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**Is the Personal Political?
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During the Post-Soviet Period**

Armine Ishkanian

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Armine Ishkanian completed her anthropology Ph.D. dissertation, "Hearths and Modernity: The Role of Women and NGOs in Post-Soviet Armenia." She is currently a Postdoctoral Research Fellow at the Institute of Slavic, East European, and Eurasian Studies at UC Berkeley. This paper was presented at the first annual George W. Breslauer Graduate Student Conference, "One Ring to Rule Them All: Power and Power Relations in East European Politics and Societies," at the University of California, Berkeley, in November 2002. Some of the arguments in this essay, particularly those related to global civil society, are further developed in Armine Ishkanian, "Importing Civil Society? The Emergence of Armenia's NGO Sector and the Impact of Western Aid on Its Development," *Armenian Forum: A Journal for Contemporary Studies* 3, No. 1, forthcoming.

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I. INTRODUCTION

In the post-socialist countries of eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union, civil society has become equated with the development and growth of non-governmental organizations (NGOs). Policymakers have hailed NGOs as “stakeholders in the transition and development of [post-socialist] countries”¹ and the “connective tissue of democratic political culture.”² This link between civil society and NGOs is a late-twentieth-century phenomenon and one that should be understood in the context of deregulated and increasingly globalized economies. It is significant because it has led to a phenomenal growth in the number of NGOs in the countries of the former Soviet Union, where democratization and a vibrant civil society have been directly linked to the presence of NGOs.³ In the post-Soviet states, the number of NGOs began to grow rapidly once Western governments and donors began providing grants to NGOs to implement democratization, civil society, and other such projects. As various scholars have pointed out, these governments and donors had political and social agendas to pursue, and this is reflected in the types of projects and issues they promoted.⁴

In this paper, I examine the growth of the NGO sector in Armenia in the 1990s and the impact of Western aid on its development. Due to difficult economic conditions in the post-Soviet period, Armenian NGOs continue to rely entirely on Western financial support. This reliance has not only meant that donors determine the types of projects that are implemented and issues that are addressed but, equally importantly, how those issues are addressed (i.e., methods and solutions) and how they are discussed (i.e., language and discourses). By examining how domestic violence became an issue in Armenia’s NGO sector, I will show how NGO-donor relationships shape knowledge-production, information-circulation, and decision-making.⁵ At the same time, I will argue that although Armenian NGOs are recipients of the ideas, goods, and capital associated with global civil society, they are not passive consumers who accept these imports automatically and in their “pure” form.⁶ Instead, local NGO members interpret, criticize, and customize the global to the local, and they adapt projects to meet local needs.

II. THE EMERGENCE OF ARMENIA'S NGO SECTOR AND ITS CHARACTERISTICS

In the late 1980s and early 1990s, the idea of civil society was attractive to many intellectuals in socialist states because it combined the notion of democratic pluralism with a continued role for state regulation and guidance, making it seem the right form of social organization for societies seeking to recover from the excesses of state socialism.⁷ At that time, intellectuals in east central Europe and in some republics of the Soviet Union, including Armenia, thought of civil society as a utopian social movement or alternative/parallel society coexisting with and opposing the weakened and de-legitimized official state.⁸

The Karabagh movement, which began in 1988 and culminated in the declaration of Armenia's independence in September 1991, has been called a "rebirth" or renaissance of the Armenian people. It was a period when Armenians believed in the ideals of civil society and the possibility of democratizing the Soviet system. This idealism brought hundreds of thousands of people into the streets and squares of Yerevan and made social and political activists out of many apathetic Soviet citizens. The idealism and vigorous social activism were short-lived, however. They were soon replaced by disillusion, apathy, frustration, and dislocation as Armenia was plunged into a severe period of crisis (*jknazham*) following the declaration of independence in 1991. The first three years of the independence (1992–94) were the most difficult because an economic blockade by Azerbaijan and Turkey over the conflict in Nagorno-Karabagh led to long periods of economic disruption, electrical blackouts, the interruption of state-provided heat and hot water services, and closures of factories and institutes. Given these harsh socio-economic conditions, most people did not have the time or inclination to participate in civic projects. As in Soviet times, the extended family continued to be the primary mode of social protection and form of identification.⁹

Following independence in 1991, however, international humanitarian aid organizations such as CARE, Oxfam, Save the Children, and others established resident missions in Armenia and began to engage in long-term activities. While such transnational, foreign, as well as

diaspora organizations proliferated in Armenia during the early post-Soviet years, there still were only forty-four local NGOs operating in Yerevan in 1994.¹⁰ This quickly changed when, beginning in 1994 and continuing with greater intensity in 1995 and 1996, Western governments and international agencies began providing grants to promote civil society and democratization in Armenia. As a result, by 1997 over 2000 NGOs were registered with the Armenian Ministry of Justice.

The opening of the USAID-funded Armenian Assembly of America NGO Training and Resource Center (NGOC) in Yerevan in 1994 was a watershed event in the development of Armenia's NGO sector because it provided locals with a template of how to create NGOs and how to seek funding from donors to sustain them.¹¹ NGOs that attended the Center's educational and training seminars not only learned how to write grant proposals and approach donors, but most importantly they began to master "NGO-speak." By mastering NGO-speak, or "project-speak," they learned how to communicate effectively with donors and to present their organization, project(s), and objectives as a good match with the funding priorities of donors.¹² In addition, NGO grant writers were compelled to learn English, since many grant proposals—even some that were submitted to local governmental bodies—had to be written in English.¹³ Furthermore, many of the terms and phrases of "NGO-speak," including "monitoring," "advocacy," "lobbying," "synergy," "trafficking," "target groups," "social partnerships," and even the innocuous "coffee break" do not translate well into Armenian. For example, when terms such as "monitoring" (*hskel* or *vera-hskel*) or "advocacy" (*karozchutuiun*) are translated into Armenian, they often take on negative connotations and conjure up images of the repressive Soviet state that kept citizens under surveillance (*hskvumeyin*) and sought to shape their opinions through massive state propaganda. For this reason, many NGOs prefer to use English terms to avoid problems involved in the translation of foreign words and concepts into Armenian. Thus Armenian NGOs organize "seminars" to "monitor" the efficacy of "social partnerships" aimed at aiding "target groups," and during these "meetings" they hold "coffee breaks" to "network" with fellow "advocates."¹⁴

A. NGOization

In Armenia, an NGO (or *hasarakakan kazmakerputiun*) is created by private citizens, has a mission statement and an objective or objectives, and is registered with the Ministry of Justice. Some NGOs have links to government officials or politicians; others do not. They address a wide variety of issues, including human rights, women's issues, children's rights, health care, peace, the environment, and cultural preservation. Membership in NGOs ranges from ten members to several thousand. As of April 2003 there were 3450 officially registered NGOs.¹⁵

The majority of these NGOs are NGOs in name only. One need only scan the lists of grant awardees posted on donor websites to realize that time and again the same organizations and individuals are awarded grants, and that only a handful of the 3450 officially registered NGOs are operating with any consistency.

B. Elite-centrism

In Armenia, as in the other post-Communist states, NGOs are overwhelmingly led by Soviet-era elites, either intellectuals or former Communist Party apparatchiks who were quick to recognize the potential offered by NGO sector participation and to make the transition from state or Communist Party structures to NGOs.¹⁶ For example, the Soviet-era Women's Council (*Zhensovet*) became the Women's Republican Council in the post-Soviet period, with its leader and hierarchical structures intact. Few working-class people or rural residents, or even intellectuals who were not part of the former structures of power, were able to make this transition. In addition to possessing organizational and language skills, these Soviet elites belonged to social networks that put them in contact with the foreigners who controlled or influenced the distribution of grants.

Those who made the transition reinvented themselves in order to take advantage of the new opportunities. For instance, they replaced Soviet propaganda with the slogans and propaganda of the West (for example, "building democracy" by developing NGOs). Individuals who participated in the NGO training programs and seminars learned skills such as grant writing,

fundraising, computer use, media relations, and advertising; they also learned the symbolic orders and discourses of the NGO world.

Donors prefer professionalized NGOs since these groups have, or can be trained to have, the administrative capabilities that donors need for their own bureaucratic budgets, accounting reports, project reports, and all other documents that beneficiaries are asked to submit.¹⁷ Less professional, informal, and poorly connected NGOs are overlooked by donors. This, as Chris Hann argues, “accentuates previous hierarchies, where almost everything depends on patronage and personal connection.”¹⁸ Only the professionalized and often elite-run NGOs survive, since they have the administrative capacity, the knowledge of grants and international trends, and the social connections that are instrumental to success.

This may sound undesirable, but there is a beneficial side. Educated professionals are able to maintain a modicum of dignity and a modest standard of living. They do not have to resort to selling cheap wares in metro kiosks or emigrate to work as babysitters, housekeepers, caretakers, or jewelry sweatshop laborers in Armenian diaspora communities in the West.¹⁹ As the First Deputy Minister of Social Security, Ashot Yesayan, explained:

Aside from providing humanitarian aid, a second reason why NGOs have been created is because they help solve the employment issue for many professional people who have a great deal of knowledge, experience, and ability but who are not able to earn money in their regular jobs. Sadly, there are many employed [but] poor people in Armenia. So these professionals apply their knowledge and skills by working in NGOs.²⁰

This, of course, was not the donors’ intention, but it is one of the more positive outcomes in the development of the NGO sector in Armenia; it has mitigated the brain drain and provided many professionals with respectable jobs.

