

NARRATIVES OF NGOIZATION: THE IMPACT OF  
FOREIGN AID ON FEMINIST ORGANIZATIONS IN  
CONTEMPORARY CROATIA

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## **Abstract**

The following thesis contributes to discussions of NGOization and the effects of foreign funding within feminist organizations in Central and Eastern Europe. I draw on topical oral history interviews with five women from two feminist organizations in Zagreb, Croatia as a descriptive case study. It is my argument that the ambivalent role of foreign funding in the NGOization of feminist organizations in Croatia is experienced acutely by employees in these organizations. Experiences of foreign funding and its correlation with NGOization thus present affective and practical consequences for the narrative framings of feminists as well as the agendas of the organizations in which they participate. Beginning with a discussion of my methodology, I then outline the historical background of feminism in contemporary Croatia. Following this, I present a chapter on the theoretical bases of NGOization in Croatia and an analytical chapter focusing on the narrative constructions of my sample group as they relate to the ramifications of foreign aid, NGOization, fragmentation, and the professionalization of feminist organizations in the country.

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## Chapter 1- Introduction

The intent of this thesis is to contribute to discussions of the construction of feminist citizenship<sup>1</sup>, social movement participation and NGOization. Brought forth previously by authors such as Einhorn and Sever (2003) and Havelkova (1997), I address these issues specifically in relation to a perceived absence of widespread feminist mobilization following transition from state socialism in former Yugoslavia, focusing particularly on the case of Croatia. It is my argument that in addition to previously offered explanations for the fragmentation<sup>2</sup> and NGOization of what some hoped would become a mass feminist movement, the influence of foreign donors seeking to promote civil society and later to provide aid and infrastructure during war and its aftermath influenced agendas in the construction of Croatian feminism as it is experienced and understood by participants today.

The influence of transnational donor organizations on the policies, projects, and structures of feminist organizations in Croatia reflects a larger global trend of relations between increased NGOization and pressure from funding sources within feminist organizations in Central and Eastern Europe as well as throughout the world (Lang 1997, Zimmerman 2007, INCITE! Women of Color Against Violence 2007). This trend is especially significant in the context of Croatia, as following the transition period and then war, these tensions were heightened by a vast increase in aid and attention from outside donor organizations. The ways that this influx of funding is experienced and interpreted by

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<sup>1</sup> Loosely defined in this context as engagement with one's polity as a space for feminist praxis.

<sup>2</sup> In this text I use the term 'fragmentation' as an intrinsic facet of the process of NGOization in post-state socialist countries. The term provides specific emphasis in relation to an imagined versus real outcome, revolving around tension between the hopes (the imagined future) that following transition post-state socialist women would participate in widespread, cohesive feminist mobilization and the reality experienced, resembling a fragmented version of this imagined (and western-centric) future. The term fragmentation then, is in direct opposition to the idea of 'wholeness' in the sense of a unified, feminist collective.

employees of Croatian feminist organizations also is critical in understanding the ways feminism is understood and subsequently shaped in the country.

In interviewing employees of feminist organizations in Croatia, it became apparent that the interactions between these organizations and foreign donors were definitive examples of what we might deem the institutional equivalent of a love-hate relationship. The ambivalent nature of foreign aid within feminist institutions has been articulated previously by authors such as Zimmerman (2007) and Ghodsee (2004), establishing that this tension is felt within organizations throughout much of the world. However, I argue that this ambivalence has been felt with particular acuteness in the Croatian context and has worked to shape the perceptions and trajectory of much feminist activity in the country.

Foreign aid from the transition period in 1990 onwards worked to create and constrain a majority of feminist NGOs in the country and is experienced by those involved in feminist organizations as a sort of necessary evil. The quantity of this funding is significant, for example NGOs in Croatia working to address domestic violence receive approximately 70% of their funding from foreign donors (Open Society Institute 2006). It can be estimated that this number is even higher for organizations focused on activities such as feminist knowledge production, as these types of organizations are generally perceived by government departments as a less pressing cause than issues of violence and human rights abuse. Without money from international NGOs and other funding agencies, Croatian feminist organizations struggle to survive in an often unwelcoming climate, but with it, their goals, organizational structure, and critical edge are felt to buckle under the pressure to suit funder's guidelines.

Therefore, I posit, that in addition to transition from socialism and the harsh realities of war, the influx of foreign money to feminist organizations and the connotations and constraints that came with it contributed significantly to experiences of NGOization within Croatian feminism. The ways in which this is perceived by employees of feminist

organizations, most significantly as a rapid transition from feminism as a critical social movement to a decentralized NGO-based sphere, is significant as it is these perceptions and experiences in concert with the material realities of foreign aid that have and will continue to influence the trajectory of feminism in Croatia and the larger Central and Eastern European region.

The following analysis will explore the above mentioned issues further, drawing from semi-structured topical oral history interviews within the framework of a descriptive case study. Starting with a discussion of the methodology used, followed by a presentation of historical and theoretical backgrounds that better situate my arguments, I will then provide the reader with an analysis of interviewees experiences with NGOization, foreign donor encounters, and employment within two feminist organizations in Zagreb, Croatia. These sections will serve to illustrate and explain aspects of NGOization and fragmentation specific to the Croatian context, as well as aspects present within larger, transnational locations of the women's movement.

## Chapter 2- Research Methodology

The intention of this project is to provide a descriptive case study as a means of looking into the experiences and perceptions of participants in the contemporary Croatian feminist landscape as they relate to the links between NGOization and the influx of foreign aid during and following war in the 1990s. It is my supposition that the ways in which foreign aid has been encountered by local participants has reinforced the location of feminism in the region as one based largely within small scale, decentralized professional women's groups. In exploring the narrative framings of employees within these organizations, I will demonstrate the causal links between the practical and affective consequences of foreign donor influence in shaping an NGO-based women's movement, often at the expense of a wider cultural/political critique.

As employees in women's organizations, the individuals I interviewed act as links between transnational ideas and their locational interpretation and adaptation. Acting as liaisons between knowledge and action, as well as between transnational NGOs, funding organizations, etc., it is my assertion that my informants often take on the role of *translator* within their particular social movements and organizations. Sally Engle Merry describes translators as "the people in the middle" who must articulate and reframe ideas and practices from the transnational arena into the local and vice versa (2006: 39). This concept is similar to several found in discussions of social movement theory including the "*articulator*," "*mobilizer*," and "*bridge leader*" (Morris and Staggenborg 2007). These terms, set forth in a discussion of leadership in social movements help us better understand the roles assumed by those in leadership positions within feminist organizations and other collectives.

In discussing the role of leaders within social movements, Morris and Staggenborg write:

Research has identified key ingredients for the emergence of social movements including political and cultural opportunities, organizational bases, material and human resources, precipitating events, threats, grievances, and collective action frames. Although it is doubtful that even the most skilled leaders could mobilize movements in the absence of at least some of these factors, leaders make a difference in converting potential conditions for mobilization into actual social movements (2007: 178).

Through enacting roles such as the translator, leaders in social movements and feminist NGOs use the resources at hand, both locally and internationally, in terms of material assets and ideological zeal, in order to bring a cause to the fore of public concern. Therefore, the insights of leaders, employees and activists into the causes of successes and failures within their organization or movement can not only teach us a great deal about their perceptions of themselves and “their” movement, but about the ways in which “key ingredients” of social movements are utilized. This is not to say that individual leader/employee-narratives will not have elements of bias, but that they are, regardless, a valuable resource for understanding the conditions and experiences that shape feminism in the region. Given this consideration, gathering oral history narratives of women employed in feminist organizations is a crucial element to better understanding the processes and perspectives that shape feminist movements in Croatia, especially applicable to the conditions following transition from socialism to capitalism, the effects of war, and more currently, attempted accession into the EU.

## ***2.1 The Sample Group***

The sample group of narrators has been chosen as case studies in two phases, first the selection of organizations by their importance and relevance in the field of Croatian women’s organizations. Second, the selection of individual narrators based jointly on their involvement with these organizations and their willingness and availability to participate in the interview process. Originally, three organizations were selected as components for an intrinsic case study, they were: the Centre for Women’s Studies (Centar za Ženske Studije), the Women’s

Infoteka (Ženska Infoteka), and B.a.B.e. (Be Active Be Emancipated). All organizations are located in Zagreb and are present in transnational feminist dialogue as well as local activism. In preliminary discussions with Croatian colleagues, these organizations were cited repeatedly as being some of the dominant feminist organizations in the country.

While undertaking the preliminary processes of gaining contacts and permission to interview women within these organizations, an interesting phenomenon arose. The first two organizations mentioned Ženska Infoteka and Ženske Studije, organizations focused primarily on education, archiving, and publishing, were eager to connect me with potential interviewees. However, B.a.B.e, an activism and women's human rights advocacy organization, simply did not respond to my inquiries. After numerous emails, phone calls, and attempts to initiate contact by colleagues with connections to the organization, it became apparent that the employees at B.a.B.e. were either unwilling or unavailable to speak with me. Numerous conjectures can be made as to why this was, ranging from a lack of interest in speaking with an American researcher, or one only at the MA level. However, the most likely explanation is linked to a recent series of tense and widely publicized events surrounding the organization's involvement in a domestic violence case against *Nacional* news magazine CEO, Ivo Pukanić by his wife Mirjana Pukanić, whom he subsequently committed to a mental institution after she disclosed his links to organized crime to B.a.B.e.'s coordinator Sanja Sarnavka. As a result of this involvement Sarnavka as well as other staff members had been subject to threats and harassment since October 2007 (Front Line 2007). At the time of my arrival in Zagreb for field research, this scandal was still going strong and was garnering significant media attention. Therefore it is my assumption that the most likely reason for B.a.B.e.'s lack of response was due to their involvement in such a high profile and volatile situation.

Regardless of the reason behind B.a.B.e.'s lack of participation, this narrowed my sample group down to two cases—Ženske Studije and Ženska Infoteka, and concretely contributed to the salient themes presented by narrators as their focus was less on activism, and more on women's NGOs and women's studies education. At this time it is important that I further articulate the importance and history of these organizations as descriptive case studies.

The first organization I began interviews with was Ženska Infoteka, an NGO founded in 1992 by Djurdja Knežević (Women's Infoteka 2007). It serves as an informational, archival and publishing center with a lending library, and has published 41 books and the journal *Kruhe i ruže* (Bread and Roses). Ženska Infoteka also leads seminars, conducts research and maintains archives and databases related to feminism in Croatia and former Yugoslavia. The organization employs three women full time and two part-time, in addition to having several volunteers. In order to gain perspective on the organization and the experiences of those involved in it I conducted semi-structured topical oral history interviews with three women—founder Djurdja Knežević, and employees Karla Horvat Crnogaj and Katja Kahlina.

