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LA CASITA CENTER: AN ACCOMPANIMENT BASED
APPROACH TO SOCIAL JUSTICE AND SOCIAL SERVICE

By Ben Harlan
M.A., University of Louisville, 2022

A Thesis
Submitted to the Faculty of the
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A Thesis Approved on

November 28, 2022

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I am so grateful to each and every staff and board member of La Casita Center. Thank you so much for welcoming me into the circle with so much love. Your steadfast accompaniment is appreciated more than words can express. I would also like to extend many thanks to my brilliant committee, Dr. Lisa Markowitz, Dr. Melanie Gast, and Dr. Cara Snyder. Your insights have been invaluable and I appreciate all of your time, guidance and expertise. In the words of La Casita, we are a circle.

ABSTRACT

LA CASITA CENTER: AN ACCOMPANIMENT BASED APPROACH TO SOCIAL JUSTICE AND SOCIAL SERVICE

Ben Harlan

November 28, 2022

La Casita Center is a Louisville based nonprofit organization that accompanies Latinx immigrants in the Louisville Metro area. and that is led and staffed by Latina immigrants. In this thesis, I investigate how employees of this Latinx-immigrant led nonprofit organization, navigate challenges to both administer service and build community using the model of *accompaniment*. Organizations like La Casita are critically important for the growing Latinx immigrant communities in the United States and as the forces of neoliberalism continue to oppress and marginalize, La Casita provides a model for what it means to center inclusion, belonging, community, and solidarity. In a global landscape of market-orientation, how can an alternative based on *accompaniment* depart from mainstream expectations of social service provision?

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CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

On September 14th, 2022, Florida governor Ron DeSantis organized and paid for Venezuelan migrants to be flown from Texas to Massachusetts (Sandoval et al 2022). Once the 48 migrants arrived at Martha's Vineyard, they were dropped off at Martha's Vineyard Community Services, a nonprofit organization. According to the New York Times, a migrant told one of the nonprofit employees that "the community service organization would help them with housing and a job" (ibid). This recent, particularly visible case of inhumanity is not altogether uncommon for migrants entering the United States. A Louisville, Kentucky based immigrant organizer had this to say:

"The immigrant relationship to the broader state is limited and often carceral—support for immigrants, including assistance finding housing, healthcare, etc, largely comes from existing networks or nonprofit organizations" (Angel Interview). While the DeSantis incident was egregious, this instance is illustrative of how the United States treats immigrants of color. Contrary to the common refrain that "this is not who we are", what Ron DeSantis did, and where the migrants ended up, is the result of several decades of austere, capitalist, and racist U.S. policy. However, despite a long history of xenophobia, racism and systemic obstacles, immigrants have developed durable civic infrastructures for social support. In spite of the denial of the benefits of legal citizenship, and in some cases, basic human rights, immigrants have organized in varied ways to support each other in the United States. One of the ways immigrants have both organized and accessed social support is through nonprofit organizations, as exemplified by the anecdote above.

In this project, I investigate how employees of an immigrant-led nonprofit organization navigate systemic racism to both administer service and build community to exercise substantive citizenship (Gast et al 2021). La Casita Center is a Louisville based nonprofit organization opened in 2006 that accompanies Latino/a/x immigrants in the Louisville Metro area. The executive director of La Casita and the other *Founding Mothers* intentionally built a nonprofit organization that is also a justice-oriented movement for Latinx immigrants. La Casa Latina, which helped spur the creation of La Casita Center, is a Catholic Worker hospitality house for Latinx immigrants in Louisville. The founders of La Casita Center opened a 501(c)3 through a lens of *accompaniment*, which the executive director states is an alternative to “mainstream” social service provision. Organizations like La Casita are critically important for the growing Latinx immigrant communities in the United States and as the forces of neoliberalism continue to oppress and marginalize, La Casita provides a model for what it means to build community and provide meaningful access to material resources.

In this chapter, I provide a broad overview for my thesis research and what is to follow in the remaining chapters. First, I describe the importance of this research, citing the growing numbers of Latinx immigrants in the United States. I then provide the context for human migration and why U.S. immigration policy is hostile, particularly to immigrants from Latin America. Next, I explain how global capitalism and subsequent neoliberalism has made nonprofits a primary provider of social services, including services for immigrants. Finally, I give a brief overview of La Casita Center, as an immigrant-led-nonprofit organization in Louisville, Kentucky, the subject of my thesis

research. Later, I discuss my methodology and I wrap up the chapter by detailing a roadmap for the remainder of this thesis.

Louisville Immigration by the Numbers

In the state of Kentucky, specifically, the Latinx population has been increasing, a trend found in U.S. Census Data and observed by long term Latinx residents. As a whole, Kentucky is home to thousands of immigrants, and according to the American Immigration Council (2020), Kentucky's immigrant community is growing and the growth is not projected to stop any time soon. Census data indicate that of the 777,874 people living in Jefferson County, Kentucky, 50,954 identify as Hispanic or Latino, which is almost 7% of the county's population (USA Facts 2022). Due to several circumstances, including the 1965 Immigration and Nationality Act, the number of immigrants from Mexico and Latin America began a steady climb in the 1980s (Pew Research 2018). A report by the Urban Institute states 38% of Louisville's foreign born population was from Latin America or the Caribbean, but the foreign born population was only 4.5% of Louisville's total population (Capps et al 2004). However, by 2020, the Latinx population in Louisville has increased to roughly 7% of the city's population (Pew Research 2018). As the 2004 report and other sources indicate, the Latinx population in the United States, and in Louisville, is on a path of continuous growth, and is not expected to stop any time soon.

Human migration/reasons for migrating

Due to a number of systemic global phenomena, including neoliberalism, imperialism and climate change, migration from Latin America sharply rose in the 1990s

and early 2000s, continuing to the present day. A wide body of literature points to civil wars, exploitative economic policy, and general U.S./European imperialism as also responsible for people fleeing Mexico and Latin America (e.g. Sassen 2016, Heidbrink 2020, Besteman 2020, Gomberg-Munoz 2011). Nationally, according to the Pew Research Center, 61% of Hispanic origin people in the United States are from Mexico, followed by people from the Caribbean and Central America (Pew Research 2022). According to data from the 2020 Census, 10,697,374 *foreign-born* Latinos are from Mexico, 3,819,603 were born in “other Central American countries” and 4,516,258 are from the Caribbean (Selected Characteristics 2021). This trend is reflected in the work of La Casita Center—the vast majority of families La Casita accompanies come from Mexico (848), Cuba (663) and Guatemala (423) (Internal Report Document).

Migration has always been a way humans have adapted to various needs, and the phenomenon has been widely documented by scholars (Bellwood 2013). While many instances of migration were met with some resistance, the formalization and hardening of state borders have created new barriers to movement. In recent decades, the confluence of neoliberal economic practices, globalization, and climate change has brought about high rates of migration from some Latin American countries to the United States. (Sassen 2016). The U.S. response to the growing number of these new migrants is exploitative and contradictory (Nevins 2010, R. Jones 2016). Whether in the form of “prevention through deterrence”, limited ports of entry, violent policing or language barriers, the conditions for (im)migrants from Latin America in the United States are hostile and exclusionary (R. Jones 2016, Nevins 2010, Heidbrink 2019)

Conditions for immigrants/racist policy/colonialism

While U.S. immigration policy has always favored “white” immigrants and been disorganized and partial, after 9/11, all immigration enforcement was moved to the Department of Homeland Security (R. Jones 2021), a move suggesting that immigrants are inherently dangerous. Immigrants, particularly Black and brown immigrants, are treated with suspicion and are regularly detained. Clark-Ibanez & Swan (2019) cite a TRAC report that confirms 68% of those held in detention were from Mexico, Guatemala, Honduras and El Salvador. (TRAC 2018, via Clark-Ibanez & Swan 2019). The most common “crime” migrants were detained for was illegal entry (ibid). If not detained or otherwise monitored, migrants often face exploitative labor conditions, up to and including trafficking, housing discrimination and lack of access to adequate healthcare. For example, as Holmes (2013) explains, undocumented Mexican migrant farmworkers face dangerous working conditions and are denied adequate care for workplace injuries. Holmes details substandard housing, lacking even basic amenities (Holmes 2013). Gomberg-Munoz (2011) describes working conditions for Mexican migrants in Chicago. Mexican employees often face racism, are paid poorly, and exploited because of their precarious legal status (Gomberg-Munoz 2011). Conditions for immigrants, specifically from Latin America, reflect racism and hostility.

However, despite the tightening of national immigration policy and the militarization of police, the federal government has left immigration enforcement power largely in the hands of individual states. Jones (2021) describes how the history of immigration policy following U.S. independence was limited, and many states enforced their own rules. A Supreme Court case, in 1875, however, determined state immigration laws were unconstitutional, in favor of federal laws. Despite federal law taking

precedence, states can determine how severely they wish to criminalize migrants and enforce immigration policy (J. Jones 2019). The 287(g) portion of the 1996 Immigration Reform and Control Act allows for state partnerships with Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), and some states and localities use this portion differently (J. Jones 2019). Additionally, according to the American Immigration Council, the Department of Justice (DOJ) determined that at least two counties in the country unlawfully detained and profiled Latinx people after adopting the 287(g) program (American Immigration Council 2021). These examples reinforce Angel's notion that immigrants' interaction with the state are generally fraught and unsupportive. As Angel states and the DeSantis suggests, support for immigrants (and certainly other oppressed groups) by and large comes from nonprofit organizations while the state is often austere at best.

Rise of the nonprofit/neoliberalism

What further complicates the situations of immigrants are the cuts to funding to public services, including food stamps (now TANF), Medicare & Medicaid, unemployment insurance and public education. While undocumented immigrants are not eligible for public welfare programs (Clark-Ibanez and Swan 2019), the reduction of direct support for social welfare programs has led to broad societal consequences. President Roosevelt's New Deal introduced part of what is now known as the "welfare state", but the public welfare programs listed above were largely expanded by the War on Poverty (Haveman et al 2015). However, as both Haveman et al (2015) and Dickinson (2020) indicate, contrary to popular belief, spending on social welfare has actually increased (Dickinson 2020, Haveman et al 2015). The difference lies in the fact that while spending has increased, neoliberal politicians have pushed funding towards both

“work support” and for the administration of services to not be directly administered by the state (Dickinson 2020). As Dickinson argues, federal spending on social welfare does not address root causes of poverty, but in fact, exacerbates them (ibid). The rise of neoliberalism in the 1980s has meant that direct funding for social welfare programs were cut from government budgets (Dickinson 2020). Munshi and Willse (2007) argue that the receding direct government funding for social welfare programs has led to the expansion of a “shadow state”. The “shadow state”, they posit, is the Nonprofit Industrial Complex (Munshi and Willse 2007). Importantly, too, they argue, is that neoliberal ideology relies on racist and sexist tropes (i.e. the “welfare queen”) to mobilize public support for the contraction of “the state” (ibid.). Additionally, the liberal emphasis on individual responsibility has garnered support for charities, as opposed to state responsibility (ibid).

Lewis (2017) argues the proliferation of the nonprofit sector is at least partly due to the expansion of neoliberal policy that encouraged limited government and market solutions (Lewis 2017). The answer to poverty, according to neoliberals, was not a robust social safety net, but the market, hard work, and limited government. While this shift toward neoliberalism became apparent in the late 1970s, the ideological trend was realized through Reagan era budgets (Munshi and Willse 2007). Danzinger and Haveman (1981:10) highlighted data that showed under the Reagan administration, the national budget was reduced by \$44 billion, and over half of these funds were cut from social services. In the absence of direct governmental support, the liberal solution to poverty was a market orientation in the form of nongovernmental organizations. According to Bromley (2020), the number of NGOs created per year was over 50,000 by the 1990s

(Bromley 2020, via Jones 2006). Nonprofits, in the neoliberal framework, are primarily responsible for the provision of social services.

In the context of a steadily growing Latinx population in both the country and the city, and neoliberal policies related to social services, nonprofits are one of the few avenues that provide support for several populations, including our newcomers. For example, in 1994, the state of Kentucky contracted out immigration services to Catholic Charities (Catholic Charities). While there is an existing critique of the nonprofit sector (Lashaw, Vannier, and Sampson 2017) Bloemraad, Gleeson & de Graauw (2018) highlight the lack of scholarly attention paid to *immigrant-led* organizations as spaces of social activism and civic infrastructure. Gast et al (2021) also highlight how immigrant-specific organizations can lead to expressions of substantive citizenship and claims-making for people who may not be treated as *full citizens* of their country of residence. La Casita Center in Louisville, is particularly important. Since nonprofit funding comes from a variety of sources, those receiving federal funding are prevented from serving people who are undocumented. Catholic Charities, one of the largest immigrant serving institutions in the city, unfortunately, cannot directly care for people who don't "have papers". Clark-Ibanez and Swan (2019: 96) state: "Unauthorized immigrants are not eligible for most medical and social services. The ones for which they are eligible are dramatically underused." (Clark-Ibanez and Swan 2019). La Casita does not ask people for documentation status, and therefore can accompany those *most* marginalized.

LCC–Movement or Nonprofit?

The *mission* of La Casita is to accompany and empower Latinx immigrant families. The doors, both literal and metaphorical are open to all, regardless of any social

identity. The founders, however, were and employees still are, concerned with supporting those who may be undocumented, who may not read and write, and who may not speak Spanish as their first language. In interviews with longtime residents, I learned more about how community and capacity were built simultaneously. In 1994, a cohort of Fulbright Scholars from Central America visiting the University of Louisville were connected with the small Latinx community. One of the scholars, Karina Barillas, Executive Director of La Casita Center, provided me with detailed information about the growth of the Latinx community in Louisville, starting with her own arrival here in the early 1990s. She and her peers sought out opportunities to provide resources and information to Spanish-speaking immigrants in need. As students at UofL, the young visitors saw a community with limited resources for immigrants and Spanish speakers. They also encountered, however, Catholic Workers and existing efforts to ensure immigrants and Spanish speakers gained access to necessary services. Catholic institutions including the Louisville based church, St. Rita, initiated a Hispanic ministry to accompany Spanish-speaking immigrants. Originally, the Catholic Worker was a newspaper started by Peter Maurin and Dorothy Day in 1933. Both Day and Maurin were influenced by the teachings of Jesus Christ, which led them to lead a life of service to people experiencing poverty and injustice. (Catholic Worker Website). The Catholic Worker Movement, and Vatican II's "preference for the poor", are both decidedly *political*. Instead of "giving charity" to a permanent, "needy" class of people, the Liberation Theology wing of Catholicism connects human suffering to political choices (Catholic Workers Movement, Gutierrez 1988).

Louisville, Kentucky has a long history of activism towards the goal of social justice. Through my research, I have been privileged to meet and speak to many people who have joined what Anne Braden called “the long chain of struggle”. I was lucky to be able to speak to one of Anne Braden’s peers, Father Jim Flynn. Father Jim, a student of Liberation Theology, and active in the Civil Rights Movement in Louisville in the 1960s, told me he saw rights for immigrants as part of a spectrum of civil rights. Catholics in Louisville including Father Jim Flynn and Sister Lupe Arciniega worked to organize Hispanic immigrants and garner support from allies, beginning in the 1980s. During this period, the Kentucky Interfaith Task-Force on Latin America and the Caribbean (KITLAC), was formed to raise awareness and bring solidarity for people suffering due to Central American civil wars. While the broad social justice initiatives and organizations are not the focus of this thesis, it is critical to point out that justice movements in Louisville have an established history, based in politics, and to some extent, Catholic Liberation Theology. These movements have provided some of the foundation for the work of La Casita, prior to the presence of a large Latinx community in Louisville.

Catholics in Louisville including Father Jim and Sister Lupe helped to coordinate with Fulbright Scholars from Central America to organize and support Latinx immigrants in Louisville and surrounding areas. What Karina, and certainly her peers, found was a small Latinx community denied meaningful access to resources. When Karina graduated from UofL and began working for the Center for Women and Families, she found that Spanish-speaking clients only wanted to speak to her. While Karina is certainly a kind person, her own experience as a native Spanish speaker and a Latina immigrant herself

allowed her to offer a safe and welcoming space for other Latina immigrants. Karina, in conjunction with Casa Latina and St. Rita began holding women's support groups for Latina immigrant women and mothers. Karina soon realized there was a need—for resources, for access, for opportunity for these women. What began as a way for Latina mothers to build community and support and empower one another is now a nonprofit that accompanies Latinx immigrants. La Casita Center is the only nonprofit in Louisville that is both led and staffed almost exclusively by Latina immigrants.

The existence of La Casita and its work is shaped by oppressive social structures, including racism, patriarchy and colonialism, which its staff directly addresses. La Casita Center as it exists today grew out of a movement of Latina mothers supporting each other—women who wanted to work but could not access childcare. The original vision was for Latina immigrants to be able to work while their children were cared for in a bilingual environment. Since La Casita, at the time, was one of the only Latinx led and staffed spaces, the employees found the Latinx community had more needs than just bilingual childcare (Karina's Interview).

La Casita has grown significantly in the past 14 years, increasing its annual budget from \$100,000 in 2015 to over \$600,000 in 2021. In 2021, La Casita was able to accompany over 3,000 people and render over 50,000 documented services (Annual Report 2021). La Casita Center's mission to empower and accompany Latinx families is actualized through the provision of a variety of goods and services. La Casita Center provides families with grocery bags, diapers, formula, clothing, car-seats, cribs, books and backpacks, all free of charge. Additionally, La Casita offers mental healthcare appointments, support groups, pre-school, and assistance navigating legal and

bureaucratic systems. The goods and services listed here are not exhaustive. Whatever an individual or family may need, La Casita finds a way to accompany them. I have come to learn that part of *la casita style* means making a procedure up while simultaneously accompanying a family. Services, for the sake of reports and functioning under the framework of an NGO, can mean meals provided, counseling sessions conducted, or donations made. What data do not capture is belongingness, community, and what it means to be an immigrant or child of immigrants in the United States. Since La Casita is staffed primarily by Latinx immigrants, individuals and families from Latin America are also afforded with a culturally and linguistically relevant space where they are welcomed with Latinx hospitality. Prior to the pandemic, families would often visit the center to have lunch with the staff. The intangible aspect of La Casita is the comfort, relief and familiarity to be accompanied by people who share one's experience, language and culture.

Research & Methodological Framework

While La Casita Center is a registered 501c3 nonprofit organization, La Casita is first a movement. As a researcher, I am interested in immigration and state borders, and as anthropologists have pointed out (Lashaw, Vannier & Sampson 2017) we gain "access to the field" via nonprofit organizations. There are several nonprofits in Louisville that work with immigrant and refugee communities, however: La Casita is primarily staffed by people who are themselves Latinx immigrants. La Casita is intentional about providing a space that is both culturally and linguistically relevant. Due to La Casita's position as both a nonprofit and a movement, the center offers an ethnographically rich opportunity to learn about social movements, identity, immigration and community.

