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Gentle Invasions: NGO Funding and the Manipulation of Civil Society within Transitional States

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Denise Horn: What I would like to present this evening is a discussion on the strategic use of democratization policies. What I argue is that these policies are used by more powerful states to manipulate civil society in ways that would be most effective for them. I started thinking about this topic because I was really interested in the whole notion of transnational advocacy networks that Keck and Sikkink wrote about in 1998. I'll get to that a little bit later in the talk. When I started my research, what I was interested in was looking at how transnational advocacy networks work in states that are transitioning to democracy, and the impact they have. So, I did my fieldwork in Estonia and in Moldova, comparing those two countries. The more I looked at them, the more I realized how much intervention was actually happening from foreign state agencies. In the Baltic case, the United States and the Nordic countries were actively involved; in Moldova, the United States has been actively involved, as well as some other regional powers there. This topic is becoming more important given the transitions we are going through all over the world, but also because there is some indication that there is a backlash against the democratization programs that the United States has been implementing for the last 15 years or so. We can see, if you look at the most recent Freedom House report that just came out, that freedom seems to be declining in the world—freedom, and the way that they measure it, which is freedom of the media, the right to civil society, and all those kinds of variables. Freedom House points to the fact that their civil society is being undermined by Russia and China, who are really interested in maintaining their whole inner region and maintaining their hold over what they perceive as danger to their client states. Those are the types of questions that I am interested in pursuing.

In this talk, I am really just going to focus on what the United States has done in the past, and do a little post-Cold War history to show how it works. During the question and answer period I'd be happy to talk about more recent events. As you can see here, I am alluding to soft power – particularly the idea of soft power being used as a form of seduction, which is what Joseph Nye writes about in his book *Soft Power*. In fact, he begins by describing how soft power is used to seduce rather than coerce. To me – given the fact that I am also a feminist theorist - the idea that states were seducing other states – that imagery to me was actually quite compelling. I begin by questioning the types of democratization policies that will be less useful or successful for those implementing them: there is the failure of democratization in Iraq, for instance, or democratization through coercion, so I think we need to examine more “peaceful” or non-coercive modes of democratization support. The title of my project calls this ‘gentle invasions,’ again sort of playing on the fact that I am looking at women’s organizations specifically, but also because it seems to be assumed by policy-makers that these kinds of democratization programs will not appear coercive to the states that are trying to implement them, when in fact they actually are coercive in a soft power way.

When we talk about gentle invasions or soft power, we are talking about non-coercive strategies that require a mode of influence and work from the ground up and not directly state-to-state. A constructivist approach is most useful in this case. We're looking at multiple levels of interaction and how this creates "rule" in the sense [Nicholas] Onuf would mean, so I'm differing from Alexander Wendt's approach somewhat. Looking at the individual level of analysis as well as civil society and how these interact with at the international level is my frame of reference. I have found that the notion of "opportunity structures" as presented in the social movement literature and then developed within the transnational advocacy literature lends itself well to this type of analysis.

In review for those of you who haven't actually had a chance to read Keck and Sikkink's book *Activist Beyond Borders*, its focus is the influence of transnational networks. These networks are organized to represent causes, ideas, and norms, and often include individuals advocating policy changes that cannot be easily linked to rational interests in the sense that behavioralists would measure political behavior. So, why are all these people around the world trying to do good things and help build civil society? As you know, this idea really took off and it became a corner stone to a lot of the literature on the idea of global civil society. They outline the major actors in these networks, the international organizations and NGOs, whether they are research or advocacy, global citizens, foundations, media and everything we tend to think of as civil society. In terms of the appearance of these networks, they often come out of the simple frustration that the government can't address the kinds of problems that these individuals or groups of individuals would like to see resolved, but also they are transnational because these groups find that they can work more easily because of their access to information that the kinds of unions they can make with other people abroad can really help them out and make their causes much more powerful and put more pressure on their government; the result is a transnational network of people. Of course, there are the political entrepreneurs that take part in this network and are part of the mission. And then the movement of people and foreign aid strengthen these networks.

In terms of the areas of influence that these networks have, they're really good at issue and agenda setting. They can create policy change and policy actors in states and inter-governmental organizations and trans-national corporations. Thus, in the end, what a lot of these networks would like to see is actually a change in state behavior, and the book is very good at outlining and tracing a lot of these things. But the thing that intrigued me the most was the idea that these networks could be so effective in changing state behavior.

