrastructure, reserves and resources). Unfortunately, CPP is flipped - they have weak infrastructure and an over-stressed staff that is subject to the very conditions CPP seeks to overturn. Their service center, theoretically only one third of their larger model, is under strain due to the increasing threats of deportations and

incarceration, and decreased social safety net services. As CPP responds to its members' needs, its long-standing balance between infrastructure and operations is at risk of disruption. This imbalance poses a major barrier in moving from analysis to critical action on the systems that produce and sustain impoverishment.

Another challenge to translate organizational analysis to poverty action is that FTN grantee organizations are increasingly called to provide more services to individual members as part of their organizing strategy. Employees and senior members of WJN and CPP provide care

for other members on a regular basis. Members need significant resources to even arrive at events and membership meetings. The rise of CPP's service center clientele signals a turn towards more individual services: these are services happily given, but they also require extensive time and staffing that would otherwise be going towards longer-term organizing and campaigns. The emotional and caring labor required to sustain the lives and needs of grantee organizations' membership bases rises alongside the need and urgency of transforming structural processes of impoverishment. This limits the capacity for grantee organizations to apply their critical analyses towards sustained and long-term action.

Despite these systematic barriers to transforming the structures of impoverishment, there *are* multiple examples of grantee campaigns acting upon structural processes. For instance, CPP's farmworker union builds capacity for workers who otherwise lack representation, so they can advocate for fair wages, reliable contracts and against exploitation and wage theft by employers. The farmworker union has also fought against pesticide use and environmental justice concerns for farmworkers. Collective bargaining occurs at individual level farms, helping organize existing workers who vote on a bargaining committee from among their peers. This committee helps establish conditions at that farm which are otherwise not guaranteed under law.

CPP also enacts their poverty politics through their service center, which is led and staffed by Latinos. This Center helps individual families build security against a decisively anti-immigrant landscape. The service center is also described as meeting the membership of CPP where they're at. Perhaps individuals aren't ready to be 'politicized', to a more active poverty politics, but they can still receive services and only pay a nominal nonprofit level fee as opposed to private service firms elsewhere. At WJN, setting firmer regulations on payday lenders meant

fewer people being financially taken advantage of; winning the Affordable Care Act<sup>20</sup> meant subsidized health care for low-income residents, but not their undocumented members.

While these examples provide compelling evidence for when and how organizations *do* advance their analysis to action on impoverishment, this capacity is limited by the scale and scope of exploitation under systems like privatized health care or industrial agriculture. For instance, a collective bargaining campaign victory benefits workers at one individual farm. If leadership changes, agreements might be annulled. In the short term, the union work sets a precedent for other farms, and union members increase their access to resources, and are at less risk to lose their jobs. However, the agricultural and health care industries are so intertwined with the State and capital that the victories, while indeed acting *upon* processes of impoverishment, cannot transform or rebuild the systems which produce impoverishment.

Transformative potential is similarly limited by the systems of legislative politics and neo-conservative ideologies predicated on rolling-back services and the social safety net. When grantee organizations help advance legislative ‘wins’, these are often accompanied by legislation that threatens parallel services or rights. Leanna explains these obstacles for meaningful movement against impoverishment:

A lot of these [legislators] have just taught me that like... ‘we’re gonna come around and make you think you got what you wanted and we’re gonna screw you in the end’... fighting for children’s health insurance program back in the day -- we did, we won – and, at the same time it was give and take for years after that ‘cause [Senator] would give us children’s health insurance and then they would take away adult dental. And then they would give us back adult dental and then they would take away adult vision. And then, it was back and forth and we’re gonna take away dental from the disabled population now. [Leanna, 9/20/15]

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<sup>20</sup> While this was a national level campaign, WJN members lobbied congress people to vote to pass the bill

To be sure, one organization cannot single-handedly reform the health care industry in an entire state; and, indeed, this is never the mission of FTN grantees. As organizations with a strong political analysis, grantees are aware of the multiple layers of precarity they all face.

When Funding Together Northwest grants are applied on the ground, they enable infrastructure and assets to stay standing. Quite literally, the unrestricted funds of FTN fund expenses like rent or maintenance, to “keep the lights on”. Similarly, unrestricted grants allow organizations to be flexible, adaptive to the campaigns and causes most important to their membership. This is what has enabled an organization like WJN to fully embrace a racial justice lens and work on Latino rights. That said, the forces against which these grantees stand wear down individuals’ health and well-being and create systematic barriers to participation. These forces place grantee organizations at a disadvantage within the nonprofit and philanthropic sectors, as they are fighting long fights without clear ‘measurable’ wins. The multi-layered, interlocking processes against which grantees fight are simultaneously the biggest barrier to translating critical analyses towards the long-term effects of impoverishment.

And yet, without consistent funding by FTN and other supportive funders, there would be no Western Justice Network or Cooperativa del Campesinos Progressivo, nor any organized voice against the exploitative conditions of racialized capitalism, privatization and violent immigration policy. A relational analysis of impoverishment through Funding Together Northwest reveals the possibilities and limitations to addressing the structural processes of impoverishment through social justice philanthropy. There are, of course, examples of meaningful action. But the scale, scope and geography of impoverishment that imbues the landscape of the rural northwest means that the intertwined processes are too persistent for one organization, or even a strong network of organizations, to transform. Without FTN’s resources,

however, the resistance and efforts to discredit, destabilize, poke holes in, and undermine capitalism and exploitation would likely cease. Philanthropy, even the most progressive, can never be enough to secure access to safety, security and dignity against the backdrop of 40 years of state devolution, anti-immigrant rhetoric and centuries of racial capitalism.

#### ***4.5 Conclusions: Establishing a Relational Politics of Philanthropy Amidst Structural Dispossession***

Funding Together Northwest does key work at multiple levels to expand a critical analysis of impoverishment. As an organization, they understand impoverishment through a relational lens, one which recognizes that impoverishment is the result of structural processes that lead to unequal distribution of resources and power, which are compounded over centuries of exploitative practices. This conceptualization grounds the priorities on which FTN operates, from the practices and activities that are taught to participants to the ways in which grants are assessed. Funding Together Northwest articulates a structural understanding of the processes of impoverishment, and this informs its philanthropic practices.

This critical analysis of poverty disrupts conventional modes of philanthropic practice. FTN attempts to build trusting and transparent relationships with organizations working on the structural processes of impoverishment. FTN encourages organizations to speak openly about the radical and political nature of their work and the ways in which it will threaten and destabilize current power relations. Funding Together Northwest is more than a ‘band-aid’ that funds organizations aiming at the *symptoms* of impoverishment. Funding Together Northwest exemplifies what I term a *relational politics of philanthropy*: rewriting philanthropic rationales through a relational poverty politics.

The grant-making priorities within Funding Together Northwest reflect this poverty politics. Organizations are funded when they, too, articulate a structural understanding of their own impoverishment and marginalization. Organizations are most likely to receive grants when they can clearly identify how their work builds power to disrupt the status quo and supports self-determination among those most impacted by impoverishment. The selection process and grant-making practices direct attention and resources first to people-of-color led and rural-led organizations, which have historically been the most marginalized groups within the philanthropic sector and have suffered the most from state-violence, divestment of the public sphere, and the racialization of urban and Native places.

While social justice philanthropy attempts to inculcate its participants with the same relational analysis of impoverishment, individuals struggle to apply this analysis into the grant-making practices above. Participants have difficulty articulating the grey area between what counts as ‘organizing’ against structural processes versus providing ‘services’ to individuals. The challenge here is expressed by the language of “good work”, which many participants and staff use as a discursive stand-in for those organizations that they believe to represent the poverty politics of FTN and social justice philanthropy.

Funding Together Northwest’s grantees are situated at the crossroads of multiple forms of structural violence, dispossession, capitalist exploitation, and institutional racism. This reflects one of the core tensions of social justice philanthropy: grantees are up against *extreme barriers to enact the critical analyses which undergird their poverty politics*. Grantee organizations across the Northwest are economically marginalized and struggle to secure assets and resources. Their members and staff navigate complex systems of diminished social safety nets, experience heightened anxieties about immigration status and deportation, poor health care infrastructure,

and are subject to economic restructuring amid extreme economic inequality. The political economic processes of impoverishment limit how effective and targeted social justice philanthropy can ever be to compensate for the massive structural inequalities that have been ongoing for centuries, but heightened in the last forty years.

Social justice philanthropy is a necessary tool and tactic to keep organizations alive and functioning in a philanthropic landscape that would otherwise leave them under-funded and unrecognized. Frequently, grantee organizations are the leading edge of a progressive and radical movement that keeps the voices of those experiencing impoverishment in the public forum. Funding Together Northwest specifically enables spaces and organizations that amplify voices aiming at directly addressing the structural processes of impoverishment. And, organizations regularly secure victories in their campaigns to establish more just policies. Unfortunately, such advancement is piecemeal and can never fully re-establish a robust safety net or equitable economy. Yet, without the voice of those closest to the processes of impoverishment, such reforms and policy changes wouldn't occur. Social justice philanthropy expands a critical analysis of impoverishment, and has significant implications for advancing a relational politics of philanthropy across the field. However, the myriad limitations and barriers to grounding this critical analysis into transformation must be taken seriously and re-worked in order to advance the transformative potential of social justice philanthropy.

## **Chapter 5: Transforming and (Re)Producing Classed Subjects: Funding Together Northwest and the Emergence of Social Justice Philanthropists**

Social justice philanthropy acts upon impoverishment by funding organizations who aim their work directly on the structural processes of impoverishment. However, it also expresses its poverty politics through the ways it tries to transform individuals that participate in its practices. In this chapter, I show how Funding Together Northwest tries to accomplish these transformations through two primary avenues. First, through pedagogical activities aimed at teaching participants how to do critical race and class analyses that encourage them to articulate and recognize their own class position and that of others. Second, FTN produces philanthropic actors who can *do* this race and class analysis through their giving, and will keep giving. Neither of these practices necessarily produce a critically reflexive class subject, and this serves as a limitation to the potential of FTN to affect and transform individuals. While social justice philanthropy attempts to transform the poverty politics of individual philanthropic actors, the impact of this transformation is limited by the nature of race and class privilege in the U.S.

### ***5.1– Creating a ‘class’ culture: FTN as a site of cultural production about class position and class identity***

Funding Together Northwest explicitly engages individuals in talking about class identity, class identity formation, class position, class mobility and privilege. In the context of broad societal silences on class and myths of universal middle class-ness in the U.S., dialogue about class and privilege is significant. Yet despite learning new language and insights about class formation and class identity, funding alliance participants struggle to develop a reflexive understanding of privilege which would disrupt their own privileged position and that they can inflect into their work as grant-makers.

Funding Together Northwest gets funding alliance participants to talk about and reflect on ‘class’ as a social category and process. Identifying class position and personalized experiences of class disrupts hegemonic myths and silences about a universal middle class in the U.S. FTN’s belief in cross-class philanthropy leads them to develop explicit practices about individual experiences of class privilege and difference. This is seen as part of how participants can engage in meaningful encounter across difference, and, ideally, to dismantle expressions of classism. As a ‘multi-racial and cross-class’ institution, FTN wants to ensure that all participants share the language and tools to understand and identify their own power, privileges, and identities. This language about class position is a way of helping the largely white and middle class participants actively name and talk about power structures and structural inequalities as well as the daily practices and social relations which constitute class and race privilege.<sup>21</sup>

FTN’s practices and frameworks make ‘class’ visible and tangible to its participants by asking them to think about their class position relative to others, relative to their childhood, and as something that intersects with racial privilege. A board member shares that FTN is, “... a cross class place and you're being asked to be really real about your class background” [Steve, 5/12/15]. One of the ways that participants become ‘real’ about this class background is through an opening exercise about class position and class background. The specificity and variety of questions asked during the exercise indicates the ways in which FTN recognizes that ‘class’ is not purely about income or labor, but an identity and position formed through material resources, racialization, educational access, leisure activities and mobility. The ‘class spectrum’ activity is

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<sup>21</sup> At FTN, the curriculum for race privilege activities comes primarily from The *People’s Institute* and the *Western States Center*. Activities for talking about class are borrowed from *Class Action*, and *Resource Generation*. Together, these resources circulate across the FTN landscape, with shared values, curriculum and language across multiple organizations.

central to every funding alliance, and replicated in other workshops outside of FTN.<sup>22</sup> I share an adaptation of my field-notes from the class spectrum to paint a picture of the activity which takes place on the second day of the race-class workshop at FTN:

After an initial check-in and establishing the agenda for the day, the facilitators ask the group to move into the hallway, and line up based on the class position we held during the first 12 years of life. Those with the least class privilege are asked to stand on the left. Those with the most on the right. The facilitators tell us to be precise and specific - we have to be accurate and detailed, and at the end, there really should be a line from those who had the most, through the middle, down to those that had the least. I stand awkwardly in the middle. Others direct themselves to whichever end of the spectrum they seem to know they fit into. Then we begin asking each other questions like: “Well, both my parents went to college - did yours? No? Ok, I’m to your right...” or, “Well, for the first few years of my life, we were quite wealthy, at least in Kenya, but here...? I guess that puts me to your left” or, “How many vacations did you take each year? Oh, we only did two...” The group shuffles around, having one-on-one conversations to suss out where everyone falls. There is lots of nervous laughter. There is also joyful laughter steeped in recognition of shared experience. At the end, there are clear clusters - based on class - among the group. It’s blatantly clear to everyone that the line is divided by race. All of the people of color in the group are on the lower end of the spectrum, and the middle and high end are all of the White participants. [Adapted from field notes, 9/18/14]

This activity is significant for two reasons. First, it provides participants with language and tools to interrogate class as a complex concept beyond an economic and financial framework. Second, this exercise prompts further reflection on other factors such as race privilege that intersect with experiences of class and class position.

