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6

Women's Organizing in Post-Yugoslav Countries

Talking about "Donors"

Aida Bagić

This chapter stems from an attempt to interrogate my personal involvement in feminist organizing in the former Yugoslav space, and the need to understand the transformation of that activism—as social movements in the context of war and external assistance—into nongovernmental organizations (NGOs). The focus of the analysis is on the process of relationship-building between "donors" and "recipients" of aid, understood as a series of complex encounters. This chapter discusses the ways in which international assistance has influenced the development of women's movements in the post-Yugoslav region by looking at how external influence has been conceptualized by feminist activists and members of women's organizations in the region.

International assistance in various forms has had a profound impact on the organizational development, agenda, and emergence of women's organizations in the region in the last decade. This chapter utilizes an ethnographic approach, within which the primary methodological problem has not been so much one of "entering the field of inquiry" as "exiting the field" or, more precisely, of reconceptualizing the site as a field of inquiry instead of a field of action. Normally, the "field" is understood as "a place where we do our work but do not live." The field for a Western consultant or researcher may be visits to the offices of various organizations in a country that is not his or her own, while for those working in the same offices, it may be represented by rural communities they visit occasionally, Roma settlements, refugee camps where self-help groups are being held,

and so on. Clearly, what is to count as the field depends on the position of the researcher, not on an objectively defined reality.

In my research I have combined several types of data collection and analysis: first, materials produced by women's organizations themselves and an analysis of their self-representation; second, interviews and personal conversations with feminist activists and members of women's organizations; and third, participant observation since 1989 of women's organizations in several post-Yugoslav countries, namely, Croatia, Serbia, Macedonia, Bosnia-Herzegovina, and Kosova.

My focus is on complex interrelationships between two sets of actors: international aid organizations as "donors," and various forms of local women's organizing as "recipients." I introduce these terms here within quotation marks because a division that seems simple at the first glance—"donors" as those offering financial or some other kind of support, and "recipients" as those that are using "donor" resources—turns out not to be so simple in reality. The donor-recipient juxtaposition appears as only one among many features displayed in the process of relationship-building. Thus, the relations between donors and recipients are framed within simultaneous encounters between the local, the regional, and the global; between the margin and the center, and at the intersections of nontranslatable and multiple languages or codes.

In their portfolios, donors emphasize a "regional" or "global" approach while at the same time claiming an impact on "local women." Myriad intermediary organizations reproduce this emphasis, and actors who are perceived as local by their own donors may, in another context, be seen as having a regional or global perspective. Though "marginal" in their own social context, encouraged and amplified by outside interveners and donors, recipients may begin to reconsider their potential to reach the mainstream. Hence, interventions from the outside reconfigure internal boundaries between the "margin" and the "center." Encounters between donors and recipients are made possible by those who are able to operate in multiple codes, who are skillful translators (not just in terms of language), and who can make incoherent life experiences appear as a coherent text, as purposeful, goal-oriented activity.

Women's Organizing in Former Yugoslavia and the Post-Yugoslav Countries

Much of women's organizing through the 1990s, and the international assistance associated with it in post-Yugoslav countries, has been affected by war and its aftermath. In all the post-Yugoslav countries, the 1990s have seen a proliferation of women's organizations, partly due to the new political environment that has encouraged the free association of citizens, and partly due to the often-observed phenomenon of women's organizing as a reaction to crisis situations. One model of the emergence and growth of women's movements suggests that there are three important conditions for social movements to emerge: group consciousness, resource availability, and sense of efficacy (Chafetz 1990: 167). Women's organizations in post-Yugoslav countries do indeed have a potential to create those conditions: by the very fact of organizing as women, they contribute to the creation of gender consciousness. The organizations themselves represent important mechanisms for mobilizing human and financial resources. Furthermore, achievements in improving the status of women under socialism permitted them to continue forging a sense of efficacy, and a potential for success in influencing and changing the broader sociopolitical context.

There is a general agreement that prewar Yugoslav society differed from that in other Eastern European countries in its openness to the free flow of ideas. This openness allowed for new social movements to emerge in the 1980s. Feminism grew independently from the official socialist women's organizations, and in opposition to it. Benderly (1997: 184) suggests three main periods of Yugoslav feminism based on specific goals and actions: (1) 1978–1985, the period of feminist discourse; (2) 1986–1991, the period of feminist activism; and (3) 1991 and onward, the period of feminist opposition to the war.

In many ways, 1978 marks the beginnings of the new feminist movement in Yugoslavia. In that year an international feminist conference Drug-ca Žena: Žensko pitanje—novi pristup (Comrade [female] Woman: The Woman Question—A New Approach) was held in the Yugoslav capital of Belgrade. It led to the formation of feminist discussion groups, most notably Žena i društvo (Woman and Society) within the Croatian Sociological Association in Zagreb, and another group with the same name within the Students' Cultural Center in Belgrade (Papić 1995; Feldman 1999; Benderly 1997). Many of the participants in the conference and in

the groups inspired by it are still active in women's organizing, some as leaders and some as supporters.