As I looked at this and as I did my research what I realized was that the literature really doesn't explain the impact of states themselves and how states become part of these networks and how states can manipulate these networks. In the literature, larger international NGOs and INGOs are seen as "gatekeepers." Gatekeepers are usually these larger entities that have so much influence that they can shape the way we think about particular issues within civil society. These gatekeepers, normally we think of them as being these major organizations: Greenpeace, Amnesty International, World Bank, but what I was interested in was how these issues are also affected by certain powers, and this

is where the question of state behavior became interesting to me. In the case of Amnesty International, for example, how they become a gatekeeper on a certain issue has to do with the kind of campaigns that they run. Amnesty International has been very effective in associating really big problems, like human rights, and linking that to individuals. The most effective campaign they had very early on in the creation of the organization was a post-card campaign profiling an individual political prisoner or a prisoner of conscience. What this would do is link people, individuals, to the larger issue of human rights in an incredibly effective campaign. Due to the strength of Amnesty International and the fact that it's grown so big, it can really set the agenda and can set the kinds of issues that people are paying attention to, because that is really the role of gatekeepers. What I'm arguing here is that states are also those gatekeepers. And, the particular issue isn't really addressed that much in this transnational advocacy literature, because there is still this notion that global civil society is kind of this pure thing apart from power interactions and power politics. Some say 'no, it's not' and policy makers certainly read this literature as well; at least I'd like to think so. But, policy makers do understand that these kinds of networks can be manipulated, and they do it very consciously.

What I am arguing here is that states do have enormous influence upon the adoption of particular issues, particularly when it is going to serve their interests. Now, if that sounds a little too realist, maybe I'm being a little too Kenneth Waltzian there. When I say to serve their interests, it really does rely on how those norms and interests are constructed. What states are doing here is to help construct the norms around which we think about global civil society, and in the case of the United States, how we are supposed think about democratization and what democratization means in a global civil society.

Here, I'm talking about the issue of democracy promotion as a tool in state politics. I argue that powerful states do engage in the exploitation of NGO networks and are very strategic about it and use many buzzwords like "women's rights", "civil society" and "free media". In other words, democratic norms have taken on a strategic meaning in and of themselves. There's a notion that democracy is necessary for stable relationships. This is a very American neo-liberal form of democracy and what democracy means. This also means that alternative visions of democratization and democracy get shut out: because the US has a lot of power and a lot of money to be able to invest in democratization and democracy programs and policies, they get to determine in some sense what democracy is going to look like and the kinds of norms that people would accept as being democratic. In this sense, I think of democracy as a tool in the toolbox that states have in dealing with each other.

So, how did this happen? How do states affect the way that people on the ground are behaving? I looked at different NGOs, particularly in Estonia and Moldova and said, "how does the funding that you are getting from the US affect the way that you work?" I was able to outline three themes that I found in both cases, and that now I am finding further, as I look at Southeast Asia, for example that these themes come up again. It has to do with how the agenda within civil society is framed.

Let me back up a little here: it's not just the United States that does this. When I was looking at Estonia—particularly at women's issues and NGOs—I also looked at the influence that Nordic states had upon women's NGOs in Estonia. I was comparing the two, just to see if there were big differences. I found there were lots of differences. The U.S. and Nordic states both want the same thing: both, of course, want a free and democratic Estonia and they also want civil society, but they have different approaches to how that is going to happen. So, it's not only the U.S. that is engaged in this, and, it's not just democratic states that are engaged in this. China, for instance, ironically, was encouraging Burma to be more democratic in its current crisis. But China also works to undermine civil society within that region. Now, Russia has been doing the same thing. Putin has been very clear that he sees NGOs funded by foreign countries as tools of those states. This is something that policy makers are very aware of.

The first thing that I found is that foreign funders establish the rules of civil society. As a result, they can delineate the boundaries of the issues that they identify as being important to democratization. So, obviously these are quite value-laden. In the case of the U.S., voting is top of the list. If you have free and fair elections, then, by God, you have a democracy, so we work to promote that. We work to promote political parties, which is also kind of ironic that we work to promote multiple political parties in other countries but not here. They also work very consciously to promote women in political parties, also ironic given our sort of reluctance here. These are all very neo-liberal ideas of what democracy is because free market reforms are also a huge part of democracy and democracy promotion programs by the U.S.

The second theme is that foreign funders bring debates into society by focusing on these issues and funding local NGOs willing to support their cause. The easiest way to trace this effect is to look at Request for Proposals (RFPs). Any of you who do NGO work or non-profit work know what I'm talking about. Big funders will put out RFPs to the community at large, and then NGOs compete for that grant money through their proposals, clearly writing their proposals to answer to the RFPs, which are usually quite detailed. The U.S. will also put out RFPs out through the U.S. embassies, for example. In Moldova, I looked at organizations competing for small democracy grants through the U.S. embassy. They are put out through the embassy, through U.S.AID and through those organizations funded through U.S.AID like the National Democratic Institute, which I'll get to in a minute.