While the ‘class spectrum’ activity above lays the foundation for an analysis of class identity, funding alliance participants deepen this analysis through dialogue and questioning those from other class ‘clusters’. Despite the nuance of the activity asking people to consider multiple indicators of class status, FTN’s role as a philanthropic institution means that they return to questions of money and giving as a way to understand class position and class identity. For instance, the core organizing question for different class ‘clusters’ is: “what did you learn about money and giving from the age of 0-12?” Responses from this set of questions reflect

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<sup>22</sup> For instance, Class Action has deputized dozens of people across the country to lead their workshops on class to constituents, trying to debunk silence on class and classism.

dominant narratives about money, charity and giving. Middle class participants reflected feeling like their lives were a series of tradeoffs, and that while there was ‘enough’, their participation in activities and resources was limited. Upper class groups shared tendencies to hoard or hold onto resources, while the lowest-class group shared that they rarely participated in formal philanthropy, but instead took care of and shared resources with their communities and broader family networks. Participants’ understanding of class position and privilege coalesces around experiences with money and charity. A previously expansive activity which broadens class understandings becomes narrowed back towards a financial lens. Despite this narrowing, this dialogue allows individual participants to see their own class position and experience relative to others. It makes visible various aspects of class identity formation through one’s relationship to money and giving. Asking specific questions of other class clusters gives people the opportunity to debunk their own stereotypes and myths about class, and to see their own experiences as not necessarily universal, but embedded in particular geo-temporal and socio-cultural relations.

Within my interviews, respondents consistently reflected on ways in which their understandings of class were transformed through this series of activities. These range from first becoming aware of class position, to questioning their own intersections with racial privilege. Additionally, some participants begin to understand how the myth of universal middle-class-ness works to obscure *wealth* and *wealthy-ness* even from those who might not ‘feel’ wealthy:

...someone who was in the high end of the group said something like that she was - they had like the least of anyone on their block. And so she didn't *feel* wealthy, even though her parents I think made something I think like 300,000 dollars in a year together, like way back when. A whooole lot of money. But didn't feel it because he or she was surrounded by all of these people who had more than they did... [Stacey, 3/23/15]

In a society in which talking about class is both taboo and class difference is simultaneously made invisible through normative middle class-ness, the naming of class position and identity

formation is transformative for participants. Stacey, above, clearly recognizes that the person in her story had a vast amount of wealth: the fact that she was unable to ‘feel’ this wealth signifies how wealth and privilege is obscured even from those experiencing it. The activity allows participants to start to open up the concept of American middle-classness as something that obscures both wealth *and* poverty and how their own identity is shaped by these obfuscations.

The ‘class spectrum’ activity also deepens how participants who have experienced poverty conceptualize and articulate class position, which is significant in the U.S. context where there is little societal language for this. The activity also disrupts some broadly held notions about what it means to be poor. Here, Sidney, who self-identifies as ‘lower class’ shares that the activities challenge him to see the nuances of the material processes of impoverishment. Indeed, his quote recalls dominant discourses about the notion that individuals with electronics or nice cars aren’t actually ‘poor’, when in reality, class identity is determined by far more than just material resources or income:

But everybody understood – the training sessions showed us, you know, what kind of life did we have when we grew up. And if you considered yourself in a... economic class. And, some of us say, ‘ok we living in that lower class, that’s poor. Ok’ then within that group, how poor was it? (laughs). And one would say, ‘well, we had TV sets’ and my mom said, “don’t ever tell anybody we got a TV set, cuz they’ll steal it!” [Sidney, 3/16/15]

Sidney talks about the exercise connecting himself and others to a better understanding of class position. Further, the idea that “we had TV sets” disrupts a broadly held narrative that insists that people are not “poor” if they have certain kinds of possessions. This opens the door to building understandings of the processes of impoverishment, by rupturing the notion that poverty is experienced and can be understood only through material conditions.

The ‘class spectrum’ activity provides a basis for deepening one’s understanding and analysis of their own relative class position. Further, the activity prompts participants to make

insights into the workings of intersecting identities, such as racial identity formation and white privilege. Martha reflects on how her participation in a funding alliance pushed her to question her own white privilege:

...I was sort of like right in the middle of the U-shape... To my right were all people of color and to my left were all white people. Sometimes it's mixed... but I was like, 'Well, I don't really belong in that one, and I don't really belong in that one.'... it was really pushing me to think where my race privilege really impacted my class status... And so at the same time being asked to think about class and then being put in this group of like upper class people that like talked about their childhood experience, that was not my — no. We were on public assistance, like, you were the people I hated in school.” - [Martha, 5/8/15]

While she felt closer to the ‘lower’ end of her group’s spectrum, Martha’s whiteness placed her closer to the top of the spectrum than she initially identified. As someone whose family benefited from the public social safety net, Martha was beginning to question how she ended up in the ‘middle’ of her spectrum despite her lived experiences with impoverishment. FTN teaches that class identity is always intersectional with race and racial identity.

Despite having a framework for identifying their own race and class position, funding alliance participants struggle to apply this critical analysis to their own philanthropic gift. This is one of the limitations to the transformative potential of FTN to create truly reflexive class subjects. For example, Maeve’s quote below shows that she understands what class privilege *is* and she can articulate how class privilege is manifest in her own life. This is part of what the activities have taught her.

... I was reconciling my class upbringing with my current class, and having trouble ... having trouble, like, reconciling the two. Because technically, like, even if I was fired and my house burned down, like, I have community and I have access to rely on. With that said, I wanted to take into account my current class status and be fair about that, and fair about, like, saving for grad school and those kinds of things. But I just kept justifying different numbers for different reasons, and [staff person] was like, “this is so arbitrary”, and I was like, “yes”. [Maeve, 3/5/15]

In the latter part of this quote, Maeve shows us that she nonetheless struggles with how to recognize the ways that this privilege is explicitly present in her consideration of ‘meaningful

gift'. She is torn between making investments in things that further secure her own class privilege versus putting those resources into her 'gift'. But, she cannot yet get to an articulation of this process in these terms. Instead, she uses the language of "arbitrary" to describe the process. The 'meaningful gift' *could* be an opportunity for those with more class privilege to actively destabilize their class position through their contribution, but lacking the reflexivity to name this process, it remains up to the individual to determine how much would be comfortable while still feeling significant.

The 'meaningful gift' process highlights how uncomfortable it is for those with class privilege to even consider threatening or destabilizing that privilege. Katrina reflected that this activity felt really challenging for her, and that she later regretted her meaningful gift amount. Despite recognizing the disconnect between current labor status and her class privilege, she felt obligated to give based on what she felt was expected of her:

...we spent that whole day ... talking about where we entered the privilege spectrum... I had a pretty substantial leg up... but we never talked about where we are **right now**... And there was this expectation because I had come from a place of privilege... that I would be able to donate a lot more to the group than other people were maybe expected to ... I felt like [my gift] actually set me back financially for a while ... and I felt like **I did it from a point of 'I have to be able to donate this because they perceive me as someone who has resources'**...

You know, and I--I guess dirty isn't the right word--but I felt kind of dirty about it... as I really internalized that perception... So the day that you go around the circle and it's like, 'So how much did you give?' ... there were some people that I knew made so much more money than me and gave like \$150 and I was like, 'Well, shit' **I really didn't have to give as much as I did**...

[Katrina, 5/7/15, emphasis added]

The 'class spectrum' activity gives individuals the capacity and awareness to talk about class position. It also reveals the ways in which individuals will secure and maintain class privilege when they decide the size of their own 'meaningful gift'. For instance, Katrina, a white woman who grew up in an upper middle class position, equates financial setbacks with diminished

privilege. She lacks reflexivity about how making a significant gift that strains her financially actually *is* a way of redistributing class privilege and resources.

By providing participants with the tools to name and identify class position, FTN disrupts the silences and myths about universal middle class experience in U.S. culture. Participants learn to talk about and identify their own class position and class mobility, as well as multiple facets of how class identity is formed and shifts throughout one's life. By exercising this practice in relation to others in the group, FTN participants also gain awareness about their own class privilege, relative to others. However, the fact that this exercise is embedded in broader processes of philanthropic giving, means that participants' initial broadened understanding of class formation and class identity becomes narrowed back to an economic lens about one's relation to money, giving and charity. While this is helpful for better understanding the philanthropic process, it limits the transformative possibility for participants to re-imagine class beyond a financial and income-based framework. In part, this explains why participants struggle to develop a truly reflexive understanding of their own privilege. Participants are largely unable to see how their own class privilege is intimately connected to actual philanthropic giving. Instead, participants regularly reduce their own class position to one of income and easily available resources, and this is what informs their meaningful gifts. Whereas the meaningful gift could be a chance to enact a reflexive poverty politics, individuals frequently use only their current financial resources to inform their financial gift. Teaching individuals to talk about class identity and class formation does not prepare them to be reflexive on class privilege and how it manifests in their philanthropic activities or in other arenas of their lives.

### ***5.2 Persistence of Poverty Governance and Mundane Performances of Privilege***

In this section, I argue that the transformative potential of Funding Together Northwest is constrained by multiple limitations, enacted through practices of poverty governance. Funding alliance participants gain the ability to identify and talk about class formation and class identity, but do not recognize how their class privilege is enacted vis-à-vis others. As a result, they continue to perform class privilege through the judgement of grant-seekers -- an exercise in governance. Additionally, the fundraising process itself replicates much of the class privilege which participants bring to bear into the ways that they approach their personal social networks. As part of a philanthropic institution, fundraising revolves around bringing in enough donations to reach the organization's grant-making goals. To that end, fundraising *can* spread the message of a structural analysis of impoverishment, but frequently the 'ask' returns arguments that reproduce many of the foundational logics of conventional charity and anti-poverty work: high efficiency, a good 'bang for your buck', and self-sufficiency. While individual funding alliance participants push members of their donor networks to think more critically about social justice philanthropy and structural analyses of impoverishment, the practices that FTN relies on for its grant making and fundraising cannot escape the governance tendencies of philanthropy and charity.

Middle class actors of Funding Together Northwest replicate notions of 'deservingness', 'accountability' and middle class legibility through the grant assessment and fundraising practices. They do not have the conceptual tools to recognize their imposition of deservingness *as an expression of class privilege – the form of getting to use these norms to govern others*. Organizationally, Funding Together Northwest disrupts the tendency to demand individuals prove their deservingness through metrics of self-sufficiency, efficiency, or measurable outcomes. However, *organizations* are expected to prove their deservingness of the specific

criteria outlined by FTN. The approaches and criteria are vastly different than conventional philanthropy, but it is still an exercise for funding alliance participants to judge, and then govern what is the ‘right’ way for organizations to self-articulate, operate, and structure themselves. For instance, FTN asks organizations to articulate their long-term strategies for social change; if they are deemed too short-term or too individually-oriented, then this is grounds for disqualification from the grant-making pool. Grant-seeking organizations must prove whether they are deserving of grants by how far they push themselves away from service-provisioning and towards a more structural and long-term analysis of impoverishment. They are similarly held to standards about how well they can articulate this vision for a multi-racial social justice movement, and whether and how they write their grant applications.

In the grant-making decision process, grantees are evaluated as ‘deserving’ based on an idea of ‘efficacy’. In other words, whether grantees seem to have the capacity, relationships, structures and/or practices to maximize the impacts of the monies given through FTN. Assessment of ‘deservingness’ is implicit to the grant-making process, expressed by whether and how organizations are deemed to be doing ‘good work’, as explained in Chapter 4. Further, staff and participants assess how well organizations can *articulate* and self-describe this good work through their applications. The notion of good work is an abstract concept that I observed funding alliance participants use as a default to talk about organizations that seem to be making significant and effective progress towards addressing the root causes of impoverishment. But it works as a stand-in not understood in the same way by all participants. Indeed, ‘good work’ was used repeatedly in my interviews by respondents when talking about organizations which they wanted to support or were seen to be successfully doing community organizing. It is a stand-in for radical approaches to social change, for those organizations trying to disrupt the status quo,

and for organizations seen to be pushing at the leading edge of how nonprofits can self-organize. One way in which organizations are deemed to be doing ‘good work’ is whether and how they enact community organizing as opposed to ‘services’.