C. Feminization

Another similarity NGOs in Armenia share with those in other parts of the former Soviet Union is that most are run by women.²¹ There are several factors that contribute to the feminization of

the NGO sector in Armenia. First, the removal of the Soviet-era quota system led to a sharp decline in the number of women in official positions, and although women had been crucial in the independence movement by participating in demonstrations, work and hunger strikes, making speeches, and collecting money for the effort, once independence was achieved, women found themselves tacitly excluded from the new government. NGOs became a popular alternative method of public participation. Second, men initially showed little interest in the “non-governmental” sector, since any man who wished to be active in political or public life could do so through the government or political parties. In addition, men generally regarded the rewards of NGO participation, in terms of grants and micro-credit programs, as too small and the bureaucratic details of operating an NGO too numerous. Men preferred the business sector, where they felt they could make more money. Third, because NGOs are non-governmental and non-political (at least to some extent), most women viewed them as a better method of public participation than political parties that were seen as inherently dirty and corrupt.²² Finally, a very important factor was the preference of donors to support women’s initiatives (e.g., gender equality) and women’s organizations. For instance, according to website of the USAID Mission to Armenia:

USAID has made a conscious effort over the years to promote women’s leadership and empowerment through the NGO sector—a sector in which, in Armenia, women already have an accepted leadership role. Since assistance began USAID has trained over 81 women NGO leaders.... However, the NGO sector is still nascent. NGOs have not yet developed a strong political voice or influence. USAID’s new NGO-strengthening program will include support to increase women’s political influence through NGOs.²³

USAID’s policy of strengthening NGOs, supporting women’s “political voice,” and promoting women’s “empowerment” is shared by other aid organizations. The United Nations Development Program (UNDP) office in Armenia, for instance, has been very supportive of women’s issues

throughout the 1990s. Under the leadership of Ms. Katica Cekalovic, the UNDP office in Armenia supported the publication of several groundbreaking reports, including the *UNDP Women Status Report Armenia 1999* and the *Millennium Gender Report (2001)*, as well as numerous conferences and seminars dedicated to women's issues. *Armenian Women: At the Doorstep of the XXI Century* (2000), another important work by local scholars on gender issues, was published with support from the Armenian International Women's Association, a transnational Armenian women's NGO based in Boston, Massachusetts.²⁴ Efforts by diaspora and foreign or international aid organizations aimed at empowering women and increasing their political voice through NGO participation have had only qualified success because the publication of reports and the organization of conferences have not led to real changes that affect the daily life of women. Women continue to be poorly represented in higher levels of government as the efforts of women's NGOs at training young women leaders and increasing women's participation in society have not led to an increased number of women running for public office or holding leadership and decision-making positions in the government.²⁵ For instance, in the May 2003 National Assembly elections, of the 558 candidates running for office, only 4.3% (24 candidates) were women. This number is less than the number of women (44) who ran for office during the 1999 National Assembly Elections. Furthermore, women's participation in the business and financial sectors, except at low and mid-level positions, is also very limited. As an Armenian scholar and one of the 24 women running for office explained during a meeting of the UN Theme Group on Gender Development at the UNDP office:

In order to increase women's participation in government, we need to help women become wealthier. Otherwise it makes no sense to speak of women's participation in government when women's participation in the profitable business and financial sectors is barely one percent. Until we see the rectification of the causes for women's lack of political participation—that is, their lack of financial capital—we will only be applying artificial (*arhesdagan*) solutions to this problem.

While organizing local conferences, seminars, roundtables, and young leaders' training programs has not had a significant impact on the lives of women in Armenia (at least for now), the 1995 Fourth UN World Conference on Women in Beijing was a defining moment in the development

of women's NGOs in Armenia because the women who attended it—either as members of the government delegation or as NGO members—returned to Armenia informed and educated about global gender issues and concerns, which they proceeded to translate into the local Armenian context.²⁶

The number of women's NGOs and NGOs led by women in Armenia increased markedly after the Beijing Conference.²⁷ The conference not only provided local women with an introduction to the international world of NGOs, but it also stimulated greater funding and interest in the role of women in development. Donors began to say that women were more “cost-effective” as beneficiaries of development and civil-society aid than men.²⁸

Donors' focus on women began in the 1970s when international development agencies began to make “women” visible as a category in development and research policy.²⁹ This came to be known as the Women In Development (WID) approach. The thinking was that if policy makers, donors, and planners could be made to see women's concrete and valuable contributions to their economies, then women would no longer be marginalized in the development process. This trend became more marked in the 1990s and continues today, as many of the largest donors, including the World Bank, USAID, and various United Nations agencies, all have departments focused on gender issues that are charged with promoting gender equality in development, or GID (gender in development). Women's NGOs and women in NGOs in Armenia recognize the ascendancy of the GID approach and have become quite adept at employing the appropriate discourses. “Talking gender” has become an important factor in winning grants. As one of my respondents explained:

You learn what the donors fund and then you talk about that in your grant proposal. They all like gender issues (*genderi hartser*) so women have a better chance at getting grants, as do women's organizations. (“Gohar”)³⁰

Although many women involved in Armenia's NGOs freely employ the discourses associated with GID, this does not mean that Armenian NGOs have a feminist agenda or that

members consider themselves feminist. Indeed, they often take offense at being called feminists, and most of the active women in the NGOs that I interviewed were keen to point out they are pursuing a nationalist (*azgayin*) agenda and that their work is more “feminine” (*kanatzi*) than feminist.³¹ The difference is crucial: *kanatzi* denotes a continuation with the past and traditional gender roles and ideologies, whereas “feminist” indicates a break with the traditional. In Armenia, the vilification of feminism is due in part to seventy years of state opposition to feminism as a bourgeois and counterrevolutionary ideology.³² But it is also rejected because it is seen as an anti-family ideology.

Armenian anthropologist Levon Abrahamian asserts that when the modern concepts of nation and nationalism emerged in European political discourse in the nineteenth century, Armenians gave preference to the Armenian word “*azg*,” since it embraced such meanings as “tribe,” “clan,” “people,” “order,” and “class.” Despite the use of the word “*azg*” to signify “nation,” it also continues to be used to signify “family” and “tribe.”³³ Abrahamian contends that in Armenia very often the “*azg*-family” is seen as assisting the Armenian “*azg*-nation” to survive.³⁴ In this context, where the family is seen as the foundation of the nation, anti-family ideologies or actions are also seen as being anti-national (*apazgayin* or *haka-azgayin*).

During my dissertation fieldwork, the women I spoke with in the All-Armenian Women’s Union and Helsinki Citizens’ Assembly NGOs, as well as members of the now-defunct Shamiram Women’s Social and Political Party, contended that it was wrong to separate women’s issues from men’s issues and that all efforts should be aimed at strengthening the family, society, the state (*bedutuiun*), and the nation (*azg*). Armenian female academics (and, of course, female politicians) reinforce this perspective. In the article, “This Is Not About Women’s Struggle, But About Society’s Common Sense,” the chair of the Yerevan State University Department of Sociology and leader of both the Armenian Democratic Forum NGO and the Dignified Future (*Arzhanabadiv Apaga*) political party, Lyudmila Harutyunyan, argues against a feminist approach. She writes:

I don't place the emphasis on the women's movement, since the woman in Armenian society is the pillar of stability and she does not have the right to cause a social implosion that would threaten that stability. Especially since our society is under crisis. Put simply, it is important to initiate constructive steps to ensure that women play a role in political affairs and governance.³⁵

Many women in the NGO sector agree with Harutyunyan's views and want NGOs to be organizations that allow women to pursue critical social, educational, civic education, and health care problems rather than feminist agendas. The women in the NGOs I studied simultaneously presented themselves as the keepers of the proverbial hearth (*ochakhe pahogh*) and traditionalists, as well as progressive liberals fighting for change. By portraying themselves as traditionalists and antifeminists, the women appeased local bureaucrats and politicians who resented the entry of women into the public sphere and politics. The use of the neoliberal-inspired Western discourses of GID, on the other hand, allowed them to secure funding and support from Western donors who wished to promote women's involvement in Armenia's socioeconomic and political development. The use of these contradictory discourses and the cultural models they represent was reconciled by women's portrayal of themselves as reproducers and nurturers of the nation. As "Datevik," a member of the All-Armenian Women's Union told me, "Our goal is not to pursue a divisive feminist agenda, but to work for the good of the entire nation (*amboghch azgi hamar*)." In describing their NGO/public activities as extensions of their domestic childrearing and nurturing duties, women invoked the rhetoric of moral motherhood and insisted that they were participating in the honorable practice of nation-building by educating future citizens about the values of democracy, civic responsibility, and self-sufficiency.³⁶ In addition to the discourses, NGO members also adapt and customize strategies and projects to correspond better to local conditions.