Interviewing these women presented varying narratives both in terms of their generational belonging and level of participation in feminism. At the time of my interviews, Djurdja Knežević, while still remaining active in the organizational structure of the Infoteka had, as she described, “withdrawn” from much of the feminist movement in Croatia. Her narrative provided a cogent critique of the current status of women's organizations in the region and is drawn upon numerous times in my analytical chapter.

Kahlina and Horvat Crnogaj, while both currently employed at the Infoteka also presented different perspectives on feminism in the region and the organization as a case study. Kahlina is currently a PhD student at Central European University in Budapest,

Hungary, residing primarily in Zagreb while she works and does research. Her narrative presented numerous themes revolving around the importance of feminist knowledge production in the region and issues of competition between women's NGOs in Croatia. Horvat Crnogaj's additional perspective was also especially interesting as while she is employed at the Infoteka, she does not identify as a feminist and was in fact, surprised when I asked her about being a feminist. Her narrative lent an important perspective on working at a feminist NGO as an employment choice.

Following my interviews with women working at Ženska Infoteka, I spoke with two employees of the Zagreb Centre for Women's Studies (Ženske Studije). The Centre for Women's Studies, founded in 1995 is the first and only independent provider of a women's studies education program (Kašić ed. 2006). In addition to providing women's studies courses, the Centre engages in research, publishing and cultural activities. While they are currently autonomous from the university system, it is important to note that one of their officially stated objectives is to "integrate Women's Studies into the university system/curricula in Croatia towards EU educational models" (Kašić ed. 2006).

In my interviews, I spoke with Executive Director Sandra Prlenda, and Educational Program Coordinator Jasminka Pešut. Both women provided even further insight into the nature of feminist organizations in Croatia and compelling narratives of their own experiences with the women's movement. As two influential women's organizations in Croatia's capital city of Zagreb, the organizations and their narrators provided a helpful perspective on the evolution of feminism in the region.

## ***2.2 Methodological Process***

The data for this work has been collected through semi-structured, topical oral history interviews focusing on narrator's involvement in women's organizations in Croatia as a

defining theme within their lives. The intention behind this methodology is to provide insight into understandings of feminist activism and NGO activity in the region. My aim is that this will add a personal narrative dimension to a discourse that has until now focused largely on more general theories pertaining to women's movements following the end of state socialism in Central and Eastern Europe (Einhorn 1993, Einhorn and Sever 2003, Gal and Kligman 2000, etc.), as my thesis has evolved and been shaped by the themes articulated by narrators as most salient. Interviews have been transcribed and analyzed using narrative analysis (as articulated by Riessman 1993) in order to identify and perform deep readings of the themes presented.

Prior to conducting interviews I anticipated that numerous themes would arise revolving around issues such as: what experiences have led Croatian women to become activists or employees of feminist NGOs, what obstacles and defining moments are most salient to them, and how social, historical, cultural and economic factors influence the formation, continuation and ideals of feminist organizations in Croatia today. This anticipation was accurate as several main themes arose. However, due to space restrictions I have elected to focus on one theme that carried through all narratives- the influence of funding (especially via foreign donor organizations) on the NGOization of the women's movement in contemporary Croatia.

At its outset this project had (and continues to have) two specific aims; the first is methodological and practice-oriented, while the second is focused on increasing and deepening the level of accessible research on Croatian feminist experience and organization. The first aim of my research lies in the data collection itself and is rooted in a desire to unify feminist theory and practice by engaging in oral history interviews that affirm the agency, dignity, and worth of each interviewee (Reinharz 1992), while contributing to a body of research into the formations of feminism(s) in contemporary Croatia by analyzing the

narratives of participants in feminist organizations as they relate to personal and organizational experiences of NGOization, foreign funding, and feminist praxis. While there are some academic works available concerning women's studies programs in Croatia, (for example Kašić ed. 2006 and Jelavić 1998), Croatian women's movements and related topics (including Blagojević, Duhacek, and Lukic eds. 1995), my research looks at these issues from a different perspective—focusing on the personal narrations of the women who comprise and define these movements and examining these narratives through a lens of feminist inquiry and analysis. Special attention is paid to similarities and differences in influential concepts between the narrators, especially as they relate to feminist mobilization and activity within feminist NGOs.

### ***2.3 My Position as a Researcher***

As previously noted, my position as an outside researcher and my desire to let the narratives of the interviewees inform the topics I choose, feature, and analyze, has significantly affected my research process and outcome. While I entered Zagreb to do fieldwork with the intent of better understanding women's perceptions of activism and social movement participation, it quickly became apparent that these were not the issues that narrators themselves framed as most significant. During this process I worked to maintain a high level of self-reflexivity. As a result, this paper took on a new focus—examining the circumstances and experiences of foreign aid encounters in shaping an NGO-based feminist sphere.

In this writing I strive to provide and analyze narratives while acknowledging the significance of these narrative frameworks in shaping the feminist movement in Croatia. All of the names used in the following text are real, as retaining anonymity in such a tight-knit community would be nearly impossible. I must however acknowledge that in using the real

names and discussions of members of this community, there may be later ramifications for the narrators featured in this research. This element then necessitates a certain level of responsibility on my part as researcher; with this in mind I must stress that all critique of the feminist movement was provided by narrators in a wider context of discussion regarding feminism in Croatia—including but not limited to narrators personal experiences, hopes, and ideas about feminism in the region. I have endeavored to provide these narratives in as much context as possible, and must also note that some narrative excerpts have been edited to preserve coherence. This was done primarily because interviews were conducted in English (the narrator’s non-native language) and transcribed in full, including all pauses and hesitations. All edited narrations have been altered carefully and minimally in order to preserve content and meaning.

## Chapter 3- Historical Background

Following transition from state socialism, many scholars perceived the feminist movements in the region as ‘fragmented’ as opposed to cohesive and large-scale (Einhorn and Sever 2003, Einhorn 1993, Pető and Szapor 2004, Lang 1997). This state of affairs was particularly relevant in former Yugoslavia, including Croatia, as war gripped the region in the early 1990s- soon after the transition period began. In addition to a transition-era emphasis on building civil society through NGOs, the instability of war and resulting pressure from foreign donor organizations eager to provide aid to the war-torn Yugoslav region, all helped reinforce the fragmentation/NGOization of the feminist movement in Croatia as perceived and experienced by movement participants and subsequently, outside researchers. This then resulted in a transition within the women’s movement experienced by movement participants as one from a critical social movement to a professionalized sphere of activity revolving around NGOs. Therefore, it is not fragmentation per se that is an issue of concern, but the ways in which this fragmentation is experienced by those involved in women’s organizations. The NGOization of feminism in Croatia reflects a larger trend and indeed indicates that certain forms of feminism have in many places, partially embedded themselves within the institutional fabric of a society. However, with this type of relative stability, certain compromises are made.

This chapter will discuss the historical and theoretical influences that have lead to narrators’ perception of the movement as one based largely within the NGO sphere as opposed to an imagined/ideal “unified feminist movement”. Presented below is an outline of the historical trajectory of women’s movements in Croatia, followed by a discussion and critique of the influence of foreign aid in the NGOization process, focusing first on the emotional and experiential consequences followed by the practical consequences of foreign

aid. In utilizing these discourses I seek to expose the material and affective circumstances behind donor encounters within the feminist movement in Croatia. This will serve to further my proposition that the perceived fragmentation of women's movements in the region was not an unusual occurrence whose responsibility rested solely on the shoulders' of local movement participants. I argue that to the contrary, this transition was one that involved numerous actors on both local and international levels, in response to the material circumstances present within a specific milieu.

The construction of narratives of the women I have interviewed reflects just this, as an acknowledgement of the increased professionalization and NGOization of feminism was present within all interviews. This narrative emphasized frustration and sometimes disappointment with the perceived trajectory of women's movements in the region, especially in terms of the negative influence of foreign donor organizations and the pressure to cooperate with (rather than critique) branches of the state. While the specificities of this thesis as a descriptive case study is unique to the Croatian context, the overall tendency of women's movement organizations to adapt to an institutional model is indicative of a larger trend in feminism that transgresses national borders (Lang 1997).

In order to explore this idea further, it is important to briefly describe the history of the women's movement in Croatia as well as to explore some of the factors leading to its current development as what one might consider a small scale NGO-based professional sector. It is my argument that the common threads within narratives of Croatian feminists enframe a context in which the influence of foreign donors during and following wartime looms large, providing both opportunity and restriction, and is experienced as one of the primary factors in shaping feminism in Croatia. Furthermore, as foreign donors influence and alter the trajectory of the feminist movement in the country over a prolonged period of time, the nature and connotations of this influence shifts and evolves—seen most recently in the

increasing presence of the European Union in the lives (and budgets) of numerous women's NGOs. In the following chapters I present a discussion of the historical and theoretical backgrounds within which we can better situate the complexities of NGOization of feminist organizations in Croatia.

As such, I must first mention the basic outlook of texts interrogating the development of women's movements in post-socialist states, as well as my own motivations in conducting this research. In a preliminary review of texts relating to women's mobilization in post-socialist states, the dominant sentiment was that women's organizations failed to mobilize in the ways anticipated by outside scholars and were therefore categorized as unsuccessful (Einhorn and Sever 2003). In part due to the desire to move beyond this critique of women's movements in post-socialist states, I made the decision to conduct semi-structured topical oral history interviews with five women who are or have been engaged in the Croatian feminist movement. I hoped that their narratives might lead me to a description of feminism in the region beyond what I had read. The narratives that interviewees presented did indeed further problematize previous writings on feminisms in Croatia, but in ways I had not entirely anticipated.

While narratives do not necessarily equal concrete historical fact, they better explain the experiences, emotions and motivations of those involved in particular movements (Portelli 1995). One way in which we can investigate the ways in which those involved in feminist organizations in the region is to understand the mythemes<sup>3</sup> that are used to enframe and narrate particular situations. Within the interviews I conducted, one of the most overarching themes was one of frustration and disillusionment with the problems brought on by foreign donors, international NGOs and state institutions in the wake of an increasingly

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<sup>3</sup> As used by Luisa Passerini. 1990. "Mythobiography in Oral History." In *Myths We Live By*. Raphael Samuel and Paul Thompson, eds. London: Routledge, pp 49-60. Passerini provides a working definition of 'myth' as "...by definition collective, shared by many, super-individual and inter-generational, beyond the limits of space and time (1990: 50)." This definition is incorporated into the term mytheme or mythologeme in reference to thematic myths that carry throughout social groups.

professionalized sphere of women's organizations. One narrator explains the ramifications of this process as such:

*Like many jobs in the in the civil society it has become a market. Market also for jobs. That's one of the reasons why this competition for jobs is also not something that would encourage pure feminist idealistic solidarity...That's something that (sighs) you have to struggle with....(Sandra Prlenda, personal communication, 25 April 2008)*

Highlighting the impact of war, foreign donors, and increased NGOization, narrators portrayed feminism in Croatia as something that transitioned rapidly from a culturally critical movement to a type of professional industry. This chapter then serves as a starting point to better understand how this narrative might be formed, as well as how it in itself helps to shape the trajectory of feminism in the region.