During my fieldwork, one incident with a grantee highlights how organizations are asked to prove their own deservingness to qualify for a FTN grant. I heard the same incident discussed by two different staff people over the course of a few weeks. A rural, Native organization had recently been denied a grant - a choice made by the individuals in a 2014 funding alliance - because their work was seen as being too ‘service oriented’. The organization, a Native youth empowerment organization, provides cultural programming and mentorship to youth in a rural Mountain West reservation, a place historically marginalized by economic and political disenfranchisement, land dispossession, state violence against Native youth, and mass incarceration. When read by the funding alliance participants, the proposal apparently did not specify how the organization was acting upon these root causes or whether and how this organization was doing ‘community organizing’. In other words, funding alliance participants had difficulty identifying whether the organization fit the category of ‘good work’.

One of the staff people, reflecting on this incident, explained that,

...one of the challenges for us as an organization was to figure out, like, are they *really* doing organizing? Because, you know, it felt like they were, kind of..... a two person show...” [Cathy, 5/5/15]

According to FTN, a ‘two person show’ indicated that the organization might be providing meaningful services and programming to a community, but that it lacked the community capacity to truly be considered ‘organizing’. Indeed, FTN’s poverty governance recognizes that doing ‘good work’ can be assessed by how broad a coalition might be, how expansive a community organization expands their reach, and how many new constituents they bring into the fold.

Interestingly, this organization had received funding from FTN in the past, and has received funding again since the incident mentioned above. But when denied the grant, the organization expressed frustration, anger and confusion. Cathy, a staff member, reflects on this interaction. She recognizes that FTN participants and staff struggle to develop a deep understanding of how the structural conditions of impoverishment impact places and communities of which they are outsiders:

They were *very angry*. And it ... was much deeper than just like, disappointment. ...some of our grantees, in this case, folks from Indian Country, really poor, *really* struggling, like, **in ways that probably most of us are not comprehending**... maybe even, a lot of us, who are in social justice circles and networks are not comprehending, like, what they're really struggling with? ...It's more than rejection for them. It's really, really, really.....Abandonment, I bet, is what it feels like. ... you know, Indian Country is one example where that can happen, but it's not the only place where people can really feel, like, 'hey, you're our only hope, and if you don't come through, we're... we're really lost.' [Cathy, 5/5/15, emphasis added]

Grantee organizations are at the crossroads of multiple forms of impoverishment, and multiple political economic and social forces which shape the landscape of lived experience. For many of these organizations, small grants from organizations like FTN are some of their only sources of funding. In Native communities, for instance, organizations face the material realities of centuries of land dispossession, settler colonialism, institutional racism, lack of public infrastructure, diminished safety net programs, extreme forms of disciplinary governance and policing. Another staff member shared insights about the challenges of funding and building alliances with Native led organizations in the Mountain West:

... when we're out talking about Native communities... like, Westward Expansion and like Manifest Destiny shit and like active policies around genocide and the theft of land... [and] you're dealing with sovereign nations... It's very different and it's disrespectful to be like, "well we're gonna organize with you on the same level [as urban organizations] and not recognize your tribal sovereignty and your relationship with the federal government." So like, the lack of understanding even around the structures that are in place makes the context around the conversation be very different... [Martha, 5/8/15]

Martha alludes to the complexity required to fully understand the context and lived realities facing organizations in Native communities. The participants and staff involved in decision-making about this particular organization's funding, struggled to grasp how a 'two-person show' could have capacity to actually be doing 'good work'. A poor understanding of this complexity lead to governance based on a perception that the organization wasn't 'deserving' of the grant, because they lacked capacity to enact the grant-money effectively.

Funding alliance participants struggle to discern how work at an individual level counts as "good work". Many participants cannot apply their critical analysis of impoverishment into their reading grants from the most marginalized of the grant-seeking organizations. For instance, while providing services to Native youth isn't the same political scale as electoral politics, fighting for federal tribal recognition, or major policy change, it *is* working against a history of removal and brutalization of Native youth, of loss of youth to legacies of violence and incarceration. Programming that brings these youth into the community as healthy, complex and contributing actors *is* organizing. Yet in order for funding alliance members to understand this complexity, they need grant seeking organizations to be able to self-articulate this and make it explicit in their applications. This is how organizations are assessed to be deserving of grants: they must be eloquent in their analysis and articulation of the vast geo-historical complexities and connecting them to the present nonprofit and community organizing work. In other words, can the organization successfully convince funding alliance participants that they are, indeed, doing 'good work' or 'community organizing'.

Middle class funding alliance participants, the vast majority of whom live in urban areas like Seattle and Portland, struggle to see how a small, two-person operation would count as 'good work': effective and able to make significant change on the root causes of impoverishment.

Though participants have learned about their own class position, and have learned about the structural processes of impoverishment, these remain abstract concepts. The example above highlights how funding alliance participants, lacking a reflexive understanding of how long-term structural processes of impoverishment constrain and shape grantee operations, end up reproducing governance practices so familiar in conventional philanthropy.

During my own funding alliance, a similar example highlights the challenges individual participants have in understanding the multiple approaches to structural, long-term change that grantees take. Our group reviewed a Native-led organization that had applied for funding before. Their primary goal, to fight for federal recognition of their tribe, had been unsuccessful previously. A white nonprofit-professional woman in our group persisted that she felt uneasy granting this organization a site visit because it wasn't clear how they would be 'successful' this time around. She expressed great discomfort with knowing how the organization was going to make effective use of the \$10,000 funds. Again, this reflects a belief that organizations prove their deservingness through perceptions of 'efficacy' in applying FTN grant money.

Another example highlights this disconnect even further. Before our funding alliance began reviewing grants, one of the staff members alerted us that one of the applications was from a very new organization, one which was effectively run by one woman trying to boot-strap her way through a grant process with little formal training. The staff member explained that the application would not look polished and that the applicant probably wouldn't know how to explain her work as well as other potential grantees. They urged us to consider it fully, though, assuring us that "they are doing really important work in the community" (adapted from field notes, 11/22/14). Despite these 'disclaimers', the group unanimously decided not to consider this applicant for a site visit, citing that they needed more time to develop and articulate their vision

for organizing and programming. FTN aims at building structures that try to avoid penalizing groups with limited staff, experience time and education. In practice, though, the proposals still get judged this way, even if less explicitly than in conventional philanthropy.

Even as Funding Together Northwest tries to level the playing field by training its funding alliance participants to assess grantees by criteria that more fully recognize structural inequities within philanthropy, participants still practice discernment and make decisions that include or exclude grantee organizations. When participants struggle to comprehend an organization as doing ‘good work’, they default to clear-cut criteria of ‘services’ or ‘organizing’ or notions of ‘efficacy’. Such a framework regularly disadvantages those organizations, such as the Native organization in the example above, whose programming is more individually-oriented than funding alliance participants want to see. This is a primary limitation to the transformative potential of Funding Together Northwest.

A second significant limitation of FTN is that many participants reproduce conventional poverty politics through their fundraising practices. At its core, Funding Together Northwest is a philanthropic institution, seeking to raise maximum funds to provide grants towards its mission. Though donors are encouraged to use their one-on-one fundraising meetings as an opportunity to have ‘social justice conversations’ within their own communities, this goal ultimately becomes secondary to getting funds contributed to the collective pool. As funding alliance participants try to maximize donations, they end up relying on arguments that reproduce many foundational logics of conventional philanthropy work.

Funding alliance participants fundraise their own communities and social networks, a process that requires them to be discerning about who they can ask who will successfully contribute a financial gift to the collective funding alliance pool. Participants reach out to individual friends,

family and coworkers, some of whom do not share an affinity for FTN's mission. In other words, funding alliance participants will ask actors who may have little familiarity with the alternative philanthropic practices embedded within Funding Together Northwest. In conversations with staff members, I heard that middle-class and lower-income funding alliance participants, predominantly 'ask' middle class actors, as they are perceived to have the most resources *and* be receptive to FTN's mission. However, most middle class actors are often more familiar with conventional approaches to philanthropy and charity work, which rely on logics of deservingness, efficiency and returns on investment to assess whether a cause deserves their donation. When fundraising for Funding Together Northwest, participants have to be aware of the tendencies and biases of the people they are asking, so that they can appeal to their values, interests and understandings of deservingness.

Funding Together Northwest prepares its participants to adapt their 'ask' depending on the positionality and beliefs of the individual being asked. One activity that funding alliance participants do as part of their training makes visible the ways that paternalistic and conventional philanthropic logics inform middle class actors' engagements with the nonprofit sector. Staff facilitators emphasize that even if a funding alliance participant doesn't believe these logics, that the community members they solicit might. They suggest that funding alliance participants either need to appeal directly to these logics, or prepare themselves for questions derived from conventional and paternalistic frameworks. Additionally, participants are asked to consider how these beliefs might inform their *own* grant-making decisions and rationales.

Participants are presented with hypothetical donors and their attitudes, and shown how to respond to these to get money. But, the hypothetical nature of this means they do not inherently connect them to their own identity. One of the hypothetical donors is "benefactrodite" who is

said to, “give and give so generously because only she knows what everyone needs for if they knew better than she, wouldn't they too be wealthy?” In other words, such a belief leads one to feel they ‘know best’ for a grantee or someone experiencing impoverishment. Indeed, if someone was questioned on their giving habits, they might say that you shouldn’t ‘bite the hand that feeds you’. The second trope that FTN names is “bootstrapopolis”, who, went “from penniless to self-made wealth he did it by himself he yanked those bootstraps up so high he almost had to yelp”. This belief reflects the myth that individuals succeed based on hard work, not because of race and class privilege. It would look at nonprofits doing individual empowerment and service provision as enabling self-sufficiency and middle class ideals. Someone with this belief might celebrate the successes of impoverished individuals as purely resulting from individual hard work; it is to hold everyone to standards that make privilege invisible. Through this activity, participants are being taught about the beliefs they encounter when they fundraise or assess grants. However, the right to judge, evaluate and decide who gets grants is an explicit marker of middle class logics that guide the nonprofit and philanthropic sector. This exercise, while making visible tendencies that FTN is trying to disrupt, does not inherently translate to individuals applying a reflexive practice to one’s grant assessment [Appendix C].

As an extension of this dynamic, funding alliance participants don’t necessarily use the fundraising process to try and change their donors’ views, or to try and teach the donors what they themselves have learned about root causes of impoverishment. Instead, they pitch the ask to fit with the donor’s existing priorities and beliefs. Thus, whatever critical learning happened inside the walls of FTN does not extend to the ask. There are notable exceptions to this, but they tend to be with donors who already share a framework or belief system with that of FTN or the funding alliance participant.

Throughout the course of a funding alliance, for instance, participants and interview respondents shared about the following adaptations of their ‘asks’, when they were confronted with someone who had conflicting interests or ideology. In each of the examples below, the analysis of white privilege, class position and structural conditions of impoverishment falls away in order to re-frame the act of giving in a way that resonates with potential donors: for conservative Christian relatives, participants talked about tithing and the Christian duty to help care for others; connecting with immigrant parents by talking about the multiple ways that they’ve already been ‘doing’ philanthropy by providing for community; for right-wing, Libertarian relatives, participants talk about the value of ‘self-determination’ and that communities are trying to provide and support themselves; for millennial tech workers, participants the long-term success of campaigns that eventually lead to fewer people needing services in the first place.

Individual donors make calculations as to who they can ask for money and how they will explain the work. In the fundraising training, this is discussed openly. Christopher, whose peers hold immense class privilege and access to resources, describes his approach to fundraising:

I did not see my peer network... would really be that sympathetic. And criminal justice, the kinds of things you’re talking about, and **people’s fear of... uh... crime an so forth, ... I didn’t feel that I could really persuade people to give me significant gifts.** So... I wrote a fairly long email... And I asked people for relatively... uh, a level of contribution that I knew was well within their comfort zone ... and that they would give, *even* if they didn’t particularly care for the project. They would give **out of respect for me...** But I just didn’t think that my base – my contacts – coming out of the **corporate finance area** – that they would even know what criminal justice was (laughs). [Christopher, 3/5/15, underlined emphasis added]

Indeed, Fletch explains that there is a tension between trying to build relationships with people who hold different views, and a tendency to ‘write them off’ as not having enough ‘analysis’ yet.

I’ll be talking with somebody who I know might be able to write a thousand-dollar check and through the discussion, I’ll realize **they would not find any alignment with any of the organizations that we’re going to be funding**, so then what do I do? Do I not ask them? Do I say, ‘Wow I’m so glad we’ve honestly built this relationship, and what I’m trying to do, you

probably would not support these organizations. In fact, you might find it counterproductive to your values.’ Do I tell them that? ... That’s where I feel like the vision...of ‘how do we engage people and actually build a community around these social justice issues’ ... falls apart a little. Like you could sort of feel in the room when I raise that, and I mean, even in myself I can feel like, I don’t want to do that. **I don’t want to say, ‘Don’t donate’, but why? Why not? I mean, if that’s really what we’re doing.** ... [Fletch, 7/10/15, emphasis added]

This extended exchange highlights the difficulty in trying to build relationships of trust and resource exchange across differential values systems, particularly when one party uses language that is seen as classed and couched in its own form of privilege. One’s analysis being “above and beyond” for instance, implies that those who are not on board with the language of FTN cannot possibly connect with the values and language of the organization.