As intermediaries, NGOs benefit from Western aid because it provides them with increased leverage and autonomy at the local level and an ability to continue working in respectable jobs instead of having to do menial and (by local standards) humiliating work. Aid, however, is a double-edged sword, and while it provides NGOs with funding and support, it also

exposes them to foreign direction and control. This dependency of local NGOs on the “uncertain largess of donors,” as William Fisher calls it, has direct and indirect effects, including the redirecting of accountability away from groups’ grassroots constituencies and toward funders, as well as the transformation of NGOs into contractors, constituencies into customers, and members into clients.³⁷ This exposes NGOs to attacks within their own countries, raising questions about whether they truly represent their constituents. If NGOs sacrifice the local for the global, they risk betraying their mission as local organizations. If they ignore the needs and wants of international donors, however, they risk losing funding that is critical to their survival and success.

III. IS THE PERSONAL POLITICAL?

The issue of domestic violence, which became a popular funding initiative among donors during the late 1990s, illustrates the difficulty Armenian NGOs face in trying to reconcile the interests of foreign donors with the interests of their local constituents. In 1995 and 1996, domestic violence was still a new topic in Armenia’s NGO sector, and it was also to some extent a taboo one. Women’s NGOs opposed public discussion of what they deemed a private, family issue. The Armenian authors of the August 1995 United Nations Review dedicated to the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing wrote:

Violence against women, although there are no records kept in Armenia, is a universal phenomenon. Therefore, Armenian women must have experienced some form of violence against them. Reporting of violence is not customary. The definition of violence is not clear. Psychological violence, violence of sexual nature [sic] and physical violence are not clearly understood or identified or distinguished.³⁸

In 1996, members of a transnational feminist NGO called the Young Women and Democracy Program (YWDP), which had funding from the European Union’s PHARE/TACIS program, began work in Armenia to assist in creating a coalition of local women’s NGOs to address the issue of violence against women together with other women’s empowerment

programs. This group had funding to help local NGOs create fund crisis shelters and hotlines, but local groups resisted working with the YWDP. They argued that domestic violence was not the most critical issue facing Armenian women and added, “We don’t air our dirty laundry in public.” Also in 1996, “Azniv,” an American Armenian expatriate, created a study group to examine the problems of “Battered Women.” Azniv organized several meetings during the spring and summer of 1996 to discuss the issue of domestic violence in Armenia. These meetings were attended by American expatriates working in Armenia and by a few local Armenian scholars. At one meeting, held in the cafeteria of the American University of Armenia, an American participant suggested that women’s NGOs should be involved—and in fact take the lead—in addressing the issue of domestic violence. In response, an American training coordinator at the Armenian Assembly of America’s NGO Center expressed her concern that many women’s NGOs did not want to address this issue and added, “Many of the women’s NGOs do not necessarily address women’s problems, and the issue of domestic violence will not be well received by such groups.” Members of various women’s NGOs had been invited to attend the meetings, but none were present at any that I visited. When I asked one NGO member why she did not attend, she replied, “That is not a problem we wish to discuss in public. If she [Azniv] wants to do so, it is her choice, but she will not receive any support from us.” While Azniv’s efforts were well received by American expatriates and a few local women, nearly all of the women’s NGOs continued to avoid addressing the issue of domestic violence in 1996–97. This situation only began to change in 1998–2000 when international donors made increased funding available for local NGOs to begin addressing the problem of domestic violence.

For instance, in 1999 the US State Department awarded grants to the US-based NGOs Sister Cities International, Project Harmony, and Winrock International, so that they might conduct anti-domestic violence programs in Russia, Ukraine, Moldova, Uzbekistan, Armenia, and Georgia.³⁹ Winrock International received a grant of \$1,558,656 (duration 1999–2001) Project Harmony received a total of \$1,518,442 (\$499,548 for 1998–2000 and \$1,018,894 for 2000–2002), and Sister Cities International, which received two grants to conduct domestic

violence prevention programs from 1998–2001, did not have any projects in Armenia.⁴⁰ More recently, in September 2002, USAID awarded a total of \$476,367 to six local NGOs in Armenia to address domestic violence.⁴¹ Local NGO leaders were shocked that USAID had provided direct funding to local NGOs and in such large amounts. This was an apparently unprecedented event and provided evidence of continued (some would say intensifying) Western attention to this issue. In addition to the USAID direct grant, USAID also provided US-based World Learning with funding to provide grants to Armenian NGOs that address domestic violence.⁴²

In Armenia, Susanna Vardanyan, president of the Women’s Rights Center, has in recent years become the most prominent local advocate for protecting women’s rights and addressing the problem of domestic violence. Initially, Vardanyan was the leader of the Hayouhi Women’s Association, whose mission was to “protect women’s rights by extending the role of women in public, social, cultural, and political life.”⁴³ In 1996, Vardanyan did not attend any of the meetings or seminars organized by Azniv. Only in later years does she appear to have become involved in addressing the issue of domestic violence. With this shift in focus, she disbanded the Hayouhi Association and formed the Women’s Rights Center in 1997. The mission of her new organization became

... [t]o extend the role of women in public, social, cultural, and political life. To promote democratic reform in Armenia. To protect the rights of women and children in accordance with the RoA [Republic of Armenia] Constitution and international treaties. To promote the improvement of women’s state [condition] confirmed by the main provisions of [the] declaration and activities of [the] Women’s 4th International Conference (Beijing 1995).⁴⁴

The first sentence of the new mission statement was identical to the mission statement of the Hayouhi Association. The remaining sentences illustrate how local NGOs often pack their mission statements with a plethora of objectives, in order to have the flexibility to apply for a variety of grants and to accommodate easily donors’ shifting discourses, agendas, and funding initiatives. The last sentence in the paragraph confirms my earlier point that the United Nations conference in Beijing provided women’s NGOs with an introduction to the world of NGOs and a new vocabulary with which to represent their organizations and activities. In an interview,

Vardanyan explained why and how her group decided to change its name from Hayouhi to the Women's Rights Center. She said:

Knowing one's rights is a very important thing. Our [WRC's] main objective is to help society and people be free from violence. When we decided to change our name in 1997, it was so that we could focus on issues of rights (*iravunk*). By changing our organization's name from Hayouhi to the Women's Rights Center, we put the issue of "rights" at the center of all our activities.⁴⁵

According to Vardanyan, the Women's Rights Center was the only NGO working on the issue of domestic violence from 1997 to 2001. She argues that while the WRC was involved in "demonstrating (*abatsutsumeink*) to the public that the issue of domestic violence must be addressed in Armenia," most NGO leaders attacked her efforts and called her a "family-wrecker" (*undanik kantoghe*). She adds:

Many people, NGO leaders, and among them many women, were resistant to our efforts in this direction. They did not understand what domestic violence is and how widespread it is in Armenia. These people accused us of wanting to destroy Armenian families and Armenian society. But when World Learning announced a domestic violence grant program at the end of 2001, the number of NGOs working on the issue mushroomed. To my surprise, over 120 NGOs applied for this grant. I couldn't believe it! [Why] did all these NGOs that had not been working on domestic violence become so interested in this topic all of the sudden? After all, only a few years before that they had accused us of all sorts of terrible things.⁴⁶

In spite of the large number of NGOs that jumped on the domestic violence bandwagon, the Women's Rights Center was and continues to be the most prominent and recognized NGO working on domestic violence in Armenia, and with financial support from the USAID direct grant it has opened one of the two crisis shelters in Yerevan.⁴⁷ In 2000, the Women's Rights Center also worked with Elizabeth Duban and Belinda Cooper of the Minnesota Advocates for Human Rights, who had traveled to Armenia under the sponsorship of the US State Department to explore how the Armenian government was treating domestic violence and whether Armenia was upholding its international legal obligations with respect to women's rights.⁴⁸ Duban and Cooper argue that "[i]n countries moving out of the Soviet past, defensiveness continues to be the more common response to critical questions" and they add that they found a lack of

willingness on the part of state officials and even some human rights NGOs to address the issue of domestic violence. They recognize that the defensiveness or reluctance of Armenians to treat domestic violence as a social/public issue is due to the fact that domestic violence is still considered a “private” issue in Armenia. They write:

There are concrete reasons that women do not report abuse, and the obstacles can be overcome. Some of them have to do with the *somewhat amorphous concept of “culture”*; [my emphasis] others with more specific institutional obstacles. Culturally, patriarchal norms in most countries fashion ideas about women’s roles and women’s place. In Armenia, we were frequently told, as in many parts of the world, women’s sphere has traditionally been confined to the home and family, while the man is considered the head of the household. The traditional family structure takes the young bride out of her familiar surroundings and places her in a new family—that of her husband. There she occupies a particularly vulnerable position at the low end of the hierarchy, at the mercy of her husband and his family. Violence is frequently viewed as “normal” and thus accepted by both women and men.⁴⁹

