

**MAKING SENSE OF POST-SOVIET NGO ACTIVISM: COMMITTED ACTIVISTS,
TRANSNATIONAL INSTITUTION-BUILDING AND NEOLIBERAL REFORMS IN
UKRAINE**

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ABSTRACT

ARSENIY GUTNIK: MAKING SENSE OF POST-SOVIET NGO ACTIVISM: COMMITTED ACTIVISTS, TRANSNATIONAL INSTITUTION-BUILDING AND NEOLIBERAL REFORMS IN UKRAINE

(Under the direction of Howard Aldrich)

Following Ukraine's independence, Westerners and local reformers transformed the system of social services. More weight was put on individual efforts and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) to meet citizens' needs. Critiques of NGOs highlight their self-serving orientation, which hinders service provision and social change. However, using data from my pilot study of Ukrainian HIV/AIDS organizations, I show that: 1) Looking inside organizations reveals a contingent of highly committed activists. 2) Yet, even among activists with the best intentions, individualistic notions inherent in neoliberal reforms and Western civil society models influence their activities in complex ways that potentially sustain a less egalitarian system. NGO critiques thus do not fully address the underlying assumptions and broader context of the NGO project. I also suggest that scholars should devote more attention to investigating supposed NGO advantages of limited corruption and less bureaucracy. Finally, I briefly outline an extension of the findings to transnational activism.

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PREFACE

In the mid-1980's I lived with my parents in Kiev, Ukraine, in a Soviet dormitory-style communal apartment with bleak beige walls, a shared bathroom in the hallway and a kitchen for several families. One fond childhood memory was a very large, old, wooden chest, with a large metal lock, which stood outside the door of our flat and always captivated my imagination - what could be inside? Living in that communal apartment was a unique experience embedded in the realities of Soviet life and ideology about individualism, privacy, and corresponding social provisions.

In the late 1980's, I moved to Russia with my family and in 1993 immigrated to Upstate New York. On a return visit to Ukraine, in 2005, I visited my old apartment building and found it completely remodeled, with bulky, brown, wooden doors indicating newly separated apartments that replaced the old communal arrangement. The large wooden chest was conspicuously missing from the stairwell, leaving me with unresolved wonder about its contents. Much had changed. Privatization of the 1990's challenged communal Soviet values and redefined much of civic life. Through the newly open borders, emigrants and curious tourists left the country, while a stream of foreign visitors, experts, scholars and organizations flowed into the post-Soviet space (Chernova 2005, p. 14).

During the summer of 2006, I was exploring my options for an internship and came into contact with a U.S.-based nonprofit that had a large USAID-funded "civil society" development project in Ukraine. After speaking with the nonprofit representatives, I was referred to the Kiev office for further inquiries. Coincidentally, the office was located on same street where I used to live years ago. I was a bit apprehensive about contacting the personnel. Despite the fact that I was fluent in Russian (many Ukrainians are as well), I was not familiar with Russian or Ukrainian NGO (non-governmental organization) terminology. In fact, I did not know what to expect, since I had not spent

more than a couple weeks at a time on recent family visits and had never heard of “civil society” projects or foreign-funded, locally-operated, non-governmental organizations, while living in Ukraine and Russia. When I called the office, I was surprised to hear the woman on the other end of the line describe NGO activities in terms that I easily recognized from English. The Ukrainian website similarly contained Ukrainian transliterations of English words, like *advokasy* (advocacy) and *treningy* (trainings). The phenomenon was not unique to this organization. In fact, Hrycak (2006), who had conducted research on foreign-funded NGOs in Ukraine, during the late 1990’s and early 2000’s, concluded that American catch phrases, such as “coffee break,” “grass-roots,” and “fund-raising,” were prevalent in “foundation programs and foreign assistance seminar schedules in Ukraine. These American terms have migrated from foreign mission statements and grant announcements into the vocabulary of elite Ukrainian NGOs (p. 93).” So what were these NGOs? How did the modes of cultural transmission that Hrycak described work in practice? What did their existence mean in the local context?

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

In this paper, I attempt to shed some light on the significance of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in Ukraine, building on existing scholarship, as well as my own pilot research on Ukrainian HIV/AIDS organizations. This study brings into conversation institutional, organizational, political and development discourses, to show how people faced with the complex new logics of the post-Soviet transition attempted to make sense of their daily work in recently created, Western-funded, non-governmental organizations. Moreover, I suggest that HIV/AIDS NGO activists' current understanding of their work - as an internal critique to *personally* do more to improve local conditions - has potential implications for sustaining a decentralized, individualistic, social safety net in Ukraine (and plausibly in other NGO environments).

While I generally agree with other scholars' conclusion that foreign aid has had unintended, sometimes even detrimental effects, I argue that these critiques could benefit from a more direct investigation of the assumptions underlying development aid, a description of the broader social reforms, and counterfactual alternatives to Western claims about NGOs. Moreover, scholars studying these organizations have largely focused on the organizational level of analysis, identifying important external relations between NGOs and other stakeholders, but generally only in passing examining internal relations and the meaning of work. If we look at the individual level, however, we discover nuanced distinctions among workers, their motivation, as well as innovative, undocumented voluntary activities that extend beyond functional obligations. Importantly, stratifying NGOs internally indicates that across organizations exists a contingent of highly committed workers who personally experienced or continue to experience many of their clients' concerns and problems and thus genuinely strive to effect positive social change. Despite often admirable efforts among committed

workers, the ideological models and social constraints of the broader social reforms and Western assistance programs create an uncertain environment, which leads them to rely on their own efforts and to adopt individualistic, decentralized approaches to resolving local social problems.

I begin by focusing on Ukrainian socio-economic transformations that followed the collapse of the Soviet Union. In particular, I highlight the roles of Western governments and institutions, such as the Washington-based IMF and World Bank, elite private consultants, as well as local Ukrainian reformers. These actors embraced a neoliberal skepticism about the centralized power of the state, prevalent in liberal-market regimes, and a positive view of personal choice within market competition. I specify how this transformation affected the provision of social services and diminished the social safety net, instead putting more weight on individual efforts and the capacity of non-governmental organizations to meet citizens' many personal needs and defend their civil, political, and socio-economic rights.

I subsequently summarize some of the main problems permeating Western-funded NGOs, using the case of women's, particularly feminist, post-Soviet organizations, which have received the bulk of scholarly attention over the past 15 years. Critiques in the literature highlight that NGOs and their staff have remained largely disconnected from local constituencies, often engaging in self-serving activities, rather than social change, which hinders NGOs' reach and sustainability. However, using data from my own pilot study of Ukrainian HIV/AIDS NGOs, I show that: 1) looking inside organizations reveals differences among workers and indicates a contingent of highly committed, innovative, activists with genuine desire for social change, and yet 2) even among the most committed activists, with perhaps the best intentions, individualistic notions inherent in neoliberal reforms and Western civil society models are influencing their activities in complex, sometimes subtle, but significant ways, thus potentially sustaining a less egalitarian system, but not necessarily in the ways usually described in the literature.

I then propose that limited corruption and bureaucracy (efficiency), cited as reasons for funding NGOs, rather than providing assistance to democratizing states, may be less objective and

more ideologically-grounded than previously assumed. I indicate that we need further critical study of these important questions. In conclusion, I investigate a potential extension of the findings to transnational activism, arguing that we should take into considerations not only NGOs' advocacy, but also their service functions, which bring to focus a somewhat different set of relationships with constituencies and the state.

CHAPTER II

UKRAINIAN NEOLIBERAL REFORMS: WESTERN AND LOCAL ACTORS

Western Players

Following Soviet collapse, Western governments, such as the U.S., and international institutions, like the World Bank, International Monetary Fund (IMF), the European Union and others, were interested in Ukraine's relatively large population (about 50 million people) and strategic position between Russia and Europe, for national security and other reasons (Pishchikova 2007). Following Ukraine's independence in 1991, major Western players, poorly versed in local legal and other traditions, called for rapid and sweeping changes while sidelining gradual approaches, as they did in other former Soviet republics (Trofimenko 2003, p. 39, 147-148). The country thus embarked on a transition to democratic politics and a market economy (Bandera 2003, Trofimenko 2003).

Outside investment in Ukraine was considerable, but followed sponsors' specific agendas. For instance, between 1992 and 2003, Ukraine received almost 3 billion dollars of U.S. assistance, much of it through USAID, which accounted for one quarter of all U.S. aid to the twelve former Soviet nations. This money was used for economic restructuring, democratization and reforms in the health and social sectors, but not humanitarian aid and economic growth (Pishchikova 2007, p. 38).

The structure of policy planning initiatives also reflected strong Western bias. The foreword to the edited volume entitled Ukraine: Accelerating the Transition to Market, which contained the proceedings of a summer 1996 IMF/World Bank seminar, held in Washington, D.C., stated that by embracing Western-recommended reforms, Ukraine had achieved a degree of credibility in the eyes

of the international community.¹ A look at the affiliations of the 80 seminar participants (about 68 men and 12 women) revealed that 53 (66%) were either from the IMF or the World Bank.

Meanwhile, eight attendees (10%) were from Ukraine, but none of them made any presentations.