### **3.1 Absence or Alternative Public Sphere? Understanding a Canonized History of Women's Movement Organizations in Croatia**

In order to demonstrate the ways in which the historical roots of Croatian feminism have helped structure the narratives of participants as well as the current context of feminism in the country, I will present and situate the movement within a narrative of its historical evolution. Many of the historical events discussed below are also reflected within what surfaces as a type of canonized narrative history in the transcripts of interviews I have recorded. This historical canon emphasizes the phases and generations of contemporary feminism in Croatia beginning with the 1970s, followed by the generations of the 1980s, 1990s, and the present day (discussed below and reflected in Chapter 5.2 discussing the trajectory of feminism according to narrator's framings). In addition to understanding the periods and phases within feminism in Croatia, the reader will see that the roots of feminism in the country were in place long before transition, often taking form within an alternative public or civil sphere. This too, is reflected in the narrator's historical canon and, in turn, helps us better understand the current formations of Croatian feminism as a movement based

on a decentralized professional sphere. We can begin this exploration with a review of some potential explanations for the fragmentation of women's movements following state socialism.

In the years following 1989, many western feminists expressed disappointment with what appeared to be the lack of a coherent women's movement in formerly socialist countries (Einhorn and Sever 2003, Petó and Szapor 2004). However this perceived absence may also be a case of ahistorically based expectations, wherein due to the rigidity of expectations pertaining to what women's mobilization should look like, the reality of feminist resistance in countries such as Croatia was ignored and/or interpreted as a lack of mobilization. Einhorn and Sever term this tendency to overlook the actual grassroots women's organizing present in the Central and East European contexts before 1989 as arising from "myths of transition" (2003:165).

According to the Einhorn and Sever (2003), these myths shape much of the dialogue concerning the lack of feminist movements and political participation in post-socialist states. The first myth described is that women were not politically active despite official equality in the public sphere, while the second myth is that women rejected activity in the public sphere, most significantly seeing political activity as being "dirty" and better left to men (Einhorn and Sever 2003: 165). While some aspects of these myths may be rooted in truthful sentiment (for example, in her book *Cinderella Goes to Market*, Einhorn herself lists one of these myths (the view of politics as "dirty") as a potential reason for the lack of women's representation in post-socialist countries (1993: 156)) this however, does present the need to look at feminist movement participation from a different perspective.

As conceptions of the absence of feminist movements, political activism and feminist citizenship in Central and Eastern Europe still rely on traditional notions of the "political," it is helpful to consider whether the aforementioned disappointment of Western intellectuals

and activists was based at least partially on a non-applicable conception of women's mobilization. For instance, Einhorn and Sever (2003) as well as Gal (1997), explain that concepts like "citizenship" and "civil society" grew to mean different things entirely under socialism than in a liberal democracy, and that incorrect interpretations of these concepts were often applied by outside scholars and organizations to the chagrin of those involved locally. With this in mind, it is possible to say that the so-called Western idea of what a universalized feminist movement ought to look like also changes in translation within a new context.

To explore this further, we can look to Steven Sampson's (2002) discussion of civil society groups and NGO projects in former Yugoslavia, in order to demonstrate how the ideals and interpretations of outside actors often come into conflict with on-the-ground realities. Sampson writes,

The discursive turn in Balkan Studies (Wolff 1994, Todorova 1997), in which societies are purely constructive and therefore artificial, has blinded us to the concrete problems which cause some organizations and projects, despite good intentions and declarations, to falter. Measuring project success is always problematic. Often we tend to compare the ideal of our own society (our own myths of efficiency, transparency and cooperation) with the harsh reality of getting things accomplished in the Balkans (2002).

In other words, gauging the success of feminist movements in contemporary Croatia is difficult at best, and in doing so we risk providing only a partial description of the reality we describe, participating in a colonialist discourse (by comparing Croatian feminist movements to an imagined Western yardstick of "progress"), or missing the point entirely. Because of these risks it is important to take into consideration several things—first, that the effects of so-called "transition" and then war in the 1980s and 1990s have created material realities distinct from those of any other region making such comparisons impractical and uninformed; second, that while a monolithic feminist movement may not have arisen following the end of socialism, a civic sphere consisting of numerous NGOs has and

continues to develop; and finally, that this is not an insular process, but one that is heavily influenced by outside forces.

### **3.2 Finding Feminism in an Alternative Public Sphere**

Because of the circumstances of transition and war, the consistent growth of a civic sphere and the influence of outside forces, it is important to look at the idea of an “alternative public sphere” as one potential argument against what appeared to onlookers to be the lack of a unified feminist movement in Croatia. While authors such as Einhorn and Sever (2003) report that many scholars hoped to see a large spike in women’s official political participation following 1989 and were then disappointed by its absence, Petó and Szapor call for a reevaluation of this notion- especially as it pertains to the separation of spheres (2004:172). The authors argue that within the contexts they are examining, gender relations took on a form that was incompatible with the strict dichotomy of public and domestic spheres, leading to women’s involvement in a Habermasian alternative public sphere (Petó and Szapor 2004: 173).

While their article deals specifically with the history of women’s activist engagement in Hungary, it calls forth several points relevant to the discussion of feminist citizenship in contemporary Croatia as well, including the location of feminist praxis a sphere in some ways positioned between private and public. In state-socialist Hungary, feminist organizations were found within counter-culture groups, and while this meant that feminists found themselves on the fringe of mainstream political (and even social) life, they did find niches in other informal institutions such as open universities. These institutions served as an alternative public sphere that provided its members with the support needed for political activism at a time when conventional political life was not an option for them (Petó and Szapor 2004: 175).

Even today in Hungary, like many other countries in East and Central Europe, women's representation still "remains largely outside of the conventional political framework" instead being found in feminist intellectual circles, as well as women's organizations and NGOs (Pető and Szapor 2004: 179). Echoing the sentiment of Pető and Szapor's article, feminist organizations as alternative spaces for resistance and community were mentioned in numerous narratives of the women I interviewed. Below are two examples of this narrative in the Croatian context. Jasminka Pešut recollects,

*I joined the Centre as a student, and especially what was important for me [was] that [the] Centre, the Centre for Women's Studies was not a part of the mainstream. And I think that this autonomy and independent way of creation, of possibility to integrate women's experience and to have reflection upon women's experience [in this] model, I like it very much (Jasminka Pešut, personal communication, 25 April 2008).*

Pešut's narrative conveys a desire to conduct feminist inquiry outside of the political mainstream, citing this not necessarily as a position of marginalization but one of autonomy and independence. This wish to conduct feminist dialogue outside of the mainstream, however, also has distinctly political connotations regarding resistance to nationalist discourse. This is articulated further in Sandra Prlenda's narrative, describing how she came to choose a career within this alternative sphere. Prlenda states,

*...Ethically, it was tough question to answer, how I can do my work as a historian and not [be] involved in national history, because the institutes of history were really nationalistic. I cannot imagine working there...*

*And I found, in feminism the place for me ethically and intellectually. Some place [where] I could do my job...not being involved in this state-building, nation-building process, which [was] in place during the 90's. So it was kind of resistance, to what was happening and that's maybe the answer for many women here. Women's Studies, the Centre for Women's Studies [was] founded in 1995, and many students...find here a place where they could be free [from] all this encompassing nationalism (Sandra Prlenda, personal communication, 25 April 2008).*

As demonstrated above, this tendency towards participation in nongovernmental organizations as opposed to direct political participation is especially salient in the Croatian context, as the realities of war in the 1990s further alienated feminists from their state government, while simultaneously an influx of support from foreign donors has encouraged the growth of organizations within civil society. As a result, locating activity within an NGO-

based sphere was one of the only options for feminists wanting to pursue careers in civil society without colluding with a nationalistic government.

### **3.3 Historical Roots of Croatian Feminism: 1800-1979**

Before further exploring the features of the contemporary landscape of Croatian feminism, it is important to provide a brief outline of the women's movement(s) in the country in order to demonstrate the ways in which historical events have shaped the narratives of those involved in the feminist movement, as well as to frame the organizational constructs that were in place leading up to the present day. It is essential to note that experiences of war, ethnic and gender-based violence, and nationalism are all influential in the evolution of feminist activism in the region in addition to its state-socialist past. It is also necessary to mention that the region in fact has a long history of women's organizations starting as early as the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century (Božinović 1995: 13).

These circumstances all work to shape the narratives of those currently involved in the movement, as well as the concrete manifestations of feminism through women's organizations in Croatia. Beginning with one of the primary emergences of feminism in former Yugoslavia in the 1800s, the history of feminism in the region can be seen as one that has evolved over time as a movement located outside of the mainstream political sphere, leading to its current state, experienced by narrators as one influenced increasingly by outside forces and NGOization.

As noted, one of the first women's movements in the region took root in the 1800s and began as a campaign for women's education related to national movements. Following this, numerous women's organizations were founded in humanitarian, religious, and educational sectors (Božinović 1995:13). After World War I, two prominent women's leagues were formed and became members of the International Council of Women and the

International Alliance of Women, respectively, a membership that denotes both seriousness of intent and transnational dialogue (Božinović 1995:14).

Despite these historical foundations, the earliest well known women's movement organization was the Anti-Fascist Women's Front (AWF) founded in 1942 (Antic 1992: 160). Established by the Communist Party to resist the Nazi occupation, it was the bedrock for a later feminist movement that matured in the 1970s (Einhorn and Sever 2003: 179). While women's movements like the AWF helped women move to some extent from the private to the public sphere, the high rate of women's unemployment, the comparatively open market, and Yugoslavia's split with the USSR (essentially ending the commitment to full-time employment) has led some scholars to assert that the reintroduction of women to the private sphere in Yugoslavia began before transition, and thus, long before many other state-socialist countries (Antic 1992: 159, Einhorn and Sever 2003: 179). This reintroduction into the private sphere is certainly a factor in the increased NGOization of women's organizations, locating them within 'civil society' as opposed to within an overtly political and public sphere.

This reintroduction to the private sphere however, does not negate the fact that feminist discourse and activism in the 1970s and 1980s, while smaller in size than the AWF and women's work associated with the People's Liberation movement following the occupation of Yugoslavia in 1941, was indeed occurring. One cause of its decreased potency was certainly the influence of socialism, especially following the period of change in 1950-51 (Božinović 1995:16). Neda Božinović writes that at this time,

All of the work pertaining to the independent woman as well as the political work on the change of the patriarchal conscienceness [sic] was shifted to the Socialist Alliance of the Working People. That was the beginning of the end of the organized women's work in which they defined their own problems and found their own solutions (1995:16).