Duban and Cooper argue that Armenia must institute legal reforms if it wishes to address the problem of domestic violence. Yet their argument that the “somewhat amorphous concept of ‘culture’” (along with the “more specific institutional obstacles”) impedes the acceptance of domestic violence as a social/public issue is problematic given their simplistic and reductionist view of Armenian “culture.” Their essentialization of Armenian society as one in which violence is “viewed as ‘normal’” and where women are “vulnerable,” voiceless individuals who are oppressed by or “at the mercy of their husbands and their husband’s families” reduces the complexities of Armenian women’s lives. By portraying Armenian women as helpless and unenlightened victims who suffer because of their cultural traditions, Duban and Cooper ignore the crucial class, educational, and urban-rural differences among Armenian women. Such a representation distorts Armenian women’s multiple realities and reduces them to an undifferentiated category of “oppressed traditional woman.” This tendency, Chandra Mohanty explains, is present in many accounts that lay claims to representing the challenges facing women in so-called Third World or developing countries. In these accounts, Mohanty contends, women in developing or “Third World” countries are often portrayed as passive victims, with

little consideration of either their diversity (class, education, etc.) or their agency.⁵⁰ Elizabeth Crewe and Emma Harrison maintain that Western development workers and consultants are often inclined to identify culture as an impediment and obstacle to development, social change, and modernization. They write:

When development flounders, self-criticism is often limited to an acceptance that insufficient attention has been paid to the recipients of aid. Implicit in this, however, is a tendency to root the explanation in the culture of recipients. Colonial denigration of the “customs of the natives” may be long gone, but the reification of culture as a “barrier to development” is still common.⁵¹

Mohanty, Crewe and Harrison are writing about development and modernization projects that were implemented in Asia, Latin America, and Africa (i.e., the traditional sites of Third World, or developing, countries). However, because in the post-Soviet period many of the former socialist states are now identified as “developing” countries, women in these states have had “development encounters” of their own with Western development workers, consultants, and “experts.”⁵² The implications of the asymmetrical relations between the global and local actors engaged in development encounters cannot be overlooked, given that the power inequalities inherent in these encounters affect the production of knowledge, the circulation of information, decision-making, and the outcomes of development or “transition” projects.

IV. GLOBAL SOLUTIONS FOR LOCAL PROBLEMS: HOW EFFECTIVE ARE THEY?

A. Soviet Experiments at Making the Personal Political

In *The Surrogate Proletariat*, Gregory Massell illustrates the process through which the Soviet government and its social engineers attempted to penetrate the traditional solidarity of kinship in the USSR’s central Asian republics.⁵³ Massell argues that the Communist Party experimented with a number of approaches, one of which was an “in-depth” approach that aimed at undermining the traditional social order in order to destroy family structures and the kinship

system. Soviet social engineers, he maintains, believed that this could most speedily be achieved through the mobilization of women. Massell explains:

It may be said, then, that Moslem women came to constitute in Soviet political imagination a structural weak point in the traditional order: a potentially deviant and hence subversive stratum susceptible to militant appeal—in effect, a surrogate proletariat where no proletariat in the real Marxist sense existed.⁵⁴

The authorities believed that if they could engender conflict within the traditional family structures, this would provide them with leverage for the disintegration of those structures and their subsequent reconstitution. Throughout Central Asia and the Caucasus, local Women's Divisions of the Communist Party (*Zhenotdel*), women's clubs, workers' clubs, tea-houses (*chaykhana*), workshops (*artel*), and evening schools for adult literacy or “illiteracy liquidation centers” (*likpunkty*) were established to integrate women into the Soviet system.⁵⁵ The overarching goal of the Soviet state was not so much to liberate women as to organize them as a political and economic force, so that they would become workers in the industrialized economy.

In Armenia, these efforts at “breaking the cake of custom” began in the early 1920s, as the Communist regime identified the traditional Armenian family as a “backward” institution and sought to transform it by dismantling family loyalties.⁵⁶ There were two main reasons for this. First, there was a political imperative to include women in the class war. Second, there was an economic need to draw women into socialized production. To do this, the Soviet Armenian leadership created the Armenian version of the Women's Division of the Communist Party, the *Kinbazhin*, with the aim of emancipating Armenian women by educating them, encouraging them to take jobs outside the home, and drawing them into the arena of public life.⁵⁷

During the 1920s, *Kinbazhin* workers would select representatives (*delegatki*) who would visit homes and give women “scientific” advice on how to raise children and on simple rules of hygiene. These *delegatki* would also try to establish rapport with the children of the household and encourage them to report cases of child beating, wife beating, and forced marriages, which

Mary Kilbourne Matossian argues had “immense potentialities for disrupting traditional family patterns.”⁵⁸ In addition to Kinbazhin, the Commission For the Improvement of the Way of Life of Women (*Kanants Kentsaghe Barelavogh Handznazhogov*) was created in 1923 to “advise government organs, conduct propaganda campaigns, offer legal advice to women, and provide an ‘inspection service’ to see that Soviet legislation regarding the family and traditional offenses was put into effect.”⁵⁹ These and other intrusive Soviet institutions and practices were resented and resisted with the paradoxical effect of strengthening family and kinship networks. Family not only became a mode of resistance to the state, but it also remained the primary means of identification, support, and advancement during the Soviet period.⁶⁰

In the post-Soviet period, family and kinship networks continue to be vitally important not only for career advancement but also for sheer physical survival. Policy recommendations regarding domestic violence are viewed by many Armenians as similar to Soviet practices in that they invite government intervention into private family affairs. As a result, Armenian NGOs cannot address domestic violence in the same way that it is addressed in the United States and elsewhere in the West. They must work in the local context, with its own expectations, cultural beliefs, traditions, and history. This not to say that there is no problem of domestic violence in Armenia. On the contrary, *there is*. Rather, my point is to emphasize the need to identify local approaches and solutions. Solutions proposed by foreign consultants and experts are often impractical because they emerge from very different settings. For example, while crisis shelters may have been successful in Duluth, they have not been successful in the former Soviet republics. They work in the United States where there is a welfare system that includes some provisions, however inadequate, for public assistance, unemployment benefits, health insurance, subsidized housing, and free schooling, and where unemployment is not as grim as in the Soviet successor states. In Armenia, these conditions and state structures are either not present or are not functioning. All that a crisis shelter can do in these conditions is to provide counseling, which itself is a highly suspect approach to solving problems in Armenia. Crisis shelters cannot provide much pragmatic assistance, and shelter programs are seen as direct assaults on the

traditional Armenian family. The opening of crisis shelters in Yerevan has engendered fierce debate precisely because shelters are seen as being “foreign” (*odar*) and not compatible with local traditions and beliefs.

B. *Profanatsiya* or Sustainable Solutions?

Many NGO leaders and government officials I spoke with said that such programs as crisis shelters threaten the sanctity or privacy of the family and do not take into account local socio-economic and cultural conditions. Jemma Hasratian, president of the Armenian Association for Women with University Education, argues that the problem of domestic violence exists in Armenia as it does elsewhere in the world, but that by addressing the issue without considering the social, cultural, economic, and political context of Armenia is problematic. She explains:

All practices and beliefs are part of a cultural context. We have to understand the cultural and social context in order to implement projects that will work and benefit society. Otherwise what we find is a “*profanatsiya*” (imitation or charade) in that there is a pretense that the problem is being resolved, but in reality the problem is far from being addressed. We often see that donors, instead of taking this context into account, prefer to give “*technologiakan*” (technological methodological) commands (*hramanner*) to local NGOs. When we [local NGOs] conduct trainings, we give our trainees both education and technology—meaning that we teach them the “what” (*inch*) and “how” (*inchbes*) of addressing a problem. When some western trainers conduct trainings, they only teach the technological aspects or the “how.” They tell you to go fight for your rights, but how can you fight for the rights that you don’t know about? The same goes with the domestic violence and trafficking issues. For instance, when they tell us to “open shelters,” they don’t take into account how Armenians will view shelters. Armenia has a very tight-knit social system and family network; if something goes wrong people often turn to their friends, their families, and neighbors. They are not likely to take their concerns to strangers. Battered women won’t go to shelters; they will go to their friends and family. They will find someone they can rely on, someone they trust, and someone who will help them. So if they go to their *kavor* (godfather) or *kavorakin* (godmother), they know they will get help because those people have a vested interest in helping to save that family, in preventing the children from being raised in a single-parent home, and in seeing that the couple does not become unfortunate (*dzhpakht*).⁶¹

Another NGO leader, Nora Hakobian, the president of the Women’s Republican Council, argued:

I am categorically opposed to shelters (*ategorik dem em*). I believe that they do not

work. They are only a temporary thing and they do not solve the problem of violence. But let's look, for argument's sake, at what the US does to solve this problem [of domestic violence] and see if it fits our situation. In the US there are shelters. If a woman is subjected to violence, she and her children go and live in the shelter for, say, six months. In those six months either the woman reconciles with her husband and moves back home or the shelter and government agencies help her find a job or they provide her with a job-training program. The shelter staff and the government help the woman find an apartment and they enroll her children in school. There is an entire social welfare system that supports the shelter approach, but this social welfare system does not exist in Armenia. We don't have the ability to provide a woman with a job, an apartment, and financial assistance. So what are we asking her to do? All we are asking the woman to do is to leave her home, stay a few weeks or months in that shelter, and then she will either have to return to her home or end up in the streets somewhere. We have an organization that gives women temporary shelter. But if all the poor, hungry, and tired people in Armenia hear about this crisis shelter, the NGO will be inundated with requests and applications. I predict that over 100,000 women will want to go there, not because they are battered but because they are tired, hungry, and living in a crisis situation.

