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Chapter 2, “NGOing and the Donor Effect,” focuses on processes of technocratization and activism. It discusses the questions of representativity and authenticity that the donor relationship raises, and demonstrates what an NGO *is* in terms of organizational structures and cultures and what it *does* via mundane activities of project-making or fundraising. Finally, the chapter invites a reconsideration of the NGOization framework—that is, the assumed de-radicalization of social struggles through the transformation of social movements into NGOs. As I will argue, NGOization in the Serbian context appears rather problematic for several reasons, including overly romanticizing past actions and disregarding claim-making processes and continuities in political positions.

The second part of this book is devoted to deconstructing “Politics of Culture.” Because Serbia’s reality was so dominated by the dichotomy Democrats vs. Nationalists/Radicals, retrieving the names of the main political enemies before World War II, the following two chapters embark on unpacking them through the analytical prism of class. Chapter 3, “The ‘Democrats’: Salon NGOs in Belgrade,” focuses on the upscale NGO circle of Belgrade, exploring its sociological profile and political positioning and pointing out its legitimizing identity strategies. As I will argue, NGOs use of practical cosmopolitanism, their culturalized production of the nationalist enemy, and the European democratic self were inseparable from efforts of social positioning within the aid scene and in the emerging political arena after 2000. Furthermore, leaving aside the flat stratification schemata of middle-classness, I will discuss the formation of a local *projectariat*, trapped within very precarious labor relations of exploitation and moral obligations of do-gooding.

The following chapter, “The ‘Nationalists’: *Radikali* and Privatization,” provides a tentative answer to the omnipresent cultural discussion (produced by the above local NGOs, among others) and spreading fears of a current resurgence of nationalism. By recounting narratives and experiences of privatization processes in the small town of Vojvodina, this chapter contends that support for nationalist political options in Serbia had more to do with class-based experiences of material and symbolic dispossession than with identity quests or cultural predispositions. The rise of the nationalist Radical Party was not a simple result of media manipulation, but it was closely linked to the absence of a critical institutionalized Left.



The third and final part of the book tackles the policies of “good governance” (the promotion of synergy between state and NGOs), but tries to go beyond a totalizing discourse of the neoliberal dismantling of the state. Chapter 5, “Revitalizing Communities, Decentralizing the State,” is an analysis of a USAID program, aiming to establish local citizens’ councils in order to foster participation and a local civic ethos. Looking at the project’s claims and practices reveals how the seemingly naive “habits of the heart” were in fact translated into a concrete political (and economic) intervention: a state-building project at the grassroots level. I intend to show how messy and complex such an intervention gets when it has to deal, on the one hand, with actors having contradictory projects and interpretations, and, on the other hand, with sociohistorical legacies and embedded social networks built around the public sector.

The last chapter, “NGOs vs. State: Clash or Class?,” examines the welfare reform in Serbia, and the push of local NGOs toward service provision, according to New Public Management trends. I take this example to theoretically criticize an overstated and assumed NGO–state clash within the current globalization/neoliberalism framework that tends to homogenize actors and obscure their internal unequal properties. In fact, we gain more analytical purchase if we analyze this dichotomy as an emic construction, linked to class-based processes. Looking through such an angle, the hierarchies of power can instead be drawn between a politically well-connected elite of experts/planners circulating among NGOs, donors, and state agencies, and precarious nonprofit staff and lower-level public servants engaged in provision, culturally stigmatized for their so-called stubborn resistance to reforms.

## In the Field

As Bate accurately stated, “ethnography is not so much method in the madness, as madness in the method” (1997: 1152). The madness started in February 2006 when I arrived for the first time in a freezing, snow-covered Belgrade. The first thing I did was to start learning Serbo-Croatian. This proved to be a hard task but I strongly believe it was an absolute methodological imperative and my research would have taken different pathways or been completely deprived of many of critical insights were I to have conducted it only in English or with the help of a translator. Learning the language also functioned as a

symbolic resource, as for certain informants it also signaled some sort of genuine interest and commitment.