I looked at those and looked at what the RFPs requested and the kind of language they used and at the proposals these NGOs write in response to the RFPs. And in most cases, these are small NGOs that are struggling anyway. We are talking about civil societies that are in the very early stages, struggling for funding and they are competing with each other and they know that. And they are very often living from project to project. The way they pay their staff— (if they have a staff), pay their phone bill is completely dependent on the money they get from these projects. They don't have huge endowments obviously and they don't get a lot of support from the state, if any. Estonia is a different case now, because they have actually transitioned quite successfully. In Moldova, on the other hand, there is no support from the state; in fact, the state kind of discourages it in some ways through its tax structures and other regulations. The language these NGOs use is reflected in the language

of the RFPs. In Estonia, for example, the U.S. is very conscious about *never* using the word “feminism.” Ever. If it deals with women, if they say “women’s issues,” that’s one thing. But generally, it is couched in the language of human rights. If you look at the RFPs in Estonia, it will say “we want to help women in business” or “we want to help fight AIDS,” and we believe this is a human rights issue. Those organizations writing proposals are very aware of this and conscious of it and will never use these words like “feminism” in their proposals.

When looking at RFPs from Nordic states, for example from the Nordic Council of Ministers, Nordic states love to use the word feminism; it’s not a dirty word. They are very clear about what they want to establish: gender equality. Thus, writing a grant to the Nordic Council of Ministers, you can see these small NGOs using this kind of language, the language of feminism. As one NGO administrator put it to me, it’s about the “magic words.” Which magic words are going to work with these funders? It also influences the kind of program they will put out. I’ll give an example: look at the AIDS Center in Estonia. I looked at it quite a bit, because it’s not a women’s organization per se, but it is run by women who generally have picked up the slack in the social services sector in these transitional countries. They are writing a grant to the U.S. government and to the Nordic Council on sex education. They want to do a sex education booklet for teens in Estonia. They have a rising rate of HIV infection and it is becoming an epidemic in that country and is an important issue. When they gave the proposal to the Nordic Council and to the U.S., the embassy said “there is no way we are going to fund this” because it is a sex education booklet for teenagers that talks about abortion, and God forbid teens having sex. It also had a section in there about feminism and women’s rights. The U.S. was very clear that it was not going to fund something like that. It was funded by the Nordic Council and was a very popular program and it did quite well. Another book was put out on women’s rights in Estonia called, “With or Without Dill.” Does anyone speak Estonian? No? It’s a recipe booklet on feminism, so it has all these recipes on feminism. The word in Estonian for dill is same as the slang for the word for penis. It’s a feminist book. It was a very popular book, but it was definitely something the U.S. wouldn’t fund. They define this by the language used in the RFPs.

Finally, what I argue is that because the foreign funders shape the programs developed and the language used by organizations, it also affects the individuals they are trying to target because these individuals are going to see the campaigns these NGOs put out. For example, in Estonia, the government became very interested in domestic abuse during the EU accession period. Domestic abuse apparently never happened before 2003, when they did this study and figured out, “Wow! A lot people beat their wives!” So, the Nordic Council gave them money to have this campaign against domestic violence. All of a sudden, it became this hot button issue within Estonia and people were talking about it all the time. It was something that had never really come into conversation before, and now people were coming forward and identifying themselves as victims of or perpetrators of domestic abuse. That is one example of how these campaigns can actually encourage people to think about who they are and their role in society.

Another example concerning feminism versus human rights is in Estonia: when they were able to use works like feminism, you see women start to associate themselves with that

term. Although very early on, when I talked to women involved in the early women's movement after that, they had the hardest time defining what feminism was or what women's issues were. One woman told me they wanted to have a conference on women's issues in Estonia, and they brought a group of women together, a nascent community, and said what should we do? They got suggestions like "lets have hair and makeup day", or "lets have a fashion show." That's what it meant to be a woman. That was the understanding they had of what women's issues were. These different NGOs in Estonia took on a concerted campaign to help women understand what they mean by women's issues, which has now become part of the discourse of civil society.

For the U.S., we like to use cookie cutter policies, when we think about women within civil society, it tends to be in terms of women as economic actors and women's involvement in that sector: getting women out of the home and working, even if you are still working in the home. As I found out in Moldova, policy often has to do with women as agents, women as economic actors, or women as victims of trafficking. The umbrella of trafficking takes on a lot of other things: it is economic, it is social, and it has to do with political rights, all of these kinds of things. That has become *the* women's issue for the U.S., and that has a lot of implications as well which I will talk about in a minute.

I wanted to give you a short synopsis of how US political strategy changed or shifted after the Cold War. Obviously, up here (points to map) we have Estonia and the Baltic states. Does anyone know where Moldova is? Moldova is this tiny country wedged between Romania and Ukraine. As you can see, Romania is becoming the frontier of the European Union (EU) now, so Moldova is becoming more and more strategically important. It was important before, it still is, I would argue; why else would I spend so much of my life there?