The purpose of this research is to highlight the work of La Casita Center and how it may offer sustainable model for building both community and an infrastructure for a social service provision based on non-hierarchical accompaniment. Other nonprofits in Louisville who work with immigrants and refugees are generally led or were founded by people who are not themselves immigrants. Additionally, La Casita is grassroots and relies primarily on grants and donations, with little to no federal funding. Although the focus of this research is certainly not to compare and contrast different immigrant serving organizations in Louisville, it is critically important to highlight several aspects of La Casita that make it a model, not for charity, but as a broader social movement by and for the impacted community. While of course La Casita has an organizational structure and procedures, boundaries are fluid and strict hierarchies are rejected in favor of mutual support. Leadership is often contextual—formal job description or title is not always equivalent to who is leading a certain project.

La Casita, as I mentioned above, was founded with the initial intent of Latina mothers supporting each other and now primarily accompanies Latinx immigrant families. While the space is decidedly Latinx, the doors are open to anyone who is seeking services, volunteer opportunities or a friendly conversation. La Casita's circle is global, with people from Latin America, Europe, Asia and Africa. I have been privileged to be welcomed into La Casita's circle as both a friend and researcher. My goal in this project has always been to conduct research in the most "community engaged" way possible. It is the duty of the anthropologist, as an outsider, to ensure research projects will not only do no harm but are also conducted in culturally relevant ways and provide some material benefit to the community. I understand my own research to be a way of

using my skills to advocate for the community with whom I work. In this case, that community is primarily the staff of La Casita, and by extension, the Latinx and immigrant community in Louisville. It is neither possible nor desirable for the anthropologist to be a “neutral” or purely “objective” observer. I strongly support the staff and mission of La Casita and am now privileged to call many people from La Casita close friends. While my intent has always been to conduct an engaged research project, I did not expect to form so many close relationships, and for that reason, my results will not be free from bias. Additionally, I have made ethical choices about how I will address tension—I focus on broader forces of the nonprofit industry, including workload and sometimes competing visions. However, I have strived to uphold ethics, conduct valid research, and maintain an academically critical understanding of qualitative data.

I conducted this research project over the course of one year. I was first introduced to La Casita in August 2021, as a graduate research assistant. When I reached out to the center, our understanding was that I would be a semester intern, however, my internship has extended well beyond one semester. During the Fall 2021 semester, I volunteered with La Casita in many different capacities, including bagging groceries and supporting at community events. My primary goal, however, was to assist La Casita in collecting stories from current and former staff and board members to compile a brief history of the organization. During this time, I interviewed several people and archived some material culture, including newspapers and magazines. At the end of the semester, I produced a presentation that loosely chronicled the history of La Casita as an organization. The Fall 2021 semester also provided time for me to become comfortable in the environment and to get to know the staff. The research that is the basis of this thesis

began, in earnest in the Spring 2022 semester. I wrote a research proposal and submitted a protocol to the University of Louisville's Institutional Review Board and was approved to conduct research in March 2022. It is important to note, however, that since August 2021, I have continuously volunteered and been an intern at La Casita Center. Since I had spent so much time in the space, I directly asked staff and board members if they would be willing to participate in my thesis research. From March until September 2022, I conducted and transcribed 18 semi-structured interviews and completed participant observations at several events. Each interview lasted between 30 and 90 minutes. I conducted interviews in person at La Casita Center or via online video conferencing platforms. I used the same interview guide for each participant. For two participants who do not speak English, I requested and received IRB approval to use a live translator. Some participants were interviewed on separate occasions to accommodate time limitations. Once all interviews were completed and transcribed, I thematized textual data, which are now the basis for the organization of this thesis. Here, in this thesis, I have edited direct quotes for clarity and conciseness. I have deleted "ums" and long pauses for the ease of the reader. I have also given participants pseudonyms to protect privacy.

Participant observation, on the other hand, took many different forms. At the time of this writing, I have spent over a year working with La Casita Center in various capacities. Through my participant observation over the course of 2021-2022, I assisted with grant-writing, donation drives, vaccine clinics, community events, and family support. I also attended various staff meetings, helped onboard new interns, and participated in La Casita group chats and email communications. Through a minimum of

ten hours per week working with the center, I became very close to its employees and attended weddings, graduations and birthday parties. I have spent plenty of time with my friends outside of the physical center and outside of exclusively “work”. Conducting ethnography has enabled me to form close and loving relationships and better understand “the work” and reasons people work with La Casita.

Through my work with La Casita, I am now part of the community, or circle which is a central theme of this research. While my own positionality prevents me from being a member of certain communities (i.e., Latinx), I am now part of the broader Louisville community working for social change, justice, and resistance. As my data illustrate, social justice, activism and resistance are broad and include far more than protesting in the streets. Participants often did not conceive of their work as “activism”, but rather, “doing what I’m supposed to”. At La Casita Center, at the heart of activism, or anything, for that matter, is radical hospitality and accompaniment. Each participant has various ways of explaining these terms, but in the most basic sense, it is first and foremost seeing everyone’s humanity with a question as simple as “Would you like something to eat?”. It doesn’t matter if a visitor to the center is the mayor of the city or a newly arrived family with only the clothes on their back, everyone is welcomed with the same level of love, care, and concern, which I have observed and will be described below.

A note on terminology

Any word used to describe people, or groups of people has limitations, especially as it relates to race. While I make every intention not to reinforce biological or essentialized notions of “race”, here, I do use the term “Latinx” to describe all people

who were born in or have lineage in Mexico, the Caribbean and Central & South America. I discuss the racialized “Latinx” identity further in chapter 2, but I use Latinx because La Casita uses Latinx. I recognize the label collapses many diverse groups of people into a single race, and many do not use the term to describe themselves. I also acknowledge the opposing opinions regarding Latino/a and Latinx/Latine. I am also aware that “Latinx” is relatively new, so when speaking about the community in the past, I also use the term “Hispanic”.

Roadmap

Subsequent chapters are built around the major themes that emerged from my interview and participant observation data. In chapter 2, I lay out more local and global context for immigration, NGOs, community building and social movements, which are all central themes for La Casita. The purpose of chapter two is to orient the reader for the broader context of my research and the existence of La Casita. It is necessary to understand global forces that are responsible for Latinx immigration to the United States, and why nonprofit organizations are so important. I hope, in the second chapter, I have accurately described the similar patterns of colonialism that have driven migration to the United States from the south. I also try to summarize United States immigration philosophy and the ways it is inextricably connected to socially constructed race. In chapter 3, I discuss La Casita’s model, *Somos un Círculo (We are a Circle)*, and how that is reflected both within and outside of the organization. In this chapter, I highlight inclusion, belongingness, community, and the rejection of hierarchy. As the staff indicate, people arranged in a circle do not have a hierarchy, since everyone is equal, and everyone belongs where people support (not boss or serve) one another. The third chapter gives a

detailed overview of the organizational structure of the La Casita and details the practical work it does, as well as the ways *somos un circulo* is realized. In chapter 4, I turn to accompaniment, advocacy and politics. La Casita is a proudly Latinx—and feminist—led organization. Accompaniment is inherently political because it contradicts individualism and promotes community. There is always a question of how supporting brown, Spanish-speaking immigrants is political. To quote James Phillips, “To call them activists completely misses the point. They are people trying to save their communities and ways of life” (Phillips 2022: 149). The final chapter offers key takeaways and a reflection on my experience as both a researcher and a person who strives to build and support community.

CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW

Orientation to the chapter:

In this chapter, I provide broader context for the existence of La Casita Center, which includes brief, recent histories of Mexico and some Central American nations. I primarily describe the neocolonial relationship the United States has exercised over these nations and the consequences of continued extractive colonization. I also discuss the history of U.S. immigration policy and how it has been based in white supremacy. Discussions of immigration and race also include sociological notions of the construction of race and identity, and the uses and limitations of pan-ethnic labels. In my discussion of race and history, I pay special attention to broad social structures (capitalism and racism, primarily) and ways these harmful structures have been resisted. Additionally, I examine economic policy within the United States leading to what scholars have termed the “Nonprofit Industrial Complex” (Munshi and Willse 2007). Most importantly, in this chapter, I attempt to elucidate the intersection of white supremacy, economic policy (read: U.S. capitalism/imperialism), socially constructed racial categories and political activism within the space of the nonprofit industry. The context in this chapter aims to answer the broad questions: Why are people immigrating to the United States from Latin America? What are the material conditions for immigrants once in the United States? How is “race” implicated in drivers of out-migration, and the immigrant body? In the

context of neoliberalism, how do people, specifically racialized as Black and brown, access resources? How do immigrants organize to challenge oppressive systems?

Theoretical & Historical Underpinnings

To better understand the context for La Casita Center and the broader necessity for this research project, it is critical to situate La Casita Center at the intersection of several social structures, including international world order, global capitalism, and white supremacy. These structures shape the lived realities of all humans in myriad ways. These social structures are the result of relations of power, labor, and land. The way humans exist today, some enduring multiple layers of oppression, is not natural. The ideology of capitalism and white supremacy has convinced us that human suffering is unavoidable and natural. At the same time, proponents of the existing world order obscure the people and reasons why people born in a certain global region or with a darker skin tone suffer more than others. “Race”, biologically nonexistent, was created to justify a stratified world order in service of resource extraction and labor appropriation. Racial ideologies permeate every level of human society. Unfortunately, the result of these social structures, or systems, is a permanent underclass that is often tied to a pathologized “race”, who are then subject to additional direct and structural violence. The logics of racialized capitalism make natural the suffering of Black, brown and Indigenous people. In the capitalist worldview, the “answer” to poverty, hunger and violence is, among a few other “answers”, more business.

What does “more business” mean in this context? Put simply, I am talking about nonprofit organizations. My focus here is human service oriented nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), which includes nonprofits. Neoliberals removed and continue to

remove the responsibility of social service provision from the state to place it in the hands of NGOs, including churches, charities and other non-state actors. The “third sector” is diverse in purpose, operation and logic. While many NGOs certainly reduce harm (Lashaw, Vannier, and Sampson, 2017) most do not challenge the systems that cause harm and suffering. However, since NGOs do administer several social services, they are a site of advocacy. While I certainly agree with the critique of the “third sector”, I do not believe we should disregard it as a space for building community *and* challenging oppressive social structures, and below, I will explain why.

My aim here is to provide a broad overview of the landscape in which La Casita exists, and how oppressive systems have necessitated the work of La Casita Center. First, I discuss immigration in the global interstate system, then I describe how the United States exploited Mexico, Guatemala, Honduras & El Salvador following their independence from Spain, and how the history of these exploitative relationships has led to the conditions that necessitate migration out of these countries. (Note: U.S. exploitation extends beyond these countries, but I have chosen to focus on them here because it is beyond the scope of this project to detail an exhaustive history of each country in Latin America and the Caribbean.) I then discuss “race” and how it operates within capitalism and as a tool for both division *and* unity. Finally, I discuss the nonprofit sector, its varied impacts and what it means for social justice activism, especially for immigrant-led organizations, like La Casita Center. Overall, this chapter serves to orient the position of La Casita and its staff in the context of several phenomena.

Colonial Legacy

I will begin by characterizing conditions in Mexico, Guatemala, Honduras and El Salvador as these relate to their relationship to the United States. My purpose is to highlight the ways the United States and select European countries (Spain, Germany, Portugal, England) have exercised a colonial and exploitative relationship with these countries. In this section, I summarize how the United States has used military and economic mechanisms to support its own imperial agenda. The result, unfortunately, has been harmful to large swaths of the populations of these countries. While a comprehensive account of the migratory waves from each country is far beyond the range of this thesis, I do aim to point out broad historical trends to better situate the need for immigrant serving organizations.

Drivers of Migration out of Latin America

Why are people leaving Mexico and the Northern Triangle for the United States? A combination of neoliberal economic policy, globalization, and climate change, are some of the reasons people today are migrating (Sassen 2016). In the case of Mexico and Central America, a history of uneven power relations has led to limited life options for great majorities of the population (Gomberg-Munoz 2011, Handy 1984, Phillips 2022, Besteman 2020). (However, it is important to note migration to the U.S. from Latin America proceeds neoliberal “development”, to be detailed below.) Besteman (2021) posits that the current global neoliberal system serves to encourage the flow of capital across national borders while simultaneously preventing the mobility of people across them. Ultimately, this serves the global elite by creating exploitable pools of cheap labor and allowing for maximum freedom of money. Conversely, however, immigration policy limits immigration to the global north from the global south.

In the example of Mexico, and Northern Triangle countries and the United States, this seems to be the case. For example, Holmes (2013) highlights the ways that the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) undercut the ability of Indigenous Mexicans to survive from small-holding agriculture and limited employment opportunities in their native communities (Holmes 2013). Heidbrink (2020) details (limited) official state data to show how precarious life is for indigenous Guatemalans. Indigenous Guatemalans not only face land expropriation, but they are also subject to anti-Indigenous racism and discrimination in the wage-labor market. Additionally, even available jobs, like call-center wage work, Heidbrink explains, are not plentiful and wages do little to cover costs of living. Despite Guatemala's and the United States' best efforts to limit migration, structural violence, extreme poverty and increased debt leaves migration as one of the only options for people's survival. While the Guatemalan and U.S. government emphasize the danger of irregular migration (deserts, gangs and violent forms of deterrence, for example) they appear unaware that migrants also know the risks and will migrate despite the danger. Heidbrink's informants recount multiple attempts at migration, noting if they are "voluntarily" deported, they will try again, despite the arduous journey, which includes *coyotes*, exposure to the elements and detention. It is also important here to note that what motivates her informants isn't necessarily a life in *el norte*, but to earn enough wages to survive in their home communities (Heidbrink 2020). Guatemala, however, is only one of the nations impacted by violent structures, often caused by U.S. intervention. El Salvador and Honduras have histories of violent U.S. intervention to support plutocratic agendas (Phillips 2022, Frank 2018, Handy 1981).

Mexico & The Northern Triangle

The Monroe Doctrine held that European nations could not have any further colonization in the Western Hemisphere. The policy was a precursor for westward expansion and U.S. imperialism in the Americas. As Chasteen (2006) posits, following liberation from rule by the Spanish crown, the United States exercised military and economic power over Mexico and several Latin American nations. In the case of Mexico, and the Northern Triangle nations, plutocratic local elites, including Jorge Ubico and Porfirio Diaz and ruled and sold significant portions of land to the U.S. based corporations. Land expropriation, corporate ownership of once communal lands, and extraction of natural resources were common in Mexico and the Northern Triangle, and shaped the current geopolitical landscape in the Western Hemisphere. The neocolonial relationships between the United States and Latin American countries often drive contemporary immigration. The relationship of the U.S. to Mexico and Northern Triangle countries can also highlight contemporary understandings of race and national identity.

Mexico

The Mexican-American War (1846-1848) established what is now the border between Mexico and the United States. According to Nevins (2010), after Mexico won independence from Spain in 1821, U.S. “economic actors exploited in what is today the Southwest” (Nevins 2010, p21). Additionally, since the western areas that now include Texas, California and New Mexico were loosely organized and tended towards regional alliances, the newly formed Mexico had trouble maintaining control (Nevins 2010). By 1846, President Polk (pro-slavery) decided to annex the independent area of what is now Texas. The annexation and succeeding confrontations Polk provoked led to the two year Mexican-American War, and established what is now the current border between the

United States and Mexico at the Rio Grande. According to the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, the area that now includes ten western states was ceded by Mexico. However, acquiring territory and “Americanizing” populations are quite different processes.

According to Nevins (2010), despite having acquired the territory, what was once Mexico had to be “pacified” meaning, in order to be part of the national identity, the people living there had to be violently assimilated. “Assimilation” meant the whitening of the population, both in color and in culture. In reality, this looked like forced boarding school, removal, theft of property and general fear and violence. The people living in this area were often brown-skinned, or, more generally “other”. While the concept of race has been and still is subjective, the people being “assimilated” did not fit the existing definition of “white”. As several have pointed out, they did not cross the border, but the border crossed them.

Despite discrimination and violence, during this period, the U.S. government didn't have much interest or administrative capacity in monitoring “immigration” from Mexico. In fact, in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, people regularly crossed back and forth over the “border” between Mexico and the United States. Nevins claims it wasn't until after 1910 that the United States government became particularly concerned with migrants from Mexico.

By the time the border started being more closely monitored (after World War I), Mexicans already had an established pattern of labor migration. Mexicans were typically employed in agriculture, some continued living in Mexico while others settled in the U.S. For many reasons, including the disastrous policies of Porfirio Diaz (1848-1876), poor and working class Mexicans moved for work, often to the United States. During the Great

Depression, however, many Mexican immigrants and citizens were deported because they were thought to be the cause of the economic downturn. Additionally, following the Porfiriato, conditions in Mexico improved because of the revolution and a reformist president, Francisco Madero, more oriented towards agrarian land reform (Chasteen 2006). Yet, by the time of World War II, following the Great Depression and the subsequent labor shortage, the U.S. instituted the Bracero Program in 1942, which created a legal pathway for farm owners to recruit and employ Mexican workers.

The Bracero Program (1942-1964), or “strong arms” in English, was one of the ways the United States supplied agricultural labor. It was common for Mexicans to cross back and forth—working and living in the United States for the cropping seasons and returning to live in Mexico in off-seasons. Given the broader history of Mexico, especially following the Porfiriato, labor migration, in general, was common in the area. Importantly, however, the Bracero program did not extend the benefits of citizenship to agricultural workers. While there were some modest worker protections, my point here is that Mexicans were only *imagined* to be laborers. *The legacy of the Bracero Program is what has led to current H2A visas, which, again, do not extend citizenship to Mexicans or other foreign nationals. Existence within the nation’s borders are premised not on common humanity, but on notions of labor, outside of the polity.*

The North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) (1994), proved disastrous for Mexico. Mexico was inundated with U.S. grown corn, so Mexican farmers could no longer afford to produce corn at a competitive price for domestic markets. While NAFTA eased tariffs, the importation of U.S.-grown corn made it nearly impossible for indigenous farmers in southern Mexico to make a profit or even survive (Holmes 2013).

The liberalization of the market and emphasis on deregulation and privatization undercut any government protections and robbed Mexicans of economic opportunity, one of the limited avenues for economic survival was (and is) migrating to the United States.