Through this we see two things: an articulation of the strength of the women's movement prior to state socialism, and its absorption into socialist rhetoric. This is particularly

significant as in order to fully understand the status of women's movements following the end of socialism in Croatia, we must come already versed in the movements and events that preceded and existed within socialism. With this in mind, it is also important to mention the activity of women's organizations in the 1970s and '80s, as feminist consciousness did not simply enter the picture after the fall of the Berlin wall, but was already in (albeit quiet) existence.

### **3.4 From 1979 on: Mapping Contemporary Croatian Feminism(s)**

In 1979, following a public meeting of intellectual women in Belgrade, women in Zagreb founded the group "Women and Society" (Božinović 1995:18). The establishment of this group may be seen as the beginning of a new period of feminist organizing and activism in the region, and has been deemed by Biljana Kašić (founder of the Centre for Women's Studies in Zagreb) as one of the four events she has "found to be significant as the crucial and transformative potential for mapping Croatian feminism" (Kašić 2006:215). The other three events listed by Kašić are the establishment of the SOS hotline in Zagreb in 1988; the establishment of the Center for Women's War Victims in 1992, and the establishment of the Centre for Women's Studies in 1995 (Kašić 2006: 215). It is relevant to note that half of these events took place prior to 1989, firmly establishing the historical roots of women's feminist citizenship in the region preceding the end of socialism.

These events also help us chart the framing of the Croatian feminist movement by its participants as a series of four time periods with distinct generational qualities, mentioned previously as part of a canonized historical narrative. The events listed by Kašić also cut feminism in Croatia into specific segments—the 1970s symbolized by the group "Women and Society," the 1980s and the activism and SOS hotlines that grew during that time, the 1990s first represented by women's work in response to war, and then later in the decade, a

final period is marked in which the Centre for Women's Studies is founded. In their accounts of feminism in the region, narrators have focused especially on the influence of foreign donors in the 1990s and beyond (after the first two periods that we might categorize as ones of "discussion and debate" and "activism and outreach"). Due to this emphasis it is important to further interrogate the effects of foreign aid spurred by war on the growth of feminism in Croatia as a possible explanation for the 'fragmentation' and increased emphasis on NGOs experienced by participants in the Croatian feminist movement today.

Unanimously cited by movement participants and outside scholars (such as Einhorn and Sever, 2003) the onset of war served as a catalyst for many feminist activists and had a large impact on women's civic activity. Einhorn and Sever argue that most of the organizations that grew out of this period had a specifically local and often one-issue focus, due to a large extent to the instability of the war, leading to the previously mentioned perception of the Croatian feminist movement as fragmented (2003:182). I agree with their statement and argue that in addition to the instability of war, the influence of foreign donor organizations during this period further contributed to the fragmentation of feminist organizations in the region, occurring in the form of a perceived transition from a critical social movement to a decentralized professional sphere of activity revolving around the work of specific NGOs and their projects.

How then, with this information in mind, might we better categorize feminist organizations and activism in Croatia's past, present and future if we are to reject connotations of failure and instead focus on the evolutionary processes that took place? The answer is decidedly not a simple one. There are, however some prevailing factors in this process of transformation—that feminist mobilization often takes place in an alternative public or civic sphere, rather than within the mainstream and that the political and economic circumstances will necessarily affect the ways in which women mobilize. It is therefore

important that we situate the context of feminism (and hence feminist civic/NGO organizations) in Croatia within a larger body of discussion concerning NGOization and the potential consequences of foreign aid.

## Chapter 4- NGOs and Foreign Aid: Theoretical Issues and Practical Consequences

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*This [situation of]... small powers, money or networking or trying to be closer to the decision making bodies and people who [have] some power and that becomes more important than feminist solidarity... that's one of the ugliest things that in the end really fatigues you and you're disappointed and you don't have enough energy or enthusiasm. Feminists have enough enemies I would say, problems in a society to fight against and to be vocal [about], but when there are problems in the movement, that's not something to enjoy (Sandra Prlenda, personal communication, 25 April 2008).*

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The above narrative was provided in reference to the consequences of issues of funding, competition and corruption within donor agencies supporting feminist organizations in Croatia. It provides us with a personal look at how donor encounters, NGOization, and foreign aid can structure experiences and circumstances within the Croatian feminist movement. To further interrogate this sphere of experience, we can look to literature focusing on the “aid encounter.”

Aida Bagic's (2004) article “Talking about ‘Donors,’ Women's Organizing in Post-Yugoslav Countries” provides an excellent starting point for those wanting to better understand the relations of foreign aid and local recipients in former Yugoslavia during the 1990s, as well as the increasing NGOization of feminist organizations as an innately linked result. Providing an ethnography-based analysis of donor-recipient interactions, Bagic articulates the experiences, emotions and practical consequences behind foreign aid in former Yugoslavia. For the purpose of providing a theoretical framework within which my own research is situated, I will focus on presenting and evaluating her discussion of the NGOization (vis a vis foreign aid) of feminism in the region, utilizing also Paul Stubbs (2006) discussion of the specificities of NGOization in Croatia and Julie Hemment's (1998) theoretical critique of NGOs in post-socialist states. The sections below will focus respectively, on the affective and practical consequences of aid, followed by a wider discussion of NGOization in the Croatian context drawing upon the work of Sabine Lang

(1997). Upon consuming this material the reader will have an understanding of some of the relations and theoretical issues implicit in the narratives of women currently involved in feminist organizations as they relate to the framing of relationships of aid and the current and future landscape of feminist organizations in Croatia. The following text will further articulate the ways in which the feminist movement is perceived by its participants as increasingly NGOized, as well as how this NGOization is fostered by unequal interactions with foreign donor organizations.

#### **4.1 Affective and Experiential Consequences of Aid**

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*For the few last few years, international organizations who did the funding of women's NGOs [moved] from Croatia because we are not anymore interesting, and we have [a] satisfying extent of democratization (Jasminka Pešut, personal communication, 25 April 2008).*

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Beginning with Bagic's article we can begin to devise a basic framework of the trajectory and consequences of aid in contemporary Croatia. This framework not only has concrete logistical manifestations, but also resonates in the experiences and emotions of the women interviewed. In better understanding the affective consequences of aid relations, such as frustration and disillusionment, we gain insight into the ramifications of imbalanced relations of power between foreign donors and local recipients in shaping the enframing and subsequent construction of the contemporary Croatian women's movement.

Drawing on Wedel's (2001) categorization of Western aid to Eastern European countries, Bagic presents three phases of aid relationships in the region, beginning at the onset of war resulting in the breakup of Yugoslavia (2004). Slightly altering Wedel's phases ("triumphalism", "disillusionment", and "adjustment") Bagic argues instead that these phases can be categorized as "great expectations" followed by "disillusionment" and "adjustment" (2004: 220). Bagic identifies the first phase as one in which both donors and recipients held high expectations but did not explicitly state them, leading to a period of disillusionment as

recipients realized that donors' motives were not purely idealistic, and donors began to experience frustration at difficulties of implementing projects on the ground (2004: 220). The last phase, one of adjustment is the result of a type of awareness cultivated when the "contractual nature of the relationship becomes predominant, opening up the possibility for partnership instead of dependency" (Bagić 2004: 220). It is worth asking however, how likely it is that following the frustrating process of disillusionment an organization or movement will proceed to "adjustment."

While these themes concisely articulate the emotional and experiential course of aid relationships in the region, it is unclear based on the narratives I have collected whether the transition from disillusionment to adjustment has fully occurred. These narratives, I must argue, suggest otherwise—that instead of a neat transition from frustration to adjustment, this process is still occurring and may continue to do so for some time. As local organizations continue to experience the withdrawal of donor funds without a clear course of internal sustainability, this frustration and melancholy may persist. One narrator illustrates this feeling of disillusionment cogently, stating,

*I'm not so optimistic, so very optimistic about feminist movement, but maybe new young generation could somehow, reinvent other forms of actions. Every generation [has] to face with something around which they will gather... And I don't know, also it depends because levels and times in feminism are different (Jasminka Pešut, personal communication, 25 April 2008).*

In essence, as narrators frame experiences of donor-recipient relations as one of frustration, where outside influences place unwelcome regulations and pressures on local organizations without much hope of mutual aid or partnership, then the process of 'adjustment' cannot be fully realized. This is not in itself a bad thing, as a critique of outside influences may help further articulate the needs and ideals of feminists in Croatia today, especially as they begin a new phase of increased interactions with the European Union. It does however reflect the embodiment of an imbalance in power where donor organizations still possess an excessive amount of influence, in turn contributing to experiences of feminism in Croatia as being

fragmented, professionalized or NGO-based. A further discussion of this critique will be seen in Chapter 5 through analysis of narrative themes in relation to Stephen Browne's appraisal of the consequences of foreign aid.

## 4.2 Practical Consequences of Aid

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*I believe that you already heard [of] this process of NGOization, it's I think, detrimental. It's not good for the movement... and me personally, I'm feeling this everyday, because my work here is mostly (laughter) in fundraising, writing proposals, technical proposals, and [I] don't have enough time either for some public action, not even for my work here. And yeah... we are dissatisfied that the fundraising became the only way of survival, of [a] group (Sandra Prlenda, personal communication, 25 April 2008).*

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While themes of disillusionment with foreign donors' influence on the Croatian feminist movement persist, it is also clear that without this often frustrating influence the nucleus of feminist organizations that exists today may not have come into being. This points to the practical consequences of aid—a situation in which while outside funding is perceived as negatively influencing local efforts, it also creates opportunities and new points of entry for feminist organizations. Bagic writes,

Currently, there are several hundred women's organizations [in] the post Yugoslav region. Whether they would have emerged, and how many of them would now exist without international assistance is a complex question. According to feminist respondents perhaps 80 to 90 percent of them would never have appeared without foreign financial support, or if they would, then their subsequent development would have been very different (2004: 221).

This reality then would have had a distinct effect on the development of feminist NGOs in Croatia. According to databases managed by Ženska Infoteka, there are 62 women's organizations in Croatia<sup>4</sup>, 21 of which are located in the city's capital of Zagreb (Rewind Net 2008). An 80-90 percent drop in this figure would then lead to the existence of only approximately 6-12 women's organizations in the entire country. As such, we can understand that the influence of foreign funds as a catalyst for a burgeoning NGO sector of women's organizations was significant.

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<sup>4</sup> It is important to note that not all of these organizations necessarily identify as feminist and that they are also in varied states of activity from very active to nearly dormant.