I started visiting local NGOs in June 2006 with the initial mission of finding a job, internship, or simply to volunteer. However, there are two reasons why this never happened. First, because I never really envisioned making a monograph of one particular organization. I became interested in a more situational analysis that could eventually cover several aspects of the NGO world, and, as a result, my research became by necessity multi-sited. And, second, because after a few interviews with prominent members of NGOs in Belgrade, I became aware of the enormously antagonistic relationship that NGOs held with one another, not only because of the scarce funding available but also because of personal rivalries and different political affiliations. I thus took the risk of remaining unaffiliated. I am sure that this decision has probably deprived me from observing some practices and accessing particular information, but I am also certain that it enabled me to develop a more intimate level of trust with my interlocutors. Despite this limitation, I was still able to observe the mundane routines of these NGOs by meeting people during their working hours in the office. I soon realized also that a considerable part of NGOing was outside of the office, mainly networking and trying to locate various flows of resources, information, funding, partners, and new project ideas. This task was mainly done in coffeehouses, restaurants, conferences, or by visiting the offices of other organizations. In addition to gathering life stories and printed material (brochures, manuals, reports, project proposals, strategic plans, PowerPoint presentations), I was able to participate in various meetings and events organized by the NGOs, ranging from inter- and intra-NGO discussions on the civil sector's future to public presentations of their project results and international conferences on major political issues such as EU integration and specific policy reforms.

Besides visiting almost sixty local NGOs in Belgrade, I also met many people (from lower managers to high-level experts) working for international NGOs (Save the Children, Caritas, America's Development Foundation, Mercy Corps, International Relief and Development, Norwegian People's Aid, Freedom House, Institute for Sustainable Communities); donor organizations of all kinds (United Nations Development Programme [UNDP], World Bank, European Agency for Reconstruction, Canadian International Development Agency, USAID, Open Society Foundation); embassies, the municipality of Belgrade, the Serbian Ministry of Labor, Employment, and Social Policy; state agencies (Social Innovation

Fund, the Office of European Integration, and the Social Inclusion and Poverty Reduction Unit); public Centers of social work [CSW] (*Centri za socijalni rad*); trade unions of social workers; political parties; think tanks; and numerous freelance trainers, consultants, and academics. Although I also had meetings with expats, my main focus was on the local population staffing the aid industry.

I was lucky enough that my research coincided with the last phase of a large USAID program, some aspects of which I present in Chapter 5. This program was particularly important as it was the last of its kind implemented in Serbia; it was a by-the-book civil-society building program. After several pilot visits to different regions, I decided to focus on the autonomous province of Vojvodina, falling under the responsibility of USAID's implementing partner, America's Development Foundation, an international NGO with years of experience in democracy promotion. Initially, I gathered ethnographic material by travelling for two months to the municipality of Subotica and Kikinda). I visited the project's recipients, in their newly established citizens' councils and warm homes, I hung around in their coffee shops and in the offices of public administrative units (*Mesne Zajednice*), and I saw the funded activities and met the project's staff and municipal representatives from the various political parties. I also had the opportunity to pay a short visit to these places after the implementation of the project was terminated, in 2008. The timing of that visit gave me the chance to talk with people that were no longer bounded by employment contracts and were more eager to express their views and reflect on the final outcomes of the project. In Kikinda, I was already conducting a parallel research on neo-nationalism, part of which is presented in Chapter 4. In trying to grasp the reasons for people supporting the nationalist Radical Party, I met many workers, engineers, and pensioners from the two industries of the city, Livnica Ltd and Toza Marković Ltd, as well as journalists, public servants from healthcare institutions, and members of their families. Therefore, because I was already in situ, it just made sense to extend my research in order to include the USAID project.

All these meetings were arranged using the snowball method which proved more than effective given the closed development circle; as my informants were saying, "everybody knows everybody." Out of those meetings, I have eighty-five recorded interviews, lasting in average from one to two hours each. Informal conversations and group meetings are of course impossible to quantify but their qualitative properties were indispensable. Finally, my research was enriched by data purchased through my active participation as

a trainee in two kinds of training programs during 2010: I participated in numerous educational seminars that the Belgrade NGOs provided to other NGOs, mostly smaller groups or from outside the capital organizations, as a part of the latter's institutional building. Each course involved one or two days of workshops, organized around topics such as project proposal writing, advocacy, fundraising, and networking. Apart from these capacity-building interventions, I also participated in a one-week seminar in a small town of Vojvodina that had an explicit focus on intercultural dialogue, reconciliation, and youth empowerment. The findings during this week seemed to me very indicative of the general phenomena and tendencies that I wanted to discuss. I decided therefore to present it as an ethnographic whole and to devote a chapter to analyzing the production of specific epistemologies of conflict and change. I will start the anthropological journey to the routes of democracy promotion in Serbia exactly there, in Vojvodina.

