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Orange Harvest?: Women’s Activism and Civil Society in Ukraine, Belarus and Russia since 2004*

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Abstract

Rising authoritarianism throughout post-Soviet countries has met with responses ranging from small-scale revolts to “electoral revolutions.” This article analyzes women’s activism to explore the impact of domestic political opportunity dynamics on the trajectory of civic organizing in Ukraine, Belarus and Russia. The extent and form of state repression are shown to affect the development of women’s activism by influencing the number, scope and capacity of women’s nongovernmental organizations.

Keywords

civil society, women’s activism, Orange Revolution, electoral revolutions, Ukraine, Belarus, Russia, NGOs

Introduction

Numerous recent studies that explore the development of public life in post-Soviet countries have come to the same conclusion: that despite a common experience of rising authoritarianism starting in the 1990s, civil society is stronger and more vibrant today in Ukraine than it is within this country’s closest neighbors, Russia and Belarus. This essay explores the consequences

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of divergent trajectories of civil society development for overcoming long-standing cultures of powerlessness that are one of the legacies of Soviet rule. It also analyzes the new civic cultures that are emerging in these three countries, asking how the Orange Revolution has shaped opportunities for civic engagement.

How does a healthy civil society open up space for articulating new rights? Scholars often assume that the strength of local civil society is an important mediator of efforts to empower marginalized groups of citizens and influence how the government addresses their needs. Public organizing and other forms of civic engagement are widely thought of as activities through which groups whose concerns are excluded from policy agendas can overcome “the problem of the powerless” and begin to develop the capacity to break through and develop political leverage.¹

When socialist states first began democratizing, domestic and foreign observers placed much hope in the growing power of civil society. There was widespread agreement that such new local associations as Charter 77 in Czechoslovakia and Solidarity in Poland were building a new democratic social order. At first, the prospects for such groups seemed excellent in other post-communist contexts. But the revolutions of 1989 brought Western-style liberal democracy only to the western rim of the former communist world (central Europe and the Baltics). Much to everyone’s disappointment, over the following decade civil societies remained weak outside this core. Hope was renewed by a new wave of “colored revolutions” that spread from Serbia in the Balkans (2000) to Georgia in the Caucasus (2003) to Ukraine in Eastern Europe (2004) and finally to Kyrgyzstan in Central Asia (2005). Opposition movements and civic groups elsewhere, including Belarus and Russia, attempted to imitate these “electoral revolutions” but failed.

Accounts of the ongoing weakness of post-Soviet civil societies point to multiple sources. These include cultural attitudes that promote political apathy or cynicism among the broader population, poorly designed Western aid programs and corruption among aid providers and recipients, inadequate

¹ The following analyses of the “problem of the powerless” are particularly relevant to clarifying the dilemmas post-Soviet populations now experience: Frances Fox Piven and Richard A. Cloward, *Poor People’s Movements: Why They Succeed, How They Fail* (New York: Pantheon, 1977); Sidney Tarrow, *Power in Movement: Social Movements, Collective Action and Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1994); and Michael Lipsky, “Protest as a Political Resource,” *American Political Science Review* 62, no. 4 (1968): 1144–58.

access to resources to sustain new civic groups, as well as weak or incomplete legal and institutional mechanisms for civic as well as more broadly political activities.² Arguably, state resistance is the most important factor that has deterred the development of civil society and the consolidation of democracy in post-Soviet countries. Many domestic political regimes have resisted democratization and moved steadily in an authoritarian direction. Incumbent elites viewed new civic groups and political parties as their chief competitors. They have attempted to eliminate, infiltrate, or co-opt them through what theorists have called “preemptive authoritarianism.”³ Rather than undergoing transitions to democracy, such post-communist states as Ukraine under Kuchma and Russia under Putin became “hybrid,” or what Levitsky and Way call “competitive authoritarian” regimes, in which elections are regularly held, but “incumbents routinely abuse state resources, deny the opposition adequate media coverage, harass opposition candidates and their supporters, and in some cases manipulate electoral results” while spying on, threatening, arresting and in some cases, assaulting or murdering journalists and other government critics.⁴