Moldova is interesting in a lot of ways: one is as a former Soviet state that has a lot of political problems. I don't know if you know, recently Moldova has been turning westwards for obvious reasons. It wants to be part of the EU. Its population speaks Russian and Romanian and Gagauz in the South, so it has some natural affinity for Romania, they were once part of Romania, but they also have, over here, a breakaway republic, called the Transnistrian region, which is currently still occupied by the Russians who came in to keep the peace and never left. It is important for us, and also because it is a main channel for trafficking in people and arms and drugs. The Transnistrian region is completely lawless and that's why we see a lot of trafficking in this region. For the US, this is a politically and geo-politically important region, although not as important as bigger states.

I started looking at this through the lens of the kinds of democracy promotion policies the U.S. established at the end of the Cold War. Clearly, 1983 is way before the end of the Cold War, but the National Endowment for Democracy (NED) took on a new life when the Soviet Union ended. When it was first created, it faced a lot of opposition within Congress. No one wanted to appropriate any money for it; but since 9/11, it has really increased in terms of its prestige and doesn't face much opposition at all. The NED is an umbrella organization for some smaller NGOs that are not government organizations but all of the money comes from the U.S. government. The National Democratic Institute and the International Republican Institute are two organizations that fall under the NED.

I look at the NED because it's important in terms of the kinds of programs they promote: free media, political parties, women's access to political parties and those kinds of things. At the end of the Cold War, the U.S. starts to create policies to support these newly emerging countries. I looked at the support for the East European Democracy (SEED) act of 1989, which was explicitly set up to promote democratic ideals and free market reform and vibrant civil societies. By 1989, you start to see the use of this language becoming more and more important to policy makers. Again, the coercive policies during the Cold War clearly weren't going to work; we didn't want to engage in more confrontation with the Russians so we start to use policies with softer language like "civil society." SEED was on the cusp of that.

Then during the Clinton era, Clinton and Albright suddenly had to deal with the fate of NATO, and the question of the purpose of NATO after the Cold War ended, when it became a kinder, softer NATO that was going to support democratic ideals rather than bomb people (though NATO still did that). In 1994, we saw the national security strategy change, which became the "En-En doctrine," I am sure you are familiar with that, which was to *enlarge* NATO and *engage* at the same time with Russia. We've got the Partnership for Peace as a way to inviting Russia in to the folds without actually making them full partners. But it was also a way of reassuring Russia that we were not intent on moving into their former territory and making life scary for them. Although now we are clearly seeing the blow back on that as Russia is threatening to point its missiles at its former territory that are part of NATO now. We also see the development of the democracy network at this point as well.

Out of all this, this was actually the policy which I was most concerned with when I started writing this book and my work has blown out from there. The Northern European Initiative (NEI) was developed in 1997 and was really a way to take advantage of civil society. We knew we needed to encourage political and economic reform in the Northern European region, we wanted to make sure they were ready to join NATO which was the stepping stone to join the EU, for which of course the Baltic states are forever grateful for now that they get to join. Some people use this to say that the Baltic states are the Trojan horse for the U.S. in the EU, but that's debatable. The focus of the NEI was on these particular tracks: business and trade, law enforcement, civil society including women's issues, energy, environment and public health: all those things that were important to rebuilding these transitional states.

There wasn't a lot of funding for the NEI policy itself, but they worked through USAID, through the NED and during the Clinton Administration through the Soros Foundation, which was a really important player. If you look at the RFPs and the language of civil society there is a broader view, the influence of Soros is there. As you may know, the relationship between Soros and the Bush administration is non-existent and so the policies changed drastically. NEI ended when Estonia and the Baltics "graduated," to NATO and the EU, but this policy has been used as a framework and model for other states and regions in transition. We see the Southeastern Europe Initiative, we see the same sorts of policies in Southeast Asia and anywhere the U.S. is intent on fostering civil society. But, it is clear that NGOs were going to be the cornerstone of this policy, this is how they were going to their

work with very little money. But it was also clear that they were using civil society because it wasn't quite as scary. It wasn't a top-down, U.S. coming in and telling a state how to behave, but rather using civil society to shape the language of civil society and the kinds of civil society that workers and people in those networks would demand from their states.

The result, I argue, of NEI, is the encouragement of democratization, which is intended to create a pro-American space. Meaning, they want to create a civil society that looks more like us. The idea is that if it looks more like us, it translates to the national level, and those states will be more amenable to U.S. policy, that's the logic behind the argument. It is also an opportunity to identify civil society as a legitimate site for American intervention. This is a change from the top-down policy of the U.S. engagement. Now, it is not a drastic change, since obviously we've been doing that forever. Voice of America, for instance, is another example of this kind of strategy. But the impact of civil society and the buzzwords of civil society and democratization represent the new thinking of the time. And the thing that was most interesting to me was that they identified women's economic and social participation as crucial to civil society. A lot of these policies have gender written into them. USAID, all their policies are supposed to deal with gender; we can talk about however successfully or not. Regardless, gender became identified as something vital to civil society.