In the middle to late 1980s, a new generation of women became more interested in direct social activism. The first SOS hotlines for women victims of domestic violence were opened in Zagreb, Ljubljana, and Belgrade. The Yugoslav Feminist Network was formed in 1987, in order to exchange experiences in establishing SOS hotlines and to raise public awareness about violence against women. In the same period the first lesbian groups were formed in all three cities. With the first multiparty elections in 1990, a number of feminists actively engaged in various political parties. The Yugoslav Feminist Network had its last gathering in March 1991 in Ljubljana. The outbreak of the war in 1991 was preceded by various women's peace actions. Subsequent events brought divisions, among feminists from the-states-to-be, as well as within the states. From then on, the history of feminism in Yugoslavia cannot be described without describing the particularities of the each of the new states. Still, despite the divisions, many continued to cooperate across borders, and the feminists formed the core of the antiwar initiatives in the entire region.

The feminist opposition to the war extended well beyond 1991, however. Despite attempts to maintain links across the borders, the goals and strategies of feminism in each of the observed countries became so different that each would need a periodization of its own, more congruent with the political context of the new states. In addition, as has become clear from this brief overview, Yugoslav feminism was based in three urban centers: Zagreb (Croatia), Ljubljana (Slovenia), and Belgrade (Serbia), although individual participants from Sarajevo (Bosnia-Herzegovina) and Skopje (Macedonia) and from other parts of former Yugoslavia were also active.

Preceding the new feminist initiatives that developed after the Belgrade conference in 1978, and continuing parallel to them, were various forms of official socialist women's organizations. The most notable of these was the Conference for Social Activity of Women (CSAW) that grew out of the Antifascist Women's Front (AWF). As a mass organization directly linked to the Communist Party, the CSAW functioned primarily as the mechanism of women's mobilization on the part of the communist elite. For many women, however, it did provide a space for emancipation from traditional roles. Especially in rural areas and small towns, active women's groups provided an opportunity for women to participate in local politics and in humanitarian work.

These two major lineages of women's organizing in former Yugoslavia—through feminist initiatives and through socialist women's organizations—were important points of reference for the groups emerging in the 1990s. In Croatia and Serbia, or, more precisely, in Zagreb and Belgrade, contemporary organizations refer to the feminist initiatives as their immediate "foremothers." In Macedonia, however, the most visible groups are those claiming continuity with the Conference for Social Activity of Women, though at the same time emphasizing that under the "new system" they are independent of any political party and associated ideology. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, where the war was most intense and long-lasting, most of the currently operating organizations emerged directly as projects of international organizations. This phenomenon of international "spin-offs" is present to varying degrees in all the countries mentioned. Although in Croatia, to my knowledge, there is only one organization founded in this way, in Macedonia and Bosnia-Herzegovina there are many more. In Serbia, as yet, there are no such organizations. This is, in part, perhaps due to the relatively recent arrival there of large international NGOs.

Recounted Encounters: From Solidarity-Based "Gifts" to "Implementing Contracts"

> Fund Heinrich Böll gives me solidarity aid of 100 German marks to survive through the NATO bombing
>
> That is how much there was in a white unsealed envelope that I received. In gratitude I recited to her a biblical sentence by Böll. . . . I didn't look into the envelope immediately. I have postponed my joy for the privacy of my own room. She didn't understand anything, she was just a treasurer of that fund and some other funds. (Markunova 2001: 19)

There are few descriptions of the aid relationship that are so telling as a piece of writing by Štefi Markunova, a poet of Croatian origin living in Belgrade. "The 100 German marks" are received from a representative of a donor whose funding portfolio comprises half "women's projects" (Rodenberg and Wichterich 1999) and which, in its earlier incarnation as FrauenAnStiftung, was one of the first agencies to support independent women's groups in post-Yugoslav countries. This hundred-mark donation epitomizes how assistance initially reached women's movement(s): small

amounts of money under circumstances of extreme need, primarily as an expression of transnational women's solidarity. No service, or anything else, has been required in return. Gratitude for receipt has been met with gratitude for the ability to give, "thank you" was exchanged for "it was nothing." The simplicity of verbal interaction corresponded to its nature: money transferred from one person to another as a (small) "gift." The ensuing processes transformed the relationship between those on the giving end and those on the receiving end from a simple gift-giving relationship to a more complex contractual one.

In this section, I analyze narratives of the "aid encounter" following the major themes that have emerged in the course of interviewing nine members of women's organizations and/or participants in feminist organizing in post-Yugoslav countries. Semistructured interviews included open-ended questions covering four broadly defined topics: a general assessment of the influence of international assistance; more specific influences on the organization of the respondent (or on organizations in which the respondent has been involved with in the past); memories of women's organizing prior to encounters with international assistance; and reflections on the future sustainability of women's organizations (and movement[s]). Excerpts from the interviews have been organized under the following subthemes: (1) classifying the donors, (2) negative assessments, (3) positive assessments, (4) (reflections on) the learning process and memory, (5) strategies of influencing the donors, and (6) future sustainability. The interviewed women represent, except for two representatives of donor agencies, the post-Yugoslav "feminist elite" in that all of them play important roles in their respective communities, as well as in transnational feminist networks. All have had direct experience in negotiating with donors; some are members of the advisory boards of international donor agencies; and most have participated in feminist organizing prior to the transitional period, the dissolution of Socialist Yugoslavia, and the wars that followed.