² Strong, autonomous civic associations are believed to offer individuals and social groups channels through which to represent their interests in public life and before the state. Most civic associations in post-Soviet states are in the early stages of formation – they are contending not only with the pervasive cultural legacies of fatalism and civic disengagement that are the result of compulsory participation in Soviet official associations, but also with extreme uncertainty about basic resources needed to sustain an organization. There are few domestic funding sources for NGOs in part because post-Soviet countries have no established culture of philanthropy, but also because businesses and wealthy individuals as well as state agencies have few incentives to consistently fund civic groups. Consequently, most NGOs are only intermittently active and devote a great deal of their time to securing funding from abroad, mainly from Western foundations but also from international and regional civil society development projects. However, dependence upon foreign funding has had many negative effects on local civil society. For an analysis of the impact of foreign funding on NGOs in postcommunist countries, see Sarah Elizabeth Mendelson and John K. Glenn, eds., *The Power and Limits of NGOs: A Critical Look at Building Democracy in Eastern Europe and Eurasia* (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 2002).

³ See Vitali Silitski, “Preempting Democracy: The Case of Belarus,” *Journal of Democracy* 16 (Oct. 2005): 36–51; and *idem*, “A Year After the Color Revolutions: Preemptive Authoritarianism and Challenges for Democratization in the Former Soviet Union” (Georgetown University Program on New Approaches to Research and Security in Eurasia [PONARS] 2005), PONARS Policy Memo No. 376, www.csis.org/media/csis/pubs/pm_0376.pdf (accessed March 31, 2009).

⁴ For an elaboration of the theory of competitive authoritarianism, see Steven Levitsky and Lucan A. Way, “The Rise of Competitive Authoritarianism,” *Journal of Democracy* 13 (April 2002): 51–65.

Below, I use the women's movements in Ukraine, Belarus, and Russia as sites for examining variations in the impact that preemptive authoritarianism and electoral revolutions have had on new civic associations in these countries. I focus on women's activism for three related reasons. First, many Western observers consider there to be a strong association between democratization and the strength of women's groups, treating the latter as an important barometer of the former. Second, as a consequence of such beliefs, women's groups in post-Soviet countries have received considerable encouragement and support from Western benefactors and international democracy observers. Lisa Sundstrom, for instance, argues that, "women's NGOs [non-governmental organizations] are an important sector to observe in Russian civil society" because they afford a context for analyzing the impact upon the capacity for self-organization of citizens not only of the activities of post-Soviet state authorities but also Western donors.⁵ But third, and perhaps most important, women's activism is useful for exploring some of the reasons why three neighboring countries that emerged from a common political order are now developing different civic cultures. Comparing the impact of different patterns of civil society development upon women activists in these three countries helps bring these new cultural differences into sharper contrast.

Post-Soviet authoritarianism and colored revolutions

The early 1990s were a time of great optimism regarding post-Soviet democratization. Government elites exhibited openness to mobilization by civic actors and relaxed prior restrictions on political life throughout the region. But by the end of the 1990s, with the exception of the Baltics, all post-Soviet countries had become noticeably more repressive, although to varying degrees. State repression of civic groups ranged from more moderate and intermittent in such countries as Ukraine and Moldova, to extreme in Belarus and later, Russia.

The political regimes that developed in Ukraine under President Leonid Kuchma, Russia under President Vladimir Putin and Belarus under President Aleksandr Lukashenka (prior to 1997) were competitive authoritarian.⁶

⁵ Lisa Sundstrom, "Women's NGOs in Russia: Struggling from the Margins," *Demokratizatsiya: The Journal of Post-Soviet Democratization* 10, no. 2 (2002): 207–29.

⁶ See Lucan A. Way, "Authoritarian State Building and the Sources of Regime Competitiveness in the Fourth Wave: The Cases of Belarus, Moldova, Russia, and Ukraine," *World Politics* 57, no. 2

Incumbents competed against opposition groups for power. But while elections were regularly held, they were increasingly unfair. Incumbents manipulated their results by relying upon slanted coverage in the media and abusing state resources to coerce voters in state institutions, particularly prisons, hospitals, and military bases. Power holders at first used repression selectively against their critics and relied mainly on softer methods. However, over time, incumbents began to apply both hard and soft forms of repression more systematically and “preemptively.”