When I look at the two regions, in the Baltic States, as I already talked about, you have these gatekeepers, the Nordic states and the US, who are not competing with each other because they want the same thing and in many cases work hand-in-hand and fund the same organizations, but the funding language they use is different and sometimes this makes organizations feel schizophrenic when writing proposals because they are not sure which magic words will work and which ones won't. What were important to me were things like trafficking and prostitution. The Nordic states were very clear that these issues were not only economic but also social and in that respect needed to be treated as a social issue that needed attention.

In the U.S., almost every time, trafficking and prostitution were almost exclusively seen as an economic issue: if women would just be trained into better paying jobs, we wouldn't have these problems, without addresses underlying social inequalities that put women in these positions in the first place. The Nordic states obviously have more liberal policies and protection of prostitutes than the U.S. was comfortable with. A lot of the language in the U.S. proposals had to do with, for example, training women to be hairdressers. This was a big one in Moldova: if you train enough hairdressers, no one will want to go to Turkey and be a prostitute. This was done without really looking at why these women were making these decisions in the first place, so yes, it's economic, but it's also social.

In Moldova, trafficking became the big issue. Clearly, it is a major issue in Moldova and there is no doubt about it, it is pretty horrendous. But the U.S. policies weren't really looking at the underlying problems. A good example of these underlying problems are the social hierarchies in Moldovan society based upon ethnic or language group identities: the differences between Romanian speakers and Russian speakers in Moldova are crucial. I don't want to say that it is defining, but it is a really important distinction, because it determines who is getting resources. During Soviet times, if you spoke Russian obviously

you had access to a lot more resources than if you spoke only Romanian. Now, there is a resurgence of Moldovan nationalism, so if you are a Russian speaker, you are looked down upon as a foreigner even if you have never been to Russia. If you speak Romanian, you have a lot more access to resources. It has become a hot-button issue for politicians and for Moldovan society, but it doesn't really get addressed by any funding from the U.S.

A small example of this is the distinction in universities where I worked in Moldova. All university classes are taught in two tracks: a Romanian track or a Russian track. So the same exact class is taught in two different languages. If the same professor teaches it, then that professor tends to favor whichever language group to which he/she belongs. I saw a lot of old-school professors, Russian speakers, who would denigrate their students who were Romanian speakers and would call them stupid for their lack of Russian speaking ability.

Of course, it works the other way, too. A friend of mine worked for the Department of Modern Languages. She was a Russian speaker and was constantly told by her boss that because she was a Russian speaker, she was stupid and didn't deserve to make as much as Romanian speakers. These things also played out in terms of the social services available to the two groups. Romanian speakers are now getting more attention, and thereby more state attention, and more funding attention. These are not issues that are being addressed by the funding opportunities that are available to them from the U.S. Embassy or USAID, for example.

The other thing I noticed in Moldova is that because of the focus on trafficking, the U.S. created this dual vision of women: women as victims or women as agents. It was often that view of women as victims that became the most important within Moldova. Everyone loves to read these really salacious accounts of what happens to Irina when she went off to Turkey and what happens to her when she comes back. No one wants to read about Irina who opens her own flower shop, makes a pretty good business, and doesn't have to sell herself as a prostitute. Therefore, more attention is focused on the victim-hood aspect rather than on women as agents.

I'm not going to talk too much about this because it is research I just started, but what I'm doing is looking at the same strategies being used in Southeast Asia, particularly in Thailand and Burma. One, because I really like Thailand, and two, because the situation in Burma is incredibly interesting because of contrast: a state that is under authoritarian rule, that is way on the bottom of Freedom House's evaluation of a "free" or "not free" country, next door to Thailand, which is actually improving its ranking, in terms of being "partly free." I really want to see what is happening on the ground there in terms of U.S. foreign funding through Thailand, working to undermine the Burmese government—which is what the US is trying to do right now. We don't have a USAID mission in Thailand, but we work through Cambodia and through the region to fund NGOs there and NED is actually working a lot in that area through NDI and IRI. That is where my research is going right now, doing a cross-regional comparison between different transitional states.

What I am looking at here is how it is that the states act as gatekeepers: that they 1) institute control of the social agenda through funding for NGOs—Soros is actually probably not in that category any longer, but USAID, NDI and IRI are, and 2) the women's issues they select or choose to promote often ignore other issues that are just as important and may actually cause more harm. For instance, the U.S. is reluctant to set gender quotas as a viable means of getting women into the legislature, for example. The Nordic States have done it for a really long time, it has worked, it still continues to work, but the U.S. refuses to look at it as a viable alternative, because apparently it looks too much like things we don't like in our own country. And then, there's the management of emerging advocacy networks through funding. What I am arguing is that they have enormous influence over the issues that get into the networks. What they can do is delineate which issues are important and which aren't according to their own interests. What I argue is that the U.S. is actively engaged in this kind of geopolitics, and that because we engage in funding that is explicitly meant to shape civil society that we can also shape the kinds of networks that emerge.