IMF/World Bank staff labeled some Ukrainian interests counterproductive. During one session, Koch-Weser (1997), a World Bank representative, stated that lobbying from public workers (whose positions were being eliminated), coal miners² (i.e. a large part of the energy sector), farming interests, and pressure from elements in the parliament, were slowing down reforms. The rhetoric often had real implications. In Russia, for instance, the IMF essentially blocked the passage of a popular budget of the Russian parliament, in August of 1993. The deficit established in the budget was greater than the IMF wanted and they threatened to pull a promised loan tranche. “In other words, the IMF and its closest U.S. associates saw the actions of the Russian parliament as an obstacle to their priorities and policies that had to be circumvented (Reddaway and Glinski 2001, p. 294).”

Local Reformers

Ukrainian reformers adopted major Western recommendations. After Soviet collapse, state institutions were touted as corrupt, overly bureaucratic and inefficient; moreover, the economy was unstable after independence and throughout the 1990s. Many local politicians and middle class professionals, leery of Soviet economic and social controls, considered the reform perspective as the necessary, legitimate, solution (Reddaway and Glinski 2001, Zhurzhenko 2001, p. 34). Some of the

¹ The seminar was a series of presentations by IMF/World Bank staff, followed by a “general discussion.” The focus was on IMF/WB policies and programs that would take effect in 1997 (Kavalsky and Odling Smee 1997, p. iii-iv).

² Five hundred thousand Ukrainian miners, who “earned their living in the official public sector (Mykhnenko 2003, p. 104),” working in one of the world’s most dangerous mining conditions, with an average life expectancy of 38 years, struck in 1989. This was followed by much contestation over the following decade, including 1996 protests involving over 600,000 miners, who demanded \$122 million in back wages, and

most prominent figures included President Kuchma (1994-2004), Victor Yushchenko, and Roman Shpek.³ Since taking office, President Kuchma pledged to undertake radical reforms to transition Ukraine to a market economy. For instance, in the late 1990's, the National Academy of Science, as well as government ministries, including Ministry of the Economy, sponsored a conference aimed at speeding up the market transition (Bandera 2003, p. 58).⁴

Social Safety Net Reforms

Social reforms that conformed to neoliberal logic began right after Ukrainian independence. Bandera (2003), for example, wrote that “quite significantly, the government [now] pursues the attainment of public objectives like social security and equity in the context of the market system rather than through the plan-command process (p. 70).” A 1994 World Bank study, “which turned almost into a bible for all those who favour a radical pension reform (Adam 1999, p. 133),” advocated reduction of state-run pensions. The World Bank was critical of monopolistic government management and investment of funds, and emphasized a fully funded, privately run management system, along with a personal or occupational component (Adam 1999, p. 133-134). In 1998, the Parliament passed insurance plans for pensions, unemployment, temporary loss of ability to work, childbirth, funeral-related obligations, and occupational disease (Yatsenko 2005).

another 140,000 miners picketing regional governments and blocking roads and railroad tracks (Mykhnenko 2003).

³ Victor Yushchenko: current President of Ukraine, former Prime Minister and National Bank Chairman. Roman Shpek: current Permanent Representative to the European Union, former chairman of the National Agency of Ukraine for Reconstruction and Development, Deputy Prime Minister for Economic Affairs, 1995-6, and Minister of Economy 1993-5 (Aslund and deMenil 2000, Wikipedia 2007).

⁴ Despite a large degree of agreement with Western counterparts, or acquiescence to their demands, some local reformers indicated their dependent position and desire for greater Western development of certain local institutions. For example, Shpek (2000, p. 46) highlighted that Ukraine relied substantially on IMF and World Bank loans, but should instead have access to EU and U.S. trade markets. He also stated that Western nations should provide educational opportunities to young Ukrainians abroad and also invest in the domestic Ukrainian educational system (particularly economics education), to prevent brain-drain of academics (p. 45-6).

Ukrainian reforms were similar to those in Russia, where massive efforts on the part of the Yeltsin administration to decrease the budget deficit, with continued pressure from the IMF, resulted in “the government’s [default] on domestic obligations, including those due to pensioners and to the work force in the public sector (Reddaway and Glinski 2001, p. 250).” Meanwhile, President Kuchma, “in response to [international monetary agency loan contract] pressures, in July 1998...ordered the halving of government contributions to the state-run Chernobyl Fund. Soon after, the government issued a press release stating the Ukraine’s budget deficit had dropped from 3.3 to 2.5 percent of [GDP] (Petryna 2002, p. 114).”⁵

People like World Bank representative Koch-Weser (1997), advocated targeted social protections to only help the “truly needy,” while reducing others’ benefits. Koch-Weser argued that while it may have been best for the government to allow “inflation to erode pension and other benefits across the board and to compress the benefit structure (Koch-Weser (1997, p. 7),” to undergo price liberalization during the first five years of reforms, the option of further benefit compression had been exhausted. It was not clear, however, from his comments about the new targeted benefits, who and under what conditions constituted the truly needy, which is one of the problems with this approach.

Neoliberalism: Decentralizing the State, Promoting the Market

Local reformers and their Western counterparts promoted another aspect of the neoliberal agenda, notably working to decrease the size and centralization of the state and increase market competition (Pishchikova 2007). This perspective reflected skepticism about the state, particularly prevalent in the U.S. (Edwards 2004, p. 7-8), although the EU also promoted a policy that reinforced free trade, the private sector and state retrenchment (Hurt 2006, p. 119). Scholars critical of state

⁵ On the other hand, Goralska (2000, p. 248) stated that the president had abolished the 12% Chernobyl tax in 1998.

retrenchment, however, have called for further investigation of the role state institutions should play in society. Kuzio (2003, following Przeworski), for example, wrote that neoliberal views

underestimate the role of state institutions in organizing both the public and private life of groups and individuals. If democracy is to be sustained, the state must guarantee territorial integrity and physical security, it must maintain the conditions necessary for an effective exercise of citizenship, it must mobilize public savings, coordinate resource allocation, and correct income distribution. And if state institutions are to be capable of performing these tasks, they must be reorganized, rather than simply reduced (p. 25).

Reforms, however, proceeded under assumptions that the state was inefficient, corrupt and overly bureaucratic and therefore should relinquish significant control, in favor of non-state institutions (Bandera 2003, p. 71, Reimann 2005, p. 38). Furthermore, according to this view, the state potentially hindered enterprise development and bred a kind of “culture of dependency;” although some scholars have contested these claims (Walsh et. al. 1997, p. 1, 6).⁶ In Ukraine, state reduction views impacted the government. Bandera (2003) noted that “compared with the preceding Soviet centralized command system, by now, the scope of the [Ukrainian] government has been reduced considerably so that it does not overwhelm the market mechanism (p. 70).”

Decentralizing Social Services, the Contracting Shift and the Role of NGOs

State and social reforms meant new institutional arrangements for dealing with service delivery as well as other social needs. Services provided through the state were now the responsibility of local authorities and therefore Ukraine was transferring state social assets to local municipalities (Shpek 2000, p. 43) and private service providers. In the West, such reforms occurred earlier. Walsh et. al. (1997, p. 5, following Flynn 1990), for example, described the logic of the 1980’s

⁶ Other negative properties assigned to the state, for example in the UK during the Thatcher reforms, also included managerial self-interest, inability to meet objectives, ineffective cost control, waste, and producers’ interests distorting service delivery (Walsh et. al. 1997).

transformation of the public sector in the UK. These reforms were based on several neoliberal arguments: First, market mechanisms should be applied universally. Second, competition should exist among service providers and should be sharpened by allowing consumers to decline state services. Third, individual choice should trump collective interest. Fourth, state provisions should be minimized. The arguments were based on the presumption of post-WWII failure of the Keynesian welfare state to deliver economic and social stability, and were particularly prevalent in Anglo-Saxon countries.

Despite a focus on the UK, Walsh et. al. (1997, p. 182), stated that the trend of service contracting, linked to changes in the public sector and adoption of market-based organizational approaches, was global in scope and in some cases resulted in regulatory and normative pressures to conform. Underscoring the relevance of neoliberal Western institutions, the authors argued that “[a]n example of [ideological] imposition in the international context includes the relationship between developing countries and the World Bank (Walsh et. al. 1997, p. 182).” Westerners, furthermore, advocated an important role for non-governmental organizations (NGOs), promoted within the context of citizen capacity for self-determination and democratization. Reimann (2005, p. 38) noted that neoliberal advocates saw NGOs as a better, market-based alternative to corrupt, failing states in developing and democratizing nations, which would bring about grassroots mobilization and civil society.⁷

Hanlon (2000, p. 136), moreover, argued that donors preferred to fund NGOs and technical assistance contractors because they did not need to negotiate detailed programs with NGOs, as they did with governments. Pishchikova (2007, p. 40, following Carothers and Ottaway 2000), meanwhile, proposed that the attractiveness of civil society assistance in the form of support for small

⁷ Richter (2002) defined civil society as “an overlapping network of autonomous voluntary associations – formal and informal, political and nonpolitical – that creates a space for public action between the individual and the state (p. 55).”

civic groups was its low cost, compared, for instance, to broad industry or banking restructuring, or engineering projects.

The role of Western sponsorship and NGO initiatives in post-Soviet Ukraine is readily apparent today. In December 2006, on World AIDS Day, President Yushchenko issued a statement⁸ relegating responsibility for curbing the Ukrainian HIV/AIDS crisis (one of the largest in Europe) to collaborative efforts of the government, international donors, NGOs and individuals. He did not specify how much of a role each of the named parties would or should play, but it was clear that the Ukrainian state was only partly responsible for crisis resolution.⁹ Moreover, he tied individualistic, decentralized solutions to “vital...reforms.”