Each of these examples works to reframe the work of Funding Together Northwest and their grantees in ways that are more palatable to potential donors who do not share a set of language or values around challenging the root causes of impoverishment, including disrupting race and class privilege. Importantly, FTN is seeking to gain resources from people *who largely aren’t yet part of the movement*. This is described as a three-prong triangle: there are people who you can ask for money that fully support the mission and will give what they can because they believe in it; there are people who will give because they respect the person asking, but maybe don’t have a huge stake in the outcome; there are people who have a ton of resources and can make a large contribution, but have no connection to the mission or values.

In preparing to appeal to potential donors whose interests are about financial efficacy and return on investment, FTN staff share a financial figure that can allay concerns about finances: for every dollar given to ‘community organizing’, there is an added \$150 of value for communities. This figure comes from a report by the Council for Responsive Philanthropy (Gulati-Partee and Ranghelli, n.d.), but one staff person I heard said, effectively, “don’t dig into that number too hard because it starts to fall apart...” (adapted from field notes, 9/14/14). In

other words, the figure carries weight as a signifier of fiscal impact, even in the absence of specifics as to how the \$150 translates as ‘value’. This financial tradeoff framing appeals to those steeped in conventional language of the nonprofit sector and market rhetoric: this return on investment sounds deeply appealing and a sign that Funding Together Northwest’s model works.

In its fundraising trainings, such as the class spectrum activity discussed in 5.1, Funding Together Northwest offers opportunities to disrupt conventions around class identity, and the silences about class formation. However, the limitations to the depth and reflexivity of these exercises in FTN result in funding alliance participants reproducing forms of poverty governance and middle class philanthropic norms through the funding alliance process. Lacking a way to recognize how their own class privilege is enacted through the judgement and assessment of grantees, middle class funding alliance participants replicate rhetoric of deservingness and professionalism that are implicit in residual poverty frameworks and that drive much conventional philanthropy. Grantees are expected to prove their fitness for funding by making clear arguments for how their work connects to structural processes of impoverishment, arguments which some funding alliance participants are ill-equipped to understand. When proposals are written in a way that makes it difficult to discern how an organization is meeting FTN goals, the default framework of ‘good work’ becomes a gut check for participants to eliminate or include grant-seeking organizations. This happens despite the fact that in some contexts, as shown in section 4.3, ‘organizing’ involves providing greatly needed services for communities that have experienced extreme divestment from the state.

Additionally, then, *individuals* enact governance through the ways they interrogate particular organizations: what is their pathway to success, what is their financial stability plan, how will they prove they’ve made improvements from the previous years, etc. Finally, as

participants appeal to those from outside of Funding Together Northwest to raise money, many choose to reframe the work of FTN in language that appeals to conventional nonprofit frameworks rather than trying to radically shift the discourses and values of these individuals. This fails to challenge race and class privilege in the everyday interactions of grant-assessment and fundraising.

### ***5.3 Giving, giving more, and giving through a critical lens: making social justice philanthropists***

FTN is invested in remaking philanthropy from the inside, by getting particular philanthropic actors, who hold awareness about the structural causes of impoverishment and of race and class position, into the philanthropic system. In this final section, I show that Funding Together Northwest both imagines and effectively cultivates this ‘social justice philanthropist’ through their programming and fundraising practices. The organization believes this subject formation is needed to sustain and expand the scope of philanthropy and who participates, and to inculcate participants with a critical analysis about impoverishment, its systemic causes, and its intersections with race and gender. Making social justice philanthropists in part involves teaching them a critical analytic around race and class privilege. But, in practice, this also functions as a process of distinction that may not translate to applying the critical analysis of race and class developed through the trainings.

FTN’s ideal philanthropic actor is supposed to apply their critical awareness about race and class position into their philanthropic practices, as well as hold a structural critique about the inequities in the philanthropic sector. One staff member I spoke to explains that, ideally, participation in the FTN process,

has to actually **impact the donor as well as the grantee**, right. That, as a giver, whether you come from a wealthy background or a non-wealthy background, the act of giving is transformative to you as well. You actually have to be **aware of your own positionality**... where you fit into it.” [Brian,

4/29/15, emphasis added].

FTN believes that their ideal philanthropic actor will gain awareness about their own class and race position, a process which is meant to be transformative.

Through the funding alliance process, participants are supposed to apply their critical language and awareness of race and class dynamics into their fundraising, by mapping their resources and engaging their communities in conversations about social justice and long-term social change. As we saw in section 5.2, though, these conversations often become more focused on receiving the financial gift than about transforming the politics of the potential donor. FTN's process of creating these philanthropic actors encourages personal awareness and reflection, but does not necessarily extend to require the transformation of these actors' communities, families and friends.

FTN's intended philanthropic actor does not limit their impact to the funding alliance process. One of the imagined outcomes is that this subject will consider the political implications of their philanthropic activity outside of the walls of FTN. Brian, a staff member, shares that his hope for FTN participants is that they translate what they learn in the funding alliance towards their future philanthropic giving, an impact that might have a massive financial outcome especially if the person has financial resources:

...folks [are] leaving with... more desire to **fund this way in the future**...in the long run? **That's our bigger impact.** Especially if we get a young [Resource Generation]-type person who might move millions of dollars over the course of their life. And, we have folks who...didn't have a close analysis of giving, before they joined us, and probably never would have gotten it... because they just would have given to whatever they would have given to... **if we can influence those millions of dollars over their life of that donor, then that's potentially going to be more of an impact than whatever dollars we move across our balance sheet.** [Brian, 4/29/15, emphasis added]

If participants come from wealth, Brian hopes that after FTN they will be more cognizant about how they give in the future. On the other side, if a participant comes from a low-income

background, then they are envisioned to be a future philanthropic actor who sees the philanthropic system as one in which they have a voice and are hailed for participation.

Multiple respondents share how they changed their thinking about giving through involvement with FTN. For instance, Noah explains,

FTN...is reaching people at their formative years of philanthropy, so that ... when I get into a position in 30 years where... my dad died and left inheritance ... Now, Annette and I are the ones in charge of that family foundation, and because of our experience in Funding Together Northwest? We'll handle that experience way differently than if we hadn't had that... it will shift outcomes by supporting these grassroots organizations, and it will shift narratives around what it means to give... [Noah, 3/19/15]

Noah hasn't participated in a funding alliance, but has been a long-time annual fund donor and attended multiple events. He sees himself as one of the future philanthropic subjects that FTN is trying to cultivate. He recognizes the potential in moving his own wealth and resources towards those most impacted by impoverishment; he simultaneously refers to the ways in which individuals within philanthropy will shift the narrative of *what it means to give* and start to reframe the institution of philanthropy.

According to FTN, this philanthropic actor applies their insight and transformation to their current giving framework, not only their future philanthropic gifts. One participant, who had recently received an inheritance from their grandmother's death, explains:

I inherited \$5,000 ... I gave away \$4,000 of that. Kind of as a result of what I was doing with Funding Together Northwest where I was like, 'inheritance laws are bullshit!' (laughs) 'and like, super classist' ... 'like, I want to redistribute this'. So, I think that was like a major thing that I cannot imagine I would have done that before Social Justice Fund." [Grady, 3/4/2015]

Further, their new perspective extends outside of their immediate social justice community.

Grady encouraged a friend who is a tech worker in the Bay Area to match their own \$1,000 gift to their funding alliance, and to start giving to causes aligned with Funding Together Northwest.

The new philanthropic actor encouraged through FTN reconsiders their own capacity for wealth redistribution, their short-term giving, and the ways their friends and family give.

Funding Together Northwest wants to produce *social justice philanthropists* who give and give earlier in their lifetimes. For the organization, they hope that those who never thought critically about how they made donations begin to expand their ideas of what counts as giving, what types of organizations they support through their giving, and whether and how they carry this forward beyond their involvement in FTN. They hope that those who previously had access to resources and have thought about their giving think more deeply about how to strengthen their impact on the movements they care about, and how to continue to leverage their networks and resources to support this work. And they hope that still others begin to ‘see’ a place for themselves in philanthropy, which historically had excluded those experiencing impoverishment and marginalization.

The *social justice philanthropist* will extend their structural critiques of impoverishment onto the philanthropic sector. In other words, they can see how the nonprofit and philanthropic sectors replicate class judgement and privilege, and that when done uncritically, reproduce power hierarchies that fail to address structures of impoverishment. One participant, who had worked in the nonprofit sector for most of their twenties, helped develop a critical analysis of social change and the capacity for what a more progressive philanthropic mechanism can enable. He frames this in opposition to conventional nonprofits:

...‘I’m going to give you these cookies’ ... is only a temporary fix. Or it’s just like a Band-Aid, but not actually really getting to the root of it. ...[With social justice] you may not be able to start, but you can identify what the root of the cause is...And even if people can’t necessarily do anything about it right away, it’s knowing that we actually know why it’s like this...So what is our plan? [Sam, 8/3/15]

Sam leaves FTN with a transformed political imaginary about the possibility for change within the nonprofit sector. He is critical of short-term, ‘band-aid’ approaches to anti-poverty nonprofit programs *and* is prioritizing work that addresses root causes.

Noah extends this analysis even further, beginning to see how class judgement is applied in philanthropic settings and functions as one of the systematic inequalities of philanthropy. Noah describes an instance when he was in a small group fundraising process, as part of a civic engagement group. During the activity, potential recipients of a small seed grant had to present their projects to the civic engagement group. Noah reflects on the dynamic between a woman of color presenting to his group, particularly that one of the white, male participants expressed discomfort in funding that group because he couldn’t ‘understand her well’. Below, Noah shares his reactions to this interaction:

...there are *so* many reasons why you don’t understand her accent. You maybe don’t understand the way she’s presenting information ...and **you should not be the one who’s then deciding whether she gets money or not!** ... but I think that’s a lot of funding models. Its these kind of people in board rooms who are so disconnected from that... they’re like, “I’m just not seeing the keywords that I want to see to make this project happen...” Well, why aren’t you seeing those keywords? There’s so many like huge reasons... why they aren’t using words that you want to see and what other groups are, which is why you’re giving to the United Way. And to the YMCA. Because they have people who look like you, who talk like you, who can speak your language.  
[Noah, 3/19/15, emphasis added]

Noah recognizes the uneven power geometries within the philanthropic sector, which perpetuate race and class privilege through unexamined practices that reify social exclusion. He is carrying forward his analysis beyond the spaces of FTN and questioning the ways in which funding decisions are made based on race and class privilege in conventional philanthropy.

Funding Together Northwest helps actualize a *social justice philanthropist* who extends their awareness of race and class position into their own giving, and build a reflexivity about the ways one’s identities relate to those around them. As we saw in section 5.1, this type of reflexivity is

not a guaranteed outcome of FTN's exercises, but occasionally, this personal and reflexive transformation does occur. Matthew, a white male who comes from a privileged background, reflects on how his involvement with FTN helped him develop reflexivity about race, gender and class privilege that he carries into his life:

As a **white person, as like, a cis-male**, I'm constantly either putting myself in the center, or other people are **putting me in the center**. And learning through the funding alliances – seeing how that process gets enacted, has made me more aware in my day to day life... **trying to counteract that**. I think it has really changed the way that I think about...how my actions influence other people? ... I try to see more, like, concretely, the choices I make... like, **what kinds of votes am I making about like, where do I stand on this?** Like, what is my voice saying? You know, how is it representing the larger sort of scope of what is happening in society. ... And I think... **tangibly giving resources is really important now**. Whereas I'm not sure that I did before I was in [a funding alliance]? And, like, even within my family, there's this sort of emphasis on, like, "oh, you can volunteer, but you don't necessarily need to give money." And, I've like, - I've literally seen how like, **racialized wealth history has given my family advantages**. And I feel like it's important to address that, right? With like, resources. [Matthew, 3/15/15, emphasis added]

Matthew is enacting the personalized critical awareness about how his Whiteness, class privilege and male identity inform his activities as a philanthropist. He understands that his own privileges are tied to the experiences of those who are *not* 'in the center', and wants to 'counteract' this process by redistributing financial resources in line with his political values. Wealth redistribution is one component of this philanthropic actor's toolkit, redistribution that is informed by a critical analysis of power structures and that requires them to put money towards those working on the root causes of impoverishment.

Critical analysis of race and class privilege is happening for some participants in FTN, but it is also the case that the *language* of this critical analysis becomes a practice of distinction. Even while providing individuals with the language to see and identify their own class privilege and identity, this set of discourses becomes a way of performing distinction and therefore of performing one's class privilege. Practicing and performing critical knowledge about poverty, race and philanthropy distinguishes FTN's social justice philanthropists as 'enlightened' actors

in the nonprofit sector. In other words, to be able to speak the language of FTN, one distinguishes themselves from other well-intentioned philanthropists to be the ‘right’ kind of alternative and progressive practitioner. This creates a distinction from a less-enlightened and less well-educated donor.