However, I did notice is there is a lot of democratic pushback now, and USAID is also picking up on this, that more countries are starting to see this as a threat to state sovereignty and state control. What they do is they undermine these NGO networks through lots of mechanisms. Whether it is through legal mechanisms like through tax regulations--calling yourself an NGO carries a lot of weight in certain countries and states can use legislative means to control who gets into those NGO networks. We are starting to see a lot of pushback, and the question is now how the US is going to reevaluate the tools they have, reevaluate how we see democratization and the importance of democratization, and what that means.

If you are interested in the Estonian and Moldovan cases, here are the two articles that I put out recently. One really recently, it's actually not out yet, but that give you more detail on the cases I looked at and on the information I found. Thank you very much.

Questions:

Q: "Some of us remember that there was very some suggestive literature on modernization directed at developing countries saying, "Be like us and you too will be prosperous" Now we see a return to Modernization with more countries trying to emulate the U.S. Even more so with women, who are supposed to be like June Cleaver, the perfect mom with the apron and pearls of the 1950's -It's America the way it should be and what the rest of the world should aim to be. I was wondering if you could mention that.

Denise Horn: Well, you did for me! I think that's really part of it. Clearly, when we are talking about women's issues particularly, there are differences between the Clinton administration approach and the Bush administration approach, one of them being in the area of women's rights in terms of pregnancy and abortion. The Bush administration won't fund anything that talks about abortion at all, period. You can see this is problematic for these social service organizations that have to pick up the slack of the state and provide things women can't get elsewhere to not talk about these kinds of services for women; it is

a real detriment. In cases where American funding is the only place to get enough money to have any kind of social service, then that really is going to have an impact.

In terms of how we think women in the world should look, every USAID page has an African woman half robed. But, again it's the simplistic economic solution, without looking at a lot of underlying social problems. Therefore, there are distinctions between the two. However, I don't want to suggest that the Clinton and Bush policies are so different, because they are not. Any of you who study foreign policy knows it's a gradual thing, its never clear cut. However, you do get the idea when reading policies in the Clinton era that there was a lot more enthusiasm and dare I say naïveté about what democratization looked like, as opposed to Bush administration policies, which kind of have a sense of desperation to them. In some ways they are more legalistic, if that makes sense. Now, they are focused on how legislatures look and on the minutiae.

Q: Do people take this aid seriously given that they know it has an agenda? Do they discard NGOs because they know where the money is coming from and that it comes with a hidden agenda?

DH: For the women I spoke with, NGO administrators, that was a huge fear of theirs: they know the U.S. has an agenda and that the Nordic states have an agenda and do not want to give the appearance of their organization being a puppet. This is not only because they want to be taken seriously within their own civil society but also because they do not want to attract the attention of their governments that also might backlash. It's a little dance that they are playing. As I said, many of the NGOs are living and dying by the funding they get. If they can't get it from their own government or from businesses in the countries, then they have to turn to foreign funders. To them, it becomes more a question of: how can we shape programs that are really going to help us and serve the needs we have while also play this word game that foreign funders have set up for us? They are very explicit about it, plenty of people told me about this game. They use the term "magic words" to indicate the kind of phrases they understand to be acceptable to a given government. Also, they are concerned about how they could have one project that might fit in with another project that another foreign funder had funded that won't contradict each other or get them into trouble. The AIDS organization that I was looking at got money from the Nordic Council, they were really worried that because they put out that book on sex, it would inhibit their ability to get further funding from the U.S. in the future. Often, foreign funders are played off each other.

Q: So the local population didn't really protest the presence and activities of these organizations?

Not so much. I wasn't able to go around and do a huge poll or survey on "what do you think this is doing?" In that regard, I didn't get to that individual level, but the campaigns that come out of the foreign funding become so widespread. People are bombarded with these images. For example, in Estonia there was an anti-trafficking campaign that was everywhere, you may have seen it: there were women hooked up like marionettes, and the language was "you are not a puppet." It was all over Estonia and the former Soviet states

as an anti-trafficking campaign. It was just so widespread that it became part of your everyday consciousness and I don't think that people said, "that's foreign funded, they are trying to manipulate us." I think I would have to do something much broader to get that sense. But, I did talk to people on the street, and a lot of people were just not aware that a lot of the projects they were familiar with had been funded by USAID.

However, in many instances, I did have people who became aware that something was funded through USAID; the reaction wasn't "oh, they are trying to manipulate us" but rather was, "oh, this NGO has an association with a powerful country." What this actually did was increase the prestige of an NGO rather than undermine it. Particularly in Estonia, which is very open and welcoming to American intervention. In the Baltic states, there was the sense that the U.S. was its only supporter during the Cold War. The U.S. refused to take it as Soviet territory and instead saw it as occupied territory, and the Estonians have never forgotten that. For them, it is not a bad thing to associate with the U.S.