In 2004, state authorities in Ukraine initiated such a crackdown on civic groups, the media, and opposition politicians in order to rig the election that was to determine who would succeed Leonid Kuchma as president at the end of his second and final term of office. But this preemptive wave of repression backfired. When the regime announced that its handpicked candidate had won the election, it met with a massive outpouring of public protest in what came to be called the Orange Revolution. More than twenty percent of the adult population of Ukraine – over a million in downtown Kyiv alone – participated in this impressive display of nonviolent civil disobedience and people power.⁷

The Orange Revolution was widely interpreted as “the triumph of civil society” over Ukraine’s authoritarian regime.⁸ While it is debatable whether civil society itself was as strong and vibrant as observers of the inspirational displays of protesters on the Maidan (Kyiv’s central square) suggested at the time, after the Orange Revolution state authorities lifted preexisting administrative barriers to the functioning of civil society. Something close to a consensus has developed among international monitoring groups that since the Orange Revolution and the election of Victor Yushchenko citizens face few limits on their freedom to form groups concerned with civil rights or political opposition; that significant advances have been made regarding the freedom of citizens to hold political demonstrations; and that significant steps have also been made to diversify the viewpoints offered in the media. Most notably, progress

(2005): 231-61; and Lucan A. Way, “Kuchma’s Failed Authoritarianism,” *Journal of Democracy* 16, no. 2 (2005): 131-45.

⁷ For an estimate of public participation in the Orange Revolution, see Viktor Stepanenko, “How Ukrainians View Their Orange Revolution: Public Opinion and the National Peculiarities of Citizenry Political Activities,” *Demokratizatsiya* 13, no. 4 (2005): 595-616.

⁸ See Nadia Diuk, “The Triumph of Civil Society,” in *Revolution in Orange*, ed. A. Aslund and M. McFaul (Washington DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2006), pp. 69-84; and Taras Kuzio, “The Opposition’s Road to Success,” *Journal of Democracy* 16, no. 2 (2005): 117-30.

has been made in removing direct censorship at the national level and in the press.⁹ Furthermore, state authorities at the national level have opened up more channels of cooperation with civic groups. And in contrast to the past, authorities no longer publicly accuse civic groups that criticize the government of serving as agents of Western governments. In short, the president elected through this electoral revolution has in fact discontinued many of the authoritarian practices of his predecessor. This is not to say that there are no violations of human rights and civil liberties in Ukraine.¹⁰ Monitoring groups, such as Freedom House, consider Ukraine to be a “hybrid regime,” in which some authoritarian elements remain but significant progress toward building democratic institutions can also be observed.

As “electoral revolutions” spread, speculation started that such protests would soon be imitated by opposition groups elsewhere, leading to the defeat of autocratic regimes in other countries, including Ukraine’s two closest neighbors, Russia and Belarus. But instead, repression significantly intensified in these countries as regime elites responded to the threat of “colored revolutions” with renewed preemptive authoritarianism against domestic opposition groups, human rights observers, and journalists, all of whom had already been subjected to increasing state repression in prior years.¹¹ Power holders also began to systematically restrict the activities of Western democracy and civil society programs, which were seen as having provided crucial support to domestic opposition groups that participated in successful electoral revolutions.¹² In other words, rather than spreading “colored revolutions,” electoral

⁹ Not only Freedom House but also many other monitoring groups have noted that the Ukrainian government now respects freedom of association and related civil liberties. See, for instance, “Ukraine,” *Amnesty International Report 2008*, <http://thereport.amnesty.org/eng/regions/europe-and-central-asia/ukraine> (accessed November 8, 2008).

¹⁰ For an analysis of human rights violations in Ukraine, see “Ukraine,” *Human Rights in the OSCE Region: Europe, Central Asia and North America, Report 2007 (Events of 2006)*, http://www.ihf-hr.org/documents/doc_summary.php?sec_id=3&d_id=4387 (accessed November 8, 2008). See also, “Universal Periodic Review of Ukraine,” *Human Rights Watch’s Submission to the Human Rights Council* (5 May 2008), <http://hrw.org/english/docs/2008/04/07/global18583.htm> (accessed November 8, 2008).

¹¹ The Russian government has restricted civil liberties and harassed civic groups since Vladimir Putin first came to power in 2000. For an overview, see Freedom House, “Russia,” *Freedom of Association under Threat: The New Authoritarians’ Offensive against Civil Society* (Freedom House, 2008), <http://www.freedomhouse.org/> (accessed November 16, 2008).