Matthew explains how participants learn this analytical language, or “buzzwords” as he initially frames:

**...all of the buzzwords** ... Like, race, not so much gender now... Integrating those with uh, money, was, really important to see, for me, like, that **there’s this really obvious, tangible connection between your social standing, your class, your race, your gender, and then your ability – and that all of those, like directly influence your ability to get resources.** Either given to you or are able to reach for yourselves, in society. And so, like, addressing white privilege.... And addressing, uh, class privilege, was – that was challenging. Because that’s not something my education had given me. [Matthew, 3/15/15, emphasis added]

Through Funding Together Northwest, Matthew and others develop a critical language around race and class privilege that might have eluded them previously. As Matthew says, learning to see class privilege and white privilege were not part of his formal education. However, teaching this framework and critical language doesn’t necessarily mean the critical analysis is internalized. Those with privilege do not give it up easily, and so some parties are not able to fully internalize the self-analysis in a way that disrupts their own privilege. We see this when privileged individuals have difficulty imagining gifts that would materially impact their lives in key ways.

Instead, learning the tools and language to identify and name privilege and power becomes a form of distinction that distinguishes those who ‘get it’ from those who do not. This is often used as a wedge between those who have the ‘right’ language and those who do not. Importantly, though, some people who have lived these marginalities have not had access to the critical language FTN uses to describe marginalizing processes. José, a member of WJN who sits at the

intersections of multiple areas of concern for social justice philanthropy (i.e. poverty, queerness, racism, immigration status), is intimately familiar with the processes Funding Together

Northwest wants to fund, but his *language* would not inherently reflect this:

...the phrase social justice is pretty new to me. Before, I thought it was like, it was equality. But I think there's a difference in my head between equality and social justice. Social justice, for me that means like justice among our society in different categories. ... It was first introduced actually in Seattle...like with WJN, we would talk about equality, human rights, community rights and stuff for immigrants. But when I was in Seattle... I noticed a bunch of different phrases for things that I thought were similar... I guess I still don't understand the difference – why is it social justice if I feel equality is the same? [José, 9/19/15]

Part of José becoming a social justice philanthropist required him learning the appropriate way to perform his knowledge of social justice and a more urban, progressive language of Funding Together Northwest and its corollary organization. While José has been open-minded to extending his knowledge base about terminology, it is equally as likely that he might feel that social justice circles were exclusive and elitist because of the language being used.

The social justice philanthropist of Funding Together Northwest has learned an enlightened approach to philanthropy and the nonprofit sector, and this becomes coded as a desirable symbol of middle class status. Middle class identity is secured through performances of distinction, often in showing oneself to be highly educated or to have access to a particular type of education (Bourdieu 1984). Being able to show your insight into race and class privilege as they are in play in the nonprofit sector, is a status marker of enlightened involvement in philanthropy that results from an informal education through social justice philanthropy. Performance of this new, learned perspective occurs through the fundraising interaction. Fletch explains how these supposedly enlightened learnings about race, class, philanthropy and privilege function as a practice of distinction and differentiation in the fundraising ask and assessing who in one's community is ready to receive the language of FTN:

...we talk about it... all of us, I think, in a way, that's sort of couched. That some people are still growing in their analysis so they're not ready to hear everything you have as your analysis yet. And I – that kind of takes us back to the patronizing tone, I feel like. It's like, that might be true, this person's analysis might be developing. But to say that my analysis is quote-unquote “above and beyond them” even if I don't use the word, “above and beyond”, we just use different language now. So like, my analysis might be growing in this sphere and theirs is growing in this sphere. But **what we really mean is, “I'm smarter and I know better, and they don't know better yet, so don't tell – only tell them as much as they are ready to hear.”** [Fletch, 7/10/15, emphasis added]

This emphasis on ‘educating’ and inculcating social justice philanthropists with a critical language about privilege and class is seen as distinguishing them from less enlightened nonprofit and philanthropic actors, who may not, in Fletch's example, be ‘ready’ to hear a pitch framed in the language of social justice philanthropy. This process leads to a great deal of ambiguity. Funding alliance participants *do* develop key critical frame of analysis on race and class privilege. But, these analyses are *also* used as a practice of distinction by which participants begin to differentiate themselves from others and show their supposedly enlightened stances.

Funding Together Northwest relies on the above philanthropic actors: those who want to participate in alternative philanthropic practices, who develop a critical awareness of race and class, and who, ideally, will give and keep giving. Participation in FTN leads philanthropic actors to envision a new nonprofit and philanthropic sector: one that recognizes Native and indigenous struggle alongside urban gentrification of communities of color; one that fights for climate justice alongside livable wages; one that wants to abolish the prison industrial complex while supporting farmworker rights. The social justice philanthropist is thus a spokesperson for ‘the movement’, a broad-based signifier for progressive social justice movements, of which grantees are at the leading edge, and which FTN funds. For participants with wealth, they are hailed to approach philanthropy with their new critical reflexivity. And for historically marginalized individuals they are encouraged to fully embrace their role as philanthropists,

leveraging their communities and applying their fundraising skills to build power for the movement.

I have argued that Funding Together Northwest imagines a particular type of philanthropic subject whose critical analysis of the structures and social relations of impoverishment activates them towards political action beyond Funding Together Northwest. This actor is critical of the conventional nonprofit and philanthropic sector and the ways in which programs address symptoms of impoverishment without dealing with structural processes. They are also critical of the ways in which most philanthropic spaces reproduce racial and class hierarchies, as Noah shares in his quote above. Yet this philanthropic actor also infuses their analysis into their future philanthropic activities, focusing efforts and imaginaries onto more redistributive and relational programs that deal with root causes of impoverishment. While these signs of individual agency and transformation are encouraging, they also must be understood against larger cultural and social structures which bound the limits of individual transformation. I argue that the language and discourses of Funding Together Northwest work to reproduce (middle) class privilege through distinction. FTN works to leverage their new philanthropic actors towards a broad-based movement of coalitions and multiple social issues that address the structures of impoverishment. Yet this is constrained by the ways in which class privilege is extended through distinction across these efforts.

#### ***5.4 Conclusions: Developing critical class awareness while (re)producing class privilege***

Funding Together Northwest enacts their poverty politics through the ways it works with individuals in its funding alliance practices. Yet there are significant limitations to the transformative potential of these disruptions. FTN provides its participants with language and tools to identify and talk about class identity, class formation, and class position. This makes

visible both the myth of middle class-ness and the invisibility of wealth in U.S. society. The ‘class spectrum’ activity asks people to understand the fluidity and granularity of different experiences of class, rather than fixed categories of ‘poor’ ‘middle class’ and ‘wealthy’ which is so often imagined in the U.S. context. Yet, these activities do not necessarily prompt participants to fully develop a reflexive and relational understanding of class, nor to see how their own experiences of class privilege are in direct relationship to their giving practices.

This lack of reflexivity about class privilege and the performance of class status means that FTN participants perform poverty governance through judgement in the fundraising and grant-making processes. While participants learn language which enables them to see race and class privilege in *society*, and perhaps even in their own lives, FTN does not provide tools to actually disrupt and interrogate the mundane practices of this race and class privilege within a philanthropic space. This is seen in the ways that participants demand proof of organizations efficacy and financial plans; the ways in which organizations must be able to prove that they deserve grants because of how radical their community organizing is; the tendency to ask organizations to be able to put together a cohesive grant application in the first instance. Further, when participants go into the world and ask their own communities for money, they retreat from critical political framings in the interest of maximizing donations. While FTN does enable participants to see race and class privilege, the pull of a conventional, classed philanthropic sector still pervades even this most alternative and progressive philanthropic model.

Finally, Funding Together Northwest produces and crafts social justice philanthopists, who, in FTN’s ideal, see themselves as future philanthopists, and consider how their future giving activity would articulate a critique of conventional philanthropy. FTN encourages participants to continue to analyze the ways in which the nonprofit and philanthropic sectors

could do more to address structural processes of impoverishment rather than symptoms and ‘band-aid’ approaches to social change. In many ways, participants can do this because of the language and tools they learned to critique and identify race and class privilege, and how it articulates within the philanthropic sector.

However, along the journey of learning these tools and language, Funding Together Northwest also (re)produces class privilege. The language of FTN creates distinction between those who embrace the enlightened perspective of social justice philanthropy, and those who do not. The learning that encompasses social justice philanthropy serves as a marker of (middle) class privilege: education and vocabulary are two ways that social justice philanthropists secure privilege by performing distinction. Frequently, the very language used to explain the structural processes of impoverishment and marginalization elude those who directly experience marginalization. Social justice philanthropy imagines and produces *social justice philanthropists*, yet the limitations and contradictions of this process mean that these philanthropists reproduce class distinction even while trying to destabilize and disrupt race and class privilege.

## **Chapter 6: Social Justice Philanthropy as an Expression of Poverty Politics**

Philanthropy plays an increasing role in attempting to alleviate impoverishment as poverty and inequality are on the rise (Krugman 2014; Sawaya 2008). Unfortunately, as much critical scholarship on philanthropy has revealed, such interventions often reproduce and/or exacerbate wealth inequality through capitalist logics. Or, they extend a social contract which views philanthropy as a necessary and legitimized alternative to public funding and support for social services and poverty research. Further, conventional philanthropy has been critiqued for the ways in which it (re)produces social actors shrouded in class privilege and elitism. This dissertation has explored an alternative philanthropic practice, *social justice philanthropy*, which sees itself as a more effective model for actually addressing the structures and social relations which produce and sustain impoverishment. At its core, this dissertation has centered the question: can, and how, could philanthropy meaningfully intervene and alleviate poverty and inequality? Further, what can a relational poverty analysis reveal about the limitations and possibilities for philanthropy that is aimed at transforming the processes, institutions and individuals which (re)produce impoverishment?

### ***6.1 Structural processes and governing classed subjects: poverty politics in practice***

Philanthropy is a form of poverty politics. Poverty politics refers to the actions, understandings and alliances around poverty action and the governance practices enacted by/on classed subjects that maintain and produce impoverishment and class difference (Lawson and Elwood 2014). Within philanthropy, poverty politics is highly dependent on the practices, commitments and social relations of the model under consideration. I have explored the poverty politics of *social justice philanthropy*, a small but growing approach to philanthropy, which sees

itself as the radical leading-edge within the larger field of philanthropy. I contextualized SJP within the political economy of philanthropy in the U.S., and explored the political-economic and socio-cultural relations which create impoverishment in the Pacific Northwest and Mountain West where this research takes place. My relational poverty analysis of social justice philanthropy revealed the logics, assumptions, social relations and practices of a highly engaged and participatory branch of philanthropy. My analysis also revealed the possibilities and limitations for transformation at the level of the institutions, individuals and grantees involved in social justice philanthropy. I have argued that while there is significant transformation occurring for individuals through the trainings and practices of SJP, its poverty politics do not produce wholly reflexive class subjects invested in disrupting their own class privilege and able to recognize forms of poverty governance they are performing within philanthropy.

My analysis illuminates key mechanisms through which social justice philanthropy establishes its poverty politics, including trainings, grant-making practices, and efforts to form particular kinds of philanthropic actors. SJP's understanding of the root causes of poverty has a great deal of resonance with relational poverty theory's conceptualization of processes of impoverishment. I show how social justice philanthropy extends this understanding of root causes into its practices, mechanisms for review and analysis, and grant-making. SJP inculcates its participants to understand how poverty is produced through processes like land dispossession, labor exploitation, colonization, voter disenfranchisement, violent immigration policies, racialized urban planning, and mass incarceration. Grantees are rewarded when they, too, have a relational poverty politics and can articulate these clearly in a grant application. My evidence showed that this poverty politics abuts two significant limitations upon transforming the structural processes of impoverishment. First, funding alliance participants remain, for the most

part, unable to deeply contextualize the work of grantees whose work presents as targeting individuals rather than policy. This becomes clear in the ways that participants struggle to discern the difference between ‘services’ and ‘community organizing’, and expect grantees to articulate precisely how their work impacts structural processes of impoverishment. If grantees are unable to succinctly narrate the ways their work extends beyond service provisioning, they are unlikely to be awarded a grant by funding alliance members. This frequently means that those grantee organizations already most marginalized politically, economically and socially are further at a disadvantage within even this most progressive, radical form of philanthropy. SJP participants have been taught a very particular language to think about what counts as organizing, and potential grantees with the fewest resources are less likely to have had the trainings or educational experiences to demonstrate how their programming should be viewed as community organizing.