Classifying Donors

In asking for a general assessment of the international assistance, I did not try to elicit responses about specific donor agencies or a specific donor category. Instead, I wanted to arrive at a classification that emerges out of the *perception* of those on the receiving end, one that is different from the classification that those on the giving end may have about themselves. The

terms "donor," "funder," or "foundation" are often used interchangeably, covering a wide variety of organizational forms involved in transferring international assistance. From the position of women's organizations "in the field," the distinction between donors and implementing agencies seems to be irrelevant, since the major characteristic through which donors are identified as donors is simply their willingness to provide direct financial assistance. While there is awareness that technical assistance through seminars, workshops, training, or consultancy also represents a form of assistance, organizations that are primarily operating in that way are often not perceived so much as playing a donor role as just implementing their own programs.

The women I interviewed used two major criteria in their classifications of the donors: first, an assumption about a shared solidarity base (women as the primary target group versus women as an element in some larger issue), and, second, physical presence versus absence in the field. Feminist groups have most often been the first to arrive, their "gifts" being based on the idea of international women's solidarity. Those most commonly referred to during the interviews have been women's foundations whose primary target are women's groups. Their advantage, in the perception of those on the receiving end, is their "genuine interest in the cause":

> International assistance to women's organizations was more piecemeal, not really big. There are, however, different organizations involved. One should single out those really feminist organizations, those who are really doing it from their hearts. They are doing it because they really believe in it.
>
> Some feminist organizations . . . really helped us when we had the most difficult time, when we didn't expect assistance, when we were under sanctions. That means it was impossible, it was difficult even to come here, and nobody really showed interest in coming. They did come and brought some little aid, but it meant a lot to us. It may be that it meant a lot to us because they were not themselves in a very good material position, but still. . . . They really did help us, sisterly, in a feminist way. [They] really helped us from their hearts, helped us because they believed in the women's movement and because they knew that it has to spread everywhere and every place. (Respondent 3)

Presence in the field has usually been achieved through setting up so-called field offices, or through the presence of the donors' representatives without an office infrastructure, mostly through regular visits lasting from

a few days to several weeks. The assessment of physical presence, which entails the potential for developing personal contact, is contradictory. On the one hand, this presence seemed to offer easier accessibility. On the other, the presence in the field and the personal contacts that it enabled often posed a challenge to the perception of objectivity in the grant-making process: "I had much better experiences with foundations that didn't have their offices [here], objectivity was greater, criteria seemed simpler to me. Sometimes they were very bureaucratic, but somehow they were much clearer in advance" (Respondent 9).

The funders appearing as "distant bureaucratic structures" may seem "thrifty," since they do not need to fund offices in the country, and are therefore less subject to criticism by those on the receiving end. On the other hand, all the expenses associated with long-distance operations, although they may be higher than those with field offices or representatives, remain hidden from the recipients.

When staffed by local women, field offices may cease to seem *foreign*, especially if the representatives are perceived as personally committed to the same cause as the recipients:

> You know why I treat it as local? Our women are in it. That's the reason I really consider [a particular foundation] as a local one. Now, if the situation with personnel would change, most likely everything would be different. For now, it is as it is. We received great help from [them] for women's projects, for things that have been important to us—that is, for small, newly founded, powerless women's groups that need to move on and get strengthened. (Respondent 3)

Negative Assessments

Solidarity-based donors initially offered money without a lot of bureaucratic requirements concerning project proposal writing and reporting. On the other hand, such funders demanded a different kind of additional energy in the form of time-consuming meetings, emotional investment in developing friendships, and occasionally even love relationships. There is no reason to doubt the sincerity of feelings; there is, however, reason to doubt whether this mixture of personal friendships and emotional attachments, coupled with an imbalance in financial power, always led to the most beneficial use of resources. The initial enthusiasm over shared beliefs

and vision often faded under the pressures of limited resources, no matter what size, and the external bureaucratic requirements for financial transfers:

> We were not aware that they were part of some strange political game which they could not influence, so I do not see a conflict of interests as the major problem but rather, the conflict between two concepts of power. They came to us as persons who would prefer cooperation based on horizontal power, but they themselves were part of a hierarchical, I would call it trans-state, or maybe state, power structure, and that is where the major conflict emerges. We didn't get it at the beginning. I remember exactly when one of them came to us and said they got the money and that we will be able to change all of what has been written according to our needs. Then it became clear that we won't have a chance to change anything, that at least one-third of that money will go back to some American funds. (Respondent 9)

The memories about the first encounters are impregnated with feelings of not being listened to and not being understood:

> I always had the impression that this was similar to some, let's say, English charity mission coming to India, you know . . . and then there are some natives there who arouse amazement by being able to speak Latin, that is English. . . . So they come and they don't listen to you at all. You can talk, endlessly. . . . They have a system, they send very young women and men who went to schools which are probably good schools, but they do not have any idea about where they are coming . . . about what it is like here. . . . Then they tell you stories about the Iron Curtain, the Eastern Bloc, some nonsense . . . you know. We lived here under circumstances that were different from what they saw in movies, in their own American movies about Russia. They come with James Bond stories. So it takes time before you can explain it to them. . . . You can explain yourself to death. They can't really get it. The best is if you don't explain anything. You let them to tell their story and you see what they want. If we can find some common point that suits us and suits them, fine. If not, then ciao. We say bye to one another, exchange our business cards, and that's it. (Respondent 3)

> [International organizations] didn't have any knowledge or sense about the perception of money under socialism—what did money mean for women, for women's organizations, for civil initiatives which did exist under social-

ism. It is not accurate to say that there was nothing. [The donors] just threw that money on our heads and we had to find the ways to come to terms with it. (Respondent 9)

These are descriptions of personal contacts in which "the foreigner" and "the native" mutually produce each other as "foreign" and "native." While the native perceives the foreigner's understanding as mediated (and therefore biased) through cultural production (James Bond movies), her lived experience appears to her as nonmediated. The idea that someone distant may know more about us than we know about ourselves, at least in terms of the ability to articulate that knowledge, seems to be frightening and to cause resentment. Therefore, an attempt is made to dismiss the knowledge (good schools) on the grounds of immediate experience.

Members of local women's movements lodge the ubiquitous accusation against external actors of their inability to differentiate the post-Yugoslav context from the rest of Eastern Europe. This impression, which relies on the popular self-image of "Yugoslavs" as being different from the rest of the socialist world, is counterbalanced with an awareness (achieved in hindsight) about their own isolation from the experiences of women exposed to international assistance in other regions:

What I can see now is that we lived in complete isolation, not just from foundations. I think that in '91 and '92 we would have benefited tremendously from the experiences of women from the Third World, and yet we had absolutely no contact with them. We didn't know what had been happening to them, and all of those stories that already happened ten, fifteen, or twenty years earlier, like the story of microcredit and about cows and milk in Asia. All of that was well known, and there was an attempt to transfer all of those things mechanically, especially to Bosnia. I read all of that later, and I think that type of experiential knowledge would really have helped us at the time.

We didn't know how to negotiate at the time, we didn't have negotiation skills, and we actually didn't know whether we were allowed to negotiate. We didn't know whether the funders were our partners, our collaborators, or our superiors; none of these things have ever been clear. I think that it came to the collision of different images and different expectations and different perceptions, and that we didn't have the knowledge that could have helped us at the time, especially regarding negotiations. (Respondent 9)

Exchanging experiences with other parts of the world that were exposed to international assistance could have enhanced the learning process. This "experiential knowledge" should not be confused with using examples from development manuals designed for the less developed countries. Rather, it refers to power relationships: the question that could have been discussed at such an encounter would be not How did you organize work with women war victims? but How did you negotiate the roles between your organization and the donors? or How did you influence their agenda, if at all?

The presence of the local (as opposed to the foreign), as well as the implied women's solidarity, is not necessarily assessed positively:

It is good to have local staff, but not local staff that is at the same time financing themselves. In my opinion, that is completely inadmissible, both legally and morally. You cannot apply for funding for your own projects and for the projects of your own company. It should also be required that the applicant isn't an NGO where some of your relatives are working, or your former group, or whatever. (Respondent 1)

The reasons for the absence of field offices or donors' representatives differed from one country to the other. Absence did not prevent them or the potential recipients from establishing personal contacts that, combined with both an unsafe and a financially restrictive environment, often created grounds for mutual suspicion and the perception of bias:

The money couldn't simply have been transferred to the bank account, so it was given in cash. So, did the woman to whom the money was given—and she brought it in her pocket (or, as we used to say, in her "left sock")—give all of it to her group? We don't know that. There were often suspicions about whether somebody put some money "to the side," whether somebody used the money for this or that. The groups where women spoke English, had computer skills, and e-mail communication, usually did the best. (Respondent 1)

What I never liked (when I happened to be on that side) was when somebody in some other country, on some other continent, imagined what we would need to do in [our country], and then they send us their guidelines and that's it: we finance this and this and this. So we start to adjust. In order to get the money, groups often did what they would have never been doing,

simply because the funders would provide financing. Instead of the other way around, that the group does something because there is a genuine need for it, and because they know that they have the human resources, and the experience. . . .

Very often there was jumping from one theme to another. That means that now for three months we will do a project, let's say, on conflict resolution, and after that we'll work on, I don't know what, combating violence against women, then afterward we'll do some publishing . . . something like that. . . . So, now all of us know everything, and in fact nobody knows anything. And so we remain amateurs in everything. (Respondent 1)

Women's foundations that have been coming here very often felt that they have to invent something new, so they did try to create something new. Very often they didn't have an interest in the motivations of those women or in whether these new organizations made any sense; their mission has often been to create something new, something that would give them some kind of legitimacy. So very often they didn't have sympathy for existing organizations. They didn't want to listen to their needs, they didn't want to finance something that was grounded, that was genuine, that made sense within a certain context. (Respondent 9)

The criticism of donors based on the role of personal relationships as a key factor in obtaining grants, on the lack of transparency, and on unclear roles and the lack of accountability to the communities they are working in mirrors, to a large extent, the negative features of women's organizations themselves. Personal relationships, friendship as the basis of establishing the group and/or organization, is still the dominant way that groups operate; the recruitment of new women is still predominantly through personal initiation, and examples of employing women through open competition are rare.