¹² For discussions of the crucial role of Western democracy programs, see Valerie J. Bunce and Sharon L. Wolchik, “International Diffusion and Postcommunist Electoral Revolutions,” *Communist and Post-Communist Studies* 39, no. 3 (2006): 283–304; and Andrew Wilson,

revolutions in these cases triggered an autocratic backlash that further weakened civil societies and consolidated authoritarian rule.¹³

In Russia and Belarus, an immediate consequence of post-Orange Revolution preemptive authoritarianism was the development of new laws that allow state agencies “legally” to harass, persecute, or extort cooperative behavior from critics of the regime. For example, in 2006 a new law on non-governmental organizations (NGOs) was passed in Russia. The 2006 Law on NGOs obligates foreign as well as domestic NGOs to submit extensive reports on their planned activities for the upcoming year, and enables authorities to shut them down if they appear to deviate from Russian “morals” or engage in activities that are judged to threaten the country’s national security. Since this law’s adoption, state authorities have used this law to subject both recipients and donors of foreign grants to increased scrutiny, particularly those organizations that are accused of promoting “anti-Russian” or “foreign values.”¹⁴ State authorities have also made clear that in the near future, they expect Western donors to leave the country and the state to become the main source of funding for domestic civic groups.

The new law has introduced stringent oversight of both domestic and foreign NGOs by the Federal Registration Service, a branch of the Ministry of Justice. This administrative structure has refused registration to thousands of civic groups and considers two thirds of the NGOs now registered in Russia to be in non-compliance with the law.¹⁵ The Registration Service has used the

“Ukraine’s Orange Revolution, NGOs, and the Role of the West,” *Cambridge Review of International Affairs* 19, no. 1 (2006): 21–32.

¹³ As a consequence of the general deterioration in the Russian state’s observance of democratic norms that has occurred since the Orange Revolution, in 2005 the monitoring group Freedom House changed the status of Russia from “partially free” to “not free.” Freedom House now considers Russia to be a “partially consolidated authoritarian regime” and expresses concern that state campaigns have the potential to transform Russian civil society into an extension of the state. It classifies Belarus as being a “fully consolidated authoritarian regime” and notes that “institutions securing the absolute presidential control over state, society, and the electoral process remain fully in place.” See Freedom House, “Democracy Score 2008 Rankings by Regime Type,” <http://freedomhouse.org/template.cfm?page=438&year=2008> (accessed November 12, 2008).

¹⁴ See “Russia,” *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices 2007*, released by the U.S. State Department Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, March 11, 2008, <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2007/100581.htm> (accessed October 25, 2008). See also “Russia,” *Amnesty International Report 2008*, <http://thereport.amnesty.org/eng/regions/europe-and-central-asia/russian-federation> (accessed November 8, 2008).

¹⁵ See “Nations in Transit 2008: Russia,” released by Freedom House, <http://www.freedomhouse.org/> (accessed October 25, 2008).

NGO law as a pretext for harassing civic groups, in particular, those that monitor abuses within the armed forces, security service, and police.¹⁶ It also temporarily suspended the activities of Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International, the International Republican Institute and more than 90 other foreign nongovernmental organizations.¹⁷ Extremely brutal harassment – including violence – has also been used against individual critics of the government, several of whom have been killed. Media smear campaigns reminiscent of the Soviet era have also been unleashed to de-legitimize opposition candidates and their supporters.¹⁸ Observers have interpreted all of these as preemptive efforts to prevent a domestic “colored revolution.”¹⁹

In Belarus, the regime’s crackdown on civil society was even more severe than in Russia. The Belarusian state has long subjected representatives of civic groups to extreme harassment, including physical attacks, arbitrary detention, and, occasionally, disappearances. Since the Orange Revolution, it has placed even greater restrictions on civic groups and intensified its pressure on opposition activists. In 2005 a new law was passed that in most respects resembles the Russian Law on NGOs. It requires NGOs to comply with extensive registration and reporting procedures, largely prohibits acceptance of foreign assistance, and allows authorities to deregister a group for minor administrative infractions. Numerous civic groups have disbanded or been deregistered. The groups that have managed to remain registered are in large part controlled by the government and engage only in activities condoned by state authorities. The operation of human rights organizations has become nearly impossible due to extreme harassment by security officials and other state authorities and new laws that impose sentences of up to two years for criticizing the government.²⁰

¹⁶ “Russia,” *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices 2007*.

¹⁷ See RusData Dialine – Russian Press Digest, November 8, 2006, <http://www.lexisnexis/> (accessed April 21, 2009).