The Armenian family has for seven centuries helped to sustain the Armenian nation (*azg*) in the absence of a state. During those centuries the family, particularly the mothers of the family, helped to sustain the Armenian language, religion, and culture. To bring in these practices and approaches [shelters] that threaten the stability of the Armenian family is wrong. We [the Women's Republican Council] are an NGO that respects our [Armenian] traditions and is sensitive to our traditions. We don't support approaches that are tradition-threatening.⁶²

Similarly, while telephone hotlines may work in San Francisco, they are not successful in Armenia because phone lines do not work (or do not exist in some rural areas), because making calls costs money (there is no system of toll-free numbers in Armenia), and because many of the most vulnerable and poorest women do not even have phones in their homes. Another problem with hotlines is that they only operate during certain days and times. As Hakobian explained:

I heard an advertisement stating the following, "If you have been subjected to violence, call the following numbers between the hours of 9 and 6, Monday to Friday. Not on Saturday or Sunday." Well, if your NGO works on domestic violence issues, then you must act like an emergency assistance system (*shtab oknutuiun*). You must work 24 hours a day. Because, as we all know, if there is domestic violence, then it most likely occurs in the evening or night hours. It [violence] doesn't generally occur between 9 and 6 and only on weekdays. You must have a service that provides aid everyday and all day. But I understand that this is because their grant only provides them with funds to cover the calls during those hours and

that they have limited themselves to those hours. They have to fit into their grant. I don't think it was their decision. I think it is what got funded that determined the hours of this hotline.⁶³

Cooper and Duban also recognize that hotlines were created “in response to the particular interests of foreign funding agencies” and that they are of “variable value.”⁶⁴

Finally, let us turn to Cooper's and Duban's favored solution, legal reform. While legal reform is certainly an important step in addressing domestic violence, in Armenia it is more a formality than a realistic solution to the problem. Even in the United States, where there is ample anti-domestic violence legislation, Patricia Tjaden and Nancy Thoennes, the authors of *Extent, Nature, and Consequences of Intimate Partner Violence*, report that

most intimate partner victimizations [in the US] are not reported to police.... The majority of victims who did not report their victimization to the police thought the police would not or could not do anything on their behalf. *These findings suggest that most victims of intimate partner violence do not consider the justice system an appropriate vehicle for resolving conflicts with intimates.*⁶⁵ [My emphasis.]

Tjaden and Thoennes add, “When one looks at prosecution statistics, it is clear that these fears are well founded given that only 7.3% of the women who were physically assaulted said their attacker was criminally prosecuted.”⁶⁶ These findings indicate that many victims of intimate-partner violence in the United States do not consider the justice system to be a viable remedy at the time of their victimization. The existence of laws does not automatically mean people use them or that laws help them in any meaningful way. Hence, promoting legal reform as “the most important step” in addressing domestic violence in Armenia will not alleviate the conditions or reform the beliefs that go with domestic violence. Instead, it is akin to trying to cure cancer with a band-aid, since law enforcement officials are not trusted in Armenian society.⁶⁷ According to two recent studies conducted by Armenian anthropologists who were funded by the Open Society Institute, law enforcement officials in Armenia are perceived as being corrupt racketeers who prey on the weak and unprotected sectors of society. In one of these studies, the anthropologists sought to understand the causes as well as the socio-economic

and cultural impact of temporary and permanent migration from Armenia. The lead researcher on the project, Hranush Kharatyan, argues that police abuse of power is one of the reasons engendering feelings of vulnerability and defenselessness that lead to migration from Armenia. One respondent she interviewed said, “What have the police ever done except for taking bribes?”⁶⁸ Another respondent explained, “They [the police and authorities] do everything so that you leave the country.” The respondent described how he had paid 30,000 drams (approximately \$60) to install an alarm system and then was visited near the New Years’ holiday by policemen, who said that if he didn’t help them to “celebrate the holidays,” he should seriously consider sleeping in his store so that it would not be looted.⁶⁹ In the other Open Society Institute–funded anthropological research project, the researchers’ primary objective was to learn how local NGOs were addressing the problem of prostitution in the earthquake zones (the Shirak and Lori regions). Based on their research in the cities of Gumiri and Vanadzor, the researchers found not only that the police were not fighting against prostitution, but that they were in fact sponsoring and recruiting women into prostitution. As one of the researchers, Hamlet Petrosyan, explained during his talk at a recent conference:

Based on our research we found that police abuse of prostitutes is rampant, and that instead of trying to solve the problem they instead recruit (*verbovka*) prostitutes and turn them into informants who then provide the police with information on their customers. This is a widespread practice, and once a woman falls into this trap she cannot get out; the police will continue to use her in this manner. The police even at times act as pimps supporting and sponsoring certain women. So instead of fighting against prostitution, they appear to have decided to regulate and to profit from it.⁷⁰

Given this rampant police corruption, how is it that a “training” seminar or roundtable addressing new or proposed legislation in Armenia would change police attitudes and responses?⁷¹ Some NGO members with whom I spoke expressed concern that people will be afraid to allow the police into their families and homes, since in doing so, they may be opening the door for police extortion and abuse of power.

Therefore while most of the NGO members I have interviewed said they believed that domestic violence and sexual trafficking (the newest issue among donors) are serious problems,

they also maintain that these are not the most serious problems facing Armenians. They argue that these are symptoms of more fundamental problems in Armenian society, including unemployment, poverty, and the disruption of society and family life caused by the mass emigration of Armenians in search of jobs and wages. Moreover, they argue that the problems of domestic violence and trafficking should not be addressed in isolation.

If NGOs, however, for reasons of economic dependency, are compelled to address issues that are deemed important by donors, to keep up constantly with the shifting demands of these donors, and to address issues in the paradigms suggested by donors, will they ever be able to meet the needs of their local constituents? It is unlikely. If the situation continues unchanged, it will bring local NGOs into disrepute, because in order to keep up with the demands of donors, they will shift priorities and address issues not recognized locally as being of utmost importance. This tendency will intensify the existing disillusion with democratization and civil society, and will contribute to the emerging corruption (*grantakerutiun* or grant-eating) in the sector.⁷²

V. CONCLUSION

Scholars of development, including Arturo Escobar, William Fisher, James Ferguson, Naila Kabeer, and Jonathan Crush, have argued that to make development (in this case “transition”) truly “work,” it is necessary to allow locals to define the problems and search for locally based solutions, not to compromise the ability of local groups to determine their own development and political agendas.⁷³ The tendency of donors to shift funding priorities compromises the ability of local NGOs to implement long-term programs since groups are constantly having to shift and adapt their discourses and projects to meet the changing funding priorities of donors instead of the needs of their local communities. Anthropologists have been writing about the problems of international aid and development for the last fifty years, as well as about the need to address local concerns in development.⁷⁴ Armenian anthropologists with whom I spoke, who conduct research for donor organizations, recognize the problems associated with the foreign aid system.

Many of these anthropologists argue that while donors at times fund worthwhile and socially relevant projects (e.g., tolerance-building projects in communities where refugees reside), at other times donors can be shortsighted, fickle, and eager to fund many different projects instead of funding particularly worthwhile projects for longer periods of time.

Katherine Verdery contends that since the demise of communism, Western capitalist societies have come to believe that they have a monopoly on “truth” and can therefore dispense “wisdom” about how to build the “proper” forms of democracy and capitalism.⁷⁵ Janine Wedel describes this as the “triumphalist” attitude of the West, which had just “won” the Cold War, and writes, “At first glance, the reasons for assisting the Second World appeared to be much the same as those for aiding the Third World: to hold communism at bay, to ensure economic and political stability, and to create markets for the West. But aid to the Second World was about more than just keeping those nations out of the clutches of communism. It was about exorcizing the legacies of communism itself.”⁷⁶ Aid practitioners continue to disregard local knowledge, not only because they consider it inferior, but also because they think it is tainted by communism.