Secondly, I argued that grantees which *do* receive funding are constrained by the results of the very processes against which they organize and fight. This limits their capacity to be able to transform processes of impoverishment even as they are deeply versed in identifying and articulating these structures internally within their leadership and membership base. Grantees develop their own analyses of the processes which produce their impoverishment: political economic processes like wage theft, the devolution of public health and welfare services, and predatory payday lending to socio-cultural processes like anti-immigration rhetoric, racialized policing and public policy, and power and decision-making being concentrated in the hands of elite conservative lawmakers and corporations. And, examples abound of grantees achieving ‘victories’ in the fight against these processes, such as passing legislation that prevents predatory pay-day lending, establishing a local hiring ordinance for the City of Seattle, establishing

collective bargaining contracts for undocumented migrant workers, or winning widespread Medicaid coverage for low-income and uninsured individuals. Indeed, these ‘victories’ are why grantees are able to prove their deservingness for funding from Funding Together Northwest, as they represent strategic interventions against the root causes of impoverishment. Yet, the very structures which grantees *critique* and fight against also constrain their ability to make long-lasting interventions into these structures. For instance, state level Medicaid expansion can be completely outstripped by threats to federal health care accessibility, and preventing the siting of payday lenders, while locally helpful, does not slow the pace of capitalist exploitation of poorer people and immigrants. I argued that viewing these intermittent ‘victories’ against the backdrop of geo-historical context and disenfranchisement revealed how such forces are bigger than philanthropic resource redistribution can advance.

My analysis of social justice philanthropy further revealed that SJP forges particular kinds of subjects. Specifically, I argued that social justice philanthropy enacts its poverty politics through the *social justice philanthropist*. These actors are imagined to critically analyze race and class difference, identify their own class position and formation, and grapple with the class position of others. In a few instances, my evidence suggests social justice philanthropists are able to internalize a reflexive understanding of privilege and how this informs their giving. However, the ‘meaningful gift’ framework does not ask about, and is not *designed* to disrupt class privilege. It is constructed through a lens of income and discomfort, but not to meaningfully disrupt one’s class position or access to privilege. My research showed that the social justice philanthropist builds a critique of conventional philanthropy and is critical of the systemic inequities built into conventional philanthropy. This actor extends this critique to their own giving practices and build hopes for future giving that are founded on the poverty knowledge and

praxis of social justice philanthropy. I argued that despite the intentions of developing this critical analysis, the process of *learning* social justice philanthropy requires language about race, class, privilege and social movements that, when read through a lens of class formation and distinction, acts as a staging ground for performing and (re)producing class privilege. I showed how the largely middle class and more privileged actors of SJP secure distinction through education, vocabulary, and exclusive institutional affiliations. While SJP *wants* to disrupt class privilege, I argued that their language and jargon (re)produce middle class subjects who differentiate themselves from others by performing a particular kind of critical analysis and showing their ability to use key vocabulary associated with these critiques.

### ***6.2 Extending relational poverty theory to philanthropic studies***

This dissertation makes significant contributions to the literature on philanthropic studies, relational poverty studies, and critical geography. Primarily, it responds to gaps in the literature which have emphasized philanthropy's measurable impact on poor persons at the expense of a robust theorization of how philanthropy intervenes and acts upon the processes of impoverishment. Further, philanthropy research has not theorized social justice philanthropy and its relationship to the processes and social relations which produce and sustain impoverishment. My research considers social justice philanthropy as poverty politics, and reveals how SJP grounds its poverty knowledge through specific mechanisms, daily practices, and by constituting social actors. This allows new insight into how philanthropy (re)produces poverty, and the possibilities and limits to forging alternative poverty politics through alternative philanthropic practices.

This research brings relational poverty theorization to philanthropic studies. Historically, philanthropic studies has assessed philanthropy's effectiveness at addressing poverty through an

efficacy framework (Magat 1989; Anheier and Hammack 2010; Pallotta 2012; Parmar 2012). Scholars examine whether and how economic distribution, state restructuring, and social practices translate to philanthropic impact on poverty (Ostrower 1995; Schrift 1997; Gaudiani 2003; Payton and Moody 2008; Jung, Phillips, and Harrow 2016). Such studies tend to be highly descriptive and/or rely on a residual framing of poverty. By contrast, my research relies on a *relational* understanding of poverty in its analysis of the underlying logics and mechanisms which structure philanthropy, as well as the types of actors constituted in the process.

A relational theorization of poverty has significant implications for philanthropic studies. It recognizes the ways in which poverty is mutually constituted with wealth and by extension, how the social relations of power, privilege and oppression are imbricated in philanthropic institutions. It allows philanthropic scholars to identify and theorize the political economic processes that produce and sustain impoverishment, which, if ignored, foreclose philanthropy's ability to ever act upon root causes of poverty. In particular, this analytical framework recognizes impoverishment as a geo-historical process founded on land dispossession, labor exploitation, settler colonialism, institutional racism, mass incarceration, and violent immigration policing, processes which have long been 'invisible' to philanthropic studies. Recognizing and theorizing this relationship makes visible philanthropy's historical and ongoing connection to capitalism and institutionalized racism, a process which, potentially, could signal conventional philanthropy's transformation or eventual undoing.

A relational poverty analysis shows how philanthropy can function as a kind of poverty governance, particularly with regard to classed subjects. Core critiques of philanthropy note how it produces a 'poor other' (Goode and Maskovsky 2001; Dogra 2012; Qian 2014). Roy (2010), focuses her analysis instead on more privileged actors engaged in philanthropic endeavors. She

shows that millennial subjects are constituted in and through their participation in micro-finance programs, by developing an identity as a ‘do-gooder’ against global poverty. My research builds on this analysis, showing that relatedly, social justice philanthropy produces middle class or more privileged actors as social justice philanthropists. Specifically, I show how middle class privilege is (re)produced through philanthropy, even in alternative forms that try to engage in a process that builds critical awareness of privilege. I argued that this occurs when the language of critical politics to do with poverty and class become looped into performances aimed at signaling distinction. These performances signal how ‘in the know’ and ‘enlightened’ a person is - rather than becoming grounded into self-reflexivity. The ideas of a critical analysis of poverty and class are displaced from inward self-reflection to outward conspicuous performance of self.

Similarly, Mitchell and Sparke (2015) emphasize how contemporary philanthropic efforts, in their case ‘philanthro-capitalism’, produce market-ready subjects in and through philanthropic practices. They argue that philanthropy, when intersecting with capitalist logics and institutions, produces a market-ready consumer who interacts with the *outcomes* of philanthropy, such as charter school programs, as well as hyper calculating philanthropists who interact with the *mechanism* of philanthropic ‘investment’. My research adds additional layers to this Foucauldian reading of philanthropic apparatuses. I show how philanthropic subjects calculate where and how to have the most success with fundraising. And that, despite learning critical language about class and class position, do not willingly sacrifice their class privilege through the size of their financial contributions. While not all philanthropy is as deeply embedded with capitalist logics and mechanisms, the structures of philanthropy constrain the possibility for disruption of class privilege.

This research also deepens and extends relational poverty studies' engagement with philanthropy and social movements. I show that social justice philanthropy has the capacity to disrupt the normative poverty politics of philanthropy-as-we-know-it, offering a potential staging ground for funding radical politics and movements. Specifically, my work extends the arguments by Kohl-Arenas (2015), who emphasized philanthropy's *limits* to radical social movements by reducing programs to individualized anti-poverty programs. My analysis of social justice philanthropy nuances this claim in several ways. I argue that, yes, social justice philanthropy truncates its efforts to transform people's views to a more radical political analysis of poverty because of its driving emphasis on raising funds. However, I show that philanthropy can and does support programs doing more than individualized anti-poverty programming. Further, I show that there are significant kinds of transformations in poverty politics happening within some alternative philanthropic practices. For instance, SJP teaches privileged people critical language and analyses of poverty that are dramatically different from the hegemonic poverty politics that circulate in mainstream US culture. Taken further, my research contributes to relational poverty research by suggesting that social justice philanthropy envisions philanthropy as part of a collective politics, one which could shift the political paradigm within the U.S. For instance, if SJP's poverty politics were mobilized across the philanthropic sector, this would have significant material implications: the \$358 billion of philanthropic donations in the U.S. could be mobilized towards funding large-scale reinvestments in the public sphere, to establish a robust public health paradigm, could establish and fund reparations, or could overhaul and reform the tax system so it was more equitable and redistributive.

At the crux of my interpretation, though, is a persistent tension between the 'both/and' transformative possibilities within social justice philanthropy. I have identified that SJP offers a

much more hopeful, holistic and radical politics of philanthropy than conventional philanthropy. It establishes and grounds a poverty politics that disrupts many of the tendencies to discipline, govern and constrain anti-poverty nonprofit programs. The politics of social justice philanthropy replicate trust, reciprocity and transparency into the grant-making model. That said, there are fundamental and structural limits *even at the alternative edges of the repertoire of philanthropic practice*. For instance, at a practical level, philanthropy can never get outside of its need to assess and ask for *some* level of metrics. My critiques about the ways in which assessment reproduces dynamics of deservingness and poverty governance will be present, at some level, regardless of the type of philanthropic practice: social justice philanthropy, as the alternative edge of philanthropy, minimizes, but does not erase, the negative impacts and problematic power dynamics inherent in assessment. At a more structural level, philanthropy is rooted to relations of class difference. The fundraising relationship and dynamic produces an affective politics which maintains middle class normativities. In other words, my research shows how and where philanthropy can or cannot transform the structures and relations of impoverishment, *even when it acknowledges and rejects the conventional priorities of philanthropy*. My work thus deepens critical analyses of the poverty politics that emerge or are possible in philanthropy.

My work also contributes to research on shifting roles of state, market and civil society under ever-deepening austerity. Schram et al. (2010) argues that NGOs and the voluntary sector have become staging grounds for neoliberal governmentality, significantly heightened in the last two decades. Peck (2012) further shows how municipalities and local governments respond to a new socio-spatial moment of “neoliberal urbanism”, of which NGOs and the voluntary sector are at the crux, while Irvine, Lazarevski, and Dolnicar (2009) and Trudeau and Veronis (2009) explore the constraints placed on NGOs in responding to foundation criteria and conditionalities

while navigating state restructuring. My research suggests a deepening of many of these trends. In particular, I show that anti-poverty nonprofit organizations are still systematically disadvantaged by rolling-back of the public sphere. Their potential for acting on and producing systemic change is limited by the scramble and competition for limited resources from the philanthropic sector. As such, those organizations acting on the structural processes of impoverishment are relegated to search for funds from small foundations like Funding Together Northwest and their corollary organizations. My research suggests that many of the same dynamics observed in relation to the NGO and nonprofit sector - limiting the nature of their political challenge to the status quo, lest it disrupt their funding - also plays out within philanthropy, by not challenging donors' sensibilities and adapting fundraising language to appeal to donors' existing poverty politics (Andersson and Valentine 2014.; Incite! 2007; Dolhinow 2010). This said, my research suggests how organizations at the cross-roads of austerity and state restructuring can adopt a collective politics, which prioritize the well-being of a collective society. The priorities and politics of social justice philanthropy hold great potential for reimagining the formation and structure of the nonprofit and voluntary sector in the U.S., and provide a possibility for the sector to get outside of its own logic to create new futures.

My research offers multiple points for theorizing the role and performance of anti-poverty programming among heightened austerity. My research points to whether and how philanthropy might transform itself from the inside, by developing and refining a relational politics of philanthropy. As such, this research extends to theorizing how other institutions involved in anti-poverty programming can incorporate and build a relational poverty politics. However, in order to fully understand the limitations and barriers to meaningfully transforming an institution like philanthropy, further research is needed.

### ***6.3 Limitations and future research and conceptual directions***

As in any dissertation, there are additional lines of analysis that I was not able to pursue, and these suggest some important directions for future research. First, my project suggests the need for further analysis of the ways in which (social justice) philanthropy grounds in particular ways in specific times and place. Throughout the research, I noticed that many of the ‘tensions’ or sticking points among participants, staff and/or grantees focused on grant proposals received from Native-led organizations, leading to mixed support and lots of debate and disagreements about how to respond to funding requests. In most cases, these struggles seemed to stem from social justice philanthropy participants not adequately understanding the geo-histories of Native groups in the U.S., nor understanding the forms of structural violence that has been endemic to them. More (and different) theorization and analysis would be needed to fully explore this insight from my fieldwork. In particular, settler colonialism and racial capitalism have much to offer as theoretical lenses for interrogating these dynamics (HoSang, LaBennett, and Pulido 2012; Bonds and Inwood 2016).

Settler colonialism is understood to be an ongoing social, political and economic project that removes indigenous people from the land, remakes economic relations to ensure land and labor are profitable, and sustains these removals through permanent settlement on the land (Smith 2010). Whereas ‘colonialism’ suggests a temporal *end* point, and allows for a ‘postcolonial’ imaginary, settler colonialism “... necessitates the eradication of indigenous populations, the seizure and privatization of their lands, and the exploitation of marginalized peoples in a system of capitalism established by and reinforced through racism” (Bonds and Inwood 2016: 716). Such an analysis highlights how structures of white supremacy undergird, articulate and legitimize the settler colonial project. Pulido (2016) extends this framework

further, arguing that materialist analyses of political economy must contend with *racial* capitalism, and the long-standing processes of “colonization, primitive accumulation, slavery and imperialism” which shape the current racial and economic moment.

