

From Mothers' Rights to Equal Rights Post-Soviet Grassroots Women's Associations

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SINCE THE COLLAPSE OF THE SOVIET UNION, HUMAN RIGHTS GROUPS HAVE EXPRESSED considerable concern about post-Soviet women.¹ Arguably, this is because most glasnost-era discussions of the Soviet Union's democratization paid little attention to its impact on women.² But this is not the only reason. Despite considerable effort on the part of international women's rights programs, the region's nongovernmental organizations for women are themselves new, inexperienced, and relatively weak. They are finding it difficult to cope with the demands of the current transition, which has exacerbated previous social, political, and economic problems and created new ones like unemployment, inflation, and homelessness.

It is estimated that post-Soviet women's rights organizations constitute less than one percent of nongovernmental organizations active in the former Soviet Union (Abubikirova et al. 1988, 16). Not only are there too few women's organizations to effectively meet the needs of local women, but those organizations that do exist are small and inexperienced at working together. Lack of coalition building experience has hurt some of the women's movement's biggest campaigns. For instance, many women in Russia and Ukraine were concerned when women lost political representation in Russian and Ukrainian parliaments after the demise of Soviet-era quotas. They formed a variety of women's parties. However, so far, these women's parties have failed to elect any of their candidates and their influence has arguably declined at least in part because of rivalries. In Ukraine, at least four separate women's parties have formed in the last decade, each short-lived and weak.

The current weakness of post-Soviet women's activism is the consequence of preexisting weaknesses that have long been stressed in Western accounts of socialist states' treatment of women: the absence of a Western-style civil society of nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), exacerbated by state paternalism (Kligman 1998; Verdery 1994) and lack of contact with the international women's movement (Browning 1987; Jancar 1978; Lapidus 1978). In order to explore how these factors left post-Soviet women unprepared for community activism, my analysis will focus

on how changes in state policy limited Soviet women's access to three sets of crucial collective action resources: nongovernmental women's organizations, collective action frames, and coalition-building opportunities.³ There are many other factors that influence women's community activism; however, the ability to establish nongovernmental organizations, develop effective collective action frames, and gain experience in coalition building have repeatedly emerged as important dimensions of successful collective action (e.g., Bleyer 1992; W. Gamson 1990; Katzenstein and Mueller 1987; Minkoff 1995 and 1997; Kalzenotein 1995; Staggenborg 1986 and 1991). Thus, a focus on these dimensions constitutes a useful (if imperfect) starting point for making cross-national comparisons about globalization's consequences for post-Soviet women as activists, as well as for assessing how other factors have affected local activists' domestic capacities for collective action.

I begin by discussing women's community activism prior to the introduction of market reforms, or perestroika. Next, I briefly examine the kind of organizations and collective action frames that women community activists developed during the final years of Soviet rule. After this, I turn to analyze the collective action frame that has been encouraged by the NIS-US Women's Consortium, a U.S.-funded organization designed to foster post-Soviet women's leadership through cooperation between U.S. and post-Soviet NGOs. I conclude by suggesting some reasons why the ultimate success of such transnational partnerships depends on whether they promote or impair domestic coalition building between older and newer activist networks.

Women's Community Activism prior to Perestroika

Observers have tended to view the Soviet Union through two opposing perspectives. Party leaders and official Soviet women's activists claimed that the Soviet state had emancipated women from traditional forms of patriarchal exploitation, and enabled women to enter all traditionally male-dominated spheres of society. The Soviet Union's critics saw it as a paternalist one-party state in which both men and women were atomized and powerless, and in which the party monopolized resources for collective action. Both perspectives present a distorted view of Soviet women's capacities for collective action.

Though the Soviet Union *was* one of the first countries to make gender equality and women's rights important political goals, claims that Soviet women had attained full political equality with men are overstated. In reality, their progress was slow. The Soviet leadership carefully recruited women into official organizations such as the Communist Party and other secondary associations, and as the country industrialized, women's access to these and other resources for collective action gradually expanded. As the country became more urban and more industrial, Soviet

women and other Soviet citizens also gradually developed a certain degree of political influence, within limits set by the party leadership. Most of these changes occurred during the post-World War II era.

During the early years of Soviet rule, the party strove with little success to integrate Soviet women into state-building projects. Initially, these efforts were coordinated through local branches of "Women's Departments" [*zhenotdely*] of Communist Party organizations coordinated through a Women's Department (or *zhenotdel*) of the Communist Party's Central Committee founded in 1919 at the urging of Aleksandra Kollontai. The Women's Departments trained a cadre of local women activists, recruited local women into the party, and directed community relief work among orphans, wounded soldiers, and the homeless. But Soviet leaders quickly closed Women's Departments when they became channels for local anticollectivization protests. In 1930 the Central Committee abolished the Women's Departments, and merged their branches with local Communist party organizations.⁴