Guatemala

Historically, the United States has also exercised a neocolonial relationship with Guatemala. The U.S. has exploited Guatemala for land and raw resources, particularly bananas. According to Handy (1981), U.S. based corporations United Fruit Company, International Railways of Central America, and the United Fruit Steamship Company dominated the land and politics in Guatemala for the first five decades of the twentieth century. Handy (1981) also claims that these companies controlled forty percent of the Guatemalan economy by the 1930s (Handy 1981). Guatemalan Presidents Manuel Estrada Cabrera and Jorge Ubico made significant land concessions to the United Fruit Company and International Railways of Central America. Although Cabrera and Ubico were repressive dictators, the United States continued to support them because they prioritized U.S. corporate interests. When these regimes were defeated by a more popular administration, led by Jose Arevalo and Jacobo Arbenz, who oversaw modest agrarian land reform during the “Ten Years of Spring”, the United States intervened. The U.S. government including Dwight Eisenhower and the Dulles brothers overthrew the popular Arbenz administration, leading to several decades of civil war and poverty in Guatemala (Handy 1981).

Following the overthrow of the Arbenz administration, the government fell under military control, making legitimate elections and popular reforms impossible. Any popular resistance to government or military repression was met with increasing violence,

including death squads and the decimation of Indigenous communities. The civil war between 1975 and 1982 in Guatemala resulted in thousands of deaths and disappearances and terror against communities even *suspected* of being opposed to the government. During the war, and perhaps after the war, the Guatemalan military, backed by U.S. assistance, committed what many label a genocide on its own population (Handy 1981). The long history of state-sanctioned violence and US imposed poverty has shaped the opportunities and life chances for many already impoverished Guatemalans.

More recently, due in part to neoliberal policy, Guatemalans are still facing poverty. Heidbrink (2020) describes the issue with neoliberal “economic development” and how proposed economic opportunities actually *exacerbate* poverty. Heidbrink describes the ways neoliberalism has robbed Guatemalans of their land, and therefore opportunity to be self-sufficient. In the global market, foreign interests often own land that once belonged to small-holding agricultural communities. Most often the foreign interests are multinational corporations usually based in the U.S. or Europe. In an attempt to “develop” these nations by “bringing them into the global economy”, predatory loans from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank are tied to requirements to specialize their economy to U.S. and European capital interests. In this way, the economy shifts from subsistence (farming on a plot of land to meet one’s material needs, usually in rural areas) to wage labor in cities or factories. In many cases this wage labor is not sufficient for people to survive and is often dangerous and irregular. Formerly rural populations are driven out of their rightful land and are forced to seek dangerous, unstable and low wage labor. The call-centers, textile factories, or industrial plantations

offered as “development”, according to neoliberals in the West, is the solution to systemic expropriation (Heidbrink 2020).

Unfortunately, “race” adds another layer of oppression to the experience of Indigenous people in Guatemala. While there is recognition of a broad national identity, Indigenous people are marginalized in Guatemala. Heidbrink highlights examples given by her informants recounting anti-Indigenous discrimination. When Indigenous unaccompanied minors are deported back to Guatemala, for example, the *Ladinos* who process their cases often use racist terms and are generally unfriendly to visibly Indigenous families. Additionally, Heidbrink describes job discrimination. Indigenous people who apply for jobs in the “economic development” programs face racism and hostility. Notably, Hiedbrink’s informants are aware of the systems of oppression that shape their experience, often attributing their struggles to capitalist policies. For example, the U.S. government often collaborates with other national governments to prevent migration, or to “stem the flow” of migrants. In Guatemala, at the time of her fieldwork, the Guatemalan government implemented a “Stay!” program that discouraged migration to the United States. With explicit U.S. support the program worked to convince Guatemalans of the danger of migrating and it was a ubiquitous campaign. When asked about the “Stay!” program, her interlocutors replied “Stay, and what?” (Heidbrink 2020: 115). Heidbrink forcefully argues that so-called development is not the solution, but is in fact, exacerbates problems. Guatemalan migrants easily see through the dubious “Stay!” campaign and continue to migrate, seeing that as one of the only survival opportunities left. Because of centuries of colonization and oppression, a recent civil war, government repression and severely limited economic opportunities, trust in state programs is low and

hope for a livable future often includes migrating. This is critical to remember as we begin investigating race, immigration policy, and social service provision.

Honduras

Honduras, too, has experienced the impacts of U.S. colonialism. As with Guatemala and Mexico, following direct military intervention and control during the first half of the twentieth century, the rise of neoliberalism has robbed smallholding agricultural communities of their land and turned them into landless peasants (Phillips 2022). There is a long history with banana plantations, and today, textile factories are common. Pine (2007) describes the dangerous working conditions in these textile factories, or, *maquiladoras*. The vignettes of work in a *maquiladora* Pine provides include wage theft, exposure to harmful toxins, and rampant workplace abuse (Pine 2007). Pine also explains the otherwise severely limited economic opportunities for the majority of Honduran citizens, and regular exposure to gang violence. Gangs, Pine asserts, are often intricately connected to state-sanctioned violence and death squads. Indeed, Phillips agrees, stating: “The United States has had a major stake in mandating and enforcing the neoliberal ‘development’ of Honduras, and a crucial partner in this was the Honduran military.” (Phillips 2022: 69).

As far as government repression and gang violence, Honduras did not experience a war in the 1970s/1980s period like their Northern Triangle neighbors. However, the United States strategically used the geography of Honduras to station U.S. soldiers to prevent popular movements from gaining too much influence in Guatemala and El Salvador to stage incursions into socialist Nicaragua (Chasteen 2006). Additionally, as Phillips (2022) states, while Hondurans didn’t face a formal war, they were affected by

the wars in Guatemala, El Salvador, and Nicaragua. Neoliberalism and elite, U.S. supported governments, have impoverished a great many Honduran citizens (Phillips 2022, Frank 2018). However, conditions severely worsened when President Zelaya (2009) was ousted in a military coup and subsequent right wing, repressive governments were installed with the tacit support of the United States. Throughout the 2010s the Obama administration turned a blind eye towards the gross human rights abuses committed by the Honduran government and continued to provide military and economic aid to Honduras, while other members of the Organization of American States (OAS) were more hesitant to support the coup government (Frank 2018). Indeed, then Secretary of State Hillary Clinton legitimized an obviously rigged election by congratulating the Honduran people on exercising democracy (Frank 2018).

Frank chronicles the resistance to the repressive government and the many killings the government committed. The United States government has a long history of “intervening” in Latin America, which has meant military support of governments that defer to U.S. and capital interests at the cost of the majority of the citizens of that country. In Honduras, specifically, directly following the ouster of President Zelaya, the U.S. CIA was implicated in the killings of Honduran citizens (Frank 2018). Frank also details the many popular resistance leaders whom the Honduran government overtly assassinated with tacit support from the U.S. government.

Phillips (2022) argues that during the civil war period in Guatemala and El Salvador, Honduran elites allowed U.S. military bases and U.S. military aid because they wanted to prevent popular uprisings. This does not mean, however, that poor Hondurans did not resist oppression. Citing the 1974 Agrarian Reform Law, many Honduran

peasants took over unused land, which the government labeled as terrorism. The entwined legacies of neocolonialism and military and gang violence has created conditions hostile for survival for poor and working class Hondurans. Like their counterparts in Guatemala, many Hondurans use immigration as one of few available opportunities for survival. Most recently, we can look at the highly sensationalized migrant caravans, which included primarily Hondurans (New York Times 2018). Thanks in part to U.S. policy, people in Central America not only have limited economic opportunities, but are subject to government oppression and gang violence, as well as conflict over degraded banana land and the usurpation of farms for palm oil production.

El Salvador

According to Menjivar and Gomez-Cervantes, Salvadorans are the second most represented migrants in the U.S. today (Menjivar and Gomez-Cervantes 2018). As part of the Northern Triangle of Central America, El Salvador has also experienced a neocolonial relationship with the United States, and “The West”, more broadly. Chasteen (2004) explains how Central American nations have been exploited for their resources and pushed toward “economic development” by engaging global markets, wherein Central American nations export products like coffee and bananas. Economic reliance on a single crop, like coffee in El Salvador, leads to economic precarity. In El Salvador, much like in Guatemala or Honduras, poor and working class peoples’ lands were expropriated for elite and U.S. interests. Growing economic tensions led to a 12 year civil (1979-1992) war that resulted in several thousands of deaths, and the U.S. government provided military aid to repressive regimes. Despite the “peace” following the civil war, widespread poverty and state violence have persisted. The legacy of a violent civil war, a

repressive government, and grossly uneven distribution of land and wealth has led to out-migration being one of the survival strategies of many Salvadorans (Menjívar and Gomez Cervantes 2018).

In *A Massive Loss of Habitat* (2016), Sassen details why people are fleeing Central America. While Sassen is attentive to repressive governments, gang violence and the history of colonialism, in this article, she focuses on the impacts of climate change. One example she uses is of people from the Northern Triangle. Sassen argues that due to neoliberal policy, which uses land destructively, large swaths of once livable land and water are now *dead*. She contends that increasing violence can be partly tied to conflicts over livable landscapes. Sassen goes on to explain that people who were once farmers have been thrown off their land and are now living in crowded urban areas with limited opportunities, which can lead to competition and conflict (Sassen 2016: 213) Honduras and El Salvador have some of the highest murder rates in the world and that most unaccompanied minors to the United States are from these nations. Conflicts over the use of limited arable land, government repression and memories of civil wars can lead to violent conflicts, which is one driver of migration. In addition to suffering extreme violence, Northern Triangle nations are poorer than nearly all other countries in the region. What is different, in Sassen's opinion, about current migrants from Central America today and those from earlier periods, is that migrants are now in search of strictly livable conditions instead of a "better" life. (Sassen 2016).

Despite similar conditions of violence and poverty, we must be careful not to collapse each Northern Triangle nation into a generic mass, devoid of specific identities and conflicts among each other. In 1969 Honduras and El Salvador engaged in a war,

wherein Honduras expelled hundreds of thousands of Salvadoran migrants (Menjivar and Gomez-Cervantes 2018). Chasteen (2006) contends the disconnect between the largely impoverished populations of Central American countries and their governments results from the national militaries' pattern of alignment with the United States since World War II (Chasteen 2006). Militaries and economic elites work together to serve their own interests, which often intersect with neoliberal U.S. interests, thus impoverishing large proportions of their populations. These governments then push the interests of the "nation" in theory, but do not recognize the harm done to their poor classes. Even Mexico, although many Mexicans immigrate to the United States, violently enforces its southern border to prevent migrants from the Northern Triangle from entering Mexico and reaching the United States.

Racialization & Immigration

Chief Justice Earl Warren wrote in 1958 "Citizenship is the right to have rights" (Perez v Brownell, 1958). Exiting the physically bounded territory where one holds citizenship often puts human rights in a precarious position. The border rule that governs the globe does not account for people who have been displaced, or are otherwise not able to access the benefits of national citizenship. In the case of the United States, who is a citizen? To begin to answer this question it is important to understand the legacy of socially constructed racial categories in the United States.

Race, White Supremacy & Inventing Latino

Until the twentieth century, citizenship was not extended to many people on the basis of race. In the U.S., race is often imagined to be an immutable biological category,

and this idea is rooted in white supremacy. How this came to be can, in part, be linked to class and labor. In the 19th century, the need for labor, particularly in rail, expanded and such labor was filled, typically, by immigrants from the Asian continent (Ngai 2004). While there certainly was immigration in the early and mid-19th century, the United States didn't formally begin conceiving of "immigration" and "immigrants" until people started coming noticeably from the Asian continent, in the late 19th and early 20th century (Ngai 2004). One of the first immigration laws recorded in the United States was the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882. Considering the position of Black people, the "assimilation" of people inhabiting what is now the Southwest, and the treatment of Asian immigrants, the general understanding of U.S. citizenship is that it was exclusively for people racialized as "white", whatever that meant. Until the early 20th century, citizenship had been understood as belonging only to white people, and "race" was based on notions of superiority of people descended from Northwestern Europe, including phenotype and cultural traditions. Because of this, it isn't a logical leap to say that the imagined body of the United States was only for people with white skin who speak English and can trace lineage to Northwestern Europe. The legacy of these examples is critical as we start to understand contemporary immigration policy and how the United States imagines what its citizenry looks like and what language it speaks. As Anderson argues in *Imagined Communities*, the "nation" is reified by a physically bounded territory and a common, or fellow citizen. The citizenry is usually imagined to have a shared culture, language, religion and lineage (Anderson 1983). In the United States, the imagined community, or "body" of the nation is a Protestant, English speaking white male and in a subservient role, a Protestant English speaking white female. From Dred

Scott to Takao Ozawa, Supreme Court decisions regularly denied the benefits of citizenship to people not white, in some cases, despite being born on U.S. soil.

The history of immigration from Latin America to the United States is another example of how the U.S. understands citizenship and national identity. In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, people regularly crossed back and forth over the border between Mexico and the United States. Prior to World War I, the U.S. didn't have much interest or administrative capacity to monitor or enforce "immigration" from Mexico. In fact, the quota system which was established in 1921 notably excluded Western Hemisphere countries, as part of the ideology contained in the Monroe Doctrine. It wasn't until after 1910 that the United States government became particularly concerned with migrants from Mexico (Nevins 2010). Despite movement across the border, citizenship in this country was not something that belonged to those who did not have fair skin and speak English as a first language.

Considering the history of racial categories in the U.S., there was always "racist" sentiment among white people and the government against those who were visibly not "white". Beginning in the mid-twentieth century, particularly after World War I, "border security" and more strict monitoring of migrants from the southern border became integral to U.S. policy and imagination. Several immigration laws from 1924 until present placed more emphasis on border security and further scrutinized those from Latin America (Jones 2021). Additionally, programs including "Operation Wetback", targeted Mexicans. The goal of this particular "operation" was to remove Mexicans, to be sure, but also to send a message that they were not welcome (Nevins 2010). One of the most hostile immigration related programs related to Mexican immigrants was Operation

Gatekeeper in 1994. While there was undoubtedly existing racism and hostility, the Clinton administration's "Gatekeeper" significantly increased the budget and subsequent militarization of the southern border using "prevention through deterrence" (Nevins 2010). In 2002, presumably in the security frenzy following 9/11, all immigration related services were transferred to the Department of Homeland Security, suggesting immigrants are inherently threatening.

In addition to understanding the United States conceptualization of who is *really* American and the U.S. relationship to Latin America, we must also examine the role of the Census and the creation and maintenance of racial categories. Here, I will explain what legal scholar Laura Gomez (2020) calls "Inventing Latino". The broader process of racialization in the United States has ultimately led to census categories that do not allow for people to accurately represent their identity and lumps hugely diverse populations under a single term. Additionally, "Latino" is a new category and has become synonymous with the older category "Hispanic". Since the census attempts to measure, among other things, the racial makeup of the nation, it is important to examine.

Until 1930, people from Mexico, or what is now the "southwestern" United States, were considered white. In view of the relative lack of attention to the southern border and immigration from Latin America until the early 1900s, it makes sense that a "Mexican" category was not introduced until the 1930 census. However, in the following census of 1940, "Mexican" was eliminated and didn't reappear (with the addition of other countries of origin) until 1970. Gomez argued those from Mexico recognized the benefit of being aligned with whiteness and lobbied against having a separate "Mexican" category (Gomez 2020). Interestingly, in the 1980 census, the Office of Management and

Budget maintained that “Hispanic” was an ethnic title that was separate from “race”. So one could be ethnically Hispanic but racially something else (white, Black, American Indian). “Hispanic origin”, while separated from “race”, served to place those from Latin America under a single title, thus racializing several populations that, according to the census, were not a “race” (Pratt et al 2015). While the census has been, and certainly still is, problematic when it comes to racial identity (which is understood differently in different parts of the world), the broad understanding of who was *really* part of the imagined “American” community meant English speaking, white skinned European descendants (Jones 2021).

Racially, people who identify under the broad title of “Latinx” come from a wide variety of backgrounds. However, based on the history of the United States and its relationship to Latin America *and* people within its own borders, it is clear how people who are racialized as Black or Hispanic/Latino or any other nonwhite category are not extended benefits of citizenship. Laws have been updated since 1882, and certainly people of any racial background *can* obtain citizenship. Yet that does not mean they are not subject to racist discrimination. In the case of immigrants from Latin America, often they are fleeing the consequences of U.S. imperialism in their home country, then face racism once in the United States.

Challenging Oppressive Structures

Despite oppressive global structures, human actors still employ agency, albeit in sometimes limited ways. Agency is an individual’s ability to behave in creative ways. Global structures, like those described above (capitalism, militarization, white supremacy) often frame what actions are available to agents. Ortner (2016) points out that

exclusive focus on the suffering imposed by structures limits anthropologists' ability to investigate agency. She aptly notes that if culture and structure are both created by human actors, they can be "un-created" or remade by human actors, and often are (Ortner 2016). Additionally, as Angela Davis (2020) has long argued, we, as agents, must imagine a world different than what it currently is. While Davis is specifically concerned with prison abolition and uses "abolitionist imagination", her concept can be applied to any social structure. In a recent interview, Davis said, "The abolitionist imagination delinks us from that which is. It allows us to imagine other ways of addressing issues..." (Davis, 2020 Interview). In studying human agency, we must not neglect the human imagination. However, it is vital to note that the choices actors may make to reconfigure structures can be met with violent physical consequences. In the case of people who carry minoritized identities, or who are from certain geographic regions, employing agency for the betterment of one's circumstances is often seen as activism or political activism, which is one of the reasons many agents are met with physical violence. If oppressed people act in ways that contradict or challenge dominant ideologies and structures (capitalism, white supremacy), elites and the dominant, wealthy classes frequently repress such actions, often through state-sanctioned violence, including militarized police forces. If suffering is created through political choices and imagination, then we can also challenge existing structures with our imaginations. There is clearly more involved than choosing to act creatively, and resistance is fraught, time consuming, and labor intensive. However, one way to mitigate the dangers associated with acting in ways that undermine or otherwise challenge existing power structures is through political organization.

Organizing through identity is powerful, and building a large and diverse community can be a way humans reimagine and restructure the social systems we exist in. There are countless examples in recent history to illustrate the effectiveness of organization based on social identity. From the Civil Rights Movement to the Chicano farm labor movement to women's liberation to LGBTQ equality, there is power in uniting people based on shared social identities. While identity based organization has been powerful, historically, it is only recently that “identity” has been recognized as such. It is in this context of identities that the term “Latino/a/x” must be understood. According to Gomez (2020), the term “Latinx” may only make sense in the United States, since it covers a wide variety of people and communities in Central and South America who may not choose that identity. However, the process of racialization in the United States renders the label “Latinx” useful. In *The Browning of the New South*, Jones (2019) describes the process of racialization. More than identifying certain phenotypes and an assignment of stereotypes, racialization is a process that limits access to resources and cultural capital through a distancing from whiteness, which is also a racialization (Jones 2019: 101).