This disregard is a product as well as a reflection of the asymmetrical nature of donor-NGO recipient relationships, which produces inequalities in knowledge-production, information-circulation, and decision-making. NGOs in Armenia address a wide spectrum of issues, including cultural preservation, refugee issues, education, and health care, but the most viable NGOs have been those that address issues that appeal to foreign donors. This focus diverts valuable human and financial resources from problems identified by locals, such as poverty, unemployment, education, health care, or the situation of orphans and war widows. Donors consider domestic violence and (increasingly) sexual trafficking as important issues, and local NGOs acquiesce in order to get the funds. Precisely because the issue of domestic violence, as well as such solutions as replicas of Western hotlines and crisis shelters, do not resonate with local NGOs, when donors’ agendas shift, local NGOs will abandon domestic violence in favor of newer funding priorities. This situation exists in other republics of the former Soviet Union. For example, Julie Hemment describes how members of the Russian women’s NGO, Zhenskii Svet,

were concerned that funders were moving away from supporting the theme of *nasilie* (violence) toward a new theme, *torgovlia liud'mi* (trafficking), and explains their frustration of having “to be like chameleons” to keep up with donors’ changing demands and funding priorities.⁷⁷

Discussing international donors’ interest in addressing sexual trafficking/domestic violence in Georgia, Lara Olson writes, “While these are very serious problems, many local women activists do not see them as the key issues for women in Georgian society.”⁷⁸

In this paper, I have demonstrated that in the 1990s, Armenia’s NGO sector was—and still is—shaped by donors’ initiatives and by funding strategies. The elite-centrism of Western donors has selected the type of people who establish and operate NGOs; the focus on GID has shaped the projects and discourses of these groups; and donor-sponsored training seminars have taught and prepared NGOs to discuss the topics of interest to donors and to use the same languages (linguistic and discursive) as donors. Regardless of what locals define as important problems, donors’ initiatives continue to influence and shape the work of Armenian NGOs. On the other hand, while NGO members are affected by the policies and strategies of donors, they are not passive consumers; they are cultural interpreters who customize global discourses and projects to serve local needs better. As one prominent NGO leader explained with regard to crisis shelters and their local, albeit planned, “customization”:

There are people who allow for the building of shelters in their communities, and they do it for one reason. They tell me, “Mrs. X, let them build this building if they want to and if it will make them happy. They [the donors] are only temporarily here. When their grant money runs out they will leave. That is what always happens. You know that! In the end, they will be gone and we will have a building that we can use for other purposes. At that time we will be the ones to decide whether to use their building as an old age home, an orphanage, or an office.”

Is it then possible to arrange matters so that local NGOs will be able to cut down on the “customizing” and straightforwardly address local concerns? Yes, but the mechanisms for this are still in the nascent stages of development. Armenian NGOs and government officials who work with NGOs are currently discussing and considering how NGOs can be more locally sustainable and legitimate in society. For this to occur, NGO members maintain that there needs

to be legislative reform with regard to the NGO sector, and that the government needs to play a more active role in supporting local NGOs.⁷⁹ Although a new grant program in the spheres of social security and primary health care, organized by the Yerevan Municipality and the NGOC, is an attempt to stimulate NGO-government social partnerships, since the program is funded by a foreign donor (USAID) it cannot be considered a locally sustainable program.⁸⁰ Nonetheless, regardless of the source of the funding, what is important is that the mechanisms for creating sustainable local social partnerships are being tested and refined. This has provided local NGOs with hope that even though much remains to be done, at least certain measures are being taken to make the Armenian NGO sector more locally relevant and sustainable.

NOTES

¹ World Bank, Armenia Country Assistance Strategy Report, no. 22111-AM, 25 April 2001; available from <<http://www-wds.worldbank.org/servlet/WDSContentServer/WDSP/IB/2001/05/19/00009494601050804481521/Rendered/INDEX/multi0page.txt>>.

² Janine R. Wedel, quoted in Chris Hann, "Introduction," in *Civil Society: Challenging Western Models*, ed. Chris Hann and Elizabeth Dunn (London: Routledge, 1996), p. 1.

³ Hann and Dunn, *Civil Society*, p. 7.

⁴ Marta Bruno, "Playing the Co-operation Game," in *Surviving Post-Socialism: Local Strategies and Regional Responses in Eastern Europe*, ed. Sue Bridger and Frances Pine (London: Routledge, 1997), p. 186; Katherine Verdery, *What Was Socialism and What Comes Next?* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton Univ. Press, 1996), p. 205.

⁵ I should emphasize that I am *not* arguing that domestic violence does not occur in Armenia—it certainly does, as is the case throughout the world. Nor am I saying that individual Armenians are not concerned, or should not be concerned, about domestic violence. Rather my point is that it was not locally recognized as a public or social issue that could be ameliorated by the intervention of law enforcement and judicial bodies and crisis shelters until Western donors and "experts" began saying it should be. Furthermore, once the topic of domestic violence was identified as an issue for NGOs, donors and Western experts urged the NGOs to apply solutions and approaches developed in the West (particularly in the US); local approaches or solutions were disregarded in favor of Western-style telephone hotlines and crisis shelters.

⁶ "Global civil society" is difficult to define, but it is a term that is used to refer to the type of work conducted by and the discourses related to the growing number of NGOs that are active in the international arena. See Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Empire* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Univ. Press, 2000); Sonia E. Alvarez, "Latin American Feminisms 'Go Global': Trends of the 1990s and Challenges for the New Millennium," in *Culture of Politics / Politics of Cultures*, ed. Sonia E. Alvarez, Evelina Dagnino, and Arturo Escobar (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1998).

⁷ Krishan Kumar, "Civil Society: An Inquiry into the Usefulness of a Historical Term," *British Journal of Sociology* 44, no. 3 (1993), p. 375.

⁸ In his article, Kumar (*ibid.*, p. 386) is referring to the leaders of the Solidarity movement in Poland, but many of the same things may be said of the leaders of the Karabagh movement in Armenia. The intellectuals who led the Karabagh Committee not only opposed various policies of the corrupt Soviet Armenian state and sought to reform it, but they also on several occasions disrupted official celebrations by using those occasions to present their objections to the state's policies. Michael Fischer and Stella Grigorian describe the Karabagh Committee's disruption of the official 7 November 1988 commemoration of the October Revolution in Lenin Square as a "seizure of symbolic power" (Michael M. J. Fischer and Stella Grigorian, "Six to Eight Characters in Search of Armenian Civil Society Amidst the Carnivalization of History," in *Perilous States: Conversations on Culture, Politics, and Nation*, ed. George Marcus [Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1993], p. 84). In this "seizure of symbolic power," the speakers and demonstrators turned their backs on the Communist leaders standing on the dais in order to express their rejection of the official stance on the Karabagh issue. A couple of weeks later, on 24 November 1988, the Karabagh movement leaders collected the required number of deputies' signatures to have the right to call an extraordinary session of the Supreme Soviet. Although the Communist authorities banned the session, the movement defied them and called an alternative extraordinary session, to be held in Theater Square. According to Levon Abrahamian, the deputies were asked to gather at the

Opera House in the square; some deputies did not show up, and the “hunt for deputies” peaked on that same day. The people in the movement, Abrahamian argues, were absolutely convinced that when a legitimate session was called, the deputies should not refuse to participate in it (Levon Abrahamian, “Civil Society Born in the Square: The Karabagh Movement in Perspective,” in *The Making of Nagorno-Karabagh: From Secession to Republic*, ed. Levon Chorbajian [New York: Palgrave, 2001], pp. 129–130).

⁹ According to the 1996 United Nations Development Program (UNDP) Armenia Human Development Report, in 1995 nearly one out of five registered residents of Armenia was living abroad temporarily or permanently, and every fifth family out of the 1000 families interviewed reported having received assistance from relatives and friends in the previous month. These remittances have helped tens of thousands of Armenian families survive the difficult economic conditions in Armenia. On average, during the 1990s, Armenians living abroad sent around \$350 million annually to family and friends in the homeland. In 1998, this figure equaled almost 19% of the GDP (\$1.85 billion) in Armenia, according to the Armenpress report, “\$350 Million Enters Armenia As Financial Aid to Some Armenian Residents,” 1 December 1997, cited in Stephan Astourian, “From Ter-Petrosian to Kocharian: Leadership Change in Armenia” (Berkeley: Berkeley Program in Soviet and Post-Soviet Studies Working Paper, 2001), p. 42. However, because the hundreds of millions of dollars were sent in \$100–500 increments by over 700,000 people a month, the impact of remittances on the Armenian economy has been negligible. Most recipients have used the remittances to survive from one month to the next; they have not been able to save the remittances in order to invest in business ventures that would provide longer-term earnings.

¹⁰ Armenian Assembly of America, *Karabagh and Armenia Factbook* (Washington, DC: Armenian Assembly of America, 1994), pp. 54–59.

¹¹ The Armenian Assembly of America is a US-based nonprofit organization established in 1972 and headquartered in Washington, DC. The Assembly promotes public awareness of Armenian issues, encourages greater Armenian-American participation in the American democratic process, and assists in humanitarian and development programs in Armenia. Armenian Assembly of America, “History of the Armenian Assembly”; available from <<http://www.aaainc.org/history.htm>>.

¹² Steve Sampson, “The Social Life of Projects: Importing Civil Society to Albania,” in Hann and Dunn, *Civil Society*, p. 123; Susan Gal and Gail Kligman, *Politics of Gender After Socialism* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton Univ. Press, 2000), p. 96.

¹³ An example of this is the 2003 application for the social security and primary health care grants program of the Yerevan Municipality and Armenian Assembly of America NGO Training and Resource Center.