Throughout the rest of the paper, I focus on NGOs’ prominent new role in Ukraine, drawing first on available scholarship and then on my own pilot case study of Ukrainian HIV/AIDS organizations. The NGO project has not been without its critics, who have cited numerous ways in which these organizations do not live up to promised social change. In the next section, I provide

⁸ “To appreciate the consequences of the epidemic, it is vital to institute medical, social and educational reforms, and to build cooperation between the government and the people, international organizations and NGOs, which should join their efforts to combat the epidemic.

The responsibility of all individuals for their behavior and [their] relatives becomes particularly important.

We must launch a massive educational campaign to forewarn teenagers of the dangers of trying drugs. The easiest and the cheapest way to minimize the risk of getting HIV is to adhere to the everlasting values of family fidelity and respect.

I urge each citizen, ministers, NGOs, business people, medical workers, educators and religious leaders to make a consistent and daily contribution to the cause of fighting the epidemic of HIV/AIDS in Ukraine. We must be tolerant, support the people affected by this evil and never create obstacles in their way.

I would like to give my support to the HIV-positive people: the creation of the National Network of People Living with HIV is an example of courage and hope. Your firm determination to fight the disease and your active cooperation with state institutions and NGOs become a powerful factor in combating the epidemic and help save each individual living with HIV.”

Source: http://ww8.president.gov.ua/en/news/data/11_12351.html Accessed Nov. 2007

⁹ In May 2006, the BBC reported that \$30 million came from the government, over \$90 million from the Global Fund for HIV/AIDS and tuberculosis (a Geneva-based NGO), and a \$60 million loan from the World Bank (which was suspended temporarily due to allegations of government fund mismanagement).

Source: http://www.bbc.co.uk/ukrainian/news/story/2006/05/060503_aids_ukraine_it.shtml Accessed Nov. 2007.

UNAIDS, however, stated that in 2007, the government *raised* its domestic funding to \$20 million, while a new Global Fund grant was approved for up to US\$ 151 million and in “late 2006, the World Bank lifted its suspension of its loan for HIV and tuberculosis, providing an additional US\$ 24 million for national AIDS activities.”

Source: <http://www.unaids.org/en/Regions/Countries/Countries/ukraine.asp> Accessed Nov. 2007.

more detailed information about these criticisms. In the subsequent section, I point out that a more nuanced look at variation within NGOs reveals that the prevalent critiques may not apply evenly across NGOs and their staff. Neoliberal reforms, nonetheless, may still be having an impact, but one sparsely discussed in the literature.

CHAPTER III

POST-SOVIET NGOs AND THEIR CRITICS

Here I summarize recent NGO literature and critiques, drawing primarily on examples from post-Soviet women's organizations, because they have received the bulk of scholarly attention over the past 15 years and because the critiques have overlapped considerably across post-Soviet states. Some analogous ideological, organizational and institutional issues have also been documented across a variety of organizations, for example among environmental NGOs in Russia (Powell 2002).

NGOs act as intermediaries between the global (Western) civil society development community and local audiences to promote "social, economic, and political change in developing countries (Brown and Kalegaonkar 2002, p. 233)." Salamon and Anheier (1997) argued that a common definition is necessary to talk about organizations that have a variety of labels in each nation, across the world and among authors. For instance, "nongovernmental," "nonprofit" "philanthropic," and "civil society organizations" just to name a few. I adopt three of Salamon and Anheier's (1997) criteria essentially verbatim and a modified fourth criterion, which apply to all organizations henceforth, regardless of the label, unless specified otherwise. First, the group must be organized and have some structural permanence, such as regular meetings, rules and officers; it should not be purely ad hoc and informal. Second, the organization should be private, or not under the majority control of government officials or government apparatus. Third, organizations should not be profit-distributing, meaning that all profits go into sustaining the organizations' activities and the necessary personnel. Fourth, the organizations should be self-governing, having internal procedures that may be substantially influenced, but are not entirely controlled by outside entities (Salamon and Anheier 1997, p. 33-34). Post-Soviet NGOs thus fit Aldrich and Ruef's (2006)

description of a newly emergent population: a collection of distinct new organizational forms “that are alike in some key respects (p. 178).”

Western donors sponsoring women’s organizations sought independent groups to develop civil society (Hemment 2004, p. 219). The funding, consequently, was not distributed equally. Richter (2002) argued that “feminist organizations receive a disproportionate share of Western assistance among women’s organizations, and they are more dependent than other women’s organizations on such assistance for their survival (p. 54).”¹⁰ He added that Russian feminists were also more likely to look to the West for sponsorship. Hrycak (2006) argued that “[m]any local observers claim that these former ‘nationalists’ were not ‘real feminists,’ but rather that they were attracted by the lure of foreign grants and foreign salaries. While most local organizations have no funding, elite NGOs...attract considerable grants and pay their staff sizeable incomes (88).” In Bulgaria, in 2000, for example, international organizations paid their highly skilled workers \$900 per month, when the average monthly salary was \$200 (Ghodsee 2004).

Kotovskaya (2004) pointed out that the most active participants of the feminist movement were rather elite “representatives of the scientific and artistic intelligentsia; for many of them participation in the movement became an important aspect of self-realization...they all came from educated [‘developed’] families, personally engaged in scientific or artistic activities and were on average 43-55 years old (p. 170, 171).” Chernova (2005, p. 14-15)¹¹ cited among Russian academics (and other researchers) interested in gender studies, a sort of “academic hunger” stemming from a paucity of academic publications based on Russian research, and a lack of professional contacts with Western colleagues, as primary reasons for seeking such connections in the early-mid 1990’s. Most had acquired training on gender issues abroad from Western foundations and non-profits (Hrycak

¹⁰ While little data exists on the numbers and kinds of women’s organizations in former Soviet states, some scholarly estimates from the late 1990’s indicate that approximately two to four thousand women’s organizations were active in Russia (Richter 2002, p. 54). Feminist organizations made up a minority of these groups.

¹¹ Chernova’s (2005) work was published in a Russian-language volume financed by the Ford Foundation.

2006, p. 84). Ghodsee (2004), moreover, quoted an UNDP National Development Report which concluded that “the NGO sector [in Bulgaria] is growing not only because of the availability of a *solvent and low-risk market* represented by donors, but also because of the growing unemployment among intellectuals (p. 739, emphasis original).”

Feminist activists had difficulty finding local connections, due to ideological rifts.¹² They were critical of local women and “traditional” women’s organizations that adhered to maternalistic principles, were reluctant to politicize relations between men and women and thus potentially threaten the sanctity of the household. Local women, on the other hand, said that they did not perceive discrimination, or felt that Soviet-era “equality” had not benefited them and were reluctant to join groups advocating for women’s rights. NGO feminists saw these arguments as denying women a “choice” (Hrycak 2006, p. 74-5, 85, Richter 2002, p. 61). Gisela Bock’s (1989) comment aptly summarizes the problems that funded NGOs encountered in promoting their Western feminist visions: “[t]he difference between women’s and men’s history does not imply that the history of women is identical for all women. ... Awareness of the otherness, the difference, the inequality between female and male history has [to be] complemented by an awareness and historical study of the otherness, the *differences and inequalities among women themselves* (Bock 1989, p. 8).” Ghodsee (2004) argued that we could consider Western approaches to foster women’s activism a kind of “feminism-by-design.” This logic paralleled the flood of Western consultants and foundations promoting the “capitalism-by-design” paradigm that subverted the contextual idiosyncrasies of the post-Soviet space. NGOs were seen as disconnected from and unaccountable to local audiences.

¹² I employ the term “Western feminism” synonymously with a kind of “NGO feminism,” which generally encompassed three aspects in the literature: (importantly) the use of the word “feminism” (along with other English words, like gender), a focus on women’s individual rights and capacity, and a focus on women’s substandard social position with respect to men.

NGO Accountability

Accountability, according to Ebrahim (2005, p. 59-60), involves reciprocal commitments in a relationship between two or more actors, although the more powerful actor can make claims on the actions of the dependent actor. Scholars have argued that funded NGOs did not have strong incentives to remain accountable to local constituencies, because donors served as the main source of support. Donors' quantitative accountability standards, moreover, worked against accountability to local constituencies, because they did not evaluate the qualitative impacts of the projects. Ebrahim (2005, p. 64, 71) noted that accountability standards established by donors often demand short-term, technical, results, such as the number of people served, pamphlets distributed, and so on, which could distort important qualities, such as the actual impacts of these actions. Stirrat (2000) argued that accountability standards are highly rationalistic and quantitative because "to count is to know – and to control (p. 36)," in modern neoliberal parlance. Scholars, like Henderson (2003), have also confirmed that donors working in Russia must meet stringent demands and time-consuming accountability standards of home offices, while attempting to have real impact on the ground, although "evaluations often focus on whether the grantee met the requirements of the project, not on the impact of the work funded (p. 88)."