Additionally, a constructionist approach to racial and ethnic identity holds that racial identities are not simply superimposed on minority groups by the dominant group. Racial assertion occurs when a group asserts their own collective identity. A constructionist framework understands that “race” only exists relationally and is always being produced and reproduced. Racial identities are not fixed and are always a result of conversation between an ascribed identity and an asserted identity based on social circumstances and relations of social power (Cornell and Hartman 2007: 75). While

racial assignment limits some of the ethnic choices for nonwhite people, identification with a racial minority can be useful in terms of forging productive relationships. Jones states, “So, while discrimination is undoubtedly harmful, it also serves as a resource for group formation, reinforcing or reconstructing boundaries in order to shore up solidarity and mobilization” (2019: 107). While national or ethnic identities may make more sense to some individuals than a pan-ethnic label, shared experiences of racism and discrimination can lead to coalition building and political engagement for improved material conditions for nonwhite people. Latinx refers broadly to people who have heritage from Latin America including Mexico, the Caribbean and Central and South America. As described above, identifying with a broader racial label, such as Latinx, can highlight shared experiences of racialization and provide access to coalitions and resources. As Gast et al (2021) note, the immigrant experience for racialized non-white folks usually includes constrained access to resources and social services. To better understand the Latinx immigrant experience in San Francisco, Gast et al investigate belongingness through claims making. Gast et al state “We argue claims-making involves having knowledge, awareness, and skill sets to make claims, managing institutional interactions that are often distinctly racialized...” (2021: 3). Gast et al is concerned with how their research participants understand their own racialized experience as low income immigrants in accessing social services. In line with Jones’ statement about coalition building and mobilization, Gast et al find these Latinx and Filipino immigrants are able to assert their collective identity through shared, racialized experiences, to make claims of their community (2021: 10). Indeed, as J. Jones (2019) highlights, it is apparent that identification with a panethnicity like Latinx, can also join people in shared, racialized

and discriminatory experiences. Making claims for social services can be more difficult as an individual, but the empowerment derived from asserting a common identity and experience makes it easier for immigrants to navigate societal institutions (Gast et al 2021: 11). In this context, NGOs can be used as a space to express collective identity and access social services. Sometimes, identity based movements will adopt the framework of NGOs to access more resources and efficiently distribute social services.

Nonprofits: Movements & Workplaces

“NGO” is a broad, catch-all title for a wide array of organizations, and its definition is vague and contested (Lashaw, Vannier, and Sampson 2017). In the context of neoliberal outsourcing of provision of social services, NGOs are seen as part of a “third” sector that is neither business nor government. Yet, sometimes, they function like a business, oftentimes as consulting firms for or with tacit approval from state governments (Lashaw, Vannier, and Sampson 2017). While NGO means something a little different to every organization, understanding their prevalence in the context of global neoliberalism and tightening state borders provides a framework for understanding the identity based work done by La Casita Center. NGOs are received differently depending on how and what they do and for whom. Despite mixed opinion on the NGO, critically understanding their function provides a necessary framework for understanding parts of social justice and identity based activism, particularly the institutional structures in which it occurs.

In discourse regarding NGOs and the third sector, there is a tension between different styles of operation, organization and service provision. The proliferation of NGOs is global and as Lashaw et al highlight, many international NGOs are staffed and

run primarily by middle class, well-educated Westerners. Top-down nonprofits have been criticized for lacking and/or rejecting the input and knowledge from the communities they are said to be serving. Additionally, some more “charitably” defined nonprofits have a tendency to depoliticize the individuals and communities they serve, opting, instead, to care for “needy” people, divorced from their political context. The provision of aid and distribution of philanthropic dollars frequently addresses need while simultaneously ignoring the political structures that created the need in the first place. As we have seen in the context of immigration peoples’ challenges and suffering cannot be divorced from their sociopolitical contexts. Nonprofit organizations, especially those aimed at alleviating the impacts (or even challenging systems of oppression), are uniquely positioned as both workplaces and spaces of activism.

Some NGOs are more politically minded and motivated than others. Small, grassroots nonprofits led by members of the communities they serve tend to not only be sites of service provision and harm reduction, but also places to share experience, build community and collectively organize for the betterment of their circumstances. In Louisville, there are several NGOs that work with immigrant communities. Catholic Charities, as the name implies, is a Catholic organization and has historically been staffed and led by people who may not themselves be immigrants. Catholic Charities took on immigration related services in 1994, and “serves people in need, especially the poor oppressed, with a wide range of outreaches that assist neighbors of all races, backgrounds, and beliefs” (Catholic Charities Website). Catholic Charities is led by the Archdiocese of Louisville and follows the tenets of “catholic social teaching” (Catholic Charities Website). Kentucky Refugee Ministries, according to their website, “is a non-

profit organization, dedicated to providing resettlement services to refugees through faith- and agency-based co-sponsorship in order to promote self-sufficiency and successful integration into our community” (KRM Website). KRM was founded by Donna Craig, a Presbyterian, in 1998, out of the Highland Presbyterian Church. Today, KRM is locally affiliated with Church World Service (KRM Website). Both organizations are grounded in an ideology that values human rights and service to marginalized communities. La Casita, on the other hand, is not based on religious tenets, and most importantly, was founded and is currently led by Latina immigrants. There is certainly a great deal of overlap in the work of all three organizations, including similar goals. However, the arrival of Latinx immigrants and their children in Louisville directs interest to the work of immigrant led organizations. Little scholarly attention has focused on immigrant-led civic infrastructures (Bloemrad, Gleeson, and de Graauw 2019). La Casita Center is unique in Louisville in that it is the only immigrant-facing nonprofit organization founded and led by immigrants.

As Markowitz and Tice (2002) point out, nonprofit organizations, especially those oriented towards social justice activism, experience tensions. In the neoliberal landscape, funding demands can sometimes contradict the philosophy and vision of the nonprofit. What once began as grassroots movements, or mutual aid networks can often reproduce raced, classed and gendered hierarchies (Markowitz & Tice 2002). In order to expand services activists may face demands from funders to “professionalize”, which can marginalize workers without formal education. This process can challenge core values and employees have to navigate this tension. Indeed, meeting the needs of funders is a delicate balance, and one that La Casita must maintain.

Louisville & LCC History

In 2021, with a full-time staff of sixteen, La Casita accompanied over 2,000 families. La Casita's services range from the distribution of grocery bags to mental health counseling sessions to legal clinics to advocacy for victims of crime. It also houses La Escuelita which is a bilingual Pre-K readiness program that includes teaching, tutoring, and the distribution of school supplies. Everything La Casita provides is free of charge for every person seeking goods and/or services. This year, La Casita maintained over 200 partnerships with entities ranging from Louisville Metro Government to Family Health Centers and Kroger. La Casita has been recognized by the sitting mayor and has hosted candidates for public office from the Louisville Metro Council to the U.S. House of Representatives. As it exists today, La Casita is a pillar of the Louisville community, but it has not always been that way.

La Casita as an organization emerged from several decades of community activism in Louisville, and of course, global circumstances. Father Jim Flynn is a retired Catholic priest who was active in the Civil Rights Movement in Louisville in the 1960s and 1970s. He saw civil rights as a spectrum—it was not a Black/white binary for him. It seemed natural to welcome immigrants fleeing violence in Latin America. During this period, many Catholic clerics from the United States, Europe and Latin America were influenced by Liberation Theology and Father Jim was no different. Father Jim worked with other churches and community members to help provide the most welcoming space for Latinx immigrants. One of those people was Sister Lupe Arciniega, a Latina, who worked in Hispanic ministry for St. Rita.

In Louisville in the 1980s, Sister Lupe and Father Jim began outreach to the Hispanic community, trying to identify peoples' needs and to supply resources. Some riskier activities included housing undocumented migrants. As earlier sections have emphasized, newcomers had strong motivation to leave home and many needs upon arrival. The combination of local and global circumstances and policies with existing forms of social activism furnished the environment for the creation of a nonprofit organization like La Casita Center.

La Casita Center: A Dream

Before I begin discussing the direct impetus for the founding of La Casita Center, I must make a quick methodological note regarding my own understanding of its history. In the timeframe for this project, I was unable to complete an IRB approved interview with every person who was involved in the founding of La Casita. I have, however, been privileged to speak to a few of them, but most importantly, I have been able to work closely with the founding and current Executive Director, Karina. Much of the history I describe is from Karina. While La Casita owes its existence to a large community of people, to know Karina is to know La Casita. Prior to its official opening as a 501c3 nonprofit, I follow Karina's journey as a starting point.

Karina's Fulbright Cohort was called CAMPUS-8, the 8th class of Central American students in this program. When Karina and her companions arrived, the Hispanic community in Louisville was very small. Among several of my La Casita friends, it was a novelty to meet another native Spanish-speaker, and "diversity" was rare. Despite the small number of Hispanic residents those here found few resources that were both culturally and linguistically relevant.

National immigration policy in the early and mid-1990s included Operation Gatekeeper (1994), which spearheaded the militarization of the southern border (Nevins 2010). In Louisville in 1994, Catholic Charities implemented wide-scale services for refugees, having resettled refugees since the Vietnam War in 1975 (KOR Website). Catholic Charities also administers the Kentucky Office of Refugees, which falls under the jurisdiction of the federal government. In 1996, the Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act was passed, which included the criminalization of undocumented immigrants and enhanced border security measures and “prevention through deterrence” making border crossing more hostile and dangerous (Jones 2021). It was in this context that Karina met Father Jim and Sister Lupe. Karina began accompanying them to Shelbyville, Kentucky, to meet Hispanic immigrants and bring them food or assist them in accessing legal services. One of the Founding Mothers told me, “When I asked why there wasn’t an organization that accompanied and supported Latinx immigrants, I was told it was because I hadn’t started it yet.” In addition to addressing needs, Karina (and her CAMPUS-8 peers) wanted to build community. So, in 1994, they organized the first Hispanic-centered events in Louisville, which was a dance with Latin music at Cafe Kilimanjaro. Another founding mother said “We need a space to accompany and create community”. Indeed, as Karina stated in her interview, while they were building capacity for material support, they were simultaneously building a community.

In 2000, for International Womens’ Day on March 8th, Karina was invited to a panel of women from different backgrounds to discuss women’s issues. This panel is where Karina met two of the four *Founding Mothers* of La Casita. Gretchen Hunt and

Jana Mayer were taken with Karina from her panel presentation and encouraged her, then a graduate student, to volunteer with the Center for Women and Families. When Karina graduated from UofL (M.Ed 2002) and began working at the Center for Women and Families, Spanish-speaking clients requested her by name. Karina has told me she didn't think it was necessarily her, personally, but the fact that she, too, was a native Spanish speaker and immigrant herself. In working with other Latina immigrants and mothers at the Center for Women and Families, Karina, and certainly her coworkers, noticed the growing need for more services, especially for a safe place for immigrant women experiencing domestic abuse and sexual assault.

Before continuing chronologically, I must briefly backtrack to 1997, when the Catholic Church sold the property at the corner of Floyd and Woodbine Street, which is where La Casita exists today. The Catholic church sold the Chapel of St. Philip Neri to a Vernon Robertson Charities Corporation. As Karina, Gretchen, and Jana tried to find more resources for their clients, they were connected to someone Karina had met before, but not known well. Maria Scharfenberger was a member of the then Hispanic/Latino Coalition and a Catholic Worker. Through this organization, she had a connection to the owner of the Chapel on Floyd and Woodbine. In 2002, the founding mothers opened La Casa Latina. La Casa Latina is a Catholic Worker house that provides housing and support for Latina women and mothers experiencing domestic violence and sexual assault. Complete with a house mother, Casa Latina was (and still is) a safe place for women and children to live and eat.

The opening of La Casa Latina in 2002, followed the attack on 9/11/01. While Louisville's immigrant population was not large at this time, it was certainly growing,

and would continue to grow. Further xenophobic reaction to 9/11 attacks rendered newcomers vulnerable. The need for immigrant services, especially those that are accessible and meaningful, was becoming ever more acute.

During the early 2000s, Karina was also hosting twelve womens' support groups for Latinas, which included Know Your Rights workshops. In 2005, the Real ID Act was passed, which rendered undocumented immigrants ineligible for driver's licenses and restricted habeas corpus for immigrant populations. As Karina continued her work at the Center for Women and Families, *and* her work at La Casa Latina, more people started showing up to La Casa Latina, and not just those in need of housing, or fleeing domestic violence or abuse. So the founding mothers continued thinking about how to give people, especially Latino immigrants, more options. The existing Hispanic/Latino coalition was not led by immigrants and could only do so much. The founding mothers kept dreaming (a term Karina regularly uses) and decided to open La Casita Center in 2006.

La Casita was opened to address the needs not only of Latina mothers, but for all Latino and Latina immigrants. In her interview, Karina told me, "We didn't start a nonprofit because we thought it was so fun." La Casita Center didn't have any paid staff members when it opened in 2006. They operated on a volunteer basis out of La Casa Latina. According to Karina, "We went to work, and then we came to work at La Casa Latina". At the time of the founding, influenced by the Catholic Worker Movement, "accompaniment" was integral to the philosophy of Casa Latina and La Casita. Karina told me families would come to Casa Latina to speak to her, and lines would be out the door. One of the women living at Casa Latina noticed and said to Karina, "We should feed these people and their kids while they wait for you". And so, with no funding, Anna

used her food stamps to buy rice and beans that fed many families, including Karina's. As Karina will tell you, accompaniment means *everything*, including a hot meal while you wait to speak to a counselor.

It wasn't until 2008 that La Casita had any paid employees, and the first one was Anna. Considering she did so much for La Casita, including cooking and cleaning, Karina convinced the board to hire her. Later that same year, Karina was finally paid—but only because of a partnership with the University of Kentucky (2008 is also the year when Karina resigned from the Center for Women and Families). Since there were no annual reports until 2018, I cannot say with certainty what the budget was for those early years, but Karina later told me that no program at La Casita was *started* because of grants. Most revenue for the first four years of La Casita came solely from donations. (As a matter of methodology, meeting minutes and records are spread among several people, sometimes in other cities.)

The first grant, however, did come in 2006 in the form of a scholarship. As Karina was meeting Latina immigrant mothers, she found one of their primary struggles was with employment. Without childcare, these women could not go to work; however, without a job, they could not afford childcare. Karina and the founding mothers began brainstorming how they could assist these women in finding not only childcare, but bilingual childcare. Perhaps by a stroke of luck, or as Karina would say, a gift from the Universe, one of the founding mothers' daughters' preschool was looking for a new space *and* to reach out to the Hispanic community. The Montessori school and the founding mothers reached an agreement: the school could be housed in La Casa Latina if it covered half of the tuition for each student. The other half of tuition was covered by a grant from

the Sisters of Charity of Nazareth. The founding mothers were going to start bilingual childcare, but the Universe provided the grant for what is now La Escuelita.

In the first four years of La Casita Center's existence, Karina, Anna, the board, and volunteers built an infrastructure for community and accompaniment. From bilingual childcare to case management to hot meals, La Casita was becoming a welcoming space for Hispanic immigrants in Louisville, and the only one of its kind. Karina also relayed to me that they built the infrastructure for the process of accompanying immigrant survivors of domestic violence and sexual assault. No other organization until that point had been led by immigrants themselves. In these years, La Casita also hosted cultural celebrations with Latin music and dance. This also included Semillita Latina, a cultural dance group for young Latina girls. (One of those first *semillitas* is now a board member.) It was becoming a space for accompaniment—help, service, community, and celebration.

In 2010, however, La Casita Center fell on hard times when Karina left as the Executive Director. Amy Shelton took on this role, but only with part-time funding. While Amy and Anna continued working diligently to support the growing Latinx community, public support waned. In the era of Barack Obama, national rhetoric regarding immigration eased, lulling supporters into a false sense of peace about the safety and security of immigrants. Amy explained that funding and attention shifted away from Latinx immigrants and shifted towards Africans and people from the Middle East. Karina's departure was deeply felt since the community knew and trusted her and in her absence, enthusiasm for La Casita diminished. Although La Casita could continue to support existing programming, including La Escuelita, they had few funds to cover other costs, like food for events or "household" items for the office. (Money from grants, I

have learned, must be used in specific ways—only for the programs they address. I will address this more in depth in later chapters.) Despite hard work and successes, the early 2010s were a difficult period for La Casita and unfortunately, in late 2011, Amy resigned as ED, leaving only Anna and the board to carry out La Casita’s mission. For nine months, from Amy’s departure until Karina’s return, Anna was the only staff member for La Casita. Alone, she continued to provide families with grocery bags, donated clothes, and a hot meal. Sometimes grocery bags only included a bag of rice and beans, but she gave what she could.

In 2013, Karina returned and found La Casita on the verge of closing. Two board members recall this time in La Casita’s history as the “dark ages”. Public support had waned since Karina’s departure. Other board members lodged accusations of misuse of funds. Leslie, who was new to the board during this period, described a fault line that developed among board members: those who wanted to permanently close La Casita and those who were committed to keeping it open. This was a fraught time and those who were present with La Casita then spoke of it with delicacy—careful not to name individuals or lay blame. The tension culminated with a final vote on whether to keep La Casita open, which ultimately resulted in the continuation of the nonprofit, but led to the bitter resignation of half of the board. To my understanding, the board members who insisted on closure were neither Latinx nor immigrants and had a much different perception of what La Casita’s purpose and mission were. I was told that board members who left expressed that the commitment should be to the “shareholders”, or those who provided funding, which was contrary to the vision of Karina and the remaining board members. Oscar told me he never planned to vote to close La Casita. He described the

importance of supporting families, by giving grocery bags, a hot meal, or even just a safe space. That did not mean, however, he didn't understand the realities associated with limited funding. Being close with Karina, I've learned she often says, "The Universe will provide". Oscar mentioned he had his reservations about this faith, but that it was Karina's unshakable dedication to accompanying Latinx families that inspired him to want to keep La Casita open during the "dark ages".

In early 2013, with Karina's return and the vote to keep La Casita open, the nonprofit was reinvigorated. This did not mean, however, that the work was easy or that funding was overflowing. Karina was living at La Casa Latina—taking a part time salary just to be able to allocate funding to services, including meals and household products, for accompaniments. Accompaniment—listening to families, connecting them with resources and coordinating donations was time consuming and labor intensive, especially with a staff of two. In 2014, however, La Casita acquired its current space at 223 E Magnolia Ave, which is right next door to La Casa Latina. Thanks to Tom's technical expertise and craftsmanship, the two story building is up-to-date and comfortable for staff and accompaniments.