Positive Assessments

The overall assessment of international assistance is by no means a negative one. There is an acknowledgment that the needs that existed in times of humanitarian crisis were partially alleviated by international assistance. Assistance encouraged women's initiatives, and many of the ideas that have been floating around since the beginnings of (neo)feminism in this

region were given a chance to develop into specific projects, programs, and, in many instances, new organizations:

International foundations had a positive role in the sense that they brought in humanitarian aid under war circumstances (it is a different question how and where they brought in humanitarian aid). Second, they encouraged some women, that is, some women's groups, by supporting some of their initiatives, some of their beginnings. (Respondent 9)

Although the money came in rather bad, irregular ways, it was still the money that stimulated many movements, many moves within the women's movement. Many projects have started, many groups have started, and that was good. (Respondent 1)

There have been positive outcomes on the personal level in terms of increased knowledge and skills that are transferable to other sectors (including specific managerial skills, such as conflict resolution, strategic planning, and evaluation skills, and more broadly applicable interpersonal skills). While this kind of personal (and personnel) development can be regarded as an indicator of the capacity of women's organizations to contribute to the wider society, its downside manifests itself in the trend of women leaving their organizations for better-paid or more prestigious jobs in governmental structures or international organizations. The nongovernmental sector also seems to entail a potential for the development of more inclusive structures and nondiscriminatory organizational cultures that are, in part, reflected in the use of gender-sensitive language:

A large number of people got trained in various things. We went through an incredibly large range of education and training. I wouldn't be able to count them all, but it seems to me that for a certain period of time, let's say in '92, '93, '94, we sat in classrooms and learned something. When I compare ourselves with people working in various ministries, we are much ahead of them. . . . Another thing, people in the NGO sector are much more politically correct, they are much more gender sensitive, in using language, for instance. Also, a nationalist, racist way of behaving is avoided. The moment you get out of that circle of nongovernmental organizations, it hits you in the face.

Then, we acquired a whole range of technical skills. Some learned to make photocopies, to send a fax, to drive, to use various computer pro-

grams. Some learned a variety of interpersonal skills. Many people learned how to run a meeting, how to talk in public, how to conduct an evaluation, how to do a needs assessment, how to do many things that are needed in this country. So it is no wonder that some people from the nongovernmental sector entered into governmental bodies—not yet enough, since the salaries are still not attractive; more people are going into international organizations, for as long as they last. (Respondent 1)

The transparency of the transfer mechanisms is crucial in attributing positive, as well as negative, outcomes to external assistance. Public announcements and clear conditions are singled out as preferred modes of identifying grantees. Securing wide participation has been achieved by relying on local women as advisers, or by using local and regional advisory boards that meet regularly or communicate with each other from a distance:

As a symbol of fair play I could single out [an international NGO]. They made a public call, specifying conditions very clearly. They were clear about the amount they have at their disposal, the time period in which the activities need to take place, what the documentation should look like: project proposal, interim report, final report. That was the kind of transparency I liked very much. I think other organizations should use it. Not that I should know the boss of the organization so and so, so that I can somehow make her give money to my group, but that the organization should make a public call once a year, or for any other time period, and clearly give conditions for grants. Afterward it should publish a list of those who got the grants, so everybody can see who got what, for what kind of activities. So that there are no ideas about hidden intentions. In that case, no criteria are difficult. (Respondent 1)

When I look at [a U.S.-based women's foundation] over the last few years, I think that the way they are functioning is quite transparent. I consider them to be one of the most interesting women's foundations . . . because they don't give a lot of money, because they rely on a large women's network worldwide, and they have a large number of advisers who are doing it voluntarily. That means they want to hear many diverse opinions before making a decision on whom to finance. They don't run around the world; they want to hear opinions of women who live in that part of the world. (Respondent 9)

Sincerity of interest and even love are often invoked as elements that make a difference between the donors that are making a real contribution and those that are "just pursuing their own interests." What is especially appreciated is the possibility of engaging in direct dialogue, of having a space for negotiation and influence, along with flexible requirements and permission to change and learn from mistakes:

I have a positive example. They didn't just ask us to set up priorities, but within the project framework they gave us absolute flexibility to change things. You plan something, you put it on paper, then you start working and you see that you got it wrong. So we changed; they gave us absolute freedom. It really turned out to be a beautiful project. At the final evaluation of all the projects in Washington, D.C., we were given an opportunity to say what was good and what wasn't, everything was fantastic. Unfortunately, they don't come to this region anymore. (Respondent 5)

The Learning Process and Memory

Encounters within the aid relationship have definitely provoked a learning process, both among the recipients and among donors:

The situation is completely different depending on whether it is the first foundation that appeared or whether it is the tenth. If it is the first one, then it has great expectations of the recipients, and the recipients have great expectations of the foundation. I would say there is some kind of idealistic confusion on both sides, and since the expectations are great, the frustrations are great as well. . . . I think disappointments decrease along with the expectations and that roles are becoming more transparent. (Respondent 9)

At the same time, the learning process has been hindered and enhanced by the memories of the participants involved in relationship-building. In the course of the last decade, through each of the encounters, memories of the women on the recipient side collided with the memories of those on donor side. While there is a widespread conception among international researchers that the socialist system primarily used civic associations, if it did allow them at all, as a means of social control instead of individual empowerment, the testimonies from feminist activists under socialism demonstrate that there was a space for debating and challenging socialist solutions to the "woman question." Although the first feminist voices were

publicly accused of introducing bourgeois ideology, most of their activities were financed by the state, either directly (meeting space) or indirectly (the system of social security provided the first activists with enough free time for their volunteer activities):

> The system completely softened sometime in the 1980s. We had some discussions on TV with those women . . . the socialist conference of women. We went on TV, they were telling their ideological story, we were telling our story. And that was OK. (Respondent 3)

> Something that was perceived as socially valuable could receive [state] funding. It was not a problem to find free space; if you had an idea you could do something. . . . The whole story revolved around some of our ideas, fantasies, and a desire to change something, to have an influence. I think it was partly connected with the self-management story. In some strange way self-management opened up space—not so much for activities, but for the feeling that you can influence something. You could discuss endlessly; everybody had a right to their opinion, and the only question was whether you wanted to channel it somehow, whether you had an interest. In general, I don't think one could have done it within the structures of work or the structures of authority; the rules were very clear there. But the fact or illusion that you can do something, that you can have your own opinion and that that is all right, did influence some of the possible organizing at the very beginning. At that time we financed ourselves in various ways: we invented for ourselves our own membership fees. I remember that in the section Woman and Society we had been paying membership fees regularly, from some kind of pocket money. Even women who had not been working were able to contribute, and that was considered completely normal because what we were doing was extremely important. (Respondent 9)

Respondents' reflections on the learning process and their memories of the time "before the internationals arrived" point the way toward more beneficial ways of developing relationships. These learning processes are also closely interlinked with strategies for influencing donors.

Strategies of Influence

Participants in feminist movements and members of women's organizations in the post-Yugoslav countries often see themselves as objects of donor agendas, caught in a power relation where the only leverage on their part is an awareness that the "other side" needs them as much as, and sometimes even more than, they need the donors. Activists did, however, adopt various strategies to influence the donors, sometimes on their own initiative, sometimes due to the readiness of the donors to create a space for such an influence.

The most successful strategic tools appear to be clarity of goals and sufficient confidence in one's own capacity, accompanied with the ability to take on the donors' perspective:

> First of all, you have to know exactly what you want. Second, you have to be strong enough to position yourself as a political subject. In that case you have the right, if they need you, if they think you are going in a direction that is interesting to them, then you have all the creative capacity, you can do everything as you want to do it. But first you have to decide for yourself, who you are, what you are, what you want. . . . Then you can negotiate with the donor. You can move a little bit here and there, but you have to keep your line. (Respondent 2)

> My project proposals usually got accepted because I wrote them in a studious way. . . . I also tried to imagine, at the time I worked in the women's movement, that if I would have been the donor, what things would I have liked to hear, what would have interested me about a project. So I wrote it, even though nobody asked me to. I guess that made a good impact on the donors, and I was successful. (Respondent 1)

Clarity of goals allows for a move away from the opportunistic approach, even if the choice is simply refusal:

> You can refuse. I remember that the representatives [of a particular foundation] fell down when I said no. Although we knew there was big money in it, we had our agenda that we dealt with and we didn't want to give up. We would rather not exist in that case, we would prefer to put much more effort into dealing with a funder who is interested in giving us the money. You cannot always run after good opportunities; there is enough of that. (Respondent 5)

Direct involvement in creating a donor agenda is a rare and appreciated opportunity:

> Up to now we have very good experiences with [a particular foundation], they listen and they are willing to talk. Recently I spent seven days with them, they were doing their strategic planning for the next two years, and they invited us, a few women whom they thought are working well, from good organizations, and they let us set priorities ourselves, so they might look for projects that fit those priorities. So there are those, a few of them, who are open to dialogue and conversation and will ask you for an opinion. (Respondent 5)

The initiative seems to remain with the donor agency ("they invited us, they gave us the absolute freedom, they invited those of us they think are working well"), although there is definitely an emerging awareness that women's organizations themselves can take a more active approach. As noted by Respondent 5, "It would be good if all of us could sit together, make an arrangement and initiate contact with funders instead of waiting all the time for the funders to come to us."