Professionalism and Top-Down NGO Management

Scholars have also discussed how NGOs distribute tasks among staff and carry out projects, in particular highlighting the role of top-down management and professionalism. Western influence was apparent here as well. U.S. donors encouraged bureaucratic professionalism, or structured rule-following, among Ukrainian women's NGOs (Hrycak 2006, p. 72). Similarly, in the 1990's donors began to professionalize and institute management practices among Russian environmental organizations (and elsewhere) (Powell 2002, p. 143). Donor funding guidelines assigned directors

and upper management in post-Soviet NGOs with the task of implementing donor-specified projects, rather than making their own reflections and assessments (Hemment 2004, p. 238, Henderson 2003). Elsewhere, Mebrahtu (2003, p. 353) noted that the British organization ActionAid, active in Ethiopia, which sought to empower local field staff and people, generally failed to do so; instead, local staff had to adhere to donor guidelines. The more flexible, bottom-up approach, which allowed for local input and members' ideas, was generally rare (Lewis 2007, p. 32, 198).

Thus far, NGOs appear largely ineffective at accomplishing their objectives. Scholars have generally theorized NGO effectiveness as engaging local stakeholders and building up grassroots support for the promised civil society. Instead, what they found fell short of these expectations. Internally, top-down management restricted organizational capacity for local input and reflection, instead emphasizing donor goals. Externally, ideological differences, professional background, lack of accountability, and a restrictive funding structure, led to the formation of boundaries between NGOs and local stakeholders.

CHAPTER IV

UNPACKING NGOS: VOLUNTEERING AND COMMITTED STAFF. A PARTIAL REJOINDER TO THE CRITICS

In a partial rejoinder to scholars' critiques, I attempt to show that some NGO activists creatively pushed against their structural constraints to produce some local impact. Staff members' meaning of and motivation for work varied within organizations. Significantly, NGOs employed a cadre of highly committed activists who closely identified with their constituencies and actively worked to make their work locally relevant, even engaging in unpaid voluntary labor. These activists' efforts, furthermore, engaged people across top-down internal hierarchies and thus potentially expanded a view of what NGOs "do." This more nuanced perspective suggests that a contingent of activists, and possibly NGOs, defies some of the prevalent criticisms. As I show later, however, even among the most committed workers notions of individualism and support for a decentralized safety net arose subtly as the outcome of a complex meaning-making process embedded in broader neoliberal social reforms and relationships with Western donors. In order to illustrate these dynamics, I draw on the literature and employ my interviews with a small sample of HIV/AIDS NGO staff members. But first, I describe my research, Ukrainian NGO demographics and the HIV/AIDS epidemic.

HIV/AIDS NGOs: Sample and Methods

I carried out a pilot study with a small sample of staff members from Western-funded Ukrainian NGOs working on HIV/AIDS issues, who attended an extended training session and "experience exchange" in the United States, in 2007, sponsored by one of their donors. I contacted

the U.S. organization that was hosting the Ukrainian staff and was allowed to observe workshops during the last several days of their stay. I participated in two workshops during which I took notes on the presentations and handed out a closed-ended survey to the staff. I subsequently conducted semi-structured, in-depth, interviews with three staff members, in their hotel. Two additional interviews occurred over the phone, after the visitors had returned to Ukraine. The survey mostly overlapped thematically with the interviews, but provided a brief summary of some responses, as well as numerical, demographic, data that I did not solicit in the interviews (see Appendix).

I surveyed and interviewed the following people: Evgenia, 21, administrator of educational programs in a church-based NGO; Efim, late 20's-early 30's, program coordinator; Isaac, 29, NGO director/head; and Grigory, 32, social worker. I only surveyed Irina, 27, head of a planning council of NGOs, though we had a brief conversation after one of the workshops. I only interviewed Vera, 30's – early 40's, program coordinator. I utilized some information from statements made during workshops by Vera, Irina, as well as Arkady (approximately late 20s, assistant to an NGO coordinating council chairperson). Additional information about the staff is in the Appendix. All names have been changed.

I also used information from follow-up emails with some of the delegation members I met and from personal statements of several regional NGO representatives listed on the website of the All-Ukrainian Network of People Living with HIV/AIDS (PLWH).¹³ Additionally, I analyzed a transcript of a round-table discussion between Ukrainian scholars and assorted local NGO staff, about HIV/AIDS representations in the mass media, which took place in February 2005, at the Ukrainian Media Reform Center.¹⁴

¹³ Source: http://www.network.org.ua/eng/regions_e.html Accessed April 11, 2007.

NGO Demographics in Ukraine

In 2005, there were about 28,000 registered CSOs in Ukraine, but only about 4-5 thousand were active¹⁵ (Palyvoda and Kikot 2006). In a recent study of active civil society organizations (CSOs; N=583) across Ukraine, Palyvoda and Kikot (2006) found that “[fourty-five percent of all] respondents...represented new organizations that registered after 1999; 30% of organizations were registered from 1996 to 1999; 13% of CSOs started their activities between 1992 and 1995, and 4% were registered before 1991 (Palyvoda and Kikot 2006, p. 22).” Thus, most organizations were quite new. Five percent of all organizations had 71-100 members, 7 % had 51-70 members, 16% had 1-10 members, 20% had 31-50 members, 25% had over 100 members and 27% had 11-30 members. In 2005, 55% of all CSOs indicated that they received funding from international grants. On average, these grants constituted 38% of the budget for organizations that received them.¹⁶ Participation in HIV/AIDS organizations was found to be equal among men and women.

HIV/AIDS in Ukraine

Ukraine is considered to have one of the worst HIV/AIDS epidemics in Europe. “As of the end of 2005...377,600 [adult] people were estimated to be...living with HIV-infection in Ukraine, or 1.4% adult prevalence (UNAIDS 2006).” HIV/AIDS prevalence varies along gender lines and over time, largely because injecting drug users (IDUs, the most risk-prone group) are generally young men, although transmission patterns have shifted recently. USAID (2003) (using 2002 data from the

¹⁴ Source: <http://mediareform.com.ua/old/article.php?articleID=383> Accessed in April 2007.

¹⁵ The CSO must have been be legally registered. The CSO must have had at least 2 years of experience implementing activities. The CSO must have implemented at least two programs or projects. The CSO must have successfully completed several projects and been known in the region.

Ukrainian AIDS Center) indicated that in 1997, 87% of registered HIV cases in Ukraine were among IDUs, 11% were from heterosexual transmission, 2% from perinatal and 3% unknown sources. By 2001, the mode of transmission shifted to 57% among IDUs, 27% via heterosexual transmission, 13% perinatal and 3% unknown. In 2001, 62% of HIV cases in Ukraine were among men and 38% among women, while AIDS cases were 76% among men and 24% among women. In 2005, the estimated HIV infection averages among adults (15-49), were 205,660 for males (54.1%), 171,940 for females (45.2%), and 2,850 for children 14 and under (0.75%). The three highest-risk groups included injecting drug users, with an estimated range of 11 - 66% HIV prevalence, followed by their partners with 8-31% HIV prevalence, and female sex workers with 8-31% prevalence (UNAIDS 2006).

Discrimination, Rights Abuses, and Public Portrayals

The grim numbers do not clearly show the human side of the epidemic. Infected people also experience discrimination, rights abuses and stigmatization. The Media Reform Center discussion indicated that media portrayals were overwhelmingly negative. They focused on medical statistics rather than preventative information, available services and positive experiences of people who take anti-retroviral drugs and continue to lead fulfilling lives. The Center discussants, as well as my seminar notes and interviews indicated that for years, particularly in the 1990's, but into the 2000s, HIV/AIDS was billed as a death sentence. One NGO worker mentioned that it was also necessary to dispel myths about HIV/AIDS transmission.

Instances when HIV+ individuals were identified in media reports (sometimes by one's clothes, a golden tooth, a ring, etc.), as one lawyer explained, bore consequences such as dismissal from work or school, or refusal to give children vaccine shots. In other cases, some pregnant HIV+ women were segregated in separate facilities, or denied some medical services. Employers

¹⁶ In my survey, however, 4 out of 5 respondents stated that 75-100% of the NGO budget comes from foreign donors, while one respondent indicated 51-75%, which shows that either HIV/AIDS organizations tend to

sometimes illegally demanded one's medical history. The lawyer described one of his cases when a woman, who was HIV+, along with her infant, was prepared to change jobs rather than disclose her positive status. Disclosure in medical or other facilities sometimes occurred, particularly in small communities. Drug users, moreover, faced potential prosecution, while men who have sex with men faced discrimination. Vera and Grigory also indicated that HIV/AIDS self-help groups had to maintain strict confidentiality and secrecy, because there was danger from groups like skinheads.

HIV/AIDS NGOs: Project-Based Services

Infected people thus need psychological, socio-medical services and protection, and numerous organizations have moved into combat with the HIV/AIDS epidemic and related social issues. Grigory, Issac, Efim and Vera indicated that in addition to informational and educational outreach efforts, their NGOs engaged in direct service provision. Services covered a wide range, from psychological assistance, to childcare, home aide services, restoring and filling out legal documents and paperwork, legal defense, supplying food packages, providing crucial anti-retroviral therapy (ART), and personal interventions. Evgenia's organization, which is a church-based foundation that assists other organizations in securing grants, also led preventative informational workshops (primarily for church members).

HIV/AIDS NGO Staff: Unaccountable, Self-Serving Elites and Intellectuals?