¹⁴ In an attempt to solve this problem, the First Deputy Minister of Social Security, Ashot Yesayan, told me that he plans to publish a dictionary of NGO sector terms in order to enhance and improve communication through the clarification of commonly used but ambiguous and equivocal terms (Ashot Yesayan, interview by author, Yerevan, 26 March 2003).

¹⁵ Edward Markarian (Chief of the State Registry of Social Associations, Armenian Ministry of Justice), interview by author, Yerevan, 16 April 2003.

¹⁶ David M. Abramson, “A Critical Look at NGOs and Civil Society as Means to an End in Uzbekistan,” *Human Organization* 58, no. 3 (1999), pp. 240–250; Julie Hemment, “The Price of Partnership: The NGO, the State, the Foundation, and its Lovers in Post-Communist Russia,” *The Anthropology of East Europe Review* 178, no. 1 (2000), p. 35; Sara D. Phillips, “NGOs in Ukraine: The Makings of a ‘Women’s Space?’” *The Anthropology of East Europe Review* 178, no. 2 (2000), p. 23; Steve Sampson,

“The Social Life of Projects: Importing Civil Society to Albania,” in Hann and Dunn, *Civil Society*, p. 123.

¹⁷ Marina Ottaway and Thomas Carothers, *Funding Virtue: Civil Society and Democracy Promotion* (Washington, DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2000), p. 13.

¹⁸ Quoted in Janine R. Wedel, *Collision and Collusion: The Strange Case of Western Aid to Eastern Europe, 1989–1998* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 2001), p. 114.

¹⁹ I discuss the reasons for and consequences of post-Soviet labor migration in “Surviving Post-Soviet Poverty: Experiences and Narratives of Armenian Temporary Labor Migrants in the US,” *The Anthropology of East Europe Review: Central Europe, Eastern Europe, and Eurasia* 20, no. 2 (2002), pp. 23–30.

²⁰ Ashot Yesayan, interview by author, Yerevan, 26 March 2003.

²¹ Democracy Union, *Women in Armenia* (Yerevan: Democracy Union, 1996), p. 4. See also Andrea Berg, “Two Worlds Apart: The Lack of Integration between Women’s Informal Networks and Non-Governmental Organizations in Uzbekistan,” in *Post-Soviet Women Encountering Transition Nation-Building, Economic Survival, and Civic Activism*, ed. Kathleen Kuehnast and Carol Nechemias (Washington, DC: Woodrow Wilson Center Press, forthcoming); Lara Olson, “Women and NGOs: Views from Some Conflict Areas in the Caucasus,” occasional paper, Women in International Security, April 27–28, 2001, Washington, DC; available from <<http://wiis.georgetown.edu/LaraOlson.pdf>>; and Nayereh Tohidi, “Women, Islam, and Democratization in Post-Soviet Azerbaijan” in Kuehnast and Nechemias, *Post-Soviet Women*, op. cit..

²² For more on this see Armine Ishkanian, “Working at the Local-Global Intersection: The Challenges Facing Women in Armenia’s NGO Sector,” in Kuehnast and Nechemias, *Post-Soviet Women*, op. cit.

²³ United States Agency for International Development, Mission to Armenia, Gender Issues web page, available from <<http://www.usaid.gov/am/gender.html>>.

²⁴ In 1994, 1997, and 2000, AIWA sponsored international conferences on Armenian women’s issues. These conferences were organized by and for elite Armenian women in the diaspora and Armenia. The first conference was held in London, the second in Paris, and only the third was held in Yerevan.

²⁵ Although there are now two women deputy ministers, these women are working in traditionally “feminine” sectors: the Ministry of Social Security and the Ministry of Culture, Youth, and Sports.

²⁶ Scholars working in Asia and Latin America have also documented the impact of UN conferences on local women’s organizing and discourses. For instance, according to Mary Fainsod Katzenstein, anticipation of the 1975 UN conference on women in Mexico City played a “catalytic role in the emergence of the contemporary women’s movement in India” (quoted in Uma Narayan, *Dislocating Cultures* [New York: Routledge, 1997], p. 91). Sonia E. Alvarez describes the Beijing conference as an effusive celebration of “global sisterhood,” adding that it was the site where professionalized, thematically specialized, and transnationalized feminist NGOs focused their energies on influencing the International Platform for Action and in helping articulate the “global women’s lobby.” Alvarez refers to this professionalization and specialization of women’s groups as the “NGOization” of the Latin American women’s movements (Alvarez, “Latin American Feminisms,” pp. 293–296).

²⁷ The three key themes at Beijing were equality, peace, and development. Some critics argue that the conference was divided along class, racial, and ethnic lines, and that women from the North were often concerned with their own debates on issues and were unable to understand the position of their counterparts from the South. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak criticizes the Beijing conference as nothing

more than “global theater.” She argues that these theaters are staged to demonstrate joint participation between the North and South, whereas the North organizes the South. She identifies a new group of activists as “feminist apparatchiks” who identify conference-organizing with activism and are not genuine activists. Spivak, “‘Woman’ as Theatre: Beijing ‘95,” *Radical Philosophy* 75, no. 1 (January/February 1996), p. 2.

²⁸ Mayra Buvinic, et al., *Investing in Women: Progress and Prospects for the World Bank* (Washington, DC: Overseas Development Council in cooperation with the International Center for Research on Women, 1996), p. 13.

²⁹ Naila Kabeer, *Reversed Realities: Gender Hierarchies in Development Thought* (London: Verso, 1994), p. xi.

³⁰ Interview by author, Yerevan, 15 May 1996. Per anthropological conventions I use pseudonyms for individuals who are not public officials or prominent NGO activists.

³¹ The Armenian-English Dictionary defines “feminine” as 1) *ikagan, kanatzi, kanatziagan*, which all mean “feminine” and as 2) *meghm* (soft) and *knkoosh* (gentle). H. A. Asmangulian and M. I. Hovannisian, *Armenian-English Dictionary* (Yerevan: Hayastan Publishing House, 1991), p. 339.

³² Mary Buckley, *Women and Ideology in the Soviet Union* (New York: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1989). This is not just the case in the former Soviet states. In east central Europe, Gal and Kligman maintain, men and women treat “feminism” with ridicule and derision in public forums and view it as a controversial concept. Gal and Kligman, *Politics of Gender*, p. 98.

³³ Levon Hm. Abrahamian, “Armenian Identity in a Changing World,” manuscript, p. 115. Abrahamian directs the “Transformations of Identity in Armenia in the 20th Century” research project at the Institute of Ethnography and Archeology of the National Academy of Sciences in Armenia and is a visiting professor of anthropology at Yerevan State University. In fall 1997 Abrahamian was a BPS Caucasus visiting scholar and a visiting professor of Armenian studies. Abrahamian gave me a draft version of “Armenian Identity in a Changing World,” which is currently under review by a publishing house.

³⁴ *Ibid*, p. 123.

³⁵ Lyudmila Harutyunyan, “Kanants Baykari Masin Che Khoskuh, Ayl Hassaragootyan Vokhchakhohootyan,” [This Is Not about Women’s Struggle, but about Society’s Common Sense], in *Kanayk Hayots: Nor Dari Shemin* [Armenian Women: At the Doorstep to the XXI Century] (Yerevan: Yerevan State Univ., 2000), pp. 21–23.

³⁶ The concept of moral motherhood dates from the late nineteenth century, when women in the United States and Europe argued that they had the right to enter the public sphere since they were promoting “good social housekeeping.” Women in other societies have used similar strategies to justify their entry into public life. Micaela Di Leonardo, *Gender at the Crossroads of Knowledge: Feminist Anthropology in the Postmodern Era* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1991), p. 16.

³⁷ William Fisher, “Doing Good? The Politics and Anti-Politics of NGO Practices,” in *Annual Reviews in Anthropology* 26 (1995), p. 454.

³⁸ United Nations Department of Public Information, *United Nations Review* (Yerevan, August 1995), p. 1.

³⁹ US State Department, “Fact Sheet: State Department Programs to Combat Trafficking in Persons,” 1 February 2001; available from <<http://usinfo.state.gov/topical/global/traffic/01060101.htm>>.

⁴⁰ Winrock International, “1999 Projects”; available from <http://www.winrock.org/general/Publications/1999_projects.pdf>; and Project Harmony, “About Us: Financial Profile”; available from <http://www.projectharmony.org/about_us/finances.html>.

⁴¹ USAID awarded a total of \$476,367 US to six Armenian NGOs, to support services for victims of domestic violence. According to a USAID Mission to Armenia press release from 18 October 2002, “These grants are the first direct USAID grants to local Armenian organizations for activities in Armenia. The grants will allow the NGOs to provide safe and adequate shelters, support, counseling and other services to victims of domestic violence throughout Armenia.” The six local NGOs that received grants from USAID are the Helsinki Association, Maternity Fund, Women’s Rights Center, Ajakits, Martuni Women’s Community Council, and Armenian Caritas. The grants, according to USAID, “will allow these NGOs to expand and enhance services that they already provide, and in some cases allow them to organize shelters for victims of domestic violence and their minor-age family members. Other services include court monitoring and training for lawyers and judges, public awareness campaigns and the promotion of alternatives to violence.” Available from <http://www.usaid.gov/am/pr10_02_DV.html>.