Future Sustainability

Future sustainability is a question that usually comes at the end of the grant proposal guidelines. The potential recipients are asked to offer insight into their own future. Predictions by the women I interviewed follow two main directions. First, they expect a loss of outside financial sources due to the reallocation of international funding toward the state (with a concomitant loss of human resources, as women seek employment in the state sector or in international organizations). This trend could lead to the disappearance of these organizations: As Repondent 5 described it, "The funders are withdrawing, and since these states are impoverished, I think the organizations will disappear unless they find some new ways to finance themselves and find some income of their own" Genuineness of interest, although seen as a positive trait when assessing the donors, does not seem to be perceived as a guarantee of organizational survival:

> I think that the best groups, the strongest ones in the sense of being professional, will survive. There is no strength in an ideological sense—some of "the most fabulous feminists" will survive, some not . . . that is not one of the criteria. Criteria include professionalism, respectability/reputation, quality of work . . . the groups with the highest profiles will survive, those who are clearly recognized for their work on certain things. . . .

> Second, the sources of financing will change. Instead of charities, those providing humanitarian aid, there will be other agencies, e.g., the European Union. What I want to say is that this will never stop. I can see that nongovernmental organizations in the U.S. and Western Europe also need to compete for funding. Any decent state will want to finance civil society. (Respondent 1)

Second, a change in the purpose of aid, from emergency to development work, may lead to the need for more professional organizations (and subsequently to NGOization), along with an increased reliance on state funding. Skills and knowledge obtained within nongovernmental women's organizations can potentially be transferred into other areas:

> I also think that the financial support that is coming for various educational and research projects, including some other activities, will get reallocated from the nongovernmental sector to the state sector. In the future, people who have numerous and rich experiences gained in the nongovernmental sector, who have a decade of experience, will enter some ministries, or state offices. We may think at the moment that we don't want to belong to state institutions, but in the future that may be the best way to apply our knowledge and to continue to receive international funding. (Respondent 1)

There is also awareness about the role of the international feminist movement in pressuring individual governments and intergovernmental organizations to demonstrate gender sensitivity in resource allocation. Respondent 3 explained, "I believe that all that money that goes for women's projects is made available due to the pressure of women's movements and associations on the global level. So, if that's some kind of good image, the ruling establishment will follow it, if not, they won't." There are also those who think about sustainability, beyond financial and organizational imperatives, in terms of raising gender consciousness in order to guarantee women's involvement in the future, regardless of the financing of particular organizations or the generally difficult economic situation:

> That network is most important to us, since it is the basis of the movement . . . When soon there will be no money, and there won't be, when poverty increases generally, as it seems it will, these women will already have some kind of consciousness, and they will know what we want. They won't

get depressed and go back home; they will continue doing something. (Respondent 3)

Encounters as Analyzed: NGOization and Policy Shifts

The process of establishing a donor-recipient relationship in the post-Yugoslav context resembles Wedel's depiction of Western assistance to Eastern Europe as divided into phases of triumphalism, disillusionment, and adjustment (Wedel 2001). It is difficult to ascribe any feeling of triumph to the time of war and large-scale humanitarian crisis. Hence, a more appropriate name for the first phase in this context, the period when most of the donors approached women and women's organizations in the post-Yugoslav countries, would be "great expectations." The first phase was marked by high and, more often than not, unspoken expectations among all actors involved.

The phase of disillusionment brings the first frustrations and resentments, when expectations are not fulfilled so easily. In the process of getting to know each other, recipients sometimes realize that the rationale for giving is not purely altruistic, while donors have to face the fact that the needs expressed by recipients are often merely desires, programs, and projects drafted in haste, with no capacity for implementation. During the adjustment phase, an awareness of the contractual nature of the relationship becomes predominant, opening up the possibility for partnership instead of dependency.

If we conceive of "local" and "international" as separate spheres that do not necessarily interact with one another, as an "outside" and an "inside," we may identify three main points of entrance for an outside intervention in the form of assistance: (1) supporting existing structures, such as organizations, groups, and sometimes individuals, without intending to change them (in this case, there is trust in the capacity of the structure to influence change in its broader environment); (2) supporting existing structures in order to change them (this is the case when assistance is dependent on the modification of the existing structure, since there is no trust in its current capacity to influence change in the broader environment); (3) initiating a completely new structure (this mode of intervention may include looking for "novelty" projects within existing organizations, or setting up completely new organizations).

Currently, there are several hundred women's organizations in the post-Yugoslav region. Whether they would have emerged, and how many of them would now exist, without international assistance is a complex question. According to feminist respondents, perhaps up to 80 to 90 percent of them would have never appeared without foreign financial support, or if they had appeared, their subsequent development would have been very different.

The general trend toward the NGOization of the women's movement has been observed in various parts of the world. The term "NGOization" can imply two different things. The first refers to the increasing tendency of the state to contract nongovernmental organizations to work on social problems that the state feels unable or is unwilling to address. The other meaning refers to the process of transformation of social movements into professionalized organizations. The two processes are of course interconnected. In Western Europe, the phenomenon of NGOization has been described by Sabine Lang (1997) for Germany. Sonia E. Alvarez (1999) explores "the NGO boom" in the Latin American context, which seems strikingly similar to the processes in all of the post-Yugoslav countries. The main similarity can be seen in the fact that, unlike Germany (and other Western countries), where the state appears as the major donor, in Latin America and the post-Yugoslav countries, international organizations are the most important instigators of NGOization.