Q: How did this play out in Moldova civil society?

DH: In the case of Moldova, civil society is really fragile: we talk about Moldovan civil society, but that's a really generous statement. In terms of NGOs that operate in Moldova, a very small percentage of NGOs are actually working. A lot of them are what I call historicized NGOs. Meaning, if they can attract funding they can get paid; and for most people, getting funding is a more of a cash cow than anything else. The bigger organizations, like CARE, they don't have to play that game necessarily, but they often work in tandem with the efforts of USAID. One organization I looked at in Moldova was an anti-trafficking organization, called La Strada an Italian organization. They were doing a lot of work and USAID was working with them. But, again, they were getting their money from the Italian government.

The multi-national ones, yeah, they definitely have less inclination to kowtow. With an organization like Amnesty International, for example, they have a lot more flexibility and maneuverability. What I am arguing here is that just in the same way that Amnesty International can be a gatekeeper, so are states.

Q: As to teaching people how to work without money, I was wondering whether in your grassroots work, you've done any of that. I found it to be really effective.

DH: I absolutely agree with you. What I found was that a lot of the funding from the U.S., the results they were looking for were quantifiable rather than qualitative. The U.S. embassy was really happy if you were going to have a conference: how many people came? How many publications were put out? That's what a lot of the organizations are working towards. But, you can have as many conferences as you want, it is not going to change problems in society, and it's just a way to bring a lot of people to a foreign country, right? I absolutely agree with you, that the need to quantify the policies really stifles any kind of creative change that may happen.

Also, the USAID grants tend to be three years long and so you have to have results that happen within that three-year period. Then when the grant is over, that's it. The reason I was working in Moldova was that I was on a State Department grant on fostering civil society, but it was to foster civil society and we were working with the universities there. But, when the grant was over, that was it. There was nothing else I could do monetarily to help people other than trying to work with the system. It was so much more difficult and takes so much longer, but I agree with you that, in the end, it was so much more useful than the kinds of things we are talking about here. So, I'll be happy to talk about that more.

Q: Going back to the World Bank as a gatekeeper. I would like to know what soft tools they have?

DH: I mentioned the World Bank as a gatekeeper; I didn't do a lot of research on the kinds of NGO stuff the World Bank is engaged in, but certainly, given the World Bank's role in maintaining hegemonic balance—whether you buy into that argument or not, but I do—, I think the World Bank is also interested in those NGO and programs that fostering democracy in the way that they talked about. In terms of the actual programs that they funded, I can't speak to that. I can talk about the ones USAID funded, I'm sorry. But I do think it is very unusual in that sense.

Q: Do all countries want a democracy? And don't NGO funders often ignore national perspective when promoting democracy?

DH: I think more and more. When I did my research in Moldova, it was during the election period, they re-elected the communist party. But that was a nationalist reaction. As you may know, Moldova is the poorest in Europe. The situation there is very bad: every time they do something Russia doesn't like, Russia will turn off the gas, quite literally, and people are out in the woods making dinner. Or, Russia will stop buying Moldovan wine, which is their main export and that will crush the economy. There is a lot of reaction in Moldovan society that they are just a plaything to Russia and the U.S. So, I am starting to see hopeful signs in Moldova of individuals working at the grassroots level to create the kind of democracy that will be Moldovan and not Americanized. But, the government is very reactionary as well, and has maintained control of the civil society by putting all kinds of obstacles for NGOs. As long as you have that kind of government that is afraid of civil society, you won't get very far. So I'm not really sure, you can say that in Moldova, American strategy there is not acceptable. The other part of your question, when you said that NGO funders often ignore national discourse, that was really clear to me when I was doing research and watching their elections, for example. It is deliberate, in a lot of ways.

Q: Doesn't the media have a significant role in this process?

DH: There are issues there, journalists are being imprisoned in Moldova for speaking out against the government, or are being silenced in other ways. It is interesting; this says a lot: When I was doing my fieldwork in Estonia, I had no problem getting access to NGO workers and people would talk to me. It was very transparent, they were more than happy to come forward with funding yet when I went to Moldova, no one would speak openly

with me about where funding was coming from or to whom it was going. They really wouldn't sign anything to give me consent to use their names or anything, which made it kind of difficult. I think this really speaks to the level of development in civil society and that silencing has been really detrimental to the whole movement and is again why the grassroots way is the way. In Estonia, they were just more mentally prepared to have a vibrant civil society.