Beginning in 2015, the Trump rhetoric and election made more visible the violence and hardships faced by Latinx immigrants. La Casita's capacity for supporting the Latinx community continued to grow during the Trump administration. In 2017, La Casita (with the inspiration of queer staff people and board members) hosted the first Latinx Pride event, to highlight and celebrate the experience of queer Latinx people. Louisville's long history of activism was also helpful in the continued recruiting of allies and supporters, especially with the heightened rhetoric of Donald Trump and his

administration. In reaction to Trump’s cruel comments about “Mexicans” greater visibility was accorded immigrants from Latin America and longtime supporters like Father Jim were ready to help in the aftermath of ICE raids. Additionally, the heightened visibility led to new volunteers. Families needed legal representation, translation services, groceries, and household products. With the work of the growing staff, La Casita was able to multiply its documented number of services from 2019 to 2020 by a factor of almost four. For example, from 3,876 cases managed in 2019 to 12,466 cases managed in 2020. All “services” are accompaniment, and include anything from giving grocery bags to helping families navigate the immigration system. They spoke four languages (English, Spanish, Mam, and K’iche). Additionally, their bilingual website went live in 2020. The increased capacity also meant that La Casita was able to expand services, and revenue almost doubled from \$460K in 2019 to over \$800K in 2020 (Annual Reports 2019, 2020).

In 2020, however, the Covid-19 pandemic changed the course of La Casita’s activities and the staff had to adapt to dramatically changing circumstances. Use of physical space was limited to accommodate CDC requirements and “dropping in” to the center was all but halted. Fundraising through in-person events completely stopped. Unfortunately, the pandemic also meant need greatly increased—for healthcare, for food, for interpretation. La Casita was able to pivot and lean on the broad network of support to ensure the Latinx immigrant community had somewhere to turn. One example of this is grocery delivery. Volunteers for La Casita were enlisted to drive grocery bags and hygiene kits to families who were unable to visit the center because of Covid precautions. La Casita became a community partner for the Louisville Metro Government by hosting

monthly vaccine clinics with Family Health Centers. As pandemic related restrictions ease, La Casita is once again adapting to changing circumstances and is prioritizing understanding, safety and care to ensure services are provided with Latinx Hospitality, which I will try to define in chapter 3.

La Casita Center is a 501c3 nonprofit organization, a community center, a workplace, a former church on the corner of Floyd and Woodbine, a movement, a set of shared values, a feeling. It is challenging to accurately define or describe it. La Casita is the result of policy, resistance, and community. In the following chapter, I will attempt to define La Casita as a workplace and explain its workplace philosophy. Although, as I have stressed throughout this chapter, it is so much more than a workplace, this is the lens I apply to recount La Casita's model of work and relationships with the broader community.

CHAPTER III: SOMOS UN CIRCULO AND THE WORKPLACE

Agreements of the Latinas Movement:

Faithfully and confidentially honor the stories of others

Judge neither myself nor those around me

Mutually support and respect one another

Speak and act with transparency

Take responsibility for my actions

Always speak up for myself

Listen to what my companions have to say

Ask, rather than assume

Know my limits

Welcome opportunities to expand our circle

Commit to the vision of non-violence

Act in solidarity towards the goal of social justice

Los acuerdos or The Agreements are sets of agreements (not rules) for protecting the safety of the shared space of La Casita. Karina explained that these agreements were developed in the Latina womens' support groups she conducted on Wednesday evenings at St. Rita, or in La Casa Latina. She summed up los acuerdos in this way,

“And rules, the rules, you know, implied that somebody’s going to be policing each other? That we fulfilled those rules? So what do we do? How—what language do we use in a way we empower one another and agree that we are gonna keep each other safe? So it took us, little by little, we, you know, asking the women, in all the groups, you know, what, what were the agreements that they would like to see from all of us? So the agreements of the Latina Womens Movement, the agreements of La Casita as a family, as a circle, as team, use are, were born from the, from the womb of the Latina Womens Movement...Nobody, not the white women, the gringas, nor me, came and said “this is what we are gonna do” it just, it, it was a very transformative process”

The goal of listing agreements, as Karina stated, was never to be a set of rules, but to be a collaborative effort that encourages participation, autonomy, safety, and belongingness in the space, which, in this case was a room in a Catholic church, but we can extend “space” to mean anywhere La Casita is operating.

The acuerdos provide the anchor for the work of La Casita Center. The purpose of the agreements is to foster a safe, inclusive community that celebrates and acknowledges each person’s circumstances. They are also universal meaning they are applied across relationships inside and outside of La Casita. Faithfully and confidentially honoring the stories of others isn’t just for community liaisons who are mental health counselors, but for how staff members interact with each other. Employees, generally, attempt to be intentional about honoring the stories of others and mutually supporting and respecting one another. In my experience, the notion of “leave your personal life at the door” was not apparent. La Casita staff have reported they often feel comfortable sharing details of personal life at work. At the beginning of each staff meeting, everyone is encouraged to share what they are thankful for, hopeful for or need support with—and it isn’t strictly work-related. The goal of La Casita Center, as Karina has expressed, is not only building capacity, but also building community. The circle model does not recognize a hierarchy

and encourages diverse involvement and participation while holding space for each individual's circumstances, skills, and goals.

“Somos un círculo. We are a circle.” This is how each staff meeting ends, by recognizing we are a circle. Every Wednesday morning at 9:30am the staff joins a Zoom call to discuss our work for the week and share updates. Before we start talking about the work for the week, we all share what we are grateful for and what our hope is for the week. Usually, in my broken Spanish, I will say something along the lines of *“estoy agradecido para la familia de la casita y yo traigo mucho amor y duro trabajo”*. While the space is fully bilingual, staff meetings are always conducted in Spanish—an intentional recognition of language justice, and the first language of most staff people. Staff meetings at La Casita generally reflect the organization's broader philosophy by asking each person to share how they are, reading the agreements and stating we are a circle.

What does this really mean? When we say we are a circle, how is that reflected in the workplace and in the community? In this chapter, using interview comments and examples drawn from participant observation, I explore what “we are a circle” means in practice. I also situate the circle model in history and the literature on Liberation Theology. The circle model has many layered meanings and is expressed in a variety of ways. Here, I first describe the work La Casita does and who is responsible for carrying out certain tasks. Within this description, I weave in comments that highlight how employees exemplify the *acuerdos*. Later in the chapter, I speak more directly to inclusion and belonging, and examples of what “we are a circle” can mean in different contexts. The goal of this chapter is primarily to illustrate how the circle model is enacted

as a workplace. I also cover how “circle” extends beyond coworkers, but my concern is mostly with the workplace.

Workplace Structure and Function

La Casita Center is located at 223 E Magnolia Avenue. I drove past it when I first visited—the trees almost cover the roof. The location is perfect for La Casita, right in the middle of a neighborhood in Old Louisville, which is a diverse part of Jefferson County. *Ouerbacker Court* just to the west of La Casita, houses wealthy residents. To the east of La Casita, on Floyd Street, Broadway Management owns low income housing. I live in walking distance to La Casita Center and bike there when the weather is nice, passing *Mag Bar* on the way. The diversity of Old Louisville fits La Casita Center well.

Outside of the building, sits a large fenced courtyard on the east side. To the north, one can see the playground. *Magnolia* (the building at 223) has two floors. Upstairs, or accessible from the blue door, is the gym, which the staff use for many purposes. In my time with La Casita, we have used the gym to host vaccine clinics, mobile consulates, candidate forums and art exhibits. The gym has dark wood floors and big windows that let in the air on hot summer days. The rooms downstairs also serve many purposes, which include housing the clothing closet, food pantry and some offices. In addition to the offices and the pantry, the kitchen sits downstairs, which exemplifies what Karina calls Latinx Hospitality. Every time I am in the center, which is often, a hot meal awaits me, and any other visitors. What is distinctive about *Magnolia* is the smell. The inside of the building always smells like delicious *frijoles*, *cafe de olla*, or *sopa de pollo*. The big table sits just outside the formal kitchen, just across from the offices. We

use the big table to share meals, host guests, or have meetings. As far as workplaces are concerned, it was new to me to always see a kitchen and shared meal among coworkers.

In 2021, La Casita Center acquired the new building, which is directly to the north of *Magnolia*, just across the small, brick paved alley. The other building faces Woodbine Street, and so it is named after the street. *Woodbine* was also part of the campus that belonged to the corporation that bought the buildings (*Magnolia* and the Chapel of St Philip Neri, which houses La Casa Latina) from the Archdiocese. *Woodbine* primarily includes office space, but it also houses a kitchen and a classroom. Tabling supplies and extra kitchen utensils are stored in the basement of *Woodbine*. Despite its relative newness to La Casita, staff have been using *Woodbine* for varied purposes, which often includes welcoming in members of the community.

While La Casita continues to adapt to the circumstances of the pandemic, these two buildings in Old Louisville are where employees of La Casita work. Prior to the pandemic, I'm told, everyone worked together in *Magnolia*. While several employees do often work from home, everyone does gather in their offices each Tuesday. I even have my own office where I work on Tuesdays. While there, I am interested in what everyone else is doing. What is the "work" of La Casita? Who is responsible for what?

The organizational structure of La Casita is difficult to define, perhaps purposely, because members of each division work so closely together and boundaries aren't strictly enforced. Here, I have separated divisions for the sake of clarity of explanation. This is by no means an exhaustive list of all the tasks the staff performs. I have identified, broadly, four divisions, or teams. 1. Community Liaisons, who work directly with community members or those seeking services from La Casita. They range in expertise

from law to mental health to public health. 2. Employees of the administrative division engage in the “business” of the nonprofit. Here, staff people apply for grants, engage volunteers, complete reports, conduct communications, and face community partners. 3. Staff support and hospitality employees coordinate the facilities, welcome visitors and staff, manage, organize and coordinate donations and ensure the functioning of the workplace. 4. Finally, child enrichment, which includes one staff person who records lessons for online audiences and is the teacher for the La Escuelita program.

La Casita, on the other hand, based on the annual report, distinguishes divisions according to programming. The 2021 annual report indicates “divisions” as *Accompaniment & Advocacy, Health & Empowerment, Hospitality & Solidarity, Legal Clinic & Support, Education & Empowerment, and Mental Health Support*. I chose not to use these titles here for two reasons. First, because, since these titles reflect programming, it does not leave room for those who are not “client” facing. My second reason had to do with clarity. Employees can often move between each of these titles and it can be challenging to untangle the difference between terms like “solidarity”, “advocacy” and “empowerment”.

Through my research, I was able to interview staff members from three of the four divisions of La Casita’s work. Each participant was able to provide more clarity about the tasks they are paid to perform. As an outsider, one can easily look at the staff and see a mass of people working, but what do they actually do? How is labor divided? What follows is my understanding of the work La Casita does, who does it, and what employees had to say about their job and the guiding acuerdos.

Community Liaisons

Community Liaisons are the people who work directly with the “community” (to be defined later). Here, the loose definition of community means “accompaniments”, which La Casita intentionally uses instead of “client”. In the context of the larger nonprofit sector, “accompaniment” most closely resembles “client”, or person seeking services from the organization. Generally, community liaisons are the people who directly “provide service” to accompaniments. (I go into more detail regarding the use of the term accompaniment in chapter 4.) There are six full time community liaisons. One is a physician who shares public health advice and helps families navigate illness. This includes assistance navigating the health system, advice on preventative treatment and information regarding vaccines and chronic illness. *La Doctora*, as she is called, described her work,

“I have been the listening ear, and after I listen I process and I process and I bring—”Hey, here, this is what we need”. And through this we have now developed, you know? The consejos videos—videos and it is for advising, you know, health tips for people. Not only related to covid, but also related to awareness for STDs or autism, or awareness about, uh, carbon monoxide, or I don’t know, so many other things.”

La Doctora educates and helps walk families through sickness and preventative care in accessible ways. She also regularly updates and advises the staff on health measures, again, embodying the circle model and extending her expertise not just to “patients” or clients, but to a broad community. Since the beginning of the pandemic, Doctora has helped lead vaccine and testing efforts, giving workshops and answering questions. Two other community liaisons are mental health counselors. They help families find providers if the family has insurance and they also conduct counseling sessions, themselves, if the family does not have health insurance. One of the mental health liaisons spoke to the

holistic model of her work, not only to provide counseling sessions, but to help influence policy:

“Writing protocols in conjunction with the other support group members, potentially looking at what services and resources the community needs. Always keeping those folks in mind. What do they need?... So that's my role kind of a bridge between our equipo or our support group and our mental health providers. I'm a mental health provider as well so I also carry my own load of clients to provide mental health support and then of course I'm not anybody's supervisor. I'm just a support person.”

Here she expresses how she supports a community she is a part of as well as the other staff people and pays specific attention to the cultural relevance and capacity to be able to conduct sessions. She is also conscious about *not* being a supervisor, but supporting other members of the circle, again, exemplifying that the circle is not exclusive, and extends to everyone. La Casita employees two other community liaisons work more generally. They do not conduct counseling sessions, but they do activities that include answering phone calls, coordinating services, and assisting families to access resources and navigate school, government, and human service systems. The community liaison with the longest tenure provided a summary of the dynamic nature of the work at La Casita, stating:

“La Casita is wrap-around services to the community. So, it is difficult to say we will only do X and Y, if we have the capabilities, the abilities, then it's something that we just—it gets done in the process, I think.”

As I describe later, the “work” and tasks are not strictly siloed, meaning the staff must be flexible and dynamic, often requiring collaboration across areas. Another full time community liaison coordinates the legal clinic, which means helping families find pro-bono legal representation, following up with ICE, and supporting families with legal claims and experiencing discrimination in housing and labor. An additional community

liaison, the Victims of Crime Advocate, works closely with the mental health community liaisons and the legal clinic liaison. She is a social worker who accompanies families through the legal system when they have been the victim of a crime, including domestic violence, assault, or robbery, often going with families to court and working closely with the LMPD. Both the VOCA and legal clinic liaison work closely together and with the other liaisons. In chapter 4, when I discuss the accompaniment model, I will highlight the importance of the culturally and linguistically relevant work of the community liaisons.

Staff Support & Hospitality Coordinators

Three staff members coordinate hospitality. What does this mean? Two of the women, Indigenous women from Guatemala, make the space welcoming by preparing meals of rice and beans for the staff and community. They are also responsible for organizing and managing all donations (food, clothes, household items) and they coordinate the use of the physical space for events and general operation. For example, they inform the administration team when the pantry is low on supplies or instruct the team on what donations the center is accepting. Often, on Resource Tuesdays, many staff members ask hospitality coordinators where tables should go or what goods La Casita Center has to give accompaniments. They also usually face the community, meaning whenever someone enters the space, these women greet them and offer food or coffee, a warm smile and pleasant conversation. Weekly, they ensure the preparation of at least 50 grocery bags full of rice, beans, pasta, and canned goods for families. They also organize the clothing closet, separating pieces by gender, age and season. I remember trying to organize clothing donations several times, and these women were so helpful in letting me know where to place items. In sum, they manage the Center's distribution of food,

clothing, and other necessities. Anna was the first staff member of La Casita, and she recounts when there was so little La Casita could do to support families when she was the only staff person. Despite having limited resources, when a family would call her, she would give them what little was in the pantry, sometimes just a bag of rice or beans. Yasmin works directly with accompaniments, volunteers and community partners to ensure the center has a supply of diapers, formula, and other baby supplies. Additionally, each of these women is integral to events and event planning. Anna and Sue are responsible for preparing the food La Casita is known for, and for events like the Circle of Solidarity, this is a labor intensive task. In 2022, they prepared over 200 tamales. Yasmin is also an expert decorator. She uses her own artistic skill to decorate the center and venues (like the Mellwood Arts and Entertainment Center) for cultural celebrations. Staff support and hospitality coordination is what ensures the rest of the staff can carry on their work. Each area is a mutually supportive part of the circle that is the staff of La Casita.

Administrators

Administrators, broadly, include the Executive Director, a digital communications coordinator, two business and strategic development coordinators and a support specialist. These staff members plan and organize events and fundraisers, write internal procedures, manage finances and fundraising, engage volunteers, complete reports, administer HR for the rest of the staff and generally make sure the bills are paid and deadlines are met. As someone whose background is in administrative work and academia, this is the division I spent most of my time in. Since I also have some research experience, I did assist modestly with grant writing and writing copy for newsletters and

with other communications related tasks. This exposure affords a more detailed description of the “administration” division. I worked most closely with the communications coordinator and one of the business development coordinators. There is overlap here because the content produced by the communications coordinator must also be in line with grant requirements. For example, any mention of “vaccines” must be reported to a grantor in order to fulfill grant requirements. As I stated earlier, grant funding is strictly tied to certain programming and messaging. One of the business development coordinators had this to say of her work:

“And that job touched on accounting, on human resources, on process development, and add-like, addition to actual office coordination, like making sure that the utilities are paid and things are running relatively smoothly.”

The administrative team handles the “nuts and bolts” of business operations. The digital communications coordinator writes copy for all reports, social media and generally any communication that comes from the organization. The digital communications coordinator described their daily tasks:

“We work in collaboration with many government organizations as well as other nonprofits on how to bring information and resources that are accessible to the Spanish-speaking community. And from there, I create content that may include editing videos, that may include graphic creations, that may include writing press releases or protocols so in a day life, that’s usually how my time is divided...”

La Casita has a strong online presence, including a weekly live show on Facebook, *Somos Un Circulo*. This virtual 30 minute Spanish-language show each week hosts guests and shares important information and resources. The communications coordinator also produces a recorded program *Consejos de Salud*, in conjunction with La Doctora to share preventative health tips and other information. Content for the two shows is

planned three months in advance. The communications coordinator also pre-plans additional content for social media accounts including promotion for community events and fundraisers, or annual reports months in advance. La Casita is regularly featured on local Spanish language media, including Radio Poder, which needs weekly content.

The business development coordinator had this to say about her work,

“my focus is on developing processes. And, supporting and facilitating structures for future processes. Another—the other way around, processes that can also support the structures and platforms for the type of work that everybody does...And supporting for organizing the events in the community...I’m responsible for organizing events for the community since—from the logistics to the executing. And I do support the development of the new branch for consulting.”

When I suggested that she handles the “back end” work, she mentioned, “*And also on the front end, right? I wouldn’t say that I’m on the back end*” here, she is referencing that at events, she is community facing, and also mentions she answers phone calls from accompaniments as well. Here, too, she also emphasizes that what she does helps to support her coworkers. She is intentional in writing procedures, that they are informed by the staff that must carry them out. This process is mirrored inside and outside the workplace. As some of the community liaisons have expressed, the programming and services they offer are based on what accompaniments report they need most. The same process is extended to the staff: before determining processes and procedures, staff members discuss the most efficient ways to complete their work. By gathering and integrating input from people who will be using the processes she develops, Michaelais attempting to resist a workplace structure that would place her near the top of a power hierarchy, where she would be one of the only decision-makers. The administrators

recognize there's a certain level of power in writing procedures and they are aware of that. To remedy the workplace power imbalances, administrators attempt to remain grounded in the circle model and share power.