¹⁸ See “NGO Activist to File Lawsuits,” *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty Newslines*, Febr. 1, 2006.

¹⁹ See Thomas Carothers, “The Backlash Against Democracy Promotion,” *Foreign Affairs*, March 2006; Yevgeny Volk, “Russia’s NGO Law: An Attack on Freedom and Civil Society” (The Heritage Foundation, May 24, 2006), <http://www.heritage.org> (accessed December 18, 2008); and James Sherr, “The Implications of Russia’s Elections: Relations with the ‘Near Abroad,’” released by the Institute for Security and Development Policy, Stockholm-Nacka, Sweden, April 2008, <http://www.isdp.eu/files/publications/pp/08/js08implicationsof.pdf> (accessed December 26, 2008).

²⁰ Public criticism of the government at home or abroad is no longer legal. Amendments to the criminal code introduced in 2005 call for harsh sentences for “discrediting the Republic of

The “colored revolutions,” particularly the Orange Revolution, marked a critical juncture for democratization in these three states, yielding greater openness to civic engagement and Western influence in Ukraine, but resulting in an authoritarian assault upon civil society and Western aid providers in Russia and Belarus. Since the Orange Revolution, authorities in both Russia and Belarus have created new legal as well as extra-legal measures to restrict the activities of civic groups. In such “managed democracies,” civic groups that publicly challenge the government are deterred by a broad range of obstacles that significantly raise the cost of civic engagement. The principal problems that civic actors face in such authoritarian contexts include: the state’s adversarial stance toward domestic civic groups and government critics, who are now the targets of considerable repression, particularly at election time; the state’s effort to starve civic groups of the crucial resources they need to sustain themselves; and the legal and regulatory environment, because new administrative and reporting policies allow the state to exert significant control over civic organizations. New laws are being used in both countries to limit the activities of non-state actors in public life. Civic groups can be shut down if they are accused of threatening “national values.” We would expect participation in public life to shrink in such a hostile political environment, as local elites “preemptively” crush the building blocks of civil society.

Within Ukraine, by contrast, state authorities attempted to repress their opponents and critics in a similar fashion but failed. Mass participation in the Orange Revolution forced the opening up of the political system. State authorities must now express greater tolerance and openness toward receiving input from civic groups, out of fear for what might happen if citizens once again draw together to overthrow their leaders. We would expect that this favorable shift in political opportunities, together with the public’s recent experience of successful civil disobedience, might contribute in Ukraine to a cascading

Belarus.” According to the new law, providing international organizations with “false information” on the human rights situation in Belarus is punishable by up to two years in prison. According to the IREX Media Sustainability Index assessment of freedom of speech in Belarus, “Amendments to the criminal code were introduced in December 2005 to add a new article, “Discrediting the Republic of Belarus,” that provides for criminal liability for submitting to international organizations “false information” on the situation in the country. Human rights groups, both domestic and international, believe the article’s vague wording makes it possible for the government to penalize anyone reporting negative information with detention of up to six months or imprisonment of up to two years. See “Belarus,” MSI Europe & Eurasia 2008: The Development of Sustainable Media in Europe and Eurasia (IREX, 2008), http://www.irex.org/programs/MSI_EUR/2008/belarus.asp (accessed January 6, 2009).

process of “cognitive liberation” that would further open up the political system to new demands by groups that had previously remained political marginal. To determine how the Orange Revolution has reshaped citizens’ efforts to articulate interests and be heard, I next turn to examine the dynamics of women’s organizing before and after this event.

Women’s activism in Ukraine

The pattern of organizational development and political influence among women’s rights organizations in Ukraine resembles pan-Soviet trends. But it differs in key respects from Belarus and Russia as well as other post-Soviet cases. Just as in other post-communist countries, intellectuals and government leaders have promoted a local cult of domesticity and motherhood.²¹ It is expressed through a myth of the heroic, suffering Ukrainian woman (the *Berehynia*, or Hearth Guardian).²² This cult has created a strong foundation in public discourse for coding politics as a masculine endeavor. In contrast, women’s activism and, more broadly, civil society, are both coded as feminine.²³

Yet, domestic political elites have chosen to pass a number of laws and policies to secure equal opportunities for men and women in the workplace, protect women from gender discrimination, and promote equal involvement of men and women in the family. These efforts are not the result of a strong and united women’s movement fighting for such measures. Gender equity legislation has been promoted by a small group of domestic women’s rights NGOs that represent a tiny minority of the country’s numerous women’s groups. The reason why this policy trajectory has been pursued is that the lawmakers and government leaders who backed the Orange Revolution also support Ukraine’s entrance into the European Union (EU), which requires prospective members to harmonize their legislation with EU laws, including gender equity

²¹ Kathryn Verdery, “From Parent-State to Family Patriarchs – Gender and Nation in Contemporary Eastern Europe,” *East European Politics and Societies* 8, no. 2 (1994): 225–55.