After World War II, the party consistently targeted women in its recruitment drives. In the 1960s and 1970s, Soviet women entered the party in greater numbers, but their role in the party remained relatively limited (Clements 1992, 99–121). The proportion of women party members, which for decades had remained low, very gradually rose to one-quarter by the late 1970s. Official Soviet statistics on party leadership show that by 1980, women had also achieved a certain kind of political influence as party leaders at the local level, where they constituted half of all people's deputies and a majority of judges.⁵ Women activists also began advancing through the system of Communist Party and state-controlled secondary associations. There were several reasons for the party's efforts to recruit more women and to pay greater attention to their welfare. One of the most important was declining birthrates and an increasing incidence of one- and two-child families. Party leaders feared that steady declines in the postwar birthrate would, in decades to come, create serious labor shortages. In an effort to reverse this trend, a variety of measures were taken to investigate and formulate solutions to problems that Soviet women faced. Women party members and academics were appointed to state agencies and commissions that investigated issues related to childbearing. These investigations determined that many women would not have more children because they lived for years in overcrowded dormitories or apartments, came home from work to face a stressful "second shift" of household work (unshared with their husbands) made more difficult by chronic shortages in housing and consumer goods. State leaders made some effort to use trade unions to relieve some of the pressure on women workers. Groups called Women's Councils [*zhensoveti*] were periodically revived within trade union organizations in order to help women gain access to day care and vacation passes for their children. Because the councils were concerned primarily with using existing trade union resources to help women workers to com-

bine work with childbearing, their contributions to Soviet women's material gains were limited. Women's Councils were politically weak, and there continued to be no women in the Politburo and few women in decision-making bodies.

How did Soviet women fare in terms of their control over indigenous organizations, the development of a collective action frame, and opportunities for coalition building among groups with ideological differences? Soviet women were officially given considerable attention. They were treated as an interest group with a common identity—"working mothers." They were encouraged to have more children. In order to help them to combine work and motherhood, women were mobilized into official women's organizations. To some extent, this allowed women to develop organizational resources through which to articulate grievances within the workplace. However, these organizations were not intended to help women engage in collective action in other realms.

Soldiers' Mothers Committees and "Maternalist" Activism

Soviet women first began to engage in independent, locally based collective action in the late 1980s, during the Soviet Union's brief experiment with market reforms. In the mid-1980s Mikhail Gorbachev introduced perestroika, "restructuring," or market reforms, and glasnost, "openness," or political liberalization. During the first years of reform, Gorbachev gave women's issues considerable attention. Like earlier Soviet reformers, he promised to help women combine motherhood and work (e.g., by creating more part-time positions and alleviating housing shortages). He also pledged to promote more women to positions of authority. More important still, Gorbachev revived the Women's Councils, and placed them under the jurisdiction of the high-profile Soviet Women's Committee, which represented Soviet women internationally and thus had ties to international women's groups from whom the country's activists had been isolated for so long.⁶ Gorbachev thus increased women's activists' access to new collective action frames and created opportunities for new international coalitions.

These reforms had some results. Women's Councils expanded their membership rapidly. By April 1988, there were reported to be 236,000 Women's Councils, with a total membership of 2.3 million.⁷ Women's Councils formed in workplaces throughout the country, to investigate and discuss solutions to their members' concerns. Contacts with international women's activists also increased, leading to new, more critical treatments of domestic problems. Not only did these developments broaden the realm of public debate to include a variety of formerly taboo issues such as abortion, contraception, and even feminism (which party leaders had long cast as a bourgeois ideology), they also emboldened women activists to engage in collective action outside state- and party-controlled channels.

During 1989, a year when glasnost protest activity began to spill over from state- and party-controlled channels throughout the Soviet Union, women activists formed dozens of direct action protest groups. A handful of women (located primarily in Moscow) experimented with feminism and tried to adapt it to Soviet women's problems. The vast majority of these protest groups was unconcerned with this largely foreign ideology, and brought together local mothers who sought to force state agencies to provide relief and assistance to their children.

Soldiers' Mothers Committees organized and carried out the first such women's protests to capture the support of the public and receive considerable attention from the Soviet leadership. These committees were initially founded in 1989 by mothers of conscripts who had died in peacetime military service as a result of hazing. At that time, Soldiers' Mothers groups staged a series of public demonstrations and hunger strikes through which they sought to draw attention to the system of hazing and to pressure the party leadership to reform military service. These protests achieved sufficient moral authority in the public's eyes that Gorbachev met with its representatives to hear their concerns.

Beginning in 1989, women activists also formed many other new women's direct action groups to force other state agencies to reform their treatment of women and their children. Independently or with the assistance of local Women's Councils, such "maternalist" activists established dozens of new community associations that sought state protection or assistance from Soviet state agencies to mothers of large families, single mothers, mothers of disabled children, disabled mothers, and other categories of needy mothers.

Also in 1989, non-Russian women began to form new national women's associations that embraced a nationalist variant of maternalist activism that sought to recognize the role women played in national identity formation. These groups tended to utilize organizational resources from the system of secondary associations (chiefly, professional unions and academic institutes) that the Soviet state developed to administer areas of education and culture (Dawson 1996). Nationalist women's activism of this type was concentrated in the western Ukraine, the Baltics, and the Caucasus, where national sentiment was rising.

This wave of community activism had complicated effects on women's capacity to use glasnost freedoms to gain greater control over indigenous organizations, successfully develop a collective action frame, and build coalitions among groups with ideological differences. For the present discussion, it is important to note first and foremost that the most effective attempts to seek control over community organizations united local networks of needy women who embraced fairly conservative Soviet definitions of women's rights and pursued fairly short-term goals, principally, increased state assistance to their children. Rarely are such community groups inter-

ested in, or able to pursue, coalition building that might increase women's political power. Typically, such groups form self-contained networks or work in relative isolation.