Providing services is a demanding and often difficult task. Despite the strain, I suggest in this section that a number of shared characteristics and other circumstances lead to significant commitment among some HIV/AIDS NGO staff to their clients. Staff members are, on average, similar to their clients in age and gender, and, more importantly, share, or have shared, many of the

receive more foreign funding, or that this was specific to my sample (see Appendix, Q. 23).

same experiences. Additionally, they have generally joined and remained in their organizations for more “altruistic” reasons than academic curiosity, self-interest, or economic gain, as critics have argued. Staff members in lower positions, in fact, are not highly paid and may endure considerable hardships.

The nature of HIV/AIDS NGO services, moreover, necessitates direct contact between NGO staff and clients, sometimes including difficult interventions. This contact opens up a space for moral accountability, which is generally associated with the “little people – those in subordinate positions. It concerns the informal means by which leaders are forced to be responsive to their followers or patrons to their clients (Hilhorst 2003, p. 127).” Hilhorst (2003, p. 138) cited an example of moral accountability in action when Philippine locals, instead of accessing a nearby office or sending mail requests, traveled to the central office of an NGO (an “arduous trip”) to demand the release of additional funds for an ongoing project in which they were implicated. “The social pressure they thus put on [the office worker] to respond to their needs was so strong that [she] felt she had no choice but to give the money, even though this was against the coordination agreement she had with [her partner organization]. As she said: ‘What could I do, they were just standing in the office with their shopping list.’ (Hilhorst 2003, p. 138).”

Just like the Philippine locals’ presence had a direct effect on the NGO worker, I found numerous situations that likely exhibited a high degree of moral sway over HIV/AIDS staff. Efim and Vera, for instance, mentioned cases when they personally made home visits to convince drug using parents and religious families to allow necessary medical attention for their HIV+ infants and children. Other services, like counseling sessions, distribution of food and medicine also provided opportunities for direct engagement with clients. Isaac, meanwhile, stated the following, as one of the reasons of why he liked his work: “I interacted with clients, I provided them with tangible help, I saw how [my assistance] helped people.” Similarly, Grigory described a poignant case, when he and his colleagues saved a client’s life:

Grigory: Well...just recently...a young man basically was...could not even walk. [The man's mother contacted the NGO.] Basically, in very bad condition. His only relatives were his mother, a pensioner, and...his children. The children were school age. Three children. And he was alone...basically...He was the sole provider...And he was bed-ridden...He had meningitis, tuberculosis-induced meningitis; he would not recognize his mother, or anyone else. And we put him back up on his feet. I mean, due to...Well, let's say, my own efforts. I personally traveled...to see him...Called the ambulance. Well, the ambulance...The mother had called the ambulance before, but no one wanted to take him in...We...I...persisted until they took him into the hospital. Quickly found medication there, quickly examined him, did everything [necessary]. And did all this just in time, because later the doctor told us 'guys, thank you so much!' The doctor herself! Even the doctor...not just his mother, who...The mother later came...almost in a stupor [and said]: 'Boys, girls,¹⁷ I will be grateful...all my life...that you put my son back up on his feet.' And then we assigned him [anti-retroviral] therapy...Everything is in order, everything is good [now].

Thus, although Hilhorst (2003) and I focused on situations that occurred in very different cultural contexts and the clients had different objectives, I argue that the moral imperative to remain responsive to clients in light of such direct interactions, involving some staff members, is hard to deny.

Client and Staff Similarities

Furthermore, it is important to highlight similarities between some staff members and their clients, which tie in with moral accountability and also contribute to worker commitment. On average, HIV/AIDS clients and staff were close in age and gender. Both were generally in their 20s and 30s (Appendix, Q. 9 and 10)¹⁸ and (in my sample) women made up a slight majority (Appendix, Q. 8 and 11). More importantly, NGO workers had personally experienced, or continued to experience, many of the hardships that their clients faced, and were thus motivated to help them.

¹⁷ Terms of endearment sometimes used by older people when talking to those who are younger.

¹⁸ In Russia, which also has very high HIV infection rates, 1.1%¹⁸ (by the end of 2005), injecting drug users studied in Moscow hospitals (N=298) and on the street (N=126), in the late 1990's, were, respectively, on average 20, 21 years old, 70, 77% male and studying or working (56%, 58%) (Reilley et. al. 2004, p. 224-225).

Hemment (2007) observed a similar trend in her research on a Tver' women's crisis center in mid-late 1990's Russia. Before founding the center, Oktiabrina, the director, had to relocate with her family closer to her in-laws for support, after she and her husband had worked unpaid for six months at an institute in Siberia. They had sold their two-room apartment and deposited the money in a local bank before moving to Tver'. The bank suddenly collapsed a few weeks later and they lost all their savings. Oktiabrina struggled to find work and endured substantial economic hardship, living with her husband and daughter in a "shabby one-room apartment that they rented on the edge of town (Hemment 2007, p. 105)." Her experiences guided her ambitions to engage in practical projects to help local women, like herself (Hemment 2007, p. 104-105).

Personal experiences and struggle were also motivating factors among HIV/AIDS NGO staff. Vera, who is openly HIV+, clearly underscored these issues when explaining why she and other colleagues had organized a self-help group in the late 1990's (which they later turned into an NGO):

Vera: We..I worked in an organization, responding to confidential calls about HIV/AIDS prevention and...illnesses transmitted through sexual contact and drug use. And when...people called, I had a lot of difficulty...consulting these people. I mean, when they indicated that they were HIV+, because I am HIV+ myself. And we decided to create a self-help group. We placed advertisements...People began calling our confidential line...This was 1999. And from this self-help group...Basically, when we had helped ourselves...emotionally...we felt that it was necessary to help other people like ourselves. We started organizing trips to the hospital facility of the regional AIDS center, where the bed-ridden patients were located; I mean, very sick people. We helped them. I mean, there was a certain...sort of this [informational] campaign, if you remember, there were posters [that stated]: 'AIDS – Plague of the 20th Century' and 'You will die alone on a hospital pillow' and so on and so forth. In essence, an HIV+ diagnosis was equal to a death sentence. And a quickly approaching one. In reality, people did not see a possibility to lead a normal life with a positive status – to live, raise children, work, study. So, in reality, the most important thing...initially, the idea is...to revitalize in people the belief that they can live fully.

Vera's account highlights issues echoed in other interviews. Several NGOs began as self-help groups, but then expanded their activity. Isaac's brother, who is HIV+, had founded a self-help group, along with three HIV+ women, which later became the NGO that Isaac now directs. Grigory's

NGO grew out of a self-help group as well (though he joined later, when it was already registered), as did Efim's NGO, which split off from Isaac's organization several years ago.

Much like Vera, Grigory, who, along with his wife, is HIV+, stated that he found it very important to share with clients his story, his initial experience as a client, and to explain that an HIV+ status was not a death sentence. Both Grigory and Vera, moreover, had been hospitalized for tuberculosis, often associated with HIV infection, and consequently had first-hand experience with this illnesses and its treatment. Other staff members also drew on their own experiences when assisting clients. Efim, for example, mentioned that counselors in his organization, who help injecting drug users take replacement medication in order to quit, were themselves former drug users. Moving beyond my interviews, a look at the regional representatives of the Ukrainian People Living with HIV/AIDS (PLWHA) Network, revealed that many workers were HIV+. ¹⁹ Often, engagement with the Network was deeply personal. As one regional branch director stated in his online profile: "...I live to work and work to live..."

I also found evidence contrary to criticisms that NGO staff was elites working for personal gain and fulfillment of intellectual curiosity, despite the fact that the majority of respondents had higher education (although with some exceptions) (See Appendix, Q. 4,5,6). Interviewees mentioned several reasons for initially engaging in HIV/AIDS work, but primary among these were the following: they joined as voluntary participants or clients, out of personal necessity for psychological and medical support (Vera, Grigory), on a voluntary basis because friends and/or family who were in self-help groups asked for help (Efim and Isaac helped with computer applications), on a voluntary basis because of affinity for people in the group (Irina), as a volunteer because of personal (religious) convictions and interests (Evgenia, a medical student, who works in a church-based NGO). They

¹⁹ I have not been able to locate actual numbers of HIV+ staff members across the HIV/AIDS NGO sector, but at least three interviewees indicated that their organizations started as self-help groups for and by HIV+ individuals. In addition, a look at 31 online profiles of regional People Living With HIV/AIDS (PLWHA) Network representatives across Ukraine, revealed that out of 22 individuals who provided statements, approximately 8 mentioned issues like "...when I found out about my HIV+ status..." "...help for people like

stayed because they found the work interesting and fulfilling and when funding became available, it became possible to devote more time to the NGO.

Pay for NGO work, however, was not lavish for many staff members. For example, Isaac said that he made about \$300 per month as the director of his organization.²⁰ He and Efim also commented on the strain of the work, citing a “temporary burnout effect” that they encountered several times per year, when they felt like abandoning everything and changing jobs. Vera also described considerable strain and low pay among lower positioned workers:²¹

Vera: Well, we had a girl who left [the NGO]; her mother was [HIV] positive, so she began working with us. Now she attends [college] and works in a store...It was just very difficult for her. I mean, the work is difficult – she worked in non-medical care – this means that clients die, it is psychologically very difficult work. And I know that in other countries this is very highly paid work. But in our country it’s...well, the maximum pay for a social worker is 750 hryvnas, that’s 150 dollars [per month], and that’s in [the capital] Kiev.