There are however, numerous consequences of this type of large influence. Bagic touches on some of these consequences, arguing that there are three motivations for foreign donors to enter such a context—these are 1) to support existing structures, 2) to support existing structures while working to change them, and 3) to create an entirely new structure (Bagic 2004: 221). Taking into consideration the narratives of those I have interviewed, I would argue that Bagic’s second assertion, that many foreign donors enter international contexts in order to both support *and* change existing structures reigns supreme as “pressure from donors has changed the working style of many organizations” (2004: 222). This further supports my argument that according to the narratives of local women’s organization employees, the situation in Croatia is located somewhere in between the donor relationship stages of disillusionment and adjustment as movement participants face increased professionalization following the influx and subsequent withdrawal of foreign aid and interest.

#### **4.3 NGOization in Contemporary Croatian Feminism(s)**

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*What is needed is maybe more like global perception of power relations ...but I think that in the context of the globalized world, we should look both at global and local perspective because they are always some kind of interrelations, and not to forget that we are living in global capitalism (Katja Kahlina, personal communication, 24 April 2008).*

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At this point we have established a basis for understanding the historical background of feminism in Croatia as well as its current situatedness within the realm of NGOs and civil society, a sphere firmly influenced by the pressures and motivations of foreign donors. It is important now that we articulate what constitutes NGOization as well as some of the further specificities of this process within the Croatian context.

Sabine Lang (1997) identifies NGOization as a key element of what constitutes the contemporary landscape of feminism. She emphasizes that the “traditional form” that

women's movements have historically taken, valuing qualities such as an anti-hierarchical organizational structure and a wide reaching societal critique, has been drastically altered (if not eradicated entirely), to proliferate the NGO-based form (Lang 1997: 102). This is echoed by Bagic, who states in a nearly canonized passage that,

In terms of strategies and programs, NGOization leads to issue-specific interventions and pragmatic strategies with a strong employment focus, rather than the establishment of a new democratic counterculture (Bagic 2004: 222).

If we unpack this quote, we can see several of the most salient traits of NGOization. First, in favoring “issue-specific interventions,” the process of NGOization implies the sacrifice of a broad-based perspective for a singular, narrow range of action. Second, a focus on employment replaces voluntarism and other forms of non-commodified participation with the notion that participation in a feminist NGO has the potential to be “just a job,” as opposed to a political sensibility or other more encompassing standpoint. The third trait seen in Bagic’s description is also related to the “employment focus” of NGOization. Replacing voluntarism with an employment focus creates a situation of dependency wherein an employee relies on the continuation of NGO projects, funding, etc. for their livelihood. In turn, this constrains the potential for critique and creation of a “counterculture,” as the culture one is critiquing becomes the main provider of financial support.

These traits represent some of the most significant issues underlying the critique and discussion regarding NGOization. As foreign organizations, governments and other sources fund feminist NGOs, a web of relations is built in which critique becomes more and more difficult and hierarchical structure, a focus on employment, and cooperation with unlikely partners becomes more and more necessary. Hemment, writes,

While historically NGOs identified themselves and were identified as oppositional to states, they are now used by governments as conduits to distribute material and intellectual resources both nationally and internationally. Organizations have to be officially recognized by governments in order to win tax exemptions and in order to practice legally, and by international bodies in order to win grants and have access to international networks (Hemment 1998:37).

As such, the shift from a movement or grassroots organization that is oppositional to the state to one that is deployed for specific purposes (often by state and international organizations) is one that can shift mission statements, project aims, and the overall trajectory of a movement. By its very nature, this type of transformation can have a negative effect on the agency and goals of NGOs. While stating the desire to resist what he deems “donor bashing” this consequence is once again echoed by Paul Stubbs (2006) in an article discussing the effects of globalization, neo-liberalization and NGOization in Croatia. He writes,

...it is certainly the case that the shifting, often fickle, nature of the priorities of external actors, particularly donors, has skewed priorities, and created a certain ‘false positive’ in which a range of local actors follow the rhetoric and language of current trends (Stubbs 2006:9).

In the Croatian context, this effect has had a distinct evolutionary process, beginning with an increased emphasis on NGOs and civil society following transition, followed by an influx of foreign funding during wartime (Hemment 1998, Stubbs 2006). While in some ways we might describe Croatian NGOs as being in a ‘gap’ period at present (categorized by the withdrawal of many previous war-related donors without a corresponding replacement in funding by new sources) this is a quickly changing situation, especially as Croatia works towards accession into the EU. Of this shift, Stubbs writes,

Gradually, the European Union context is becoming the most important in structuring development policy in Croatia, after a long period in which the World Bank, USAID, and a host of other bilateral donors, held sway (2006: 8).

The increase in EU influence presents a series of questions as to who and what is constituted as inside/local and outside/foreign. As Croatia is in the process of joining the EU, this boundary is blurred slightly, while still retaining its asymmetrical balance of power with the EU dictating the terms and conditions of new funding in the region. Previous critiques of foreign donor encounters within countries in Central and Eastern Europe have stressed that in the democratization efforts made through financial support of civil society organizations, an imbalance in power, coded as an “East-West” binary, was constituted. Of this, Hemment writes,

East-West boundaries are patrolled and reinforced by agencies that constitute citizens of 'western' nations as 'experts' or 'primary investigator' and those of 'eastern' nations as recipients or junior collaborators (1998: 32).

This facet of the aid encounter is also reflected in the narratives of interviewees. The imbalance of power between donor organizations and researchers coming from the "West" was cited by narrators as a shallow form of interactions, wherein outsiders solicited information but not insight from movement participants in the "East." One example of this is seen in the narrative below,

*Women's organizations, especially foreign researchers overlook the authentic view from the women's organization and we had a lot of experience especially during the 90s from foreign researchers, activists, [wanting] to somehow transform. We were like resource persons but not [a] kind of resource for reflection but only for, you know, like a role respondent (Jasminka Pešut, personal communication, 25 April 2008).*

This type of critique clearly demarcates the presence of discursive boundaries between "East" and "West" as well as the unequal power relations and mutually constitutive nature of these categories. Because of this prevalent discursive framework, it is important to problematize notions of "East" and "West" (Havelkova 1997, Funk 2004, etc.) especially in terms of popular notions of a hegemonic "West" imposing a rigid idea of feminism onto a malleable and monolithic "East". This is seen in issues of funding and NGOization as well as in the previously mentioned framing of Croatian feminism as "fragmented" and therefore unsuccessful because it did not consist of specific imagined (coded "Western") characteristics such as unity, wholeness, etc. There is certainly truth in the discussion of "Western" organizations dominating the agenda and discourse of global feminism to the detriment of women in marginalized regions, especially when it comes to what organizations garner support from foreign donors and why (Merry 2006). However, when we look at knowledge production, dissemination and circulation, we are presented with a significantly more complex picture.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Sources providing further discussion of this issue include Susan Gal's chapter on the circulation of texts throughout Hungary, "Movements of feminism: the circulation of discourses about women." In Barbara Hobson, ed. 2003. *Recognition Struggles and Social Movements, Contested Identities, Agency and Power*.

This complexity is reflected in many of the interviews I have collected. Interviewees cite frustration with the almost colonial-feeling arrangement of relations between their organizations and foreign donors, organizations and researchers, as well as a sense of presence and unity within the transnational feminist movement. In addition to discussing how she felt Croatian feminists' knowledge was often marginalized by outside researchers in the 1990s, Jasminka Pešut expressed a sense of solidarity and appreciation for the level of transnational dialogue that Croatian feminist organizations such as Ženske Studije took part in. Pešut states,

*Somehow these feminist concepts, they're coming to us and going back from us. We communicate to the other countries from Western Europe, within the European Union. This exchange from North, South, East, West- that could also bring new strength to Croatian feminism (Jasminka Pešut, personal communication, 25 April 2008).*

From this we see that while the discursive boundary of "East" and "West" is rife with meanings that, while powerful, can be challenged and potentially modified. It is likely that this situation will continue to develop in such a complex nature as women involved in feminist NGOs in Croatia work locally and transnationally on the issues that have meaning to them. This will also have increased importance for feminist NGOs as Croatia begins the EU accession process.

As EU funds and directives work to further influence the course of NGO activity in efforts to "European Union-ize" Croatian civil society, the emphasis on NGOs that was a central factor in work to democratize post-socialist states during transition (and the issues that came along with it, presented in the above critique) is once again deployed. This time, however, many boundaries are blurred and further complicated as new layers of bureaucracy, NGOs, and ideological thrusts come into play.

In an excellent illustration of the complexity of this inside/outside dilemma in relation to women's NGOs and the EU (a situation that will come into play increasingly in Croatia),

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Cambridge: Cambridge U.P. And Cerwonka, Allaine. Forthcoming. "Traveling Feminist Thought: Difference and Transculturation in Central and Eastern European Feminism." In *Signs*.

the Network of East West Women has received EU funding to write a report in which they critique the gender policies of the EU itself (Ann Snitow, personal communication, 19 May 2008). After describing this project, Ann Snitow remarked recently on this strange relationship, “What a great co-optive move-- you just hire all the grassroots organizations that are yelling at you (personal communication, 19 May 2008)...” This new type of relationship may be indicative of what is to come for feminist praxis as Croatia works more and more within the EU framework. While in some ways accession will help to erase (or at least disguise) some of the mutually constitutive boundaries such as “East”-“West”, demarcated by imbalanced and condescending relations of power between donors and recipients, it will ultimately present a new series of challenges for fostering partnership and mutual aid. As the EU becomes a main actor in the administration of funds for feminist organizations in Croatia, we must ask how this will affect a wider critique. Will situations like the aforementioned employment of the Network of East West Women arise, and if so, how will this new series of relations serve in constructing future feminist critique?

## Chapter 5- Fragmentation, Professionalization and Foreign Donor Influence: Narratives of Contemporary Croatian Feminists

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*I think that at the end of the day, it's about the money...* (Katja Kahlina, personal communication, 24 April 2008)

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In this chapter I will address the narratives of women employed in Croatian feminist organizations as they relate to NGOization and the experience of feminism as a professional sector. This will articulate further the constitutive effects that NGOization, foreign funding, and the experiences of narrators themselves have on the trajectory of feminism in contemporary Croatia. This is crucial to our understanding of feminism in Croatia, as one of the most persistent themes that occurred in the interviews conducted revolved around notions of feminism as an industry. With this, issues of NGOization, competition between feminist organizations, and the influence of foreign donors and branches of the state were all reported as major factors by narrators. These factors were cited by interviewees as influencing and at times, impeding, the goals and structure of the Croatian feminist movement, by fostering an environment where many small, professional feminist NGOs rapidly developed. To an extent, this rapid growth of feminist organizations reflected the claim of “fragmentation” of the feminist movement articulated by authors such as Einhorn and Sever (2003). Allegations of fragmentation as a primary cause for the lack of a cohesive feminist movement however, do not take into account the specific historicity of Croatian feminism in the 1980s and 1990s.