## Notes

1. According to Ivo Baučić writing in 1972, "With a population of 20,504,516 (figure for 31 March 1971) and a total of 860,000 external migrants, Yugoslavia has an emigration rate of 4.2 percent—i.e., Europe's highest after Portugal (Portugal 5.7 percent, Italy 3.4 percent)" (1972: 3).
2. Data from Serbian Ministry of Finance: [www.mfin.sr.gov.yu/eng/2724](http://www.mfin.sr.gov.yu/eng/2724).
3. At the time of my research, associations were registered at the Serbian Business Registers Agency. These data are taken from there: <http://www.apr.gov.rs/%D0%9D%D0%B0%D1%81%D0%BB%D0%BE%D0%B2%D0%BD%D0%B0.aspx> (last visited on 22 December 2012).
4. The main concern of that period was the post-war reconstruction of European democracies funded by the Marshall Plan. But what was really new in the mid-twentieth century, in terms of conceptual frameworks, was the notion of underdevelopment. The world is no longer divided between civilized and barbarian but between developed and underdeveloped, implying the possibility of the latter to gradually reach the former. Cold War struggles for influence were being transformed into technological development interventions. The transcript of Truman's famous speech can be found here: <http://www.trumanlibrary.org/calendar/viewpapers.php?pid=1030> (last accessed 10 September 2013).
5. Modernization development economics were very influenced by the work of theorists such as Seymour Martin Lipset and Daniel Lerner, political sociologists who were arguing about the strong correlations between economic growth and democracy (Lerner 1958; Lipset 1959).
6. NGOs that were already active at that period include Oxfam (1942), Save the Children (1919), Catholic Relief Service (1943), and Cooperative for American Remittances in Europe/CARE (1946). Many more were established later during the decolonization

period and under the ideological influence of third-worldism, adopting either its Christian version (e.g., Comité catholique contre la faim et pour le développement, 1961), or following a more critical Marxian one (e.g., Frères des Hommes, 1965, or Terres des Hommes, 1963).

7. This approach stemmed out of the International Labour Organization in 1976. For a critique of the concept of needs, see Baudrillard 1981.
8. The evolution of NGOs' budgets in this period is very telling of such a development. As an indicator, Sylvie Brunel notes that between 1970 and 1990, the funds that NGOs received from public sources for operating programs in the developing countries, representing one-third of their total financial budget, passed from less than \$200 million to \$2.2 billion (Brunel 1997: 32).
9. As Nicolas Guilhot has discussed in his book *The Democracy Makers* (2005), this transition paradigm is also closely linked to the "tension between intradisciplinary developments and the evolution of the structural position of academics in the field of policy-making" (2005: 102).
10. The emancipatory language of empowerment and human rights, grassroots approaches and social responsibility, were adopted by actors as different as the US State Department, the World Bank, Zapatistas, anti-communist Russian NGOs, think tanks like Freedom House, liberation movements in Maldives, Indian agrarian cooperatives, indigenous movements, Philipp Morris, the UNDP, Rastafarian associations in Trinidad, and Green Peace.
11. His book, *Making Democracy Work*, sought to understand the regional differences of economic development and institutional performance in Italy since the 1970s. He found that there was a strong correlation between a flourishing civic life and the development of responsive institutions and economic prosperity in the northern part of Italy; the "fate of Mezzogiorno," on the other hand, is understood in terms of a civic engagement deficit. Instead of horizontal links among citizens, best encapsulated in the form of voluntary associations, Putnam found detrimental strong interpersonal relations based on blood-ties and friendship. Such views echoed Banfield's views of "amoral familism" (1958), but also Gellner's repulsion for the "tyranny of the cousins" (1994: 7). For a critique, see Tarrow 1996.
12. Among the most well-known are the Center for Civil Society at the London School of Economics, the International Society for Third Sector Research (ISTR), the Center for Civil Society Studies at Johns Hopkins University, the Program on Nonprofit Organizations at Yale, and the Hauser Center for Nonprofit Organizations at Harvard.
13. Such are the Executive Program for Nonprofit Leaders at the Stanford Graduate School of Business or the Philanthropy and Nonprofit Organizations at Northwestern University.
14. Exceptions are those social movements participating "in the fight against dictatorship or terrorism." See for example the case of Otpor! discussed in Chapter 2.