Bringing settler colonialism and racial capitalism to this research would help us understand how and why (social justice) philanthropy enacts its poverty politics in particular times and places. Specifically, these conceptual lenses would help explain why, for instance, the participants of SJP, both White and people of color, struggle to ground their relational analyses of poverty into the grant-making processes. Indeed, Byrd (2011), highlights how an anti-racist approach based on *inclusion* allows for settler colonialism to go unchecked: “When the remediation of the colonization of American Indians is framed through discourses of racialization that can be redressed by further inclusion into the nation-state, there is a significant failure to grapple with the fact that such discourses further reinscribe the original colonial injury” (xxiii). Taking this argument seriously would provide a more robust theoretical frame to a relational poverty theorization of philanthropy.

Further, this framework would contribute to existing scholarship that unpacks the legacies of racial capitalism with projects of poverty governance, state-sanctioned structural violence and dispossession, and studies of displacement and socio-spatial exclusion. In particular, Roy, Schrader, and Crane's (2015) historicized look at mechanisms of urban governance in the 1960's sheds light on how philanthropy and philanthropic research intersects with racial capitalism, white supremacy and poverty governance. Adams (2013) also looks at the articulations of racial capitalism, place imaginaries, and subjectivity in her work on New Orleans and post-Katrina 'humanitarian' efforts at remaking place. This research already informs my work and the project, but her framework brings geo-historical specificity to explain the structural

and social processes of disaster capitalism in a particular place. Such frameworks allow a geohistorical perspective on how and why (social justice) philanthropy grounds its poverty politics and where it reaches its limitations.

Bringing the insights of settler colonialism and racial capitalism to bear on analyses of social justice philanthropy stands to further deepen critical theorization of philanthropy and its connections to multi-faceted processes of impoverishment, beyond the ones I have focused upon in this dissertation. In particular, these insights would go a long way to not only explain moments of tension and disconnect noted in my empirics. They would allow a deeper understanding of the inherent limitations of a transformative poverty politics for philanthropy, as well as what it would take to untangle institutions of philanthropy from their current imbrication with the ongoing project of settler colonialism. Further, this has implications for any industry aimed at intervening on the structural processes of impoverishment and the possibilities and limitations for these interventions.

Mitchell and Sparke's (2016) research also suggests the need for further research on the relationships and interactions between differently structured and resourced modes of philanthropy. Specifically, the remaking of philanthropy to target publicly facing institutions such as education, mass incarceration and health care mean that some of the largest threats to the very public structures which SJP wants to protect are *coming from other philanthropists*. This suggests three things: first, that social justice philanthropy cannot compete with the massive wealth infrastructures and their intertwined nature with capital. Second, that because of this fact, the biggest area for social justice philanthropy to make interventions on impoverishment are through the individual-level transformations. It suggests an increased urgency of how to ensure the kind of self-reflexivity that *could* happen but is not yet happening across the board. This line

of further research would be key to fully understand the limits and potential of social justice philanthropy in this larger changing context. Third, that an as-of-yet untapped possibility for social justice philanthropy is to redirect its funding exclusively towards large-scale mobilizations and campaigns which push for tax reform, a truly redistributive politics, and shifting the political paradigm.

My research has shown that despite the limitations to grounding its poverty politics into broad scaled actionable and transformative action on the processes of impoverishment, social justice philanthropy remains a vital source in keeping the doors open for a variety of small-scale, grassroots efforts. At the time of writing, the current political regime in the U.S. threatens to even further dismantle what is left of an already gutted social safety net. Explicit Islamophobia and anti-immigration policy threaten Muslim and Latinx communities across the country. Criminal justice reform feels like a distant possibility. While it is true that social justice philanthropy cannot alone transform the structures of white supremacy, racial capitalism and settler colonialism, it *does* mean that those most impacted by these forces continue to have the means to express their voice. Social justice philanthropy provides resources to those with the most to gain from imagining a new world.

All of that said, there are significant limitations to where social justice philanthropy can begin to make that world anew, and where further empirical research would be needed to understand how social justice philanthropy grounds in other places. To begin, the cities of Seattle and Portland are largely, though certainly not exclusively, White. This means that the majority of funding alliance participants identify as White, and my interview samples certainly over-represent White participants. Further research is needed in cities where the funding alliance model is being replicated, which have a more diverse racial demographic. Relatedly, my own

perspective as a White, middle class researcher structured the analysis of this work, illuminating insights into the performativity of middle class politics and affect. Indeed, my research into the poverty politics of social justice philanthropy revealed and interpreted middle class-ness in large part because this is the analytic I carry with me. My embodied and performed self were not threatening in this work, and allowed me access and insights that would not have been revealed by someone with less class privilege, a black or brown body, or less familiarity with middle class nonprofit norms.

Secondly, since I began this research, FTN has started three new initiatives: rapid-response campaigns, two-year grant cycles, and specific issue-area funding alliances that are responsive to contemporary needs and engage alumni of former funding alliances. All of these mechanisms thus represent even further examples of the practices which SJP uses to enact its poverty politics, but none of them received attention in this research.

Finally, a few consistent themes emerged in the research, but did not feature strongly in this dissertation. One was the idea of rebuilding the tax system to be even more redistributive of wealth. Multiple respondents alluded to the fact that they thought this would be the next frontier of broad scaled reform. This is a persistent theme within Washington State, where FTN operates and where there is currently no income tax. At the time of writing, the city of Seattle is exploring a high-income earners income tax (Real Change, 2017), though it remains to be seen what type of involvement social justice philanthropy might have in these efforts. Additionally, Resource Generation, another leader in SJP, has a ‘tax justice’ action campaign, asking for tax reform that would fairly tax higher-income earners and those with wealth (Tax Justice Organizing 2013). This has implications for further research about social justice philanthropy as well as a broader question about alternative forms of resource redistribution outside of philanthropy. Another

theme which received less attention was the contradictory nature of trying to solve the problems of capitalism with money. Only a handful of respondents brought this up or felt comfortable raising this critique. Future analysis of mine would dig into the silences and challenges for philanthropists to engage with a radical politics which envisions new forms of capitalism or grapples with the contradictions of philanthropy. Lastly, the inter-personal dynamics and affective politics of fundraising and making donations featured prominently in the analysis and in people's stories and responses. These require further research to understand what these relationships can reveal about the politics of middle-class-ness as well as the role of moral discourses and the ways in which historical continuities of morality and care are reproduced and/or disrupted through the fundraising ask.

#### ***6.4 Implications for practice and practitioners***

This dissertation articulates the organizational and structural practices that drive social justice philanthropy. While there are white papers and conference presentations on SJP, this research allowed me to identify the important pieces of this model of philanthropic practice. In other words, this dissertation allows me to paint a picture of the 'machine' that makes up social justice philanthropy, such that practitioners in other organizations or places can better understand how their own versions of SJP are similar or different than the model presented here. This makes it clear what parts of this 'machine' are mutable as sites of intervention, and which are immutable and built into the core structural of social justice philanthropy.

Funding Together Northwest is an illustrative case within the broader group of social justice philanthropic organizations. Its 'funding alliance' model is currently being piloted by at least four other organizations across the U.S., and elements of its poverty politics can be seen in many organizations who don't rely on the funding alliance model. At its core, social justice

philanthropy challenges limits of mainstream philanthropy by bringing in elements of a relational poverty theorization. Primarily, it does so by engaging participants in explicit conversations about race and class position as well as the structural inequities of the broader philanthropic apparatus, practices which conventional philanthropy does not do.

A key practice of social justice philanthropy is having participants identify and discuss their own class position in front of the group. However, this process stops at asking individuals to deeply investigate, for instance, what it would mean to actively disrupt and destabilize experience of class privilege. In other words, while participants abstractly discuss and understand processes like labor exploitation, land dispossession and the racial wealth gap, middle class and more privileged participants do not apply this framework to thinking about how their personal ability to give and participate in SJP also reproduces and sustains class difference. While some individuals demonstrated a firmer understanding of this, they tended to be staff members who had been involved for years, or participants with marginal identities who were intimately familiar with existing processes of power, privilege and marginalization.

Social justice philanthropy also grounds its work through explicit attention to long-term philanthropic funding aimed at the root causes of poverty, something that stands in stark contrast to the short-term, individualized funding patterns of mainstream philanthropy. As such, social justice philanthropy's grant-making practices stand out and make it unique compared to their peers in more conventional grant-making circles. For instance, SJP does not require grantees to report-back their outcomes and metrics. They fund no-strings-attached general operating expenses rather than program areas. They push towards multi-year grants instead of annual, to ease the burden of repeated grant-applications and allow organizations to write more predictive budgets. SJP aims to develop cross-class spaces for fundraising, shifting the long-standing

domain of elite, wealthy white men controlling philanthropic endeavors. As part of this, SJP also encourages democratic grant-review processes, moving decision making away from board rooms and increasing transparency. At Funding Together Northwest, all of this transpires around the core funding model, a six-month program that includes race and class trainings and trains donors to fundraise their own families, peers and friends. Each person makes a personal contribution that is meant to be meaningful given their own circumstances and class history, though this core belief seems to be one of the areas with the most possibility for disruption and continued innovation. These are some of the defining practices of social justice philanthropy, all of which have potential to be included in conventional philanthropic efforts.

Through this set of practices which define social justice philanthropy, I identify three key areas for improvement where social justice philanthropy must contend with the limitations of its current model and politics. First, my research suggests that in order to produce actual class transformation, *(social justice) philanthropy needs to grapple with what it would look like to actually destabilize class privilege*. This means considering that class privilege transcends income: class position is both performed *and* tied to one's position in the labor market and owning potential. Current practices of wealth redistribution through philanthropy never ask individuals to give enough that it actually threatens their class position. Rather, at most a gift might disrupt a short-term lifestyle choice, but wouldn't threaten actual class privilege. And how could it? Class privilege isn't secured through money alone, and thus even a sizable gift would not destabilize *privilege* so much as it would disrupt access to *resources*. Taking these questions seriously has implications for the types of question (social justice) philanthropy asks itself. For instance, what would philanthropy through a lens of reparations look like? What would it mean if social justice philanthropy was paired with a systematic re-negotiation of the nonprofit sector

and the politics of service provision, such that signing on to SJP also meant agreeing to disrupt the conventional poverty governance of the nonprofit sector? In particular, what would philanthropy look like that sought to actively undermine processes of racial capitalism, and how can SJP encourage this process at an institutional and individual level?

Second, social justice philanthropy must continue to examine what it means to build a “multi-racial and cross class” institution that relies on participation by largely White middle class actors. Despite prioritizing a diverse perspective and inculcating individuals with tools to talk critically about race and class, these trainings end up reproducing middle class privilege. Indeed, extending the funding alliance by a few weeks and including a *second* race and class training / check-in mid-way through the process would allow participants to reflect on the ways in which more privileged actors reproduce this privilege in the grant-making process, particularly in how they assess the deservingness of organizations. In particular, adding a more robust training on the *current processes of settler colonialism* would allow participants to see how Native marginalization and disenfranchisement is not a holdover from a ‘colonial moment’ of invasion, but rather an ongoing process of state-sanctioned dispossession, White supremacy, and racial capitalism.

Finally, social justice philanthropy needs to be wary of the dichotomy between services and community organizing, which hinge on an unclear understanding of whether a potential grantee is “doing good work”. While this sentiment seems to be shared across SJP, it ends up reproducing processes of poverty governance which ask grantees to be responsible for articulating whether and how their work stands as organizing. In many cases, grantee interventions on structural processes of impoverishment manifest as services, thus disadvantaging them in the grant-making review process. While individual staff might intervene

to help correct or re-direct a conversation during grant-review, there must be more training and discussion of the nuance between what counts as “good work” and how that is identified.

The findings of this research are significant for practitioners and activists interested in how philanthropy can meaningfully address structures of impoverishment and inequality, beyond the world of philanthropy. This research more fully illustrates how poverty is the result of structural processes and socio-cultural framing and governance of classed subjects. Specifically, practitioners must learn to identify and disrupt residual and discrete understanding of poverty that underlie so much of dominant poverty research and policy. Such rhetoric and theory must move beyond the academy and bring “theory to the bus” (Crane 2016). This research suggests alternative ways of engaging with the framings of ‘poverty’, which move away from a depoliticized and individualizing framing and towards one that grapples with structural processes and governance practices.

For nonprofit practitioners in particular, I hope that this research demonstrates that *all organizations express a poverty politics*, even if they are not reflexively claiming one in the way that social justice philanthropy does. Further, it is vital to recognize that reflection and integration alone do not guarantee a transformative poverty politics: even within Funding Together Northwest, extremely intentional about matching their practices to their beliefs, the organization *still* reaches significant limitations to how transformative their practices can be. Yet, I would hope that more organizations begin the reflexive practice required to begin to craft a relational poverty politics. This research shows that such a politics is possible, and that it must constantly push and negotiate structural and systemic barriers to transformation.