Hemment (2007, p. 120), similarly, mentioned in her account of the Tver’ crisis center that social worker salaries were very low. Grigory (a social worker) also stated that “you can’t make big money as a social worker.” This account consequently contrasts the view that foreign-funded organizations were well-compensated, in particular, because of pay discrepancies *within* NGOs.

Furthermore, I did not interpret social status, satisfaction from obtaining grants, creative work and self-realization, which came up in most interviews, necessarily as liabilities for NGO effectiveness (i.e. striving for local impact). These may be self-serving objectives in some cases. But my research suggests that such factors, in fact, made work more satisfying and meaningful for NGO

me...,” “...I live to work and work to live...,” etc. which I understood as indicative of their HIV+ status. At least three other PLWHA representatives mentioned that their friends or relatives were HIV+.

²⁰ In early 2007, the approximate average monthly salaries were as follows (by age): 18-28 years: \$120; 29-49 years: \$200; 60+ years: \$100. (N = 2118, across 132 locations)
Source: <http://www.vecherniy.kharkov.ua/news/9624/>

²¹ Vera described her own workday as follows: “at nine in the morning I leave [home] and at nine at night I return. And I have no strength left for my family (laughs), nor for sex, nor for my [teen daughter]. I just bark [at them]: ‘why are the dishes not washed,’ or ‘why is something else not done?’ Well. Of course... (pause) It’s like that.”

employees, and thus buttressed their commitment to alleviating what they perceived as significant problems. Additionally, one of the best indicators of commitment was staff members' engagement in unpaid voluntary work.

Improvisation and Voluntary Work

Improvisation and voluntary work - phenomena that have received sparse attention in the literature (Hilhorst 2003) - came out prominently in my research. Similarly to Oktiabrina's outreach efforts, based out of the Tver' women's crisis center (Hemment 2007), Grigory, Isaac and Efim indicated that they, and other staff members, engaged in or contributed to unpaid voluntary activities. These activities involved upper management and lower staff members, but were initiated at various levels, for example by social workers, thereby to some extent circumventing hierarchical top-down management structures.

The voluntary activities were part of how ideologically-driven activists attempted to make their work more meaningful, thus seeking out and creating opportunities for action. Hilhorst (2003, p. 9-10) maintained that "[i]t is by reshuffling and combining the different 'pulls' and 'pushes', in other words, by improvising, that NGO actors attribute meaning to the organization and arrive at a certain coherence in their everyday practices (Hilhorst 2003, p. 218)." Hemment (2007, p. 126), for example, argued that at times Tver' crisis center members - just like staff at other such centers - used the organization to discuss and plan "ingenious solutions" for self-education, material problems, and socializing, rather than domestic violence. The women adopted the crisis center model, because it was viable with the donors at the time. Simultaneously, however, they wanted to make sure that it would allow them to facilitate their own ideas and hoped that through contact with clients they could assess the need for counseling versus material needs (Hemment 2007, p. 106). Oktiabrina, one of the center founders, and her coworkers, moreover, engaged in awareness-raising talks on domestic and

sexual violence, when the temporary absence of a phone line prevented the center from running a crisis hotline (Hemment 2007, p. 120).

Voluntary work, in HIV/AIDS NGOs, occurred outside funded projects, when some staff members thought that they were not able to engage in certain activities that they considered important. Grigory, for example, stated that he was “very concerned with [with preventative measures in educational establishments],”²² but “no matter how much I looked...for donors, organizations, that could give some sum of money for leading these...activities in our city...unfortunately there is nothing.” Not everyone within his organization wanted to work voluntarily, because informational meetings in schools “take up a lot of time, there is a lot of resources [needed] and basically, this...is done on a voluntary [unpaid] basis... only through our initiative.” “In essence,” he added, “we do not shy away from this, we always gladly do it. It would just be preferable for us to do this...on a greater scale.”

Grigory’s management, although supportive of the idea, was initially hesitant to release staff for this work, which sometimes took hours or days away from workers’ functional duties. They eventually agreed, once the issues were negotiated and planned out. Grigory proposed to collaborate with a center that had government funding for centralized preventative work among youth, because he and his colleagues had “newer technology and more...interesting information and...also training programs, like small workshops, for youth...interactive [workshops].” The center rejected collaboration, however, so Grigory and his colleagues continued this work on their own, but “on a smaller scale.” One government agency, nonetheless, asked Grigory and some of his colleagues, as HIV/AIDS specialists, to conduct some of their preventative work; so they designed an official plan

²² In 2002, (Saenko et. al. 2004, p. 30) interviewed 50 HIV/AIDS experts – law enforcement workers, doctors, city and local administrators, NGO activists, social workers, social educators - in three regional Ukrainian centers, Dnepropetrovsk (central), Donetsk (eastern) and Kherson (southern). 59% stated that HIV/AIDS informational talks in schools, community, technical colleges and universities occurred regularly, 33% said that they occurred from time to time, 8% stated that they did not occur (Saenko et. al. 2004, p. 64). 31% of the experts also said that at the city level preventative work with youth was mostly or completely sufficient, 25% found it difficult to evaluate, while 44% said that it was mostly/completely insufficient (Saenko et. al. 2004, p. 66).

with the agency.²³ Grigory complained, however, that “again...[the agency staff] receive a salary for this, right? We do not receive anything...for this work for our own [people (‘dlya svoih’)].”

Similar initiatives took place in Efim and Isaac’s NGOs. Isaac wrote “[t]his is truly voluntary work, because it is not written into the project descriptions,” and Efim confirmed that donors did not take it into consideration (“ne uchityvaetsya”). Isaac, moreover, was directly involved in planning these activities and even emailed me a list of objectives that he developed for a three-session workshop. His staff scheduled and arranged activities with local educational establishments and he had no problem releasing them for these purposes. Like Grigory, Efim added that staff members were released when they were invited to schools as HIV/AIDS specialists (mostly by government agencies that deal with youth and families).

Isaac and Efim revealed another interesting effort to implement ideas that they considered important. At one point I asked them whether they knew of open-ended funding competitions, which I had read were generally rare (Sundstrom 2006, p. 38-40). Both had applied for and did not receive such grants in the past, which, indeed, they considered rare and did not know anyone who had obtained such grants. Isaac wrote a proposal to support a voluntary association of youth organizations created under the regional governor’s office. He explained that “[s]tudents gather after class and analyze Ukrainian legislation that pertains to youth...which laws are being upheld, which are not. They make their recommendations to the governor, so that he can take action accordingly.” Isaac’s NGO was part of this association, because “HIV/AIDS is a problem that mostly affects youth.” He stated that he wanted to support the group, and create leaders who would be more educated on issues and would take them to upper-level authorities, but the problem was that “sooner or later initiative can disappear,” because “it is a lot of work... let’s say, they work for a year and

²³ 63% of experts rated cooperation between government agencies and non-governmental organizations, on HIV/AIDS informational/educational initiatives with children and youth, as sufficient in the cities (Saenko et. al. 2004, p. 72).

there are no results, nothing. Just initiative. Then problems begin. This is all youth...students. They finish their university, go to work, and they have absolutely no time for the social sphere anymore.”

Efim and his colleagues, meanwhile, wrote a proposal for assistance to street children, which they considered important because they were not aware of any such projects in the city or regionally.²⁴ Efim stated that “[t]here were no [donor-specified] grant competitions [for street children]. I mean, some say that there were competitions for that, but...we have not seen them.” Although it is unclear why these projects were not funded, we can see how both men assessed the local situation and substantiated their claims. Isaac’s proposal, in particular, was a textbook example of what most social scientists would argue strengthens civil society - a project to build up a cadre of critically engaged youth who analyze the nation’s legislation. His proposal, in fact, was not even directly for his organizations’ project activities! Both men, who are in upper management positions, attempted to make the best of their structural constraints to fund initiatives that they perceived as locally significant.

Not every staff member, however, was as committed as the people I interviewed. Hilhorst (2003, p. 159-60), for example, described a three-way staff division within a Philippine NGO that she researched. The first division consisted of highly involved and committed upper management, who were former movement activists. The second division consisted of ideologically committed newer staff. The third division, however, consisted of staff hired for various project purposes and had little or no affiliation with the political movement. They had little loyalty and could easily move on to other job opportunities. It is logical that internal stratification existed across a variety of NGOs. Vera, for instance, stated that some people in her NGO only complete their assigned tasks and “do not think at all how to develop this [project] direction, or how to strengthen it, or what to do so that it becomes stable, regardless of whether there will be donor funds.” She can hold them responsible for

²⁴ 84% of experts rated preventative work with street children in the cities mostly or completely insufficient (Saenko et. al. 2004, p. 66).

their work quality, as long as long as she provides them with a stable salary. “But such people,” she added, “do not need anything, except to carry out this work and to receive their stable salary.”

Discussions of internal divisions are largely lacking from prevalent NGO accounts, which do not show us internal variation that constitutes these organizations. Moreover, Vera’s comments suggest that perhaps top-down management operates primarily on workers who do not take initiative (although, alternatively, some of them possibly forego initiative because of top-down management). Meanwhile, others, like Grigory, influence NGO direction and activities despite the organizational hierarchy, in fact, circumventing it by initiating activities and then engaging upper management in the planning.