Each of the administrative team, however, does more than just handle "business". They also engage with accompaniments, and engage volunteers and donors, which is a hugely time consuming task. Rose, who was once the volunteer coordinator, shares her own perspective for engaging volunteers. (I myself was once a volunteer, new to the space.) Rose said, "*within volunteer coordination, there's a lot of...there's a lot of bringing people in and sharing the same hospitality with them...*" Rose is the only white staff member (of three) whom I interviewed. I specifically sought out the voices of those staff members in the Latinx and immigrant community. However, Rose here expresses what the circle model means to her. The broader circle isn't just staff and accompaniments, but also volunteers who are often also white and do not speak Spanish. When I discuss accompaniment in more detail in chapter 4, I will touch more specifically on what accompaniment means for different communities.

In the course of my work, I was unable to formally interview the La Escuelita teacher, however, we did work together on a couple of projects and became friendly. *Maestra* records lessons for the La Escuelita Facebook group, organizes school supply deliveries and helps provide one on one tutoring. La Casita's physical space includes a classroom, and this is where *Maestra* keeps school supplies, including books, crayons, and flash cards. The classroom is also where students spend time during summer camp. There are also volunteers who tutor and serve as camp counselors. During the pandemic, La Escuelita was critical in supporting families during Non-Traditional Instruction (NTI)

and giving supplies and extra support where Jefferson County Public Schools (JCPS) was limited. Again, this is an example of La Casita listening to members of the broader circle and developing programming and resources that the community desires. The Child Enrichment Program, which includes La Escuelita, is what La Casita originally began as—a bilingual preschool to support Latinx mothers and children.

While there are separate divisions of work, utilizing each person's expertise, it is important to note that the boundaries between these areas are porous. There is close collaboration among all areas to ensure the work is done as efficiently as possible. Community Liaisons regularly engage in writing reports and administrative staff will often receive guests and visitors. Often, members of the administrative team work directly with accompaniments, as do the support and hospitality staff. If there is an event at the center, like the monthly resource day, the entire staff is usually present, working with visitors and community members in varied capacities, depending on need. All staff members greet and welcome visitors and generally ensure the event goes smoothly. For example, the business development coordinator could help someone carry a bag of clothes to their car or explain the event to a member of the Metro Council. Staff collaborates, without the imposition of silos or hierarchies and everyone is encouraged to share ideas and feedback.

Workplace Philosophy & Los Acuerdos

“I don't remember all of them at this moment, but it's just a feeling that I have that it makes me feel safe. It makes me feel safe, and it makes me feel like I have a voice to say what I need to say, and that I'm also, that I'm able to do it without any punishment or any repercussions.”

Lucille accurately summed up the sentiment most employees shared regarding the power of the acuerdos. Staff members spoke to how they were personally influenced by the agreements. Many noted that the agreements are the baseline and the anchor. If work becomes stressful, which it often does, employees can come back to the agreements. One of the community liaisons, who is often the first point of contact for people seeking services from La Casita had this to say about the agreements:

“And I realized, like, I try to go by those because it’s, it just makes everything more calm. It’s like you’re just being transparent, or showing what your work—nobody is behind you telling you, you know, “you have to do this”. It’s you and your word and it’s your work that you’re showing. So it’s just respect for what you do and you know, giving it your all.”

The agreements in messaging and practice encourage autonomy, including knowing one’s limits, and speaking up for oneself. One of the community liaisons had this to say of the acuerdos and how they influence on the workplace:

“Because I know I come from white collar office work. And in those spaces, people do behave in that sort of way, you know, where you, when your coworker is not responding, or whatever, so you just kinda let it go or your coworker seems like they’re annoyed or something, and you just kinda “oh, they’re an asshole” and you don’t actually talk to them or anything.”

At once, he is challenging the “professionalized” workplace in favor of authentic connections among coworkers with a shared set of values. He summed it up in this way, *“Authentic relationships between coworkers instead of you know, people you’re forced to be with because you work together, kind of space.”* The acuerdos bring intentionality to the workplace, and encourage staff members to recognize each other’s life and circumstances outside of work. Rose had this to say,

“I think, I see that there’s a lot of grace in the acuerdos and so there’s a lot of space to—there’s, there’s grace that’s required from like, all parties. So there’s grace on my part to, to understand that I’m part of a team that’s building something from the ground up...”

There is grace in understanding that the circle model can be challenging, and at times, uncertain. The assumption, as Rob pointed out, is that coworkers are working with the best intentions and problems are bound to arise. Michaela had this to say about the acuerdos:

“Um, I do think the acuerdos I think that’s...probably one of the things that got my attention about La Casita, or got me curious about the way La Casita works. It is the accompaniment model, first of all. And that is very different from other approaches. And then, in the acuerdos, I do feel a connection to them because I—there is some similarities that I use in my personal life, as an individual.”

The approach to the workplace expressed in the acuerdos generally makes the staff feel safe and supported. From what I have seen and heard, staff members strive to embody the acuerdos in their work.

At La Casita, there are no “supervisors” “managers” or “bosses”. While Karina is the executive director, each staff person is encouraged to take the lead on various projects unique to their expertise. The second Tuesday of every month, La Casita hosts a Martes de Recursos, where families can stop by the center and pick up grocery bags and diapers and get vaccines. Usually, a minimum of ten staff members work on the resource day. Community liaisons generally conduct registration and check-in, the administration team coordinates volunteers and the hospitality coordinators make lunch and ensure clothes are properly organized for people to shop. Yet, while these are “typical” stations, everyone carries tables, directs visitors, and arranges chairs. On Resource Tuesdays, the circle

model is easy to observe. It is common to see the executive director bring water to a staff member or have lunch with a visiting family. I, myself, have been privileged to have attended several of the resource days. What still surprises me is how much autonomy I am encouraged to exercise. If a volunteer or a visitor has a question, I don't need to go find my "boss" to answer it. I am also encouraged to take part in decision making processes, for example, how should the process flow? What would be the most efficient use of the space? Volunteers, families and staff people all work in supportive and complementary roles, with no evident hierarchy. The model, however, is not only observable at community events. It emerges in interview responses and in my experience and observed practices. Here I will provide a few examples.

Inclusion, Belonging & Community

During one of my first times volunteering with La Casita at a big event, La Casita organized and facilitated the Mexican Consulate's of Indianapolis visit to Catholic Charities. In true La Casita style, much more was available: free covid-19 vaccines, dental screenings, t-shirts, and as always, something to eat and drink. Despite it being October, it was still quite hot outside. Since it was one of my first times volunteering, I wasn't sure what to expect. I helped set up tents for the outdoor area and handed out t-shirts with my faltering Spanish. The team was busy, as Mexican citizens had planned for several weeks to attend and get documents from the government of their home country. When a few white houseless folks showed up, I wasn't sure what to do. In my head, I was running through some things I was going to say "So sorry, this is for immigrants!" or "We only have capacity for Spanish-speakers". Before I was able to say anything, Karina walked up. "Hola my love! How are you? Would you like some lunch?" I was just as

surprised as these visitors. While I was still gathering my bearings from the surprise, Karina looked at me and said “Would you go grab them a couple of drinks and sandwiches to go with them?” Of course I did just that, and appreciated the example of La Casita Style.

While this example is certainly not unique, it points to the intentionality of the circle model. Everyone is welcomed as they are, and provision of service is not based on any criteria. The circle is extended inward and outward, however, Karina and indeed other staff members find “audience” and “inward/outward” to be inaccurate representations of the position of La Casita. Karina told me:

“We are not foreign, we belong to the community. We are part of it. I am the audience because I am the one sharing information. So there is not that, that’s the other... There is no separation between us and the community that allows us and gives us the privilege to accompany them. We are going through the same struggle that the community that we are serving.”

Part of the intentionality of La Casita is trying to eliminate the formal barrier between “client” and “provider”. Her message here reflects why La Casita says “we are a circle”. There isn’t a hierarchy of “resourced provider” and “underserved receiver”, but rather we are all in a bigger community, supporting each other.

Who is the circle? To my understanding, several terms can be used, but “circle” and “community” are often used interchangeably. From interview data, the broader geographic (Louisville Metro area) community or “circle” of Louisville is composed of several overlapping circles, with each person belonging to several and bringing their own experience that is valued holistically. There’s every resident in Louisville, people who are immigrants, people who are from Latin America, government officials, citizens and non-

immigrants from a variety of backgrounds. While difference is recognized and celebrated, including the intersection of several identities, it is understood that everyone is included if they want to be. La Casita was certainly founded and exists to support those from Latin America, however, nobody is turned away from participation in the circle. People seeking services, volunteers, donors, and staff members are from all over the globe. Members may participate in the circle in ways that work for them, often in multiple roles. It is common for volunteers to become staff people, or for accompaniments to volunteer. One need not seek services to be part of the circle. One can donate, volunteer, or generally engage with the mission of La Casita, as I have been delighted to do.

Who is the community of La Casita? Based on all of my interviews, the community is everyone, with some limitations, of course. Some even likened community and family, or *la familia*.

“I think the community was and still is, everyone that is around us because I do believe that we cannot attempt to...educate and empower our, Latinx community alone. I think we also have to do that with the community at large.”

“Community at large” is usually said to mean residents in the Louisville metro area.

There is no gender, sexuality, racial or ethnic definition of the community of La Casita, as illustrated by Yasmin:

“Everybody. Everybody is welcome. I mean, we are a Latinx nonprofit organization, but it’s for everybody. I mean, we have people from other countries that aren’t Latino, so. But everybody is welcome and I am so happy to know that.”

The community is everyone who is involved with La Casita's mission in one way or another. From older white women who donate and volunteer to a board member, to neighbors on Ouerbacker Court (the pristine neighborhood just one block west of the center, where neighbors often donate, volunteer and offer their space), the community of La Casita is extensive.

One example of the reach of La Casita's circle is evident in results from the 2022 Give for Good fundraiser. Give for Good is a 24-hour online fundraiser for nonprofits in Louisville. This year, as in years prior, La Casita had fun—complete with costumes, pet pictures and prizes like tamales. La Casita, despite being small and grassroots, was fourth in the city for the number of unique donations—totaling 430 in only 24 hours, beating well-established nonprofits like Metro-United Way. The reach of La Casita is wide.

Community can also be seen as family, an idea expressed by several staff people.

“I think they're interchangeable. I think since our community is so family oriented in terms of things like multi-generational households and things like that where family is very important in Latin America.”

Here, Mario's response is twofold. It first shows the connection between community and family but also draws out the specific Latinx community and their values of family.

Michaela also expressed the following as it relates to the workplace:

“The family of La Casita. So, which is very interesting—I don't think other organizations, I don't think it's a common thing to have in other organizations that coworkers or the team itself is referred to as la familia. And you—like this...model and structure in which we perform which it is the circle, um, it is inviting to la familia of La Casita”

Angel, on the other hand, recognized that in “mainstream” workplaces, the analogy to family is used problematically. They had this to say regarding the family of La Casita

“It’s a very beautiful thing and it’s wonderful to have, I think it’s definitely a different aspect than when we use it within mainstream, which is a word we also use, family aspects of just like, “oh, we can burden each other because we’re a family”, no, we uplift each other because we’re a family.”

At La Casita, “community”, “circle” and “family” are used in dynamic ways, referring to examples in specific contexts. While every resident of Louisville may not be “family” they are part of the broader community, which happens to include family.

However, depending on who you ask, the community La Casita is intended to *serve* may bring varied responses. Of course, there is the broader Louisville community, which includes every resident. So, who is the “target audience” for the services La Casita provides? If you ask Karina, she rejects the notion of “target audience”, arguing instead that there is no productive use for the “mainstream” separation of “providers” and “clients”. Nonetheless, there is certainly an aspect of hospitality and inclusion for Latinx people, which is a notion Karina does not reject. Although La Casita’s services are open to everyone, the space encourages proud expression and claiming of diverse Latinx identities. Michaelahad this to say about the community La Casita accompanies:

“So, I feel like standard systems are based on these majority needs and that’s many times not representative of someone who doesn’t speak English, who doesn’t read and write, who don’t have a laptop, only will be able to navigate the internet on the phone, so many of the websites that are designed are not phone-friendly.”

In her opinion, La Casita's commitment to accompanying families means recognizing those who have been most marginalized by "standard systems". She accurately points to part of the intentionality of the circle model: bringing in voices of those who have been left out and increasing visibility of particularly oppressed populations. At La Casita, I often hear "mainstream". As is evident in the responses to interview questions, "mainstream" is imagined in opposition to what La Casita is. When I discuss the accompaniment model in chapter 4, I will further define how La Casita uses the term "mainstream". Here, from the responses of participants, whatever the mainstream is, it does not work for all people, especially those who don't speak English, or who may not read and write.

La Casita regularly engages with organizations who are thought of to be part of the mainstream, including the Louisville Metro Government and other charitable nonprofits. Part of the mission of La Casita, in building community, requires working with "mainstream" organizations. While La Casita does provide an alternative to "mainstream" organizations, the mainstream is also part of the circle. From Metro Council to the Louisville Metro Police Department, La Casita operates in two spaces—welcoming the mainstream and providing its alternative. What I have witnessed as an ethnographer, though, is that their statement that everyone is welcomed and treated the same is true. When someone walks into the center, they are asked how they are and if they'd like something to eat. So, while La Casita challenges the "mainstream" to be more inclusive, people who represent the mainstream are not rejected.

The challenge to the mainstream is not a challenge to individuals, but a challenge to the systems of government and social service provision that overlook certain

populations and operate in ways that are oriented toward the conventional market economy and its explicit and tacit hierarchies. In a capitalist business model, professional hierarchies and organizational charts are normative. La Casita actively resists the imposed structure of hierarchy: organizationally boundaries are required, but the La Casita team challenges mainstream expectations of organizational dynamics to encourage an equitable distribution of power and resources. The team aims to avoid reproducing color or gendered hierarchies that reflect the broader structure of society. One of the subtler examples of this is the “About Us/Nosotrxs” section of the website. The staff members are listed in alphabetical order instead of by job description. Other organizations, I have noticed, have a tendency to list the “leadership team” above other employees. Of course, this alone is not necessarily consequential for how an organization operates, but it does highlight intentionality and attention to detail.

La Casita Center is a nonprofit organization, but it is also so much more than that. The executive director explains La Casita as a movement. There was a necessity for applying for 5013c, *“And then we thought, ok, we cannot provide the service but if we are a 5013c, we can ask for grants and, and cover...”* Karina later stated:

“Correct, because La Casita was born from the Latina Women's Movement. La Casita exists because of the Latina Women's Movement. We didn't say, “oh, I want to do a nonprofit because it's so much fun” it was because, you know, there was and there is not any other space that is Latinx led, feminist led and that really looks at the needs of our community.”

As Karina described, La Casita is an outgrowth of community advocacy. La Casita Center is a site for building community and for families to make claims and assert their rights. However, as many of my interlocutors go on to describe, “advocacy” or

“activism” isn’t necessarily what they would call their work. The work of La Casita, first and foremost, is accompaniment. *Acompañar*, the Spanish verb, is deeper and more meaningful than its English counterpart, *accompany*. It was described to me in several ways, however, the most basic way to describe the accompaniment style of La Casita is “we are with you”, in whatever capacity that means.

“Somos un círculo” is La Casita’s motto, appears on the website, on social media, and in annual reports. This reinforces the absence of an organizational hierarchy and that each person supports and complements the work of others. In my field notes, I have written that, if I didn’t already know the organizational structure, it would have been difficult for me to recognize who was the “leader”. The term “boss” is rarely used, and when it is, it is always used lovingly, i.e., the business development coordinator is often referred to as “la jefa”, in a way meant to honor her expertise and skill in event planning and management. Karina doesn’t call herself a leader and in fact, told me she didn’t want to “lead” anyone. However, the staff does follow her example. This is evident in her explanation of the *acuerdos*. She notes she didn’t want them to be imposed rules, but mutually understood and acknowledged agreements that everyone is responsible for upholding. In my understanding, the circle model is reflective of Freire’s (1968) critique of popular leaders who often become insulated from the community they are supposed to be a part of. As a student of Liberation Theology in her youth, it isn’t surprising Karina draws on this model of activism.

CHAPTER IV: ACCOMPANIMENT, ADVOCACY, AND POLITICS

“HOLA! Would you like something to eat?” I was briefly taken aback. Here I was, a nervous graduate student at a powerful nonprofit and the (unbeknownst to me) Executive Director was offering me lunch and a coffee. It was late August and the heat in Louisville was overpowering. I was in the kitchen organizing grocery bags when a woman walked in with a bowl of burning sage and a smile so big I could see it from behind the mask. “Hola!” said the voice! “It is so nice to meet you, I’m so happy you’re here” was accompanied by a big, genuine hug. Not a side hug, but a strong embrace. Naturally, I returned her kindness, but I had no idea who this was. When she proceeded to offer me lunch and a coffee I realized she was the executive director, who, at this point, I’d only exchanged one email with. This is one of many examples of what it is like to be at La Casita Center.

Throughout this thesis, I have used the term “accompaniment” several times because it is central to the mission and philosophy of La Casita Center. At different points, I have also given a few examples of what “accompaniment” means and often framed it in opposition to something more generic, or “mainstream”. In this chapter, I aim to clearly explain how La Casita uses the term “accompaniment” and how staff people practice it. In my experience, a significant component of accompaniment is a powerful feeling of safety and acceptance. Prior to working with La Casita, “accompaniment” wasn’t really a word I used, in any of its forms. When I heard it being used so often at La Casita, I wasn’t sure what it was supposed to mean. After a year of

participant observation, I'm still not sure I'd use it in my personal daily language, but I do better understand what it means in the context of La Casita.

The dictionary definition of accompany (verb) is: go somewhere with (someone) as a companion or escort. Although accurate, this definition does not capture the way La Casita conceives of what it means to accompany someone. While it can certainly be the physical act of going somewhere with someone, it is far more than that, and is purposely expansive and takes on different meanings across contexts. What does it mean to “be with” someone? In this chapter, I will try to define and untangle what “accompaniment” means and how La Casita uses it and share examples of how it is practiced. To me, its use is analogous with the contingent ways anthropologists deploy “culture”. My language cannot possibly describe accompaniment completely accurately, as there are certainly things, a gringo and non-Spanish speaker I miss. As De la Cadena (2015) argues, there are vast gulfs, or gaps, between the concepts and terms we use among different communities. Accompaniment, at La Casita, can mean anything from providing water, to helping schedule a dentist appointment, assistance enrolling a child in school, or lobbying a legislator.