Perhaps more salient than the notion of “fragmentation” as an impediment to a large-scale feminist movement (if in fact, a large-scale movement is the only desirable outcome) is the ways in which this fragmentation took place, through the development of a “social movement industry” (Marx and McAdam 1994, McCarthy and Zald 2003), increased professionalization of women’s groups, and the strictures of outside financial support, all

leading to the increased development of specific types of NGOs shaped the Croatian feminist movement in complex ways. Thus, it is not that fragmentation itself is necessarily an issue of concern, but the perceptions and experiences of this fragmentation and the ways in which it helped construct the foundations for the contemporary landscape of Croatian feminism as it is understood by those involved.

It is the purpose of this chapter to examine the narratives of members of the feminist community in Croatia in order to provide descriptive explanations of the growth and transformation of the feminist movement during the 1980s and '90s. During the period directly preceding transition from socialism to capitalism and then in the immediately following realities of war and the breakup of Yugoslavia, feminist organizations grew, shifted, and grew once again, their evolution fostered by numerous influences and events. These processes have resulted in narrators' current perceptions of feminism in Croatia and have a direct impact on the goals and programs implemented by them. Therefore, narrators' framing of Croatian feminism coinciding with material circumstances such as the violence of war and resulting influx of foreign aid have helped produce a milieu experienced by its members as primarily NGO-based, located outside of the mainstream public sphere within decentralized small-scale professional organizations. These effects situate Croatian feminist organizations as decentralized bodies that strive to be independent forces for social change but are simultaneously subject to the prejudices, corruption, and whims of donor organizations.

As a key coefficient in the development of feminist NGOs, it is crucial that we examine the ways in which narrators frame their experiences with feminism in contemporary Croatia. In order to better understand the encounters of foreign aid and how these may lead to an increase in NGOization or fragmentation of a movement, we can first lay out how narrators categorize the phases and evolution of feminism in Croatia, beginning with the

1980s. The 1980's were typified by the interviewees as the beginning of this trajectory towards NGOization, marked by the emergence of women's activist organizations, including SOS hotlines, women's shelters, and similar projects. Through examining the narratives of interviewees concerning the foundations of the current feminist movement in the 1980s, we see that the growth of women's activism in this period had a distinct impact on the situation following during wartime and beyond.

Narrators in the sample group stress emphatically that the activism and spread of feminist organizations that defined the feminist movement in Croatia and indeed, Yugoslavia at large, was at once interrupted and transformed by the realities of war. War brought with it not only widespread violence, but the influence and interest of powerful foreign donors. It is through accounts of these two decades that we can observe experiences of not only the fragmentation of the feminist movement, but in fact the development of feminism as an industry unto itself. It is important to note that this was not solely a home-grown development—as participants in a transnational feminist movement, narrators have acknowledged the influence of outside thinkers, educational institutions, and texts. These influences however, were not emphasized by interviewees to as great an extent as those wrought by international donor organizations. In discussion of feminism in Croatia, narratives pointed to a context wherein by the end of the war, in providing monetary aid and other incentives, foreign investors had potentially shifted the trajectory of feminist organizing in the country.

Using Sabine Lang's writing on the NGOization of feminism as well as a brief discussion of social movement theory literature concerning the growth of a movement into a 'social movement industry', I will explore the ways in which the activism of the 1980s set the stage for future professionalization of feminism in Croatia. Following this I will present an analysis of the influence of foreign money (brought on by war) within Croatian feminist

organizations during the 1990s and today, using Stephen Browne’s critical look at “centrally planned” foreign aid in order to illustrate how feminism as an industry was developed in part, through the needs and interests of foreign donors.

Through this discussion I will demonstrate that the circumstances of transition from socialism to capitalism, war, the breakup of Yugoslavia and the powerful impact of foreign aid have all worked to shape the perceptions and understandings of the women’s movement by its participants. This understanding, developed as mythobiography or mytheme (Passerini 1990) has helped in turn to construct the landscape of feminist praxis in contemporary Croatia and informs the views expressed by movement participants regarding the future of feminism in the country—one that largely centers on a move to institutionalize feminist knowledge production within the university system and continues to reinforce the professional capacity of feminist organizations. In this chapter, I will further articulate the ways in which narrative framings and imbalanced relations of power within the context of interactions between foreign donors and local recipients contribute to the construction of a professionalized NGO-based feminist sphere.

## **5.2 Activism in the 1980s and the Growth of Social Movement Organizations**

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*In the ‘80s it was activism, activism, activism* (Djurdja Knežević, personal communication, 22 April 2008).

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To accurately discuss the activism of the 1980s, it is important first to identify the presence of seemingly contradictory trends of feminism in the 1970s within movement participants’ narratives. This can be articulated best through the narrative of Djurdja Knežević, a feminist scholar who has been active in the contemporary Croatian feminist movement since what is seen as its inception in the late 1970s with the founding of the group “Women and Society” (Bozinovic 1995: 18). In her narrative, Knežević leads us through her

personal chronology of feminism in Croatia, identifying three specific eras—the 1970s, 1980s, and War/the 1990s. She typifies the 1970s as being overtly political (defined in part by engaging in critiques of the political regime), while the 1980s were more focused on direct service and activism. She explains that the 1990s, with the onset of war was an altogether different experience, disrupting much previous feminist work and shifting the agenda to suit the immediate needs brought on by the events of wartime.

Knežević sees the feminists of the 1970s generation as very political, expressing that this is something she feels Croatian feminism is missing today. Feminists in the 1970s were primarily focused on criticizing the current regime from a gender standpoint while “Nowadays,” Knežević explains, “feminism became only an issue for itself (personal communication, 22 April 2008).” This statement is a telling one, as it situates the period of 1970s feminism as one with a larger sphere of impact while simultaneously emphasizing the more insular qualities of current manifestations of the feminist movement. Knežević’s narrative continues with her impressions of feminist experience at the dawn of the contemporary women’s movement. “I was not aware,” she states, “of the process, we were just *busy with things*,” meaning, upon further elaboration, that through the political, the discussion and debate inherent in a gendered critique, that feminism became a movement organically, without a great deal of planning (personal communication, 22 April 2008).

Knežević’s narrative of the birth of feminist discourse in 1970s Croatia is replete with experiences of tackling new theoretical issues and opening up space for questions and problems that were not previously discussed, spurred on in part by a growing body of feminist critique on the international scene. Knežević explains that the foundation-laying group ‘Women and Society’ as well as the groups following it involved much debating and discussion, something that she claims the next wave of feminists (of the 1980s) often criticized as being “all talk and no action.” Knežević, however, emphasized the importance of

this stage as a formative one that encouraged open critique, writing, critical thinking, and new production of knowledge. One is left with the impression that the 1970s period of feminism was a political and intellectual movement that contrasted starkly with the activism of the 1980s. Knežević sums it up cogently, quipping “In the ‘70s it was political, political, political...In the ‘80s it was activist, activist, activist” (personal communication, 22 April 2008).

The 1980s are marked for Knežević as a time when many things changed. There was a second generation of feminists (including Ženske Studije founder Biljana Kašić), who had a much greater emphasis on activism. When asked about this, Knežević emphasizes that the generations clashed less because of internal conflict and more because of their different approaches to feminism. According to Knežević it was the emphasis on the political and writing versus the emphasis on activism that caused a divide between the feminists of the 1970s and the feminists of the 1980s. It can be argued, then, that even in its most formative stages, contemporary feminism in Croatia was a movement with multiple trajectories—one leaning towards political critique and knowledge production and one hinging on activism and providing direct service to women in need.

These dual paths certainly give weight to the argument that the feminist movement was not a singular or cohesive one, but what is left unasked is whether a singular feminist movement was in actuality, the preferable choice. Would the feminist movement have become a stronger force for change had the activist and political factions banded together, combining their interests? Katja Kahlina, a PhD student and employee of Ženska Infoteka does not think so. Drawing on her experiences with the current manifestations of feminism in Zagreb, Kahlina warns that trying to combine theoretical knowledge production and activism often leaves both areas wanting. When asked whether she felt activism had a role alongside critical knowledge production, Kahlina responded,

*I think that activism is a different thing. I mean, yes the ideal would be, combination of activism and theory but I think that they also should be separate, because you just have to kind of focus and concentrate on something and I think if you're always kind of negotiating between activism and theory, then you just wont do your best in either of these (Katja Kahlina, personal communication, 24 April 2008)*

Regardless of the risks of combining knowledge production and activism, it appears that for the 1980s at least, activism won out. Indeed, in most interviews conducted, the feminism of the 1970s was mentioned seldom in comparison to the feminist activism that ensued in the 1980s and '90s. Jasminka Pešut's narrative begins to explain this shift in the context of war.

*You can't say there is some continuation in theory or in practice because during the socialism there is...you hardly could say there is something like a women's initiative or a feminist initiative, it is more by the end of '70 the last century there is more academic work in this activism. And then, this shift to more activism, what we usually mean by that, and then during 90's because of the war it somehow happens to spread this more practical, humanitarian reflection upon all experience of women (Jasminka Pešut, personal communication, 25 April 2008).*

Just how organic the spread of this "practical, humanitarian reflection" in the form of activism was, however, is an important thing to question.

It may be posited that, as in Sabine Lang's discussion of the NGOization of feminism in German women's movements, previously existing societal structures, political realities, and the post-socialist context created a more advantageous situation for feminist organizations that closely resembled small-scale professional organizations than less-hierarchical mass movements. Lang writes,

While feminist movement building was once about the establishment of new democratic counterculture, feminist organizations today are about issue-specific intervention and pragmatic strategies that have a strong employment focus (Lang 1997: 102).

This tendency to simplify a complex feminist critique in favor of single-issue advocacy can be seen today in nearly every feminist milieu, be it the United States, Germany or Croatia. What is unique to Croatia however, is the rapidity with which the feminist movement of the late 1970s (focused more on political critique on the basis of gender) shifted to emphasize activism, single-issue advocacy, and the professionalization of feminist organizations, beginning with the grassroots organizations of the 1980s.

The foundation of grassroots organizations such as SOS hotlines in the 1980s is likely to have been propelled by a more natural momentum than that of some organizations following the war. This is not to say that these organizations had questionable motives but rather, that the push and pull of outside forces was far greater at that time. Indeed, if we are to apply several concepts relevant to social movement theory, it can be seen that the inertia for a group of organizations, such as those present in the 1980s Croatian feminist scene, to transition from a loose grassroots collective to a more industrial model is strong.

While preliminary instances of collective action within social movements entail some kind of break with in-place social norms, prolonged and successful movements will often “become incorporated into the institutional life of society” (Marx and McAdam 1994: 72). As this process occurs, (especially in cases such as Croatia in the 1980s where there were numerous activist organizations performing similar roles) social movement organizations will compete for influence and funding, leading to the development of a social movement industry (SMI) (Marx and McAdam 1994: 102). Marx and McAdam report that often, the trajectory of a social movement’s future often depends equally on this type of SMI competition as it does on “outside forces” (1994: 103).