Associations of Mothers of Large Families that began forming in 1989 now exist throughout the Newly Independent States. In Ukraine (which Western women's rights advocates would later claim had only three women's NGOs in 1994), such an organization formed in 1993.⁸ As of 1996 (the most recent year in which a comprehensive survey of Ukrainian women's NGOs has been conducted), 25 local chapters of this NGO had united under the auspices of the All-Ukrainian Association of Large Families, based in Kiev. This organization has engaged in a wide variety of activities. It cooperates with a variety of state agencies and advocacy groups for women, children and the disabled, and conducts regular meetings, independent research, conferences, and public service work to bring attention to the rights of children and families.

Similar organizations have also proliferated in Russia, although many outside Moscow and St. Petersburg work in relative isolation from each other (perhaps because of the country's size), and conduct activities primarily in conjunction with local successors to Soviet Women's Councils. In Kalingrad, an organization was established in 1990 that sought to help mothers of large families by providing assistance, advocating the preservation of state benefits, and raising public awareness about large families. It claimed 600 members in 1998. A second such organization is Home (Dom), located in the town of Olenegorsk, Murmansk oblast, established in 1989, with 250 members. A third community group, Women Together, of Novosibirsk, was established in 1994 and claims 300 members. Hundreds of such organizations have formed throughout the NIS by formalizing preexisting informal networks of mothers whose children had received particular types of aid. Only rarely have these mothers' associations merged two welfare constituencies to create a stronger group. One relatively rare example is Orange Tree of Leningrad Oblast, which was established in 1991 with the goal of mutual support of mothers with many children and single mothers. In 1998, it claimed 260 members. As important as these groups may be for needy women, they have limited political goals and capacities, and hence a limited impact on the policy-making process.

Ethnocultural women's associations originally sought to revive women's commitment to national languages and cultures and claimed to have no political goals. However, many were closely affiliated with organized movements for national sovereignty that during the final years of Soviet rule called for independence. These types of groups, in mobilizing support for national sovereignty, enjoyed considerable political influence. In part as the result of the new conditions of independence, some of these groups have been able to form large federated national associations with dozens

of local chapters. However, they have achieved their success primarily by building coalitions with nationalist groups that were not focused on women's rights and that have lost vitality since achieving their goal of independence from the Soviet Union.

Although national revival movements have subsided, a number of nationalist women's groups have survived independence. Two examples are the Ukrainian Women's Association (Zhinocha hromada), affiliated closely with the Ukrainian movement for independence (Rukh), and the Ukrainian Women's Union (Souiuz Ukrainok), both of which were established in 1989 to restore national traditions and are run by wives of prominent nationalist leaders. These two organizations have prospered and achieved a sizable mass membership of locally based chapters affiliated through a national association based in the capital. In 1996, the Ukrainian Women's Association claimed 15,000 members, and the Ukrainian Women's Union claimed 11,300 (Women's Information Consultative Center 1996).⁹ Both lost some members as new feminist women's NGOs have formed. And neither they nor the new feminist groups have had much success in their attempts to advance women's issues in the political arena. Indeed, the share of women in Ukraine's parliament is lower than it is in Russia's. The success of these groups will depend on their ability to build coalitions. So far, efforts to build such coalitions have foundered.

As these examples suggest, it not true that Soviet-era secondary organizations failed to become channels for Soviet women to engage in collective action. Nonetheless, Soviet-era resources have been insufficient for women to develop political power in their own right. Soviet women activists used both institutional and noninstitutional channels to increase their control over local organizational resources. The strongest protest activity was motivated by maternalist claims, which foreign and domestic observers have often argued had a depoliticizing effect on women. When glasnost first allowed women community activists to engage in independent collective action, they utilized this discourse of motherhood to elaborate a "maternalist" collective action frame to make new political demands. Soviet women thus turned "maternalist" activism against the state. Groups of soldier's mothers, welfare recipients, and non-Russian cultural activists tried to wrest from the party and the state control over areas that had long considered the jurisdiction of women. But opportunities for coalition building have declined as the result of this sudden decentralization of state power. Many new community organizations either don't know of each other's existence or are prevented by ideological differences and new political borders from common initiatives, and this might be seen as an important limiting factor on glasnost-era women's community activism.

In short, when the Soviet state loosened long standing prohibitions on non-governmental associations, the gains for women community activists were mixed. While Soviet state organizations quickly gave rise to certain kinds of independent women's community activism, nonetheless, the official, federated Soviet women's

associational structure created through Women's Councils collapsed, and this organization ceased to be able to coordinate activities that might have translated greater agenda-setting independence into increased political power.¹⁰ As a result, glasnost-era organizations remain nodes of community activism, but their efforts to coordinate women's collective action have been fairly local, and even at the local level, community activists have been seriously hampered by the state's incapacity to make concessions in a time of economic crisis.

Post-Soviet Women's Activism

Perestroika and glasnost were intended to stimulate the USSR's flagging economy and inspire greater confidence in the country's government. Instead, they soon unleashed a dramatic wave of protest against party and state hegemony.¹¹ In one republic after another, the Soviet state lost control. Separatist movements arose and demanded greater local control over economic and political affairs for the Soviet Union's republics. Those pressures contributed to the Soviet Union's collapse and led to the reconstitution of its far-flung republics as independent states, many of them quite unstable.