While accompaniment is expansive enough to accommodate the myriad ways La Casita can “be with” a person or family, a few examples stood out as the most frequent ways La Casita accompanies families. As my friends at La Casita explained, accompaniment has the following aspects: meaningful access, empowerment, advocacy, and solidarity. In this section, I will attempt to shed light on what each of these concepts means to La Casita staff and in the practices of the organization at La Casita.

Accompaniment, as it has been expressed to me, is all inclusive with multiple situational meanings. Michaela provided examples of what accompaniment can be, stating:

“And it can be pretty much anything, right? Like, if I have a question and I truly don’t know, where can I take my son for getting a vaccine? Or for getting a dental appointment?”

Meaningful Access

What is “meaningful access”? Eva, who often leads inclusivity workshops for other organizations, always centers her presentations around *meaningful access*. “Access”, in the context of human and social services can broadly be explained as access to information and resources, or access to goods and services necessary to survive. Is healthcare accessible? Is housing accessible? Who is most commonly accessing material resources? What is the difference between access and *meaningful access*? It is one thing for resources to be generally “available”, however, what are the barriers preventing some people from utilizing these resources or even getting to these resources? Even still, are resources culturally and linguistically relevant? More generally, if resources are available, are they provided in ways that make sense for people to use? The staff at La Casita, through their own experience and through listening to members of the Latinx and immigrant community, address questions of access and *meaningful access*.

The most common barrier for Latinx immigrants discussed by the La Casita staff is language accessibility. While healthcare services and housing may be *available*, if they are provided in a language someone does not speak and translators are either not available or not used, there isn’t meaningful access. For example, the VOCA community liaison speaks to advocating for victims of crime and working with the LMPD, “I

definitely notice how—I guess sad and upsetting it is that LMPD, for example, they have the language line and they don't use it.” Earlier in her interview, Mary gave this example,

“I had an accompaniment who, before she came to me, she was talking to a detective and the translator, she said, and I quote, she said, “the detective said like a paragraph or more and the translator told me like a sentence...”

In this example, despite victims of crime being entitled to benefits, regardless of citizenship or other legal status, the lack of meaningful language access prevents those not fluent in English from accessing compensation. So while there may be an *accessible* process for compensating crime victims, without adequate translation, including unwillingness on the part of police, meaningful access is absent. I have been told on several occasions that officers will often rely on children or nearby bilingual people to do the work of translation. In some cases, the nearest person who can translate may actually be a perpetrator, as in some cases of domestic violence.

Lack of linguistically relevant resources extends into nearly every aspect of life. Newly arrived immigrants who may not speak English must not only learn how to navigate new bureaucratic systems for accessing resources, but also must do so in a language they do not speak. Mildred, one of the community liaisons, explained how assisting with translation occurs in a couple different ways. Employees, themselves, can help translate, but they can also use their English skills to call other organizations and ask about available translation services. Lucille explained that prior to working formally with La Casita, she would help translate documents like light bills (Louisville Gas & Electric, or LG&E) for other Spanish-speakers. Now that she has the institutional backing of La

Casita, she can represent Spanish-speakers by pressing for the adequate use of translation services. *“So it is our duty, I believe, to say, ‘hey, the organization needs to be providing interpreters’”* In this way, accompaniment can mean either helping translate directly, or pushing for other institutions to improve existing translation services. As Lucille explained, a lot of this work is calling and waiting on hold, being continuously redirected to someone who can adequately address questions of translation. As recently as June 2022, La Casita was one of the organizations involved with the passage of the Louisville Metro Government’s passage of the Language Access Ordinance which states that written and verbal translation should be available for everyone in Louisville who does not speak English (Kobin 2022).

Accompaniment, on the level of translation, also includes a less quantifiable level of relief and cultural relevance. Sarahca, who welcomes callers to the center, had this to say,

“Just hearing a Hispanic nice voice. Just somebody nice that doesn’t hang up the phone when they say hello in Spanish, or try to ask for an interpreter. It’s just that welcoming.”

Angel also, personally spoke to the importance of hearing affirmations in their “native language”. Even someone who is fluently bilingual feels more comfortable and at ease when language is inclusive. La Casita staff, both those who work directly with accompaniments or on the operational side, recognize that institutions like the Louisville Metro Police Department, LG&E or even healthcare, are part of the mainstream, which often does not include Spanish-speakers.

“Um, but I do think La Casita’s type—and the community that it focuses its attention on is a community that is most likely gonna be overlooked by more standard

systems. Or more standard procedures” Here, Michaela was discussing what meaningful access means in opposition to what “standard systems” provide. Careful not to place blame, Michaela pointed out that “standard systems” in the United States are designed to focus on the “majority”. Without directly stating it, her implication is that people who do not speak English are outside the scope of standard systems. Meaningful access, to Eva, is filling the gaps left by standard systems to ensure services are presented in ways people can understand. It is also critical to remember that not all immigrants from Latin America speak Spanish, or read and write. In creating programs, La Casita is also intentional about meaningful access for non-Spanish speakers. Michaela discussed the importance of acknowledging a wide, heterogeneous community, and stated,

“I do think that it’s specialized on Latinx and immigrant community that faces um, more, uh, faces challenges like um, language, uh, injustice like, um, lack of accessibility because of different literacy levels. That is—it is a diverse community and it has members of indigenous communities...”

Meaningful access means creating programming that is understandable to people who may not read or write and to people who may not speak English nor Spanish. Meaningful access, put in the simplest way possible, is meeting people where they are, and making them feel comfortable and valued in the process.

Empowerment

Part of accompaniment is also empowerment: La Casita is not a charity and doesn’t want charity. Empowerment for La Casita, as I understand it, is centered around autonomy and the recognition that each person is an expert in their own life and experience. Empowerment is apparent in the acuerdos, which faithfully and confidentially honor the stories of others, judging neither oneself nor others, and listening

to what companions have to say. La Casita recognizes agency and that the goal of empowerment is to provide what each person *asks for*. Empowerment, in this way prioritizes choice and staff people do not assume they have the “right” answers for families. Casey had this to say about the empowerment aspect of accompaniment:

“that's why we use accompany that only you know what is best for you for your family and that's why we accompany you in your in your story and your journey we will accompany you until you think it is inappropriate.”

Contrary to prescribing a strict set of guidance, empowerment recognizes that the same tools or courses of action are not right for everyone, and they honor the decisions each person makes for themselves. Each choice is respected. For example, if someone is with an abusive partner, staff at La Casita do not judge them if they choose to stay. My friends have told me there is no guilt or shame, just a welcoming space whenever the individual feels it is appropriate to seek out accompaniment.

The concept of empowerment, at La Casita, helps staff people remember that they are not here to impose their ideas on other people and that everyone’s choice is valid. For example, Michaelahad this to say about accompaniment as it relates to empowering people and families, *“We don’t think we can rescue um, and we don’t victimize. Um, but we are in solidarity with the situations that are happening.”* Again, this part of accompaniment points to honoring each person’s circumstances and choices. People are not helpless and in need of charity: people are capable and accompaniment has the goal of supporting people in ways they choose, if they choose to be supported at all. Additionally, as Michaelapoints out, La Casita also does not conceive of itself as being

saviors or rescuers. Often, as many employees point to, people who seek services often face less than ideal outcomes. Robhad this to say:

“I mean, you know, in a lot of ways there’s nothing you really can do. I mean, um, once, once I’m not able to help someone, the best I can do is refer them to someone that may be able to help them in some particular situation.”

The staff clearly recognize they neither can nor should be rescuers but strive to be with or accompany families through what can be incredibly difficult situations. La Casita, in contrast to many mainstream organizations, creates a culturally familiar and linguistically accessible space to express autonomy and access community and resources. The goal of empowerment is to equip families with the resources and information they need to make the best choices for their circumstances. The empowerment aspect of accompaniment allows La Casita employees to be more flexible in the ways they work with families.

Accompaniment V Client

“Client is cold. Client comes from academia, it comes from social work, it comes from, again, systems that were not made with the communities that we serve in mind.”

Here, Angel is describing why La Casita uses accompaniment as a noun, to represent people seeking services. While it has been explained to me in several unique ways, Angel’s explanation gets to the point of La Casita being opposed to both “mainstream” language and ways of operating. So what is “mainstream” and what are “standard” systems? Karina and Angel put it quite clearly, Angel stating, *“Yeah, so ‘mainstream’ is white, capitalistic, cis-heteronormative society, that is the outside world that we live in.”*

Karina had a similar answer, and said:

“Mainstream to me is anything that is created by white, by, by the white society. You know, the law of the land that has been created by white heterosexual males... So, for me, mainstream is the ones that have the power to make decisions and to say how things are.”

Discussing “standard systems”, Michaelaput it a different way:

“incentives have always been put into designing systems that will approach the majority... I feel like standard systems are based on these majority needs and that’s many times not representative of someone who doesn’t speak English, who doesn’t read and write...”

Accompaniment challenges the idea of a “client” based model that was created, according to La Casita staff, by and for white men. Accompaniment, as a word used to describe the work La Casita does, comes largely from Liberation Theology, which connects individual struggles with the broader forces of white supremacy and colonization. Accompaniment, used in the context of social work, differs from “client” because inherent in accompaniment is also the acknowledgement of systemic injustice and the need for accompaniment to challenge that (Wilkinson and D’Angelo 2019). La Casita employs several social workers (by training) and social work is certainly part of what La Casita does. However, the National Association of Social Workers must contend with the problematic legacy pervasive throughout the profession. According to the National Association of Social Workers, the discipline’s legacy includes segregated settlement houses, eugenics, and Indigenous “boarding schools” (NASW Website). Accompaniment, alternatively, departs from this more “mainstream” descriptor of “client” and instead chooses “accompaniment” to more accurately reflect the nature of the work employees of the organization do. Even in the intentionality of language, La

Casita challenges the mainstream and doesn't "ask for a seat at the table", but instead, creates its own table.

Solidarity & Advocacy: Accompaniment as Politics

Accompaniment, as I understand it, and indeed as Liberation Theology (Gutierrez 1988) mandates, is expressly political. There are political systems La Casita employees must navigate to accompany families. Even more, La Casita as a community center, encourages families (especially ones who may not have many resources), to assert their rights. Even cultural celebrations (of dance or holidays) can be thought of as political. Asserting one's identity in an atmosphere of xenophobia is a political statement. Cultural celebrations are especially important in the context of a space organized around a Latinx identity. While it may not be partisan electoral politics, La Casita engages in politics nonetheless, and on many levels.

"Solidarity is not, they are not words. They are actions. So solidarity for me is um, being in a march, being in a protest, you know, being within the community." Almost every staff member said solidarity is action. This is in line with the acuerdos to act in solidarity towards the goal of social justice.

"Politics is who gets what, when, where, and how." When I spoke with longtime community activist, Shameka Parrish-Wright, this is what she told me. While I explain what accompaniment is, I am also interested in how accompaniment includes politics. If, as Shameka stated, politics is "who gets what, when, where, and how", then engaging in social service provision is politics. As I tried to explain in chapter 2, racialized, politicized bodies, languages, cultures, and landscapes have been and are subject to

structural and direct violence. This violence has been the result of politics through policy. Here, I posit that it would follow that any action taken to liberate, serve, or accompany people who have been the subjects of violence must be inherently political. "Politics" is a delicate matter. For nonprofits, politics can be even more delicate because of the intimate and nuanced relationship with the funders. The mainstream legacy of social work and nonprofit organizations oriented toward social service provision may, even unintentionally, depoliticize human suffering, focusing on a generic "poor" or "needy" body. Nonprofits, however social justice oriented, must still contend with the larger political landscape in order to access donors and mechanisms of power. There are also internal politics to consider. As Markowitz and Tice (2002) point out, nonprofits, especially in the space of social justice activism, have to navigate layers of politics, especially as it relates to grantors and philanthropic organizations.

La Casita is intentional in connecting the struggles of the communities they accompany to oppressive global forces, like colonialism. Accompaniment cannot be separated from politics. Who gets what, when, where, and how can be extended to families seeking services from La Casita, between coworkers, and among the plethora of other direct service NGOs. The economic and social structures that determine our ways of existing in society must be grappled with at every level. How does La Casita advocate for communities impacted by colonialism? How are politics expressed among the array of nonprofits in Louisville? How does La Casita reproduce or challenge what they consider "colonized" hierarchies? My aim here is to get at how accompaniment, with its love and hospitality, is also directly political.

Conversely, in several interviews, when I asked about experiences in advocacy, I was met with surprise. Some of my friends seemed to not necessarily consider their work “politics”. So is accompaniment political or is it not? Even as Phillips (2022) stated, “to call them activists misses the point...” (Phillips 2022). Is it a political act to accompany people? People who have been oppressed? To access basic human rights for oneself and one’s family? While some staff members may not call or understand their work as politically motivated or as “activism”, I argue that accompaniment cannot be divorced from the broader political structures we exist under.

At La Casita, solidarity means aligning with oppressed populations and supporting work towards equity. La Casita’s staff, as Latinx people and as immigrants, face oppression and see their work as connected to all other movements for social justice. In the summer of 2020, La Casita was one of the first nonprofit organizations to state Black Lives Matter. In 2017, La Casita hosted the very first Latinx Pride event, highlighting Latinx people who are also queer. Karina stated:

“[I] cannot say that I am liberated if my LGBTQ siblings are not liberated. If my Black siblings are not liberated. If my Indigenous sisters are not liberated. If people with disabilities are not liberated”

Similar to the circle model where nobody is excluded, solidarity in accompaniment doesn’t mean colorblindness or “we’re all one human race”, but it recognizes, honors, and holds space for every identity and experience. The Latinx identity, as I have argued, is not monolithic, and sometimes La Casita staff experience tension when ideals may not match, however. The grounding in the acuerdos, though, allows staff people to faithfully

and confidentially honors the stories of others, they understand each person has their own experience with systemic injustice.

As I have argued, injustice, and with it, social suffering result from structural forces. According to Wolf (1999), social structures (colonialism or capitalism, for example) are expressions of power relations, made real through physical force and systems of communication like language. Capitalism, at the outset, relied on divorcing people and groups from means of subsistence to accumulate wealth (like the expropriation of land in Central America). Additionally, Robinson (1983) tells us capitalism co-developed alongside ideas of “racial” distinctions. In other words, the dispossession of land that occurred throughout history as relations of power or “politics” has resulted in racialized populations bearing the brunt of human suffering. The pattern in the Western Hemisphere is that darker skinned people and those living in Mexico and Central America, have been dispossessed of their means of survival. Additionally, due to capitalism’s destructive use of the planet, these regions are also bearing the brunt of the impact from climate change. All this is to say that human suffering is not a naturalized state of being, as capitalist ideologies suggest. Human suffering is the result of oppression, which has occurred through policy. Thus, activism that builds community and advocates for systemic change is also *political*.

La Casita Center, as a nonprofit, works with members of communities who may have faced systemic challenges, including those associated with being an immigrant. The staff members of La Casita can often see parts of their own experience reflected in the experiences of those who visit La Casita. The work La Casita does, which includes asserting the rights of those who may have endured systemic barriers, is political and it is

more than just charity for “needy” people. While part of accompaniment is certainly providing material resources like food and clothes, another part of accompaniment is political work on behalf of an oppressed community, by members of that same community. They connect their work to broader systems of injustice and the exclusions and harms these have visited upon Latinx immigrants. Legally, of course, La Casita is *non-partisan*. However, there is a difference between endorsing a candidate for office and advocating for specific policies. Casey, a mental health counselor, gives the following example:

“When I’m working on La Casita and I’m doing research for families with children with disabilities, I’m asking them questions like ‘what barriers do you have currently?’ and ‘what would you like to see?’ I’m working with other organizations such as FaceIt and Kentucky Youth Advocates and I’m working with organizations so that we can propose changes to bills.”

This is a direct example of how the work is political. La Casita regularly partners with other organizations to work on policy so Latinx immigrants can have better access to resources. One side of the accompaniment coin is accompanying a single family through counseling, while the other side is advocating for their needs on a level of policy.

Influencing policy is one of the ways La Casita, as a nonprofit organization works politically. Another way political activism can be realized is by helping to build a civically engaged community. Some scholars also argue that for immigrants or otherwise non-citizens, immigrant focused and led nonprofit organizations can be “important sites for immigrant civic engagement (Bloemraad, Gleeson, and de Graauw 2018). Part of La Casita’s work is accompanying families as they navigate social systems in the United States, and since one of their goals is empowerment, it logically follows that

accompaniments become more engaged in community, often returning to volunteer. So, while scholars have long argued nonprofits can become removed from activist goals due to the structure of the industry, this critique often leaves out immigrant infrastructures. For several years, La Casita was left out of larger discourses and surrounding local social justice activism, which also meant more limited funding. Only recently have they been able to hire more staff and operate with a bigger budget. Additionally, as Gast et al (2021) found, nonprofits can be spaces for immigrants to make claims and work toward having more substantive citizenship. By hosting know your rights workshops and providing a space to exist in community, La Casita is empowering Latinx immigrants to exercise their rights and make claims. Additionally, the centering of the Latinx identity gives people from Latin America the space to express linguistic and cultural similarities. People can become civically engaged by taking part in a community that uplifts a broad identity.

Navigating Challenges

As La Casita continues to grow and increase capacity, what does this mean for their interactions in the nonprofit playing field? What does this mean for employees? How is La Casita managing its steady growth and upholding its philosophy of accompaniment? When asked about frustrations, many of my friends reported a heavy workload and the lack of broad institutional support (from other nonprofits or local governing bodies). La Casita's commitment to wrap-around services implies a consistent, heavy workload for the team. My friends point out the limited local resources for Spanish-speaking people and pace of referrals from other organizations intensifies their workload.

Since La Casita practices accompaniment, other organizations that work with immigrants often refer Latinx immigrants to La Casita. If a family calls La Casita and asks for a service they may not provide, La Casita does not turn the family away. Sometimes La Casita staff people work creatively to help families with housing. Other times, as I have highlighted above, staff people simply share moral support while families seek services elsewhere. Because of the dynamic nature of La Casita other immigrant serving organizations will direct families to La Casita, without knowing whether or not La Casita is equipped to help in that situation. Angel had this to say:

“Many times we’ve seen people who get referrals from other organizations who are just like, ‘this is the first time I feel seen. This is the first time I actually—someone is actually listening to me’.”

Earlier in their interview, Angel explained more directly that they feel as though other organizations view La Casita as a kind of “catch-all” for anyone who speaks Spanish, regardless of their circumstances. While La Casita does welcome everyone, receiving visitors whom they may not have the capacity to assist is frustrating. Angel also spoke to a certain misunderstanding people and organizations may hold regarding what La Casita does. Certainly, from my perspective as an ethnographer, as I have stated, there is a feeling and a level of “magic”. In the space of La Casita, observing the work, it can be easy to forget that answering calls, listening to traumas, filling bags with food, and coordinating volunteers are all labor intensive tasks. This is to say that since La Casita does do a great deal for families, sometimes not everyone realizes that La Casita is not equipped to accompany everyone in every circumstance. Angel elaborated their point about misunderstanding of La Casita, stating:

“...Especially now that we are so busy, that has been the biggest struggle of like, making sure that everyone who we see is able to have that same amount of care, but also to convince funders and other nonprofits and other grantors to show this is why it’s needed.”