For activists interested in the relations of redistribution, privilege, wealth and identity, my hope is that this research is both instructive and thought-provoking. Often, those enmeshed in the

nonprofit sector are so focused on ‘getting the work done’ that they leave little energy or time to think about how they are (re)producing the very systems and structures they seek to disrupt. This is a result of middle class poverty governance as well as the structural reality of massive social and economic inequality being tackled by an over-burdened nonprofit sector. Such reflexive practices are not encouraged by the current philanthropic landscape. Rather, short-term, high-outcome programs are rewarded. As such, the commitments of social justice philanthropy and its poverty politics highlight a new way forward: one where both the funders and recipients of funds are encouraged to reflect on structural power dynamics, relations of power and privilege, and the ways that market-based logics infuse philanthropy, seeking to govern places and people experiencing impoverishment.

Most importantly, I hope that my research is significant for any on the ground engaged in social justice pedagogy, education and/or base-building. I want practitioners to reflect on the dynamics of class distinction and class privilege, and how these are replicated across social justice circles and organizations. Particularly in the fraught and divided political times we are in, I hope this research can serve as a guidepost for the limitations of building a social justice movement with specific social justice jargon at its core.

I close this dissertation then with reflections on my own future as a potential nonprofit professional working in a progressive organization, trying to advance the same kinds of politics as what Funding Together Northwest and social justice philanthropy are doing. Even if my work takes me outside of philanthropy, I envision bringing the same kinds of critical analysis and politics into my future work. I enter this world with a greater understanding and even more questions about the implications, priorities, and commitments needed to practice reflexive and relational poverty politics on the ground. Rather than closing this research with a sense of

disenchantment about the limitations of social justice philanthropy, I am energized about pushing myself and this field of practice to think critically about its potential to transform individuals through its giving practices, as this shows the greatest area of possible transformation. This type of self-reflexivity is more urgent than ever, as the social contract in the U.S. and elsewhere continues to be undermined by massive austerity, implicit and explicit White supremacy, and, ironically, philanthropists set on rewriting public-facing institutions. I am poised to enter the next phase of my career informed by the empirical and theoretical insights of this research, humbled by the emotional and personal growth opportunities that accompanied by involvement with Funding Together Northwest, and eager to continue to learn from movement leaders and practitioners who live and breathe the contradictions, realities and imaginative potential of making a new world into being.

## APPENDICES

### *Appendix A: FTN year-end report*

**2012 YEAR-END REPORT**

**DATE:** \_\_\_\_\_

**ORGANIZATION:** \_\_\_\_\_

**CONTACT PERSON:** \_\_\_\_\_

**CONTACT PHONE AND EMAIL:** \_\_\_\_\_

**WEBSITE ADDRESS:** \_\_\_\_\_

**GRANT NUMBER:** \_\_\_\_\_

PLEASE FILL OUT THIS FORM AND ATTACH YOUR ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS #1-4 IN TWO PAGES OR LESS.

1. **SUMMARIZE YOUR ORGANIZATION'S ACTIVITIES AND ACCOMPLISHMENTS OVER THE LAST YEAR.**
2. **IF NOT ADDRESSED IN #1: DESCRIBE THE PROGRESS YOU HAVE MADE FOR EACH GOAL OUTLINED IN YOUR APPLICATION FOR THIS GRANT. ALSO INDICATE WHAT GOALS WERE YOU UNABLE TO ACHIEVE, AND WHY.**
3. **DESCRIBE ANY MAJOR STAFF OR BOARD CHANGES OR OTHER MAJOR ORGANIZATIONAL CHANGES IN THE PAST YEAR, AND DESCRIBE THE INTERNAL OR EXTERNAL CAUSES.**
4. **OTHER COMMENTS OR INFORMATION? DO YOU HAVE ANY SUGGESTIONS FOR HOW SJF CAN IMPROVE ITS GRANTMAKING PROGRAMS? PLEASE ATTACH ADDITIONAL INFORMATION IF NEEDED.**
5. **PLEASE ANSWER THE FOLLOWING TO HELP US GAUGE THE IMPACT OF THESE GRANTS:**
  - a. What is the total size of your base? That is, how many people, including paid staff, identify as part of your organization?
  - b. How many people gave a financial contribution of any size to your organization in the last year?  
How many people made a financial contribution the previous year?
  - c. Do you evaluate your work by any quantitative measures (e.g., number of voters registered, members trained, leaders developed, etc.)? If so, provide that information:
  - d. What, if any, specific policy changes have you achieved over the past year

## Appendix B: Grant-evaluation criteria

Excerpted with permission from Funding Together Northwest

### PROGRAM

**Overall Question:** Will the proposed work help build concrete and lasting political power to address the underlying causes of the problems that it addresses?

| STRONG (deserves high score)  | ...Or... | WEAK (deserves low score)  |
|---|----------|--|
| Will the proposed work build concrete and lasting political and economic power?   | ...Or... | Are the goals and objectives likely to create only temporary change?   |
| Does the group understand the root causes and underlying power dynamics of the identified need or problem?  | ...Or... | Does the organization identify the need and its symptoms without addressing the root cause or power dynamic giving rise to the need?     |
| Does the proposed work address root causes, challenge existing institutions, and/or advocate for policy reform?   | ...Or... | Does the proposed program work to relieve needs and symptoms without linking the work to broader systemic change?                        |
| If self-empowerment is a part of the organization's strategy, is it a step towards building power for disenfranchised or marginalized communities?  | ...Or... | Is individual empowerment separate from community organizing or collective action, or unlikely to assist a movement for social change?   |
| Will the proposed work help build a democratic and diverse movement for social change?  | ...Or... | Will the outcome of the proposed work feed into the existing social, political and economic power structure?                             |
| Are the goals and objectives clear and, where possible, measurable?   | ...Or... | Are goals and objectives vague or confused?  |
| Is there a detailed and complete work plan?   | ...Or... | Are proposed activities vague or incomplete?   |
| Is the work plan designed to accomplish the stated goals and objectives?  | ...Or... | Are the proposed activities unrelated to the proposed goals and objectives or insufficient to make concrete progress towards those ends? |
| Are the goals and objectives achievable? Is the work plan feasible?   | ...Or... | Is the proposed work too ambitious or otherwise unreasonable?  |
| Does the organization provide a plan to collect data and clear criteria to effectively evaluate its measurable objectives? Will the organization thoughtfully review broader, less easily measured goals? | ...Or... | Does the organization appear unsure about how to measure the impact of its work?   |
| Does the proposal clearly designate responsibility for program evaluation?  | ...Or... | Is it unclear who will conduct evaluation or appear that evaluation will not happen?   |
| Is there a clear mechanism for incorporating evaluation results into ongoing or future work?  | ...Or... | Does it appear that evaluation results will be irrelevant to ongoing or future work?   |

## DIVERSITY

### Does the organization:

- 1) work with communities that are exploited, oppressed, or marginalized?
- 3) include members of these communities in the decision-making leadership of the organization?
- 4) work to build a multi-racial, multi-class, multi-gendered social justice movement?

| STRONG (deserves high score)   | ...Or... | WEAK (deserves low score)   |
|--|----------|---|
| Does the organization represent and/or benefit historically disenfranchised and/or underrepresented communities?   | ...Or... | Does the organization only represent and benefit communities who have historically had institutionalized privilege? Does the organization claim to benefit disenfranchised and/or underrepresented communities without including representation from those communities? |
| Do most of the individuals in positions of leadership in the organization come from historically disenfranchised and/or underrepresented communities?  | ...Or... | Do most of the individuals in leadership come from communities who have historically had institutionalized privilege? If people from disenfranchised and/or underrepresented communities are in leadership, do they appear to be tokens?                                |
| Does a significant percentage of individuals in positions of leadership in the organization come from the specific constituency most directly affected by the issues the organization is working on?   | ...Or... | Do most of the individuals in leadership come from communities not directly affected by those issues? If people from the affected communities are in leadership, do they appear to be tokens?   |
| If a significant percentage of individuals in positions of leadership in the organization do <u>not</u> come from historically disenfranchised, underrepresented, and/or affected communities, is there a concrete plan and timeline for increasing the diversity of the leadership? | ...Or... | Does the organization fail to acknowledge that it has room to increase the diversity of its leadership or minimize the problem? If it does acknowledge the problem, does it only state an intent to improve without a clear and realistic plan for how it will improve? |
| Does the organization articulate and demonstrate a commitment to building a multi-racial, multi-class, multi-gendered progressive movement (e.g. by dismantling/bridging the divides of racism, sexism, classism, homophobia, etc.)?   | ...Or... | Does the organization lack a clear commitment to, or articulation of, the importance of building a multi-racial, multi-class, multi-gendered progressive movement, or of dismantling the "isms?"  |

## SOUNDNESS

**Overall Question:** Does the organization have the internal capacity and systems to sustain it as a strong, lasting organization?

| <b>STRONG (deserves high score)</b>  |          | <b>WEAK (deserves low score)</b>  |
|--|----------|---|
| Does the organization have a track record of success in mobilizing their constituency on political issues?   | ...Or... | Does the organization lack a focus or strategy in mobilizing their base?  |
| Does the organization have a clear and specific sense of its mission?  | ...Or... | Does the organization seem to lack a sense of what its mission is?  |
| Is the organization's work well distributed among staff, volunteers and board members?   | ...Or... | Is this a "one-person show?"  |
| Is there an active Board of Directors or Steering Committee that has final authority over policy and program decisions?  | ...Or... | Does the Board of Directors or Steering Committee seem not to be very involved?   |
| Do volunteers and/or new members have clear opportunities to develop leadership skills and to move into positions of power in the organization?  | ...Or... | Is the organization controlled by a small group of people who do not let new members into the decision-making structure?  |
| Is the organization's volunteer leadership stable?   | ...Or... | Have there been frequent changes in volunteer leadership in recent years?   |
| Are the organization's sources of revenue diverse and stable?  | ...Or... | Is the organization overly dependent on a few sources of funding?   |
| Are volunteers (including the Board of Directors) actively involved in fundraising?  | ...Or... | Is the fundraising relegated only to staff or a small group of volunteers?  |
| Are fundraising plans realistic and achievable?  | ...Or... | Does the organization seem overly optimistic in its ability to raise/increase its income?   |
| Is the organization able to retain experienced staff? Does the organization provide a workplace conducive to good staff retention (e.g. respectable salaries/wages for the area, benefits, family friendly policies, budget for professional development)? | ...Or... | Is there frequent staff turnover? Does the organization offer a workplace likely to result in high turnover (e.g. huge salary disparities between higher and lower status employees, unrealistic workloads, top-down management style)? |
| Are there clear roles for Board and staff?   | ...Or... | Do the Board and staff seem to be at odds, unclear of their respective roles?   |
| Are there clear systems and roles for managing the organization's finances (including periodic budgeting and financial reporting procedures)?  | ...Or... | Do the finances of the organization seem loosely managed, with unclear authority or systems?  |

## COLLABORATION

**Overall Question:** Does the organization demonstrate a commitment to collaboration, partnership, and/or networking as an approach to social change?

| <b>STRONG (deserves high score)</b>   | ...Or... | <b>WEAK (deserves low score)</b>  |
|---|----------|---|
| Does the organization see collaboration and partnerships as important strategies for building a social change movement? |          | Does the organization see itself as capable of winning its issues and agenda by going it alone?                             |
| Are efforts to collaborate part of a long-term commitment to build a broad winning progressive movement?                |          | Are collaboration efforts short-term tactics that are likely to be abandoned once a particular objective has been achieved? |
| Do the organization's collaborative relationships cross issue and constituency boundaries?                              |          | Does the group only collaborate with organizations working on the same issues and with the same constituencies?             |

## LACK OF ACCESS

**Overall Question:** Does the organization have access to more mainstream funding to support this work?

| <b>STRONG (deserves high score)</b>  | ...Or... | <b>WEAK (deserves low score)</b>   |
|--|----------|--|
| Is the work of this organization too "controversial" to be likely to receive "mainstream" funding?   |          | Is this organization's work likely to be able to be funded by more "mainstream" foundations because it is not controversial? |
| Is this organization likely to face barriers of resources, networking, education, language, or culture in appealing to "mainstream" funders? |          | Does this organization have the savvy, expertise, resources, or contacts that will help it obtain more "mainstream" funding? |

*Appendix C: Nonprofit actor training*



**She gives and gives so generously  
because only she knows what everyone needs  
for if they knew better than she  
wouldn't they too be wealthy?**

From the workshop "The Other Taboo: Talking about Class"





**From penniless to self made wealth  
he did it by himself  
he yanked those bootstraps up so high  
he almost had to yelp**

From the workshop "The Other Taboo: Talking about Class"





**He is the smartest man around  
a harder worker cannot be found  
his riches are his just reward  
because his choices were obviously sound**

From the workshop "The Other Taboo: Talking about Class"



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