Local independence movements stressed the inability of Moscow-based reform to understand and be responsive to conditions in their republics, and advocated that local leaders develop their own policies. However, since independence, the locus of control over post-Soviet economic and political reforms has moved from Moscow even farther abroad. The International Monetary Fund (IMF) now sets the pace and decides the nature of reforms with support from foreign lenders who constitute a major source of funding to post-Soviet states: the World Bank, the European Union (EU), the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development, and the governments of the United States, the United Kingdom, Germany, and Canada. These foreign donors have worked closely with one another to put pressure on local aid recipients to increase the pace of mass privatization and economic restructuring, and of course, to increase foreign trade and investment.

What effects have these macropolitical shifts had on resources for women's community activists? It is important to note that donors have made repeated efforts to stimulate the growth of civil society, and in particular, to empower local women's NGOs. The U.S. Department of State and the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) have focused considerable attention on developing a unified strategy for civil society building. In the words of an early report that set the agenda for future Western partnerships in Russia and Ukraine (the largest post-Soviet countries and the first priority for Western assistance), "[f]acilitation of private voluntary action and the strengthening of civil society institutions is necessary to generate a successful transition to democracy" (Lear 1992, ii).

In short, U.S. policy has targeted coalition building between American NGOs and local post-Soviet partners as a policy priority. This approach to democratization has created several unintended problems that have weakened preexisting local women's groups. First, it fails to acknowledge the important role that local state agencies and governmental organizations can play as local nodes of civil society-building activity (thus ignoring the organizations that trained many Soviet women's activists). Second, it gives priority to transnational exchanges between local organizations and U.S. partners, rather than seeking to strengthen domestic ties between the dozens of small women's groups that formed during the Soviet period. Third, in practice, rather than building on well-networked local organizations such as the Women's Councils as nodes of women's community activism, it leads to the creation of new women's groups able to appeal to the particular interests of Western foundations and other intermediaries who act as gatekeepers for Western initiatives. These new women's groups often have little practical knowledge of other local women's organizations or access to the local political process. Their success also subtly shapes the kinds of activities preexisting nongovernmental groups must engage in to win ongoing financial support.

The US-NIS Women's Consortium is an instructive case for understanding some of the reasons why Western aid and Western activists have not, as yet, built effective local foundations for post-Soviet women's community activism. The Women's Consortium is the largest coalition of American and local post-Soviet women's groups to have formed through U.S. civil society partnership programs. As of September 30, 1998, 216 member NGOs and 11 individual advisers belonged to the consortium. Of these, 93 were women's groups from 26 cities across Ukraine, 2 were from Belarus, 4 were from Moldova, 2 were from Armenia, 1 was from Azerbaijan, 1 was from Uzbekistan, 91 were from Russia, and the remainder represented the United States. This is a smaller coalition than the Soviet-era network of Women's Councils, and few of the coalition's initial members originated in older activists networks. As a result, many have not been able to coordinate their activities with these more experienced potential allies.

The Women's Consortium was initially formed in response to a USAID invitation to the Winrock International Institute for Agricultural Development, an Arkansas-based nonprofit with field offices in Brazil, India, and the Philippines. Winrock had received numerous federal grants for development work, but had no prior ties to the Soviet Union and had never established a women's advocacy group. A self-consciously feminist representative of Winrock, Elise Smith, first traveled to several post-Soviet cities on a USAID-funded tour intended to identify local partners for USAID partnership programs. Smith had time only to meet briefly with a small handful of the organizations that had formed during glasnost. On the basis of their promises to join, Winrock successfully applied for two initial grants: a

\$95,000 grant from the Eurasia Foundation,¹² and a \$750,000 grant from USAID, both intended for leadership training programs for local women.

Few of the consortium's U.S. advisers and staff had ever worked with grassroots community groups, which most proponents of civil society see as the foundations of democratic life. They typically had previously worked in U.S. development agencies or other official Soviet-U.S. exchanges (e.g., Peace Links, Friendship Forces). A few of the consortium's advisers had taken part in official exchanges sponsored by the Soviet Union's official women's organizations. Others had recent experience working full-time either with the U.S. Embassy or federally funded organizations that had only recently established programs or chapters in Moscow (e.g., the Peace Corps), or with American nongovernmental organizations that had received subcontracts from larger federally funded organizations to undertake projects in the region after the Soviet Union's dissolution. Still others had experience working with high-profile, professionally staffed, single-issue U.S.-based organizations like Planned Parenthood that had developed and maintained chapters in developing countries and were being encouraged by the federal government to expand into the former Soviet Union. Conspicuously absent were representatives of the small ethnic or religious community-based women's service organizations that were staffed by local volunteers and relied primarily on face-to-face fundraising and more closely resemble grassroots ideal-types of community activism. Indeed, far from belonging to a face-to-face community group that post-Soviet women's activists might emulate, many of the high-profile activists the consortium enlisted in the project had been participants in large international development projects that had worked primarily with women in developing countries. They found it hard to support the interests and objectives of the glasnost-era welfare rights mother's groups and nationalist women's associations that existed outside Moscow.