⁴² World Learning, a US-based organization founded in 1932, received a cooperative agreement from USAID to implement the four-year NGO Strengthening Program in Armenia. According to the World Learning website, “Together with its partners, IESC (International Executive Service Corps), MSI (Management Systems International), and ICNL (International Center for Not-for-Profit Law), World Learning assists in the development of the NGO sector in Armenia. The program aims at building the capacity of NGOs throughout Armenia to help them to deliver services in a more efficient manner and become better and more articulate advocates for their constituents.” World Learning, Armenia NGO Strengthening Program, “About Us”; available from <<http://www.worldlearning.am/about/about.html>>.

⁴³ Armenian Assembly of America, *Karabagh and Armenia Factbook* (Washington, DC: Armenian Assembly of America, 1996), p. 69.

⁴⁴ Quoted in Armenian Assembly of America NGO Training and Resource Center, “Who Is Who in Armenian NGOs,” August 2002, p. 79; available from <http://www.NGOc.am/Whoiswho/WIW_Eng.pdf>.

⁴⁵ Susanna Vardanyan, interview by author, Yerevan, 12 March 2003.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ See footnote 41 for more information on the USAID grant program.

⁴⁸ Belinda Cooper and Elizabeth Duban, “Respecting Women: Domestic Violence in Armenia,” in *Armenian Forum* 2 no. 3 (2001), pp. 77–90.

⁴⁹ Ibid., p. 80.

⁵⁰ Chandra T. Mohanty, *Third World Women and the Politics of Feminism*, (Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 1991).

⁵¹ Emma Crewe and Elizabeth Harrison. *Whose Development? An Ethnography of Aid* (London: Zed Books, 1998), p. 15.

⁵² In 1990 Armenia ranked 47th on the Human Development Index (HDI) as calculated by the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) and was considered a “developed” country. In 2002, ten years after independence, Armenia was ranked 76th out of 173 countries on the HDI and was listed in the “Medium Human Development” category. Eleven of the other fifteen former Soviet republics were also included in this category and as such were considered “developing” countries. Life expectancy at birth, the rate of adult literacy, the ratio of primary, secondary, and tertiary enrollments, and per capita GDP are

factors used by the UNDP to calculate HD scores and rank nations on the HDI. Armenia, which ranks in the middle between Norway (#1) and Sierra Leone (#173), is actually much closer to Norway in the categories of life expectancy (Armenia has 72.9 vs. Norway's 78.5), adult literacy (Armenia – 98.4% vs. Norway – 100%), and educational enrollment (Armenia – 80% vs. Norway – 97%). Armenia, it appears, only falls into the “developing country” category because of its low GDP per capita (\$2559 vs. \$29,918 for Norway). The GDP is calculated based on World Bank economic statistics that are converted into a common currency. This results in the purchasing power parity rate (PPP), which compares prices, purchasing power, expenditures, income, inequality, and poverty among different countries. United Nations Development Program, *Human Development Report 2002: Deepening Democracy in a Fragmented World* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2002).

⁵³ Gregory Massell, *The Surrogate Proletariat: Moslem Women and Revolutionary Strategies in Soviet Central Asia, 1919–1929* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton Univ. Press, 1975).

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. xxiii.

⁵⁵ See Nayereh Tohidi's discussion of such efforts in Azerbaijan in “‘Guardians of the Nation’: Women, Islam, and the Soviet Legacy of Modernization in Azerbaijan,” in *Women in Muslim Societies: Diversity within Unity*, ed. Herbert L. Bodman and Nayereh Tohidi (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1998), pp. 195–197.

⁵⁶ Mary Kilbourne Matossian, *The Impact of Soviet Policies in Armenia* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1962), p. 61.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 63.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 66.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 67.

⁶⁰ Ronald Grigor Suny, *The Revenge of the Past* (Stanford, CA: Stanford Univ. Press, 1993).

⁶¹ Jemma Hasratian, interview by author, Yerevan, 3 April 2003.

⁶² Nora Hakobian, interview by author, Yerevan, 25 March 2003.

⁶³ *Ibid.*

⁶⁴ Cooper and Duban, “Respecting Women,” p. 86.

⁶⁵ Patricia Tjaden and Nancy Thoennes, *Extent, Nature, and Consequences of Intimate Partner Violence* (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Justice, 2000), p. v. This report presents the findings from the National Violence Against Women Survey. Both the survey and the report were co-sponsored by the United States National Institute of Justice, which is part of the Department of Justice and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 52.

⁶⁷ This metaphor was initially used by L. Beneria and G. Sen to critique the efficacy of teaching women in developing countries better techniques as a way to promote their inclusion in their national economies (quoted in Kabeer, *Reversed Realities*, p. 11).

⁶⁸ Hranush Kharatian, ed., *Migration from Armenia* (Yerevan: Zeitoun Publishers, 2003), p. 39.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 30.

⁷⁰ Hamlet Petrosyan, “The Dangers of Globalization and Civil Society: The Role of NGOs in Addressing Prostitution in the Earthquake Zone.” Paper presented at the conference, “Democratic Consolidation,

Civil Society, and the Perspectives of Globalization,” sponsored by the Armenian Association of Women with University Education, Tsakhkadzor, Armenia, 13–16 March 2003.

⁷¹ One need only drive anywhere in Armenia to realize how corrupt traffic police are; even if a driver has obeyed all the rules of the road a traffic officer (GAI) may pull the driver over and either ask nicely for a bribe or threaten to confiscate the driver’s license if the driver does not pay the appropriate “tariff” (*dugank*). These tariffs are usually between 500 and 2000 drams (between \$1 and \$3.50) depending on the mood of the GAI and the number of people with whom he has to “share” his takings. On a recent trip from Yerevan to Tsakhkadzor, our taxi was stopped three times by GAI officers in the cities of Abovian, Hrazdan, and Tsakhkadzor, even though our driver was obeying all rules of the road. Before we reached our destination the driver ended up paying 3000 drams (approximately \$5.50) to three different GAI at 1000 drams per officer.

⁷² Bribes are called *kashark* in Armenian, and corruption is known as “bribe consumption” or “bribe eating” (*kasharakerutiun*). *Grantakerutiun* is another form of corruption and can be seen as the continuation of the *kasharakerutiun* that began during Soviet times and continues unchecked today.

⁷³ Jonathan Crush, *Power of Development* (New York: Routledge, 1995); Arturo Escobar, “Anthropology and the Development Encounter: The Making and Marketing of Development Anthropology,” *American Ethnologist* 18, no. 4 (1991), pp. 658–682; James Ferguson, *The Anti-Politics Machine: “Development,” Depoliticization, and Bureaucratic Power in Lesotho* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1990); Kabeer, *Reversed Realities*, op. cit.; and Fisher, “Doing Good?” op. cit.

⁷⁴ Riall Nolan, “Now That We Know Where the Bodies Are Buried, Who Do We Tell?,” paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Anthropological Association, Washington, DC, November/December 2001; Michael Cernea, ed., *Putting People First: Sociological Variables in Rural Development*, 2nd ed. (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1991); Michael Horowitz, “Development and the Anthropological Encounter: A Reflective Underview,” *Development Anthropologist* 16, no. 1-2 (1998), pp. 44–50.

⁷⁵ Verdery, *What Was Socialism*, op. cit.

⁷⁶ Wedel, *Collision and Collusion*, p. 21.

⁷⁷ Julie Hemment, “Strategizing Gender and Development: Action Research and Ethnographic Responsibility in the Russian Provinces,” in Kuehnast and Nechemias, *Post-Soviet Women*, op. cit.

⁷⁸ Olson, “Women and NGOs,” p. 9.

⁷⁹ There is hardly any public discussion about the role of the private sector in funding local NGO projects. NGO leaders and government officials I interviewed explained the lack (or near complete absence) of private sector support for NGOs as being due to several reasons, including: 1) the absence of a law on charitable contributions; 2) NGOs’ inability to fundraise with local sponsors; 3) local sponsors’ fear and desire to “hide” their wealth; and 4) the disdain and scorn of certain NGO leaders toward the new rich (*Novii Armenii*). I plan to interview certain *Novii Armenii* business magnates to understand their perspectives regarding the development of NGOs in Armenia.

⁸⁰ This grants program is funded by USAID and is intended to enhance the role of NGOs in the process of social and primary health care service provision in Armenia. Several 4,712,000-dram (approximately \$8000) grants will be awarded to NGOs that are working with beneficiaries living in Yerevan. NGOs were required to submit grant proposals in Armenian and English. The grant application, which was due on 16 April 2003, will be evaluated by a proposal review committee comprised of representatives from the Yerevan Municipality, the NGO Center, and local NGOs that are not participating in the competition. USAID will only be involved in the monitoring of the process as an observer.