To sum up, we should consider NGOs’ internal stratification, because these divisions help to conceptualize and unpack various organizational activities. In fact, through this lens we can see that prevalent NGO critiques in the literature do not apply evenly across workers and possibly NGOs. It is important to note that commitment varies among NGO staff and my focus here is primarily on a cadre of some of the committed activists. They are distinct in their motivation and efforts to implement ideas that they consider locally relevant.²⁵ Committed activists, moreover, may hold positions across the organizational hierarchy. To the extent that activists in lower positions initiate (voluntary) projects and engage upper-level staff, they mitigate top-down NGO structure. Some upper-level workers, however, also strive to support local initiatives, but within their own sphere of activity, namely assisting with administrative and planning tasks (as opposed to direct outreach), as well as attempting to find and secure funding for important causes (which may not even be directly tied to their NGOs’ activities). It is also noteworthy that voluntary activities occurred in collaboration with state agencies, either initiated by activists, or the agencies, and, as Grigory noted, were intended to broaden the scale of the outreach efforts.

²⁵ Although some discrepancies between clients and NGO workers exist. For example, Grigory mentioned that he considered some clients’ requests for money, in lieu of food assistance packages, “mercantilistic.”

Despite these somewhat optimistic findings, juxtaposing the larger neoliberal logic of the post-Soviet reforms and the NGO project, with the activists' understanding of their work in general and their often admirable personal efforts specifically, revealed a potentially troubling issue. Faced with considerable strain, uncertainty, and new individualistic values, NGO activists, perhaps implicitly, sought to take refuge in the idea of personal efficacy and responsibility, thereby potentially sustaining a decentralized social service model. In an interesting parallel, Rivkin-Fish (2005) argued that in the reformed Russian healthcare system "personal and privatizing strategies repeatedly produced less than actors hoped: doctors' efforts to resist the 'collective irresponsibility' structured into the health care system through individual, heroic efforts of taking 'personal responsibility' for their work were unable to overcome the range of obstacles stemming from poverty, political disenfranchisement and the fragmented nature of the system itself (p. 212-213)."

HIV/AIDS activists' demands and responsibilities for ameliorating local conditions resided primarily with themselves, despite some notable efforts to "externalize" solutions and broaden outreach. Thus, Grigory and his colleagues, as well as activists at other NGOs, sought out and engaged in voluntary work with state agencies that agreed to collaborate with them (and sometimes even extended invitations). While the intention to extend outreach efforts was admirable, it is important to emphasize that these meetings occurred only due to the tenacity and individual labor of committed activists.²⁶ Similarly, Isaac and Efim sought funding and provided administrative support, for what they considered important local issues, on a case by case basis and through rarely available (and attainable) flexible funding. These efforts largely emphasized individual activists' responsibility for expanding outreach and extending services, rather than expanding the social safety net constricted via neoliberal reforms.

The uncertainty of the post-Soviet transition, moreover, was manifest in the activists' equivocal perceptions of donors, the state and their own roles. Interviewees simultaneously criticized and sought collaboration with and support from the state, foreign donors (and other local actors, like businesses, the public, etc). They praised donors for providing funding and information. On the other hand, they explicitly lamented the instability and insufficiency of funding and implicitly its competitiveness. Similarly, they listed a litany of grievances against the state – ranging from unwieldy bureaucracy, to prejudice against NGOs and HIV/AIDS, to corruption, and other problems - yet, they voluntarily collaborated with state agencies and extended hopes for state support. Moreover, they hoped for some future stability, juxtaposing state funding with “third sector” (nonprofit/civil society) and the new NGO-based “social entrepreneurship”²⁷ models introduced by donors. They intuitively perceived their precarious environment, but could not acknowledge the larger social trends accountable for their difficulties. The following (rearranged) excerpts from Efim and Isaac's interview are exemplary of some of the activists' ambiguity:

Efim [explaining the dependence on foreign funding]: That's the horror of it all. Why are we here [on a donor-sponsored trip in the U.S.]? I mean, the terrible thing in our country is that the government, aside from making speeches, does not help us with anything. And what they tell us, that they are doing something, is all fairy tales. Well, corruption? Yes, I'll admit it, there is corruption everywhere... [On the other hand] if the government does not offer support – then it will be an...enemy (laughs). Yes, an enemy. And what will happen? Well, the third sector, if it survives, will be strong...[But] if we have self-service without government [help], then what will happen in the future?... all these donors [lists several] are planning on leaving

²⁶ Underscoring the idea of decentralization inherent among NGOs, Saenko et. al. (2004, p. 8) argued that inadequate coordination among various international donors' projects, leads to duplicate HIV/AIDS studies with similar focus and methodology, rather than investigation of new topics.

²⁷ Phillips (2005) argued that in Ukraine, the “logics of the social enterprise and similar programs reinforce [the] burden [of social responsibilities formerly managed by the state] through their implicit dismissal of citizens' claims on state assistance and support, and the stress they place on ‘self-sufficiency’ and ‘independence from donors.’” Additionally, the burden of the “caring work,” could fall disproportionately on women, already relegated to “caring work” within their families. Some social enterprises, when headed by dedicated social activists, were successful at generating necessary operational capital, feeding the hungry and employing people with disabilities. The prospects for many enterprises, nonetheless, looked limited. NGO activists who adopted the social enterprise model sometimes did this out of necessity, when other funding options were foreclosed or severely limited. But the ventures were fraught with difficulties and contradictions, ranging from ethical and practical concerns that needy members would have to work to keep the NGO afloat, to cumbersome, mercurial business laws, public skepticism about businesses and NGOs, corruption, and the viability of business success.

[Ukraine]... And now everyone understands that and everyone works with the state, somehow trying to do something there (laughs)...

Isaac: Solution to the current situation? Well, I have thought about this a lot and...well, two solutions: of course, financing from the government...at least. And secondly...creation of a social enterprise [an idea Evgenia also championed]. Right now...my central office is working on this; [they] already started to implement it. So that...there would be a business which would produce revenue and it would support [NGO] programs...

Efim: Yes...So we have only two solutions.

Isaac: Only two (laughs). And both from the realm of the impossible.

Efim: Everyone begins with [foreign] donors...Some options exist...to receive start-up grants for social enterprises. Small ones... Ten thousand...dollars...They give them for...some small laundromats, small (work)shops...

Isaac: Well, that's just laughable. That's not an amount with which you can start something.

Efim: Well, at least [something]...So, two solutions...

These exchanges indicate that commitment-driven activists, who were unable to overcome the elusive gaps in the social system, constantly felt personally responsible to both capture and create opportunities from numerous sources, thus trying to make sense of, systematize, and channel social resources that had become particularly unsystematic in the post-Soviet period. Thus, Vera maintained a constant self-critique to do more, work harder, and push the limits to sustain and create projects, which brought her great satisfaction when she succeeded and disappointment when she did not or could not.²⁸ It is also telling that Isaac and Efim perceived both social enterprise and government funding within the frame of the contracting paradigm – such that business-generated, or government money should *replace foreign funding for non-governmental organizations*. In the process, they affirmed notions of liberal individualism underlying the broad neoliberal reforms. Thus, Western funding, combined with other social transformations, may have socialized some of the committed activists in Ukraine into an individualistic paradigm and created (the beginnings of?) what Bartley (2007) called an institutional field, or an organizational environment with new norms and legitimacy

²⁸ We should not dismiss, however, some of the positive developments of NGO advocacy. Vera stated that “[o]ver two years we developed a methodological manual, in partnership with the regional institute for teacher development...called ‘Interactive technologies for HIV prevention and formation of tolerant attitudes toward HIV positive people.’ It was issued a certificate of authorship and now we are going to move it to the

claims. These new norms outline what Neuman (2005) dubbed the shadow (private) welfare state in the U.S., which includes shifting “the basis for claiming benefits from being a universal and public citizenship right to being a private, contingent patron-client reward” and reducing “pressure to expand and improve public benefit levels by offering private sector alternatives (p. 538).” Thus, fewer resources are devoted to human needs and services, while the trend is toward negotiating subcontracting and division of labor with the private (and non-governmental) sector (Shaw 2000, p. 3). These findings are thus potentially at odds with Western promises of a more prosperous, egalitarian society.

On the other hand, what is a viable alternative? As Kuzio (2003) had argued above, the state should not be reduced, but reorganized to better suit its citizens. In light of this comparison, I critically evaluate two claims that Westerners had made in favor of NGOs, as opposed to the state: NGOs’ relative credibility (lack of corruption) and limited bureaucracy (efficiency). First, despite the prevalence of significant state corruption, which I have noted above (also see Shelley 2005, p. 15, Hemment 2007), corruption among NGOs (Reimann 2005, p. 42-43, Gibelman and Gelman 2004) is also a potential problem that has received little scholarly, or donor attention (who, of course, would be reluctant to publicize it). In my research, several interviewees indicated the existence of this problem. Evgenia, for example, explained that “it is not a secret that...many...[non-governmental] organizations are created – well, it’s like that everywhere – they are created for the purpose of money laundering...”