The local post-Soviet partners who became active in the consortium were from similarly elite circles. For example, one of the primary Russian figures in the consortium's work in Russia was Elena Ershova, who in the first years of the consortium's existence succeeded an American staff member to become the consortium's Moscow coordinator. A 1950s graduate of Moscow's elite Institute of International Relations (the training ground of the Soviet Union's developers of foreign policy), Ershova worked for the Communist Party organ *Kommunist* from 1957 until 1968. She then wrote a *kandidat* thesis on the American peace movement for the Academy of Social Sciences of the Central Committee. Upon completion of her degree, Ershova left party work for a position as a researcher at the USA-Canada Institute of the Soviet Academy of Sciences, an elite think tank where she and other politically reliable scholars worked on the American New Left and on second-wave feminism—topics that were off-limits to most Soviet citizens. Until glasnost, she was also a consultant to such official organizations as the Soviet Peace Committee

and the Soviet Women's Committee. Several other Russian activists prominent in the consortium also held positions at the USA-Canada Institute and were, like Ershova, scholars rather than community activists. They had a knowledge of feminism and could frame their concerns in terms familiar to American activists.

Initially, relatively young, highly placed local women with strong ties to local academic establishments were the only prospective members who expressed interest in the consortium's invitations and were encouraged to join. Few members of local community women's groups founded during glasnost joined the consortium. This was at first surprising and frustrating to the consortium's American employees, who had hoped to mobilize more classically grassroots women's groups in the former Soviet Union. Yet they felt little enthusiasm for the local women representing the Associations of Mothers with Many Children and nationalist women's associations who attended public meetings organized by the consortium and spoke to consortium staff about the political functions of motherhood. These activists' goals seemed to subordinate women and so did not mesh well with the consortium's pre-existing agenda to strengthen women's leadership in post-Soviet societies.

As a result, the consortium's local members and partners in the former Soviet Union are mostly new groups that are not typical of the first small autonomous women's protest groups that formed during glasnost. It has helped to fund a series of important local women's ventures modeled on Western women's NGOs. These range from rape crisis centers to business incubators and gender studies centers. All of these are, of course, institutions that did not exist in the Soviet Union, are sorely needed, and without question have made a genuine contribution to post-Soviet women's rights. Nonetheless, with few exceptions, because the consortium's agenda was based on strengthening women's leadership, most of its initiatives have been oriented toward highly educated professional women who might become future leaders.¹³ Its programs failed to support more classically grassroots community organizations that formed prior to the consortium.

Local members of the consortium are a select group who have been and remain better positioned to compete for Western funding than to develop local sources of financial support. The consortium teaches a relatively small number of women how to compete for Western grants. These local partners then run campaigns for women's rights that are modeled directly on U.S. or western European styles of activism. Through the consortium's influence, a handful of new post-Soviet women's groups have become integrated into transnational networks. They rarely work cooperatively with preexisting local women's groups, whose solutions are often hostile to feminism and whose focus is on maternalist causes. As a result, deep ideological rifts have formed between a small feminist community and broader networks of community activists.

Invariably, Western funding can undermine local alliances and inhibit badly

needed local coalition work. Indeed, one of the greatest current obstacles to domestic coalition building has been the clash between the "maternalist" collective action frame that local post-Soviet activists tend to adopt, and the feminist collective action frame that foreign advocates use and encourage in their post-Soviet partners' funding proposals. International organizations that have established independent programs in the region soon encountered a frustrating dilemma: their mobilizing strategies frequently presuppose a type of women's rights activism that is absent in the region, particularly at the grassroots.

Western conceptions of women's rights that focus on political empowerment and independence were and remain alien to the broader population (Einhorn 1993; Marsh 1996; Pilkington 1996; Posadskaya 1994; Racioppi and O'Sullivan See 1997). They are also far from the collective action frame of women activists who joined glasnost-era associations and who are often unable to identify with international organizations' objectives. Hence many more seasoned activists have had little or no access to new Western resource bases, and their organizations have struggled to exist during the economic crisis that began after the Soviet Union's collapse. Indeed, the new women volunteers and activists who became involved in Western outreach efforts were quite often not the same women who had previously managed organizations created from above by the state, such as Women's Councils and state agencies concerned with maternal and child welfare. Rarely are Western initiatives likely to attract the wives of prominent politicians or political activists who now run nationalist women's associations. Instead, their local partners tend to be small groups of young women in their 20s with close ties to academic and political elites and above-average receptiveness to Western literature—feminist writings in particular. In short, the post-Soviet women's groups formed with the assistance of American partners are distant from many preexisting women's community groups and are also much smaller in size, tending to draw their membership and leadership from a small, relatively elite stratum of women with fairly close ties to Washington and Moscow state-based programs and agencies.

Conclusion

Clearly, civil society as it currently exists in the former Soviet Union has brought little relief to the local women community activists who sought greater state protection for their children. It is also far from having met the objectives of transnational women's activists who arrived to help post-Soviet women develop a capacity for feminist activism. Women's organizations have been particularly hard hit by the institutional rearrangements that the Soviet Union's collapse has entailed, and as I pointed out earlier, women's NGOs now constitute less than 1 percent of all post-Soviet NGOs.

To what can this sad state of affairs be attributed? I began by asking whether the current weakness of post-Soviet women's activism results primarily from globalization (by which I mean recent economic and political programs intended to help integrate the former Soviet Union into the world economy), or if this weakness is primarily the consequence of preexisting weaknesses that have long been stressed in Western accounts of Soviet women. In order to determine an answer, my analysis focused on changes over time in women's access to three sets of resources needed for collective action: control over indigenous women's organizations, the development of a collective action frame, and opportunities for building coalitions among women's groups divided by ideological differences. My analysis suggests that a tentative answer can now be made.