We must ask then, did the growth of direct-service, single-issue activist organizations help foster the NGOization and transformation of some aspects of feminism in Croatia to become a type of self sustaining industry as opposed to an independent force for social critique? This theory certainly holds credence for some, as in Kahlina’s words,

*...What I think would be specific [to feminism in Croatia] is that feminism here became kind of like, Industry. And there are really a lot of women’s organizations who are all doing the same, practically. They’re all fighting for the same money, they all have similar projects and they are basically all covering everything (Katja Kahlina, personal communication, 24 April 2008).*

However, the professionalization of feminism cannot be attributed solely to the development of and competition between numerous feminist groups. What then, occurs when competition within an SMI is increased not only due to the natural tendencies of a prolonged social

movement, but because of outside influence? The case of the Croatian feminist movement in the wake of 1990s wartime is one of just this. With this in mind we must question what structures were already in place prior to wartime, and how those structures were affected by war, foreign aid, and the pressure on a prolonged movement to integrate into the institutional fabric of a society. The following section seeks to address these questions, utilizing the experiences of those involved.

### ***5.3 War, Foreign Money and the NGOization of Women's Organizations in Croatia***

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*And then we had the "wonderful" '90's* (Djurdja Knežević, personal communication, 22 April 2008).

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In this section I will explore the impact of war and foreign funding on feminist activism in Croatia during the 1990s and beyond, focusing specifically on how these influences are enframed by women employed in feminist organizations in the country today. Synthesizing narratives, analysis, and a critique of the problems presented when foreign aid influences local social movement organizations, I will further demonstrate the ways in which foreign aid is experienced by narrators as a direct factor in the NGOization (and/or fragmentation) of the feminist movement in Croatia. Beginning with a discussion of how foreign aid may contribute to the development of a social movement industry I will draw on narratives of movement participants as well as certain aspects of social movement theory to explore possible catalysts for the transition of feminism in Croatia from a counterculture movement to a professional sphere. Once this base is established, I will further explore the impact of foreign aid as a primary mechanism in this process.

It is my argument that building on the foundations of activism in the 1980s, the period of war in the 1990s led to changes in both the perception and praxis of feminism in Croatia that further accommodated the professionalization of feminism. However, I do not cite

violence and nationalism as the sole root cause of this shift, but urge the reader to consider the influence of foreign donor organizations as a key factor in this process. The disruptive and transformative effect of wartime was a major topic for nearly all narrators, raising discussion of issues from nationalism to colonialism to peace activism. Women's previous experience in feminist activism and anti-violence work, their role in the cultural imagination as caretakers outside of "masculine" political expectations, and the concrete impact of foreign donors, scholars, and activists all served as factors in the transformations that occurred within the women's movement during and directly following wartime. The latter issue of the influence of outside donors, however, resounded throughout the narratives with an urgent sort of frequency.

Upon further discussion, it became obvious that the long-term effects of outside forces (appearing mainly in the form of monetary support) during and after the war are still being felt in the lives of the individuals and organizations within the feminist movement in Croatia today. Equally striking, are the similarities that the themes elucidated by the interviewees had with Stephen Browne's critique of foreign aid in his book *Aid & Influence, Do Donors Help or Hinder?* The following section explores these issues at greater length.

In the previously mentioned interview of Djurdja Knežević, she recalled what she saw as the two most harmful things that came out of the 1990s for Croatian feminism: "war and money" (Djurdja Knežević, personal communication, 22 April 2008). While feminist organizations in Croatia had already begun to construct an alternative semi-professional sphere, the events of war and the interest of foreign donor organizations increasingly catalyzed the growth (and NGOization) of the feminist scene. This trend then, contributed to the further detriment of feminist activities (such as knowledge production) located primarily outside of the activist/NGO sphere. One particularly prevalent theme that carried throughout

the narrative sample was the perception of power wielded by outside institutions. Jasminka Pešut explains that during war,

*...many women's organizations [developed] due to help of international organization, you know. Women from international organization, women especially women feminists, or more, you know, relief organization, somehow produced NGOs (Jasminka Pešut, personal communication, 25 April 2008).*

This perspective, that the intervention of relief organizations directly resulted in the sudden spread of women's NGOs leads us to question theories of resource mobilization. While it does not necessarily explain the social-structural factors linked to individual participation within social movement organizations, theories of resource mobilization do offer a partial explanation as to why some movements flourish, while others decline (Marx and McAdam 1994: 81). In their discussion of resource mobilization in social movement organizations, McCarthy and Zald outline several central features to the study of social movements within this perspective. They write that examining the accumulation of resources (money, personnel, etc) is not only necessary, but that also taking into consideration that utilizing collective resources implicitly requires some form of organization (McCarthy and Zald 2003: 171). As such, an influx of monetary resources in the form of aid from outside relief organizations necessitates the administration of this aid via an organized body, leading to the increased formation of feminist NGOs.

Additionally, this increase in formal organization can lead to numerous issues, including corruption, competition for funding, and the shifting of institutional goals to suit resource needs. From the needs of feminist organizations to support themselves and carry out their missions, to the pressures of state-sponsored or outside donor organizations, the multiple motivations of acting organizations serves to constitute a structure that, while perhaps not ideal, works to sustain the NGO-based structure of feminist organizations in Croatia. While this theoretical framework begins to explain how an increase in resources within a budding movement often results in an increase of professional social movement organizations, it does

not interrogate the ideological agenda-shifting power wielded by donor organizations in conferring aid to receiving organizations.

For this reason the influence of outside funding sources and their potential to mold organizations and shift agendas is not one to be underestimated. This can be further understood through applying Stephen Browne's critique of the features of "centrally planned aid" (institutional aid based in part on market-driven economic principles) to the circumstances elucidated within the narratives collected. Browne lists six features as being determinant of centrally planned aid, and while much of his discussion applies to development related aid, these features can additionally be seen working within the context of aid to women's organizations and gender based policies in 1990s (and contemporary) Croatia (2006: 136-9).

Browne identifies the features thusly:

*"1. Most aid is administered by many large public bureaucracies each with procedures of their own" (Browne 2006: 136).*

In the Croatian context, this has several ramifications. The issue of fundraising as a main component of one's job responsibility within feminist organizations was a topic that came up several times in the narratives of the sample group. As employees within feminist organizations must dedicate large portions of time to fundraising, they are left with significantly less time to focus on their other tasks, such as research and community outreach. Therefore, the bureaucratic/procedural element of working with outside aid organizations has a concrete impact on the time commitment to fundraising necessary for a women's NGO to thrive, or for that matter, simply to keep afloat as well as serious implications for the wider goals of organizations.

Depending on the restrictions in place within external funders, this also reinforces the need for NGOization within feminist organizations, as it is more likely that an organization

with the physical manifestations of a professional group (with, for example, a board of directors, NGO legal status, and a hierarchically structured staff) will be deemed worthy of funding. However, as Browne points out, this does little good for the organizations on the ground, as within this system donor organizations are largely accountable “upwards” rather than “downwards” to the recipients of aid. This can also be seen in sample narratives, as interviewees express dissatisfaction with large-scale institutional practices. One example of this relationship can be seen in the following narrative:

*I know that lots of energy was being put into mechanisms for gender equality, like the law on gender equality and office for gender equality and its ombudsperson, but the feeling now is that...it was not being good for women's movement...There is this problem of gender mainstreaming which silenced the feminist agenda and tried to tame the feminist demands through the institutions, but in the process they often become like the state institution—the other state institution, with whom we are not satisfied. So there is this bureaucracy and they often have a feeling that they have to stand for the state and they are on other sides, so although it's obvious that the goals were and are supposed to be the same because the persons who are employed there also are from the prominent women's movement, but this kind of state thinking, that they have to defend their government because they are part of the government-- it was not very good and...the influence of, [the] question of money, donations, and foundations—its not been present only in gender equality and women's groups, but also in the whole civil society (Sandra Prlenda, personal communication, 25 April 2008).*

Narratives such as this reflect that while programs like gender mainstreaming are viewed with discontent by many feminists Croatia, these same programs garner the widespread approval of the larger supporting infrastructure. This creates a situation in which organizations that mirror the goals of the state are the beneficiaries of funding regardless of whether they are seen by on-the-ground movement participants as being helpful.

As mentioned in Prlenda's narrative above, this also creates a tension for those movement participants who act as “translators” between national and international organizations and local women's groups. The difficulty of this situation is also brought to light in Sally Engle Merry's writing on the role of translation within human rights work. What Merry points out as fundamental to the process of applying transnational concepts to local matters is the role of the translator—activists, NGO workers, scholars and other individuals who reside in the “middle” of the situation and act as mediators between international institutions and local situations (2006: 39). The translators that enact this

process are, Merry argues, “both powerful and vulnerable (2006: 40).” As these cultural practitioners must translate both “up” (to international organizations, funders, etc.) and “down” (to their local communities), they are subject to the needs, requirements and prejudices of two not always complementary groups.

While this role is mentioned in Prlenda’s narrative, it is with a different perception than that put forth by Merry—one that instead, underscores the instances in which translators cease the active critique that may be necessary in their translating “up” from local situations to international or state institutions. This too, however, may be in part due to increased dependence on transnational resource support in order to sustain feminist organizations. If both translators and funders are accountable “upwards” instead of to those with which they are working to provide direct assistance and services, then the efforts of local organizations, in this case local feminist NGOs, suffer.

*“2. Supply is excessive and duplicative” (Browne 2006: 136).*

Browne continues, stating that “Supply-driven means more rather than less. Many of the aid organizations offer similar services, which are developed in parallel, rather than being selected on the basis of competitive choice” (Browne 2006: 136). This type of duplicative aid can be seen as a further catalyst for the increased development of feminist organizations in contemporary Croatia. While this is not necessarily a purely negative effect, it can lead to an excessive degree of overlap within organizations. This is reflected in Kahlina’s previously offered narrative regarding her thoughts on Croatian feminism as an industry, and is also attributed by her as being a contributing factor to both internal conflicts and the dearth of new critical knowledge production within the movement. In this way, then, excessive and/or duplicative aid (in this case in the form of foreign donors, institutional support, or other outside organizational support) may in fact be a traceable cause for the growth of feminist

activism/direct-service organizations to the detriment of groups organized around other gender-based issues.

In other words, if the resources in place are those that encourage numerous feminist groups to work on the same issue, others may be overlooked. This process, it is important to note, has a distinctly gendered component. Jasminka Pešut, in a section of her narrative describing how war changed feminism in Croatia, states:

*Women were like, 80% of the activists of peace, peace organization, because men you know, were exposed to other ways by military service or drafting in the war and it was very insecure for [them], and this position of woman, this perception of women who are caring and humanitarian who are helping was not so exposed to the political pressure (Jasminka Pešut, personal communication, 25 April 2008).*

We can glean from Jasminka Pešut's emphasis that many women were engaged in peace and other forms of activism during wartime due in part to their social construction as caretakers within the national imagination. Through the types of programs given aid (such as women's shelters, and other care-oriented activist organizations) we can see women's roles as caregivers are further emphasized and reinforced. This gendered nature of aid spills over into the subsequent categories as well as funding choices from which region to what content to support is necessarily influenced by the gendered perspectives of donor organizations.