Carol mentioned that I run the Northeastern branch of an organization called the Global Partnership for Activism and Cross-Cultural Training, which started at Rutgers University, started by Dr. Michael Shafer. The idea was that students could actually foster civil society in peer-to-peer training and peer-to-peer education. That's what I do: we train students to train other students in the strategies needed to create grassroots organizations and to create their own NGOs, but also to use a community development model rather than a philanthropy or charitable giving model when addressing community problems. We train them to actually go out into the community and find out what the community needs and trying to solve big problems by engaging in creating projects that address small parts of the problem. We do these trainings locally in Boston but also abroad. Trainings I have done have been in Thailand, South Africa and this summer will be in Brazil and next spring hopefully in India.

What happens when the students go abroad is that they work with students in those countries. They are put in small groups and create their own NGOs and create projects to address problems. One of the projects we have that came out of our Thailand training last year (the theme of the training was trafficking, not just sex trafficking but also labor trafficking), each group is half American students and half students from that region.

One of the groups came up with an organization called Ta-To [Wide Eyes] which uses documentary film-making to prevent trafficking by going around the region filming people and then using that film to educate people in that region rather than for foreign export. It's really exciting, because it has really taken off, and the two American guys working on the project are now engaged in raising money for the organization and are going back to Thailand for more documentary film-making. This is a successful example of what we do.

However, all of it is predicated on this notion of grassroots organizing with no money (we actually train them how to do it with no money). It gets past the idea that you need funding from an outside source to make things happen, that this is the only way to make civil society grow. For me personally, it is half about solving the problems that I saw in my own research by giving people the tools to engage in that sort of activity without feeling they need to kowtow to these organizations.

Carol Cohn: Are there other places it exists in the Boston area besides Northeastern?

DH: Not yet, but I have a vision of an empire. Its very interesting, in the two and a half years I've been at Northeastern, we started with local trainings my first semester. It has really exploded: through international trainings and local trainings, we now have well over 200 students who have gone through training. Almost every important or socially involved

student organization we have on campus has a G-PACTer in its leadership. Thus, it is great for leadership skills, public speaking skills.

CC: I want to go back to the issue of impact of local civil society organizations. What I wanted to ask you is: in a parallel, or related but not similar project, I have found that nationally and internationally identified NGOs, when engaged in a project (this is not about their funding as much as their trying related to the UN and the strictures of the Security Council or whatever), but my point for the moment is that in shaping their discourse in a particular way (finding the right magic words as well as the bounds of what are acceptable projects to be in, like trafficking but not reproductive rights, for example) that they experience, as they are successful, a kind of what I think of as “functional forgetting” of what their original goals were. With the existence of funding or other kinds of opportunity in relation to the UN, if you ask people, “what are the goals of the organization?” they might be able to tell you, but if you parse out what they spend their time on day-to-day, those original goals don’t even exist in any way. I am wondering what you see about that in these less-well structured organizations with fewer resources, and fewer opportunities. To what degree is the agenda setting by these states really quashing national discourses or women’s discourses where they understand their needs to be something other than dealing with trafficking?

DH: Yes, that is absolutely the case, even more magnified I would think because as I said they are living and dying by these grants. I would interview people in Estonia, who were in women’s rights or human’s rights organizations, and I would say “so, what do you do?” and they gave me the proposal they had written to the embassy. That is what defined them, the funding they were seeking. The projects they were creating were going to be short-term projects that would develop quantifiable results. They were aware of that, and a lot of them lamented the fact that they couldn’t fulfill the broader visions they wanted to see. They often knew what was holding them back, and couldn’t really see beyond that.

In the case of Moldova, it is even worse because the government would put so many obstacles in the way. For instance, in Moldova, companies can either give funding to a NGO or give it back through the state but there is no tax incentive in giving to an NGO, so in the end they end up paying the state twice anyway. So, no company was interested in funding an NGO, they didn’t see the point. Surveys that were done in the Moldovan legislature, and showed that most didn’t think that NGOs had had any real impact on life or policy. The perception of NGOs in Moldova is that they are simply a way to make a quick buck, so there is not a lot of respect. They are trying to make money and they have a list of what they want to do, but at the same time that is the perception...I have met a lot of shady NGO workers, too, who don’t do anything. It’s really in the media. A lot of the people I talked with in Moldova were part of the media and were really pushing for media reform, and they were the ones really in the limelight getting into the most trouble.

Biography

Denise Horn, Ph.D., is Assistant Professor of International Affairs at Northeastern University in Boston, MA. She served as the Associate Director of the Center for Global Security and Democracy at Rutgers University, where she was instrumental in the development of the Civic Engagement Program (CEPO) at the State University of Moldova in Chisinau, Moldova. The program has expanded to include teacher training, statistical research, and student involvement in local and international NGOs and the community. At Northeastern, Dr. Horn spearheaded the development of the Global Partnership for Activism and Cross-Cultural Training (Global PACT), a peer-to-peer training program in grassroots activism and advocacy, with local trainings in Boston and international trainings in South Africa, Brazil, Thailand, Croatia and Cambodia.