The relative weakness of post-Soviet women's community activism is a byproduct of increased dependence on foreign activists and causes; this is a direct (albeit unintended) outcome of U.S. policy, rather than simply an unintended consequence of a weak local tradition of community activism. The centerpiece of foreign policy on civil society has been to establish transnational partnerships of local and foreign NGOs and to cultivate future leaders. Women's activists' prior dependencies (on the party and state leadership) have been replaced by ties to Western activists and causes that strive to teach local activists Western strategies for conducting community initiatives.¹⁴ Consequently, nearly a decade of Western assistance has taken local civil societies one step forward (increasing possibilities for international coalition building), but two steps back (decreasing local control over women's NGOs and action repertoires).

The weakness of local women's NGOs is not simply a continuation of a long history of powerlessness. An examination of access to three sets of collective action resources suggests that during the Soviet era, women gradually developed control over indigenous women's organizations and elaborated an effective collective action frame based on mothers' rights. Increasing access to these first two sets of resources created a capacity for decentralized collective action that manifested itself in a variety of new forms of women's activism and in a proliferation of new women's NGOs.

However, recent post-Soviet political instability (caused by the Soviet Union's collapse and the impact of subsequent market reforms and globalization) has indeed prevented these new forms of collective action from translating into increased political power. But this is not simply the result of globalization, as the USSR's demise brought an end to preexisting coalitions created through official women's groups. The subsequent shifts in political and economic life have tended to create great challenges for women's community activism. In other words, ironically, Soviet women activists increased their access to certain kinds of collective action resources, but their opportunities for another kind of important collective action declined considerably.

An unintended benefit of globalization has been increased Western support for post-Soviet women's activism, manifested in greater access for women activists to new public and private sources of aid and assistance from Western women's advocacy groups. Unfortunately, increased possibilities for Western coalition building have failed to compensate for the real loss of locally based coalitions. Very few of these ventures have been able to build on the wave of women's community activism that began in 1989. Instead, many Western initiatives have encouraged the formation of new partnerships between U.S. women's groups and local post-Soviet groups. Not only has this coalition-building strategy led to the formation of new, typically feminist groups oriented toward U.S. agendas and dependent on Western public and private support, it has failed to encourage (or at least, has delayed) the formation and strengthening of cooperative ties between these new groups and the older activist networks formed during glasnost.¹⁵ This coalition-building failure can be attributed in part to a mismatch between the collective action repertoires that local "maternalists" adopt and the feminist one that transnational feminists view as legitimate. Thus, Western policies have stressed an approach that creates considerable unintended negative consequences for post-Soviet women's activism.

A number of new Western-funded civil society building initiatives seek to provide continued relief and support to post-Soviet women's NGOs. According to the most comprehensive recent survey of post-Soviet women's groups to date, 63 percent of Russian women's organizations that responded report that they derive financial resources from Western foundations, while just under a third receive support from their government (Abubikirova et al. 1998, 16). This trend has been observed throughout the region, although in the Caucasus and Central Asian regions Western outreach efforts have largely failed to generate women's activism.¹⁶ This suggests that the region's activist networks may become increasingly divided, rather than being strengthened by increased contact with Western women's activists. This cannot fail to prevent women from sustaining local community initiatives, regaining their lost political influence.

In sum, globalization and the policies intended to soften its effect on post-Soviet societies have had complicated effects on women. The Soviet Union's transition from state socialism to free-market capitalism abruptly overturned a corporatist political system within which women's rights activists and organizations were becoming an increasingly important interest group. Even though men monopolized positions of authority and influence, Soviet women were represented politically by activists who were given access to policy makers through institutionalized political channels. Official governmental women's rights activists and glasnost-era maternalist organizations have been fatally weakened by the dissolution of this corporatist system, but nonetheless, it does seem to be the case that they have a stable, perhaps even growing niche, among the region's women. New post-Soviet groups

are small, rarely cooperate with one another, and rely heavily on Western sources of short-term support. Increasingly dependent on outsiders, post-Soviet women's rights activists and organizations remain poorly positioned to use the political system to revitalize the local infrastructure of women's organizations that might have helped shield local women from the disastrous effects of globalization.

Western initiatives have introduced complementary approaches to the local activist community. The new women's rights activists differ in composition, size, and primary basis of affiliation from the previous generation of Soviet-era women's activists. Women's groups have become more numerous, more overtly political in their demands, and in fact may now have started to develop a broader membership base (although many membership figures that post-Soviet women's groups claim are suspiciously large and may include lapsed members from the Soviet era). However, the activist community remains divided over ideological issues.

There is obviously one possible way out of this dead end: increased local coalitions between older activists who came of age before or during the glasnost eras, and younger activists who have gravitated to Western initiatives. In the short run, this may not be the strategy taken. U.S. women's activists who work for Western foundations and initiatives are often impatient with the Soviet-style women's advocates who run local successors to Soviet Women's Councils, which they see simply as bureaucratically run, mass-membership organizations that are not responsive to their members' needs and requests. But this characterization is only a half truth that obscures the fact that these organizations were anchored in valuable networks of activists who were familiar with local conditions and integrated into preexisting local and regional associations and organizations.