Secondly, lack of NGO bureaucracy may be somewhat of a misnomer, which neglects the local complexity of running these organizations. Uvin (2000, p. 24) proposed that even when NGOs are not directly involved in active politics or want to change state behavior, they are nonetheless engaged with the state and political processes. In part, this is due to the registration, taxation and legal requirements, as well as public funding issues, joint projects and personal connections with state

ministerial level, so that we can implement this program at the national level, through the ministry. Because I think that it is unique; before, there was no such methodological manual in Ukraine.”

officials. My research supports Uvin's proposal. An NGO does not simply receive a grant and begin providing services and advocating on behalf of its constituencies. Establishing and maintaining a funded organization, in addition to Uvin's claims, also involves dealing with the sponsors' bureaucracy and oversight, including frequent audits, reports and other guidelines. Moreover, NGOs have infrastructural needs and must deal with authorities at different levels, in order to obtain office space, water, heat, electricity, phone and internet lines (not always easy in the post-Soviet environment). Some organizations, which are located in networks, or are part of federated structures, have to coordinate activities with other NGOs, and comply with regulations of and obligations to their central offices or governing boards (Hemment 2006, Henderson 2003, my interviews). If we think of some of the difficulties NGOs face, when working with various actors, as decentralized bureaucratic hurdles – i.e. NGOs dealing with a kind of “diffuse bureaucracy” outside these organizations, which nonetheless “resides” between NGOs' goals and the ability to carry them out – then we can begin to think of these problems in comparison with the centralized bureaucracy of the state. The nature of these piecemeal NGO interactions, however, as opposed to the more visible state bureaucracy, potentially obscures a succinct comparative focus between the two. It would be interesting to see whether this observation may apply more broadly to Western non-profits and contract-based services. Preliminary findings consequently suggest that donor claims about NGO credibility and lack of bureaucracy likely warrant further research and perhaps questions about donors' sustained support for NGO initiatives, instead of greater assistance to building state capacity. If my assertions here are correct, then ideological commitment to liberal notions of civil society, the relatively low cost of supporting NGOs, and ability to influence them more than states, which I mentioned earlier, may play the main role in donors' motives to fund these organizations.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION AND BRIEF IMPLICATIONS FOR TRANSNATIONAL ACTIVISM

My aim has been to show how NGO activists, embedded in a reforming nation and complex relationships with local constituencies, foreign donors and the state, seek to make sense of their work, drawing on multiple discourses. I also sought to outline what their understanding may imply for the broader social context. Specifically, I have argued that Ukrainian, post-Soviet, NGOs were supported by Western sponsors at the same time as broad neoliberal social reforms considerably shifted many social responsibilities to non-state actors and reduced the social safety net. HIV/AIDS NGOs began to respond to these changes by providing services to and advocating on behalf of thousands of people affected by the burgeoning HIV/AIDS epidemic.

In order to examine how activists made sense of their daily work, I unpacked internal NGO dynamics and found variation among workers based on ideological commitment and engagement in voluntary work. Internal variation also revealed that when considering only some of the most committed activists, many of the prevalent NGO critiques in the literature seemed less appropriate. Despite this finding, placing activists' sense-making processes in a broader social context indicated that activists committed to helping the local population, yet facing great uncertainty within the post-Soviet transitional environment, sought a sense of security and efficacy in the emerging norms of personal responsibility and individualism, inherent both in the broader social reforms, as well as liberal civil society models and funding structures that Western donors advocated. In doing so, NGO activists potentially reinforced the decentralized social safety net. Finally, I proposed that some of the Western arguments for sponsoring NGOs, rather than developing state capacity, deserve further

investigation. When considered critically, NGOs may exhibit some of the corruption and bureaucratic problems that were cited as shortcomings of the state.

This research potentially speaks to different literatures. In closing, I want to briefly explore potential implications for the emerging study of transnational activism. In recent scholarship, Keck and Sikkink (1998), Jackie Smith (2000) and Tilly and Tarrow (2007, p. 172-174) have all highlighted the increasing global ties between activists. They underscored the importance of new global institutions and transnational non-governmental organizations in maintaining ties that span from local NGOs to global polity forums and foreign governments. In particular, the authors focused on the advocacy aspects of global activism. Smith (2000, p. 65), for instance, substantiated this focus by stating that NGOs, which have been traditionally service-oriented, since the 1960's began increasingly moving into advocacy. While this may be true, it is also likely, as Uvin (2000, p. 25-6) had argued, and my research indicated, that many NGOs are involved in numerous activities simultaneously, including advocacy and lobbying, as well as providing services and engaging in direct community action.²⁹

To the extent that services and advocacy are combined in some organizations, I suggest that we should consider them together. Examining how NGOs balance service and advocacy functions within their environments is important not only because of the ideas that NGOs explicitly propagate (which may be quite progressive) - and thus we should be cognizant of the content of their claims - but also because service and advocacy functions influence their "modes of activism." Depending on the context, they may contribute to social organization models that are simultaneously "pro-people" and "pro-market." In a sense, as I suggested earlier, local NGOs with transnational ties, which provide services, are, in fact, part of the local social safety net. When they also engage in advocacy,

²⁹ Smith (2000, p. 73) indicated that TSMOs (transnational social movement organizations) tend to over-represent activists from Western Europe and North America. They also tend to be smaller and command budgets that do not compare to those of development organizations with funds from government aid agencies. Smith (2000, p. 74-5) argued that these organizations tend to be relatively democratic and representative and break down social inequalities. While this may be true, my extension of the argument to NGOs that combine

however, they may be inadvertently pitting the two objectives at odds with each other. Organizations embedded in a decentralizing, privatizing, state, which are advocating for expansion of services, may be defusing the urgency of state response when they simultaneously provide the services for which they lobby; or they could be effectively advocating for some rights, while their service model undermines others. Committed activists may feel compelled to offer direct aid through their NGOs (“at least *something*”) in light of dire circumstances, but may miss how they help propagate the broader social system that curtails services. Undoubtedly, there may be instances when NGOs are best-suited to help, perhaps to quickly mobilize their personnel and provide urgent aid. In other contexts, however, maybe when services are necessary for a large population over many years, we should question the practicality and stability of roles NGOs play. On the other hand, some types of advocacy may work well, depending on the environment.

advocacy and service functions adds potentially relevant, yet complicating factors, including post-Soviet environment idiosyncrasies and interplay between advocacy and service.

APPENDIX

Selected Survey and Interview Responses from HIV/AIDS NGO Staff about their Backgrounds, Clientele and Workplaces (N=6)

					Survey #			Interview Only				
			1	2	3	4	5		Mean	Median	Mode	Sum
Notes	Q. #	Item										
from donor description (supplied by staff)		Head of Coordination Board of NGOs	Administrator of Educational Programs	Program Coordinator	Head of Organization	Social Worker	Program Coordinator					
my determination		sex: (1 = female; 2 = male)	1	1	2	2	2		1.6	2	2	
	2	Name	Irina	Evgenia	Efim	Isaac	Grigory	Vera				
	4	Age (years)	27	21	late 20s-early 30s	29	32	mid 30s-early 40s	about 29.5	about 29.5		
	5	Education	higher	higher in progress	night school in progress	higher	incomplete higher	higher			higher	
	6	Place of education	State University	Medical University		State Universities	State Institute				State University	
	7	Current workplace										
		Only in one NGO that focuses on HIV/AIDS issues.	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
		Number of years working in NGO	2	2	5	4	2.5	about 6-7	about 3.7	about 3.1		2
		Work in other place(s) (number)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
		Number of people working in NGO										
	a	total	12	7	25	15	14		14.6	14		73
	b	men	5	3	12	3	8		6.2	5	3	31
	c	women	7	4	13	12	6		8.4	7		42

Selected Survey and Interview Responses from HIV/AIDS NGO Staff about their Backgrounds,
 Clientele and Workplaces (N=6)
 (continued)

					Survey #			Interview Only				
			1	2	3	4	5		Mean	Median	Mode	Sum
Notes	Q. #	Item										
		Age of NGO coworkers (1-8: greatest to smallest category)										
I changed 0 (no one) to 8 (smallest category)												
	a	under 18	8	8	8	8	8		8	8	8	
	b	18-25	1	2	3	1	2		1.8	2	1	
	c	26-35	2	1	1	2	1		1.4	1	1	
	d	36-45	8	3	2	3	3		3.8	3	3	
	e	46-55	8	8	4	8	8		7.2	8	8	
	f	56-65	8	8	8	4	8		7.2	8	8	
	g	over 65	8	8	8	8	8		8	8	8	
I changed 0 (no one) to 10 (smallest category)		Age of Clients (1-10: greatest-smallest category)										
	a	0-5	10	10	3	2	4		5.8	4	10	
	b	6-10	10	7	7	4	5		6.6	7	7	
	c	11-17	2	6	6	10	5		5.8	6	6	
	d	18-25	1	2	5	3	3		2.8	3	3	
	e	26-35	3	1	2	1	1		1.6	1	4	
	f	36-45	4	3	1	5	2		3	3		
	g	46-55	5	4	4	10	6		5.8	5	4	
	h	56-65	6	5	7	10	7		7	7	7	
	i	over 65	7	10	10	10	10		9.4	10	10	
		Percent men & women among NGO clients (target audience)										
	a	% women	55	50	55	70	60		58	55	55	
	b	% men	45	50	45	30	40		42	45	45	
		Percent of the budget from sponsors										
	a	0-25%										0
	b	26-50%										0
	c	51-75%	1									1
	d	76-100%		1	1	1	1					4

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