Part of the work of La Casita, from the lens of a communications strategist, is ensuring interested parties understand what La Casita does. Yes, it may be heartening to watch, but it can also be expensive and laborious. Angel thinks if other nonprofits understood what accompaniment meant, they could both recognize La Casita for what it is, and perhaps update their own practices to reflect a model more oriented toward accompaniment.

Further, other social service providers may not even be equipped to assist families who speak Spanish at all. One of the mental health counselors reflected on her frustration:

“The organizations that I’m talking about include Seven Counties. Mental health services—it’s a big non-profit organization but they don’t have enough mental health providers that are speaking Spanish.”

Again, language accessibility is an issue, and one that increases the workload for La Casita. What are staff people to do when some people are systemically locked out of services but staff people are already managing high volumes of work? In their interviews, team members did not express anger or hostility towards other organizations, people find taking on additional work frustrating, especially when more “mainstream” providers don’t necessarily fully understand what La Casita does and has the capacity for.

The nature and volume of work is heavy, which several of my friends expressed. And “heavy” can mean both volume and content. Employees perform a large amount of labor, but the work can also include listening to harrowing tales of trauma, or fielding

panicked phone calls. One of my friends, who is often the first point of contact for families put it like this: *“sometimes the mental health part of it. It’s a lot. When somebody calls in crisis it’s—it’s a lot. And it’s hard to, you know, separate your feelings.”* La Casita often accompanies families in crisis, and this can be stressful to staff members. Listening to some stories can be especially difficult if staff people can see pieces of their own experience, related to being a brown or woman immigrant, reflected in the experiences of accompaniments.

Staff at La Casita collectively rendered over 50,000 services to families in 2021. On a staff of only 16 people working “40” hours per week, evenly divided, that is over 3,000 services for one staff member to administer in a year, which breaks down to 60 services per staff person, per week. Accompaniment, for all that it is, is not easy. Several staff members spoke to the large volume of work. I have provided a few quotes here.

“It’s never-ending work. It’s, you know, a lot of—because you are finishing with something and then there’s two or three more phone calls about the same.”
Community Liaison

“I will say sometimes the load of work. Being the delivery coordinator got frustrating a few times. Sometimes we couldn’t find volunteers, or we didn’t have things to send out.” Communications Specialist

“Ok, some frustration is sometimes when I have a lot of cases in the same day”
Community Liaison

In addition to volume of work, accompaniment (which is extended among staff members) can be a challenging way to work. Of it, Rose had this to say:

“Collaboration takes a lot of work. When you need to get input from lots of different people and you have a deadline you have to make, you have to do a ton—a lot of planning work to be able to set those—get their input.”

The collaboration central to the rejection of a hierarchy can be time consuming, as Rose stated. Since there isn't a "boss" with "direct reports", it can sometimes be challenging to collect input from the appropriate people. Again, accompaniment is full of grace and understanding, but it can also be time consuming. Additionally, the work can sometimes be in tension with the acuerdos, on the level of an individual. While I have seen and experienced encouraging words from others to be mindful of one's limits, sometimes that grace is not necessarily extended to oneself.

For example, during especially busy times, like the Fall (which includes three big fundraisers and requires the preparation of the Annual Report not to mention closing procedures for the holidays), staff people often work more hours than usual. In addition to the day-to-day work, there is also event planning and extra fundraising to do. In the week of the Circle of Solidarity, staff members conducted "normal" work alongside the increased demands related to planning a 500 guest dinner. Managing a heightened workload while also extending grace and accompaniment to oneself and to others is challenging to navigate. What I witnessed, as a participant observer, is that despite apparent stress, everyone continued to follow the principles laid out in the acuerdos. Perhaps Michaelasummed it up best, which seems to be a norm for those working in social justice: "*Advocacy work, I feel like, is frustrating because if it was not, then there would be no need for it*".

CHAPTER V: CONCLUSION

“...This lady comes with this little container with three sausages and four eggs. And she came to me and she said, ‘Well, you said it was a breakfast, I didn’t have anything at home because I have not been paid, but I didn’t wanna come to thank all your donors, without bringing something.’ She brought what she had at home. She didn’t have anything else. Nothing else. She gave us the blessing, the honor, of bringing not her leftovers, but what she had on hand. That is, for me, the circle of La Casita. We are not giving our leftover time. Our leftover beans, rice, it’s what we have at hand. It’s the sharing. The idea of sharing. Not the idea of giving down. Not handouts. It’s the idea of, I have one piece of bread, cut it in half, have half and then have half. And if you are hungrier than me, I give you a little bit more from my piece. That is the—right there is the movement. Right there is when I’m talking to you about that, we are siblings. We belong. And this lady, humble lady, with no—she didn’t know how to read and write, but she got it. She got it.”

While I could share several heartwarming stories about La Casita (and I did share a few), I think this story from Karina best sums up what La Casita is about. Inclusion, accompaniment, and solidarity are all evident in this anecdote. La Casita exists at the intersection of so many different phenomena: colonialism and resistance; oppression and joy; racism and cultural pride. La Casita is at once a workplace and a community center, extending accompaniment to staff, volunteers, and visitors. But what does it all mean and why does it matter? For social justice? For nonprofits? In the face of rising numbers of Latinx immigrants, growing need and political ruthlessness, what can we learn from La Casita? In my opinion, La Casita offers several possibilities.

Connecting the Strands

Historically, the United States was built on racism and imperialism. From chattel slavery to the Monroe Doctrine, this country has taken actions that support an ideology of greed

and white supremacy. In the case of Mexico and Central America, with the complicity of plutocratic governments there, the United States has used military and economic means that have rendered living conditions in those countries precarious. Because of this, many people leave Mexico and Central America in hopes of finding opportunities in the United States. However, because of an ideology of “white” supremacy that tends toward those of European descent, immigrants, especially those who are brown-skinned, have been excluded from the imagined community of the United States and often are denied access to material resources. This points to the phenomenon Besteman calls the *militarized global apartheid*. People from the southern hemisphere are often robbed of their resources by countries in the northern hemisphere, and then prevented from moving to or accessing resources in those same northern countries. The recent migrant flights from Texas to Martha’s Vineyard and subsequent reception by a nonprofit organization there highlight many of these elements.

The driver for these conditions is capitalism, or, more specifically, neoliberalism, with the justification of “development”. The point of this economic system is to increase *capital*, or profit. According to neoliberals, “economic development” is needed to bring *those* countries into the global economy, the implication being they need to be developed. This ideology justifies continued land expropriation, appalling working conditions, and widespread poverty. However, neoliberalism does not only apply to countries that are in the global south. Within the United States, because of the profit motive, citizens struggle to meet even their most basic needs.

One ideology in service to the profit motive was popularized by Ronald Reagan, which ultimately posited that the state shouldn’t be responsible to a “lazy” and “deceitful”

citizenry (See “welfare queen”). Essentially, Reaganomics (which, as policy is concerned, preceded him), reduced or eliminated programs that were intended to ameliorate poverty. The move to cut state-administered and/or funded social services has resulted in the outsourcing of these activities to either private contractors or nonprofits. In consequence, both citizens and noncitizens increasingly must rely on nonprofits to help make ends meet, and more generally, to survive.

Scholars critical of the “nonprofit industrial complex” argue that, in effect, nonprofits do little to challenge the system that necessitated them in the first place. Additionally, the notion of “social work” in the United States takes on connotations of charity and has a troubling history with racism. The transactional, rule-book bound framework of nonprofit social service provision curtails its contribution to creating a more just social order.

However, as other scholars have pointed out, there has not been enough attention paid to a certain type of nonprofit organization or NGO.

So then, if one is fleeing poverty or the impacts of climate change in their home country in Central America, what are they to do in the United States when they may lack citizenship or indeed authorization and may be brown? In the context of U.S. hostility to immigrants, people who are nonwhite and people who are not wealthy, what resources are available? For all the valid critique, nonprofits often do assist people in accessing basic human resources. But, as Bloemeraad et al (2018) point out, not all nonprofits are the same, and there has been a dearth of literature regarding immigrant-led organizations in the United States.

According to Gast et al (2021), immigrant led civic infrastructures can at once help people with accessing resources *and* be a space for asserting one’s rights and making

claims and building a community. La Casita Center, as an immigrant led nonprofit organization, does just that. Through intentionality, a set of shared agreements and *accompaniment*, La Casita Center departs from mainstream narratives of social service provision and fosters a space for building a community based on shared culture and ideals. The way La Casita functions both as a community center and a workplace can be seen as a model for implementing social change, especially as our newcomers experience heightened discrimination and exploitation. Of course, their model cannot be cloned and reproduced all over the globe, but the aspects of accompaniment, solidarity, and empowerment that La Casita strives to embody on a daily basis, contain powerful lessons for what it means to usher in a more just social order.

Contrary to the traditional frame of reference for social work, accompaniment comes out of Liberation Theology. Followers of Liberation Theology, which includes La Casita's Executive Director, understand that accompaniment is not just the administration of resources. Accompaniment also means that one must recognize that people are struggling and oppressed because global society is organized around concepts of capitalism and white supremacy. To *really* accompany people, one must also work to dismantle the social structures that manufacture suffering in the first place. From contributing to policy, to encouraging civic engagement, and celebrating a shared nonwhite culture, the accompaniment model La Casita follows is more than just giving people grocery bags or "case management".

Accompaniment is not only given to those seeking goods and services. As a workplace, La Casita is organized around the *acuerdos*, which guide employees on a daily basis. The shared agreements include knowing one's own limits, acting in solidarity towards the

goal of social justice, being non-judgmental, and speaking up for oneself. What the Executive Director told me is that the agreements were created by and for Indigenous women of Oaxaca in women's groups. Since La Casita is proudly both Latinx and feminist led, it makes sense that the agreements were generated by Oaxacan women, underscoring one way that social identity informs the organization's vision and practice. Not only are the agreements shared by the staff in the workplace, they are extended outward, as well, reflected in the agreement to welcome opportunities to expand the circle.

The "circle", like accompaniment and the agreements, departs from "mainstream" organizations. The circle welcomes everyone, no matter what their identities. While there may be many overlapping circles of family and friends, everyone in La Casita's proximity is welcomed to participate. *Somos un circulo* also has another meaning. The actual shape of a circle has no "top" or "bottom"; there can be no hierarchy in a circle. As a workplace, employees do not have bosses, but support people. For the sake of human resources, it can be challenging to be organized as a circle while still having to function under a broader system that only works in hierarchies. Yet, La Casita's employees endeavor to navigate these challenges by being intentional with their language and behavior, by always asking permission and listening to each other in authentic ways, as described by several of my friends.

The work of La Casita is not easy. Staff people often manage a high number of tasks and responsibilities and help families through traumatic situations. Other immigrant serving (but not immigrant led or founded) nonprofit organizations often do not adequately understand *how* La Casita works, and thus, inadvertently add to its workload. Despite the

challenges, however, the grounding of the acuerdos, of the principles of accompaniment, of the circle model, bolster employees when the challenges seem insurmountable. There is an inherent recognition of one's humanity and effort. During my thirteen months of fieldwork, while I saw stress, I did not ever see fear of losing one's job, or of punishment or retaliation.

La Casita is at once a space for activism, empowerment, celebration, and a week's worth of groceries. The principles of inclusion, belongingness, community, empowerment, and accompaniment and the ways they are enacted, provide an important lesson for academics, revolutionaries, and social workers alike.

What are the lessons?

While we can certainly appreciate La Casita and its methods and philosophy, why does it matter? The phrase I continue to go back to is "would you like something to eat?" It is at once such a simple question, but one that's importance cannot be overstated. After a year of being with La Casita, I make sure *not* to eat before I go because I know once I get to the center, I am going to have two plates of rice and beans and the most delicious cup of coffee I've ever had. But the question, as the opening anecdote to this chapter reflects, isn't about cafe de olla or frijoles. It is about recognizing one's humanity. All of us must eat. How am I to work with someone (in whatever capacity) if either of us are hungry? But it's not just strictly about interpersonal relationships, as I have tried to make clear. The possibilities offered by La Casita can help us remedy some of the most hostile consequences of structural oppression in the face of growing need.

Although I have never sought services from an immigrant-serving organization, I have been to a healthcare provider and a government office and even a church. In my experience with what my friends call the “mainstream”, not once have I been offered something to eat. I think that is why, when I was first asked, I was so surprised. The simple question is so disarming—if one is coming to La Casita with troubles, how much more at ease would one be by first sharing a meal with the people here to accompany them? Even as university affiliated researchers, what could projects look like if the first thing we did was sit down and eat together?

Of course, however, there is much more to accompaniment than simply sharing a meal. How can social workers in “mainstream” organizations learn from La Casita? Setting aside case-loads and pay rates, what if mainstream institutions framed their work, not as “helping” the “needy”, but as accompanying people? I believe that if more social service providers, and certainly those working on policy, embraced the removal of hierarchies and developed a shared set of agreements, we could better address human suffering.

There is a burgeoning body of literature in social work that considers these ideas (Wilkinson and D’Angelo 2019). Indeed, social work connects struggles to systemic injustices, but what if it went further? If people are viewed not as “clients” or “cases”, but as equal members of the same community circle, I think, something revolutionary could happen. Perhaps immigrants would be less likely to be treated as sub-humans if we all acknowledged the violent consequences of global forces.

As far as revolutionaries are concerned, I too, share the concerns about a big nonprofit industrial complex. Yet, nonprofits can be, like La Casita places for activism and change. Since La Casita’s philosophy is separate from the “mainstream” and because it is

immigrant-led, it demands our attention. If systems of oppression are to be dismantled, something must be built in their place, a concept La Casita's employees know well. Often, the Executive Director talks about dismantling, but at the same time, La Casita is building infrastructure for support that isn't based on exploitation or hierarchy. For example, prior to the work of La Casita, there wasn't a system to support immigrant women experiencing trafficking and domestic violence, but now there is. As I detailed in chapter 3, the reach of La Casita is wide and it enjoys much community support. La Casita isn't just harm reduction, or policy work or even celebration. As Karina said, it is a movement, and the 5013c nonprofit organization is but a piece of it.

Future Directions

As I have explained, one of my goals in undertaking this project has been to support the mission and vision of La Casita Center. I have also been clear that my "research participants" are also my close friends. I have had the privilege of becoming close with people I consider to uphold high standards of social justice, and have learned more about accompaniment, inclusion and solidarity. However, as is the case with much ethnographic research, this project, especially with the limited scope and timeframe of an M.A. thesis, has left me with many questions about La Casita related to the role of an activist researcher, the inclusion of social identities, and nonprofit governance.

One of the bigger methodological questions I am left with is: what is my role as a community engaged researcher? What tensions should a white male researcher investigate and present in a project that primarily centers around Latina women? As researchers, one of our goals is to not points of conflict and contradiction. I intentionally did not ask "too much" about these, so my analysis of internal tensions could be limited.

Additionally, as I have tried to emphasize, the Latinx identity includes multitudes and people hold different opinions on politics and identity. I had difficulty as someone attempting to be in solidarity, asking and writing about what I perceived to be inappropriate. Is it the role of a white scholar, trying to act in solidarity, to ask about intra-workplace and intra-identity tensions, conflicts, and frustrations? At the time of this writing, I do not think, as a community engaged researcher, I should place too much focus on critique, which is often the role of the researcher. Future research could include more critical reflection on tensions and interrogation of how research can simultaneously shed light on dynamics while supporting the valuable work of La Casita and its justice-affirming counterparts.

I am also still curious about geography and Jones' (2019) conception of the "new south". Is the limitation of resources for Latinx immigrants in Louisville because its location in "the south"? Additionally, what is it about Louisville that is drawing Latinx immigrants? While I was primarily interested in the workplace philosophy of La Casita, what I learned about Louisville activism and immigration has left me with additional questions about *why Louisville?* In future research, it would be productive to more closely investigate movement patterns and histories of immigration in the southeastern quadrant of the United States.

Finally, what are some of the gendered dynamics at play in service provision? How do men seeking services understand feminism and feel about working with an almost exclusively woman staffed organization? More specifically, what are the gender ratios for men and women in Louisville, and how does that shape the work La Casita does? La Casita identifies as a feminist organization but that does not mean they exclusively

accompany women. However, does this influence how they work with men or how services are administered? Additionally, the strong focus on women brings up questions of gender identity outside of the male/female binary. While La Casita attempts to be inclusive of all identities, how do they ensure everyone feels welcome and comfortable? Sadly, however, in view of current attitudes and politics, like the actions of Florida's governor, conditions for immigrants are unlikely to ease any time soon. Because of this, the work of La Casita and other similar organizations is that much more critical. It has been an honor and a privilege to work alongside an organization based on accompaniment and inclusion. As we move forward, I hope we all have the opportunity to share our own versions of accompaniment.

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APPENDIX A: INTERVIEW GUIDE

La Casita Story Interview Guide

1. Can we start with your telling me a bit about yourself?
 - a. How did you become involved with La Casita Center?/How long have you been involved with La Casita?
2. What is your job title/role? Describe a typical work week.
3. Can you please explain how the acuerdos influence your work on a day-to-day basis?/To you, what does “solidarity” look like?
 - b. Who is part of the community?
 - i. Is there a difference between family and community? Why or why not?
 - c. How has your experience with La Casita changed (or not changed) your idea of advocacy work?
 - d. How has being part of a feminist, Latina led organization been similar to or different from your other experiences with outreach or advocacy work?/How does your work with La Casita make you feel (only if you’re comfortable sharing)?
4. In your experience, what do you think is the importance of using “accompaniment” instead of “client”?
5. What frustrations have you experienced in your work?
6. Would you be willing to share one of your favorite memories or stories working with La Casita?
 - e. Helping a family, sharing a meal with a coworker, or sponsoring a particularly special event?
7. Is there anything I haven’t asked you that you think is important to know about the story of La Casita Center?
8. Who should I talk to next?

APPENDIX B: INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

Rose 7/8/22

Yasmin 5/23/22

Ingrid 6/22/22

Matt 7/25/22

Karina 8/1/22

Leslie 6/20/22

Michaela 7/28/22

Lucille 8/15/22

Annette 6/28/22

Rob 7/25/22

Dra 5/30/22

Angel 6/9/22

Oscar 5/24/22

Casey 6/9/22

Ella 8/3/22

Sarah 6/6/22

Melody 7/18/22

Mary 6/20/22

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