It is worth considering more explicitly what the costs are to leaving the "maternalists" out of Western initiatives. At least in their network ties, these older activists remain far better suited to working within the local political system than foreign-funded groups tied to international agendas. While Women's Councils were also tied to party agendas, these official Soviet women's organizations represent an enormous resource pool of trained leaders and networks of career activists throughout the Soviet Union. Unfortunately, former party members and former party-controlled organizations bore little or no resemblance to the style of activism Western funders (in particular, women's rights advocates) expected to find. As a result, preexisting activists and organizations instead fell into disfavor with reformers, who provided the building blocks for integrating women activists. Although Western funders and advocates never came to see local Women's Councils and other locally based groups as capable of acting in their behalf, these groups continued to become important bases for community activism during and after glasnost. Thus it seems that the effectiveness of Western initiatives might be greater if they placed

priority on building domestic coalitions rather than international partnerships. This is an important point to stress.

Coalition building with external advocates should not be pursued to the exclusion of other strategies for increasing local women's control over other collective action resources. Post-Soviet women who do not fit the leadership profile that Western funders adopt are badly in need of bargaining power to increase their influence over policy making. Prior to glasnost, an absence of democratic freedoms prevented local Soviet women from using official women's associations and local organizational resources to develop the commitments, skills, and resources necessary for effective community activism. Once democratic rights were introduced, these women's groups began to develop new strategies for influencing policy, but they were not far along when the Soviet Union's collapse destroyed a significant share of their previous resource base. Rapid "shock therapy" reforms promoted by the IMF, the World Bank, the EU, and Western governments threaten to undermine existing women's organizations by moving the locus of policy making and funding further beyond their access. As a result, older activists with an understanding of the rules of local politics were at first largely bypassed by Western funders in favor of more radical women's groups of younger activists, many of whom embrace feminism and Western understandings of rights. Although these new women's groups are much easier for Western observers to identify with, they are less effective in mobilizing public support than are older activists. It may be difficult to build bridges between new feminist groups and older networks of Soviet activists, but greater local control over organizational resources and collective action frames will ultimately give local women greater future opportunities for effective and sustained collective action, and this, after all, has long been the objective of Western advocates.

Notes

1. State involvement in and tolerance of overt gender discrimination, and the state's failure to investigate violent crimes against women in post-state socialist countries, are reported in several Helsinki Watch and Women's Rights Project publications (see Human Rights Watch 1992, 1995a, 1995b, and 1997) as well as in the U.S. Department of State's annual human rights reports (see U.S. Department of State 1994, 1997). Governmental responses to global trafficking in women and children from Ukraine and Russia are examined in the United Nations Commission on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice 1996 and in several RFE/RL reports (see Hyde 1998; Kamerud 1988; Moffet 1997). Public policies toward women and families are examined by annual United Nations and USAID reports (see *United Nations Gender in Development Bureau* 1999; USAID 1998).

2. For the most comprehensive Western discussions of the status of Soviet (primarily

Russian) women prior to glasnost, see Lapidus 1978 and Atkinson, Dallin, and Lapidus 1977. For the most comprehensive discussions of the women's activism during and after glasnost, see Buckley 1989 and 1991; Lapidus 1993; Marsh 1996; Pilkington 1996; Posadskaya 1994; Racioppi and O'Sullivan See 1997; and Sperling 1997.

3. I interviewed or consulted representatives or members of the following North American organizations that work with NGOs in the former Soviet Union: the Alliance of Russian and American Women; the Canada-Ukraine Parliamentary Program; the Center for Safe Energy; Counterpart International; Friends of Rukh of Northern New Jersey; Human Rights Watch; ISAR: Initiative for Social Action and Renewal in Eurasia; the MacArthur Foundation; Magee Womancare International; the NIS-US Women's Consortium; the Peace Corps; Planned Parenthood of New England; the Samuel Rubin Foundation; the Ukrainian Women's Union; the United States Agency for International Development; and the US-Ukraine Relief Committee. During extensive field research conducted during winter and spring 2001, I also interviewed representatives and/or members of more than 60 women's NGOs in three Ukrainian cities.

4. Party leader Lazar Kaganovich justified the organization's dissolution with the claim that it had become too focused on women's issues that were better dealt with by the party as a whole: "In view of the fact that work among women has acquired important significance in the present period, it should be carried out by all departments of the Central Committee and, more specifically, it should be continued under the rubric of the successful mass campaigns which the Party organizes in towns and [the] countryside" (Goldman 1996, 63). Historians have produced a considerable literature on the party's treatment of early Soviet women activists. For an overview of the history of the early Soviet women's movement, see Stites 1978. On the rise and fall of the *zhenotdel*, see Clements 1979 and 1992; Farnsworth 1980; Goldman 1996; and Wood 1997.

5. Some official Soviet reports inflated women's political power, and most were largely silent about their continuing problems. One official report widely available in the West claimed that by 1980, Soviet women deputies occupied 49.5 percent of the seats in the USSR's representative institutions, only 3.8 percent less than the proportion of women in the total population (Council for Mutual Economic Assistance 1985). But this statistic was inflated, for women had achieved this level of representation only on relatively powerless local councils. The report failed to point out that Soviet women were not as well represented at higher levels of government. Nor did it indicate their share of party membership.