*"3. Recipient countries are chosen according to the instincts of Northern politicians and donor self interests" (Browne 2006:136).*

The emphasis on Croatia as being a 'fashionable' locale for foreign donors to invest during and directly after wartime was mentioned by nearly all respondents, as well as the fact that when the Yugoslav region was no longer in immediate crisis much of the previous funding given to women's NGOs vanished. One respondent offered this explanation for the evaporation of interest and funding as the political context in Croatia began to stabilize:

*...It's like a fashion of some topics like war, [outside scholars, etc.] were all interested in us during the war, but it is not, Croatia is not more interesting, for research field for women's movements beyond a war and victim paradigm (Jasminka Pešut, personal communication, 25 April 2008).*

That multiple narratives emphasize the sentiment that Croatia (and the feminist organizations located therein) is only perceived as interesting in terms of research and funding within a “war and victim” paradigm is particularly salient. This underscores the imbalance of power, as well as the construction of an ideological divide between donors from the “West/North” and recipient organizations from the “East/South,” constructing the real needs of Croatian women as a passing trend that can be easily remedied by a paternalistic donor organization. The real situation, however, is not so simple and as donors pull their support as the region begins to stabilize and prosper, the fates of even some of the oldest and largest feminist organizations are questionable, including Ženske Studije in Zagreb. Sandra Prlenda describes this below:

*Now we have this institutional support for three years. We are in our second year. And this institutional support helped us in that it came at the right time and for our donors who funded the most of our programs left Croatia, the decision by Swedish government that Croatia doesn't need anymore, this amount of help. So we got this support who enabled the continuity of the place. This place is rented and it's expensive, and also to cover one part of salaries of personnel here so that they can fundraise for other programs. But after that, I'm not very much optimistic (Sandra Prlenda, personal communication, 25 April 2008).*

With this we see the experience that as donors leave, programs are often no longer sustainable. This also has specific implications for the goals and content of feminist organization's programs, and may also be a factor in the increase in professionalization of feminism as well as the perceived decrease in outspoken political critique. As donor organizations pull funding, feminist NGOs must look for the next source of funding, often reported by the sample group as coming from state initiatives. This was seen ultimately, as a factor for the silencing of critique as well as an influence in the emphasis on programs tackling issues of import to larger governmental forces.

*“4. The content and terms of aid are strongly influenced by the needs and interests of the suppliers rather than the recipients” (Browne 2006: 137).*

While much of this component of aid has already been touched on, it is important to reiterate that the content and terms of aid (as dictated by donors) can and will influence the

types of programs being funded. This was seen especially, in the case of Ženske Studije, the Centre for Women's Studies. Narrators emphasized that as an educational organization that existed outside of the mainstream university system, the Centre was in a double-bind of sorts. Outside donors did not appear to be interested in funding many of their efforts because they were not focused as keenly on the topics deemed significant, while Croatian governmental bodies (most specifically, the Ministry of Science) could not provide support because the Centre did not fit specific requirements of a formal institute. Sandra Prlenda explains this situation as such:

*What we tried here for example is to have our-our mission no matter what donors are demanding and its- there is tons of literature- interests in donors are shifting, every one year, two years. It was democratization and programs for politicians, and then one year, it's trafficking and violence against women, and nobody, almost nobody, would give a fund for women's education of this type. For many donors our center is too academic, and for [the] Ministry of Science we're not scientific enough. So it's this impossible situation and we will try to do what we do-- so kind of humanistic education, with theory but also with art and activism, but not doing for example, projects related to the violence, family violence or trafficking. It's not what we do. There are great groups that are specialized in that and our mission is education. So yes, we did projects which were important for our survival, so the whole office and the Centre can survive, but it was related to gender equality in politics, training politicians. We had one niche that maybe served us to survive, but other groups (its not like we are good the others are bad)...sometimes found a situation that they change priorities (Sandra Prlenda, personal communication, 25 April 2008).*

What is seen in this narrative is the overarching tendency of foreign aid organizations to support programs that, as Browne (2006) puts it, support the “needs and interests of suppliers,” leading to gaps in programs (such as some of the educational goals of Ženske Studije) which cannot find sufficient funding without compromising their organizational missions.

This tendency may also be a factor in encouraging multiple organizations to work on seemingly identical projects instead of diversifying their goals or pursuing new topics of concern. As aid is dictated by suppliers, it may be excessive in some areas and lacking in others, depending on which type of program is emphasized. This in turn, can result in a situation where many needs on the ground are not being met, as well as one in which certain types of organizations (in this case, small scale professional feminist NGOs focusing on

specific issues) have the resource support to multiply and become a type of freestanding industry.

This leads us to Browne's fifth point, "5. *The rules of engagement are stacked in favour of the providers, whether in global governance, creditor-debtor relations or trade practices*" (2006: 137), one that does not need a great deal more explanation than he provides, and was emphasized less by the respondents. What it does continue to underscore, however, is the imbalance of power between foreign donor organizations and local feminist organizations, and the wide extent of (often negative) impact these practices are perceived to have on both recipient organizations and countries.

In contrast, Browne's last point was given particular emphasis by narrators. Browne writes, "6. *The current aid system encourages leakages and corruption*" (2006:139). Stories of corruption were featured widely in narratives regarding competition for funding and the administration of grants and other resource support. Issues mentioned included lack of an open and meticulous record-keeping process when it comes to the evaluation of grant applications, nepotism and preferential treatment of organizations headed by board members of donor organizations, and the promotion of organizations who dull their social/political critique over those who do not. For example, Sandra Prlenda describes the growth of corruption as funding for groups within civil society became available:

*There were very [many] problems with [the] National Foundation for Civil Society in the first year... it is [a] mixed state and there is one mixed status of foundation, but it is [the] National Foundation for the Development of Civil Society which in [its] first years, there was very much manipulation, and its all got in the paper and we have here a whole folder, of writing and press cuttings. Apparently, the first organization who got the money [was an] organization of the persons who were in the board...I mean, there is widespread corruption in the country so yeah, it happens, and the groups really formed [a] forum to oppose that, but every year there was a cycle of new awarding of new donations and you really could see that some groups gave up of criticism one year and the second year and even there [were] attacks of other groups and it all became very ugly (Sandra Prlenda, personal communication, 25 April 2008).*

While many respondents expressed a high level of cynicism regarding this type of corruption, it was also listed repeatedly as a source of frustration and a factor in producing an SMI without as sharp a critical/theoretical edge as desired by many movement participants. As

Browne writes, “Because of the way aid is currently financed and managed, it is linked inexorably to influence” (2006: 148). For this reason, it is essential to take into consideration the outside forces as well as the internal, which have worked to shape the growth of the feminist movement in Croatia.

It is therefore, through the exploration of personal narratives and an analysis of their intersections with theories of social movement growth and competition, alongside a critique of the ways in which foreign aid influences the growth of social movement organizations, that the current developments in feminist NGOs in contemporary Croatia can be better understood. It appears that through the growth in activist organizations in the 1980s, coupled with the agenda-setting powers of foreign money and the severe disruptions of wartime that the NGO-based trajectory of the Croatian feminist movement was set.

## Chapter 6- Conclusion

What happens to independent voices as culturally-critical feminist institutions seek balance with foreign money and larger institutional agendas? Speaking eloquently on living with NGOization as an emotional reality and everyday fact of life, the narratives provided by my respondents offer a look at hope alongside uncertainty as their NGOs cope with a changing donor landscape and a professional sphere dependent upon foreign donor support. In synthesizing an analysis of these narratives with theoretical knowledge pertaining to NGOization, the ambivalent nature of foreign aid, and the development of Croatian feminism as a social movement industry, as well as a discussion of the historicity and periodization of the Croatian feminist movement from 1800 onwards, it is my argument that the practical and affective circumstances of the aid encounter have lead, in part to the current landscape of feminism in the country. This landscape is categorized primarily by increased professionalization of feminism through decentralized, small-scale NGOs with a strong focus on employment and is ultimately a source of both frustration and hope for those involved.

While perhaps contrary to normative hopes of a “unified feminist movement” the context of feminism in Croatia has been driven by numerous actors, from local feminists to international donor organizations to the increased influence of the EU. I assert that the fragmentation cited by researchers was a product of war, necessity and NGO funding rather than a decided failure of intent, and suggest looking not through the lens of “Western” expectations for success (a unified movement) or failure (a fragmented movement) but rather looking at Croatian feminist mobilization in the context of a civic sphere under specific political and economic circumstances.

In this thesis I have outlined ways in which the NGOized context of Croatian feminism can be better understood through the narratives of those working at and

determining the agendas of these organizations. While previous scholarship has countered claims of the “absence” of a feminist movement in the Yugoslav region with discussions of political and ideological factors that negate the applicability of particular notions of a “unified feminist movement” (Einhorn and Sever 2003), I have sought to contribute to this body of scholarship by articulating the ways in which foreign aid and NGOization have also functioned in this way in the Croatian context. In regards to works such as Zimmerman (2007) and Ghodsee (2004) that point out the ambivalent nature of foreign funding in both helping and hindering feminist aims, I seek to provide a descriptive case study that links foreign funding, NGOization, and the fragmentation and professionalization of women’s organizations within the narratives of those involved in shaping the future of feminism in Croatia. As a result, this thesis works to mediate theory and narrative, providing an analysis of the affective and practical ramifications of the abovementioned factors on participants’ framings of the past, present, and future of feminism in Croatia.

Based on this analysis, what can be said about the future of feminism in Croatia? It appears that feminist NGOs (and the advantages and disadvantages expressed by those working within them) will continue to be a primary facet of the feminist scene in Croatia; however the likelihood that Women’s Studies as an academic program within the mainstream university system will become an influencing factor in the coming decade is significant as well. In addition, several narrators placed a great amount of hope within the next generation of feminists coming out of Croatia. This young generation of feminists was credited as having great potential to establish fresh modes of cultural critique while being perhaps less hindered by the influence of NGOs, foreign funding, and other agenda-setting forces, including the older generations of feminists themselves. What they do with this potential is yet to be determined, but perceptions of this generation recounted by veteran feminists in Croatia situate them as creative and intellectually curious rebels. Djurdja Knežević may

articulate this best, joking about the newest cohort of Croatian feminists, “Thanks god they just don’t give a shit to this older generation of feminists” (Djurdja Knežević, personal communication, 22 April 2008).

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