In terms of strategies and programs, NGOization leads to issue-specific interventions and pragmatic strategies with a strong employment focus, rather than the establishment of a new democratic counterculture. In terms of ideology, the "traditionally" complex feminist agenda of emancipation and equality gets translated into specific, single issues with a state-oriented focus (the recent trend in post-Yugoslav countries is an increased pressure on the third sector to cooperate with government). In terms of structure, professionalized (and decentralized) small-scale organizations, with more hierarchical structures, become dominant, replacing overarching movements focused on the politicization and mobilization of feminist publics. By the same token, feminist organization-building and institutionalization replace movement activism (Lang 1997: 102–103).

The process of NGOization has been fostered through various practices. Along with a variety of measures designed to increase "organizational capacity-building," the most prominent and explicit mechanism is the transfer of NGO management skills. The concept of "capacity-building" often resembles "compliance-building" in the sense that knowledge

and skills gained through training aim primarily at increasing the capacity of participants to comply with the requests of others. While training is provided under the assumption that strengthening NGOs will contribute toward strengthening civil society, the downside of this is that participants often see a well-run NGO as the equivalent of activism for social change. The idea of "a small group of citizens that can change the world" very often gets lost in the process of "strengthening organizational capacity." In addition, the concepts of "civil society," "NGO," and "women's or feminist movement" undergo transformations according to specific local contexts that are not taken into account by those who intervene from the outside.

Pressure from donors has changed the working style of many organizations. For instance, many organizations did not have hierarchical structures prior to the receipt of a significant grant. Grant application forms, however, often require a role such as president or vice president, and even if a group has decided to delegate that role to one of its members for that particular occasion, if the grant is awarded, the "hierarchy-for-the occasion" may become the real structure, creating new, not necessarily harmonious, relationships within the group.

A common development within social movements that attempt to raise public awareness about deficiencies perceived by movement initiators is transformation of parts of the movement into organizations. Outside interventions in the context of post-Yugoslav countries seem to have worked from the other end: organizations are being supported (sometimes even created) with the idea that they will incite and sustain the movement. Foreign donors should consider whether the concentration on women's NGOs should be the primary vehicle for achieving gender equality. The effects are ambiguous. The support offered is too short for the organizations to reach full sustainability, and therefore the constant pressure to keep the organizations running decreases the capacity of the organization (and the women involved) to mobilize broader public support for a feminist agenda of social change. Whether the movements can indeed be strengthened, even created, through strengthening of organizational development skills remains to be seen.

International funding policies regarding gender issues in general, and women's organizations in particular, are more appropriately conceived from a notion of policy as "authorized choice," as distinct from a conception of policy as "structured interaction" (Colebatch 1998: 102). Policy as authorized choice assumes a simple definition of policy as "governments making decisions," following a linear process defining the problem that

needs to be solved, identifying possible options, and establishing rational criteria for making a choice. In contrast, policy as structured interaction makes no assumption about a single decision maker or the clarity of a policy problem. It allows for the emerging pattern of activity not to be seen as collective effort to achieve known and shared goals. There is no single decision maker in the field of international assistance, regardless of the level on which we focus our attention. There is a range of "players" having diverse understandings of the situation and the problem.

There is no united set of donors' agendas, and no united set of agendas on behalf of women's organizations. To say this does not imply that there should have been such a set. In the period of emerging movements, in time of war and humanitarian crises, the immensity of the problem may function as the unifying factor. As soon as tensions calm, or as soon as the choice becomes more complicated than that of satisfying immediate needs, agendas also become more diverse.

All actors involved in the process of relationship building between donors and recipients are simultaneously players in policymaking processes influenced by many other factors in their environment, most notably by the sociopolitical context in which the relationships are being built. What kind of guidelines can be given for policymaking processes aimed at achieving gender equality through women's empowerment?

All the issues supported are valuable causes: eliminating violence against women, economic empowerment, political participation, and so on. They are usually interlinked in the sense that one heading can easily subsume others. The simple question, What is the most important issue for women in country X today?—whatever the answer may be—cannot provide guidelines on *how* the most important issue should be dealt with. If the answer is "violence against women," this does not imply whether it is necessary to provide shelters (how many, who should run them, what kind of support should be available in the shelter, how the quality of support will be assessed); to run public campaigns' or to educate policemen, social workers, and health care providers on dealing with victims of violence. In the search for "best practices" and "innovations," actors engaged in social change for gender equality often neglect local memories that play a crucial role in the implementation of models based on success in another location.

In order not to foster "practice without language" (Husanović, 2001), it is necessary to allow sufficient time for needs to be articulated, for an "incubation period" during which actors have an opportunity to develop

their ideas and adjust their perceptions without immediate pressure to produce results. On a practical level, this implies direct financial support for activities such as needs assessment, planning, and developing cooperation. In addition, it means giving more attention to the question of *how*—that is, to the mechanisms for transferring financial and technical assistance. Through this chapter, I have tried to show how an ethnographic analysis of donor-recipient encounters can provide a fuller basis for understanding how this *how* can be imagined.

NOTE

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