6. Women's Councils began to be formed locally in small numbers in the late 1950s, but the party came to use these organizations as transmission belts for party directives. Large numbers of Women's Councils were founded during the Khrushchev thaw in the early 1960s, and then again under Gorbachev in the 1980s during glasnost. But these groups tended to be short-lived and isolated (predominating in rural areas). According to Browning's (1987) study of the Women's Councils, they never developed sufficient au-

tonomy to raise women's political awareness or sufficient power to provide women greater access to formal political posts and formal politics (65, 126-29).

7. Buckley 1989 (21) and Muzyria 1989 both give the same figures.

8. For membership figures and alliance structures, I have relied on the two most recent surveys of Ukrainian and Russian women's NGOs, the Women's Information Consultative Center 1996, and Abubikirova et al. 1998.

9. In the Central Asian republics and among minority populations elsewhere, ethnocultural organizations emerged on a far smaller scale, and in most cases, did not achieve wider popular support. Thus far, Central Asian groups that promote a revival of Moslem traditions such as the League of Moslem Women of Kazakhstan, based in Almaty, and the Fatima-Zakhira Society of Moslem Women in Gyandzha, Azerbaijan, have not achieved a mass membership.

10. U.S. government commissions on women's status, by contrast, did become vehicles through which women articulated further political demands for equal rights (see Ferree and Hess 1994, 59-68).

11. For a fascinating English-language collection of Soviet women's responses to the early stages of perestroika and glasnost, see Buckley's (1989) collection.

12. The Eurasia Foundation was created in 1993 to help the NIS introduce markets and democratic institutions. It is funded by both public and private donors.

13. Hence, in contrast to the unknown women who formed local soldiers' mothers groups, several of the consortium's most prominent board members on the Russian side had been leaders of the official Soviet women's organizations and had considerable experience advising government officials and communicating with the mass media.

14. Thus, for example, international agencies have continued to tolerate gross violations of civil rights in Chechnya, but they pulled out of Belarus only after its government repeatedly failed to implement economic reforms.

15. The Soviet state's collapse has permitted widespread intervention by Western states such as the United States and international institutions such as the World Bank and IMF. As reforms accelerated, so has the flow of Western aid and Western representatives who run various Western organizations. Among those who arrived were a wide variety of Western women involved in official intergovernmental scholarly exchanges such as IREX and Fulbright, or in bilateral official exchanges through such governmental organizations as Peace Links or the Citizens Democracy Corps. Many of these women, alarmed by what they perceived to be the remarkable political apathy they encountered among Soviet women and their absence from positions of political power and authority, quickly immersed themselves in local feminist activism. Some translated Western feminist works into Russian and arranged for their publication. Others started feminist publications with Russian partners. Most were frustrated with the resistance to feminism among all but a few of the women they encountered.

Las Mujeres Invisibles/The Invisible Women

Sharon Ann Navarro

16. Nijole White (1997) writes that cooperation with Western women's movements is "likely to continue to play a major part in shaping the strategy of the movements in Latvia and Lithuania and also in lending them support, both moral and material." She concludes that "the women in the Baltic and the women in Russia have two major things in common: the Soviet experience which they strive to leave behind, and the Western models of feminism which they strive to emulate to a greater or lesser extent" (215). By contrast, Shirin Akiner (1997) concludes that in Central Asia, development agencies and NGOs' efforts to integrate women into development programs often misfire. "Central Asians, both men and women, deeply resent what they regard as a patronizing attitude of some of the administrators of these programs [whose] schemes have little relevance to local conditions. . . . Another cause of irritation is the implicit, or even explicit, bias that some Western (or Western-trained) staff display against Islam and traditional society." According to Akiner, women who work with Western organizations are seen as opportunists. Women's organizations are also seen as illegitimate in the Caucasus (Dragadze 1997; Dudwick 1997).

NAFTA is a story of violence against women. It is a treaty that created violence against women and their families. There are tremendous implications, the economic implications and the whole impact it has had on women's health, their lives, their future, and their families. It is as violent as any beating, if not more destructive.

—La Mujer Obrera

EL PASO, TEXAS, IS A MICROCOSM OF THE INHERENT CONTRADICTIONS CREATED BY the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) along the border. On the one hand, NAFTA profoundly shifted the focus of national and international commerce, moving it from an "East-West" emphasis to a "North-South" paradigm. In doing so, El Paso became the gateway to the tremendous economic opportunities available to Mexico and Latin America (Ortega 2000). At the same time, north of the U.S.-Mexican border, NAFTA acted as a catalyst, another force, or another trend, that is steadily squeezing Mexican-American women workers (in the garment industry) to the margins of the economic sector in El Paso. These Mexican-American garment workers are typically low-skilled and low-income women. As the garment industries close down their businesses and move across the border, the Mexican-American women that once worked in these businesses are being left out of the economic restructuring taking place under NAFTA. These women are being marginalized. The type of work that they have done—in some cases for more than twenty, years—is now becoming obsolete and replaced by advanced technology.

Before this study is presented to you, it is important to note that NAFTA is not characterized as *the main factor* for the displacement (or permanent layoffs) of female garment workers in El Paso. NAFTA is instead used by one grassroots non-governmental women's organization, La Mujer Obrera (LMO), as a symbol of what they face as female workers in a border city, as a tool for political activism and