²² For a discussion of the cult of the *Berehynia*, see Marian Rubchak, “Christian Virgin or Pagan Goddess: Feminism versus the Eternally Feminine in Ukraine,” in *Women in Russia and Ukraine*, ed. Rosalind Marsh (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2001), pp. 315–30.

²³ Susan Gal and Gail Kligman, *The Politics of Gender after Socialism: A Comparative-Historical Essay* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton Univ. Press, 2000), pp. 91–108.

directives.²⁴ The gradual victory of Western-leaning political forces in this country has consequently created greater openings for advocates of policies to protect women's rights.

Numerous new women's organizations emerged in Ukraine in the 1990s.²⁵ There were three main channels of recruitment into women's activism. The first was the Communist Party apparatus and, in particular, the Union of Women of Ukraine, the post-Soviet successor to the official Women's Council of the Soviet era.²⁶ The second was the independence movement, Rukh and its successors.²⁷ The third was Western initiatives to raise women's issues, such as the Soros-financed International Renaissance Foundation's Women in Society Program, the USAID-financed US-NIS Women's Consortium, and the UNDP's Project for Equal Opportunities.

The women's movement appeared in the early years of independence to be weak, disunited, and dominated by conservative voices.²⁸ No women's party succeeded in winning seats in parliament (in contrast to Russia, discussed further below). Indeed, there was no parliamentary women's caucus bringing

²⁴ Indeed, well before the Orange Revolution, Viktor Yushchenko and other Western-leaning policymakers began to support equal opportunity and gender mainstreaming policies, in the hope that this would help advance the country's case for entering the EU.

²⁵ The number of women's organization registered with the state increased from 575 in 1997 to 992 in 2000. See Oleksandr Sydorenko, "Zhinochi orhanizatsii Ukrainy: Tendentsii stanovlennia" (Kyiv: Center for Innovation and Development, n.d.). Available at <http://portal.uwf.kiev.ua/> (accessed December 15, 2008)

²⁶ After the Soviet Union collapsed, the women's councils' leadership established the Union of Women of Ukraine (Spilka Zhinok Ukrainy). Women's councils were dissolved throughout western Ukraine, but many regained their footing. Several later split off and reemerged under new names, typically in partnership with new politicians, political parties, and political party blocs in eastern and southern Ukraine that viewed women's issues as potential sources of electoral support.

²⁷ Women became active in Rukh out of anger over the Soviet state's cover-up of the Chernobyl nuclear accident and the mistreatment of Ukrainian soldiers within the Soviet military, and also in order to aid the revival of the Ukrainian language and traditions. After independence was achieved, the Women's Council was reestablished under a new name, the Union of Women of Ukraine. Meanwhile, some of the independent movement's women leaders began to develop agendas of their own, differentiating themselves from other groups and identifying new concerns for women as a population.

²⁸ See Solomea Pavlychko, "Between Feminism and Nationalism: New Women's Groups in the Ukraine," in *Perestroika and Soviet Women*, ed. Mary Buckley (Cambridge Univ. Press, 1992), pp. 82-96; and Solomea Pavlychko, "Progress on Hold: The Conservative Faces of Women in Ukraine," in *Post-Soviet Women: From the Baltic to Central Asia*, ed. Mary Buckley (Cambridge Univ. Press, 1997), pp. 219-34.

together lawmakers interested in women's issues.²⁹ Most women's organizations embraced a "maternalist" style of activism that focuses on improving the welfare of children or families. Several of the most publicly visible women's organizations took their inspiration from past forms of civic activism involving women in nation building rather than in campaigning for their rights. Atena Pashko, the wife of Rukh founder Viacheslav Chornovil, became the first leader of the Ukrainian Women's Confederation (Soiuz Ukrainok), which was based on an eponymous organization dating from the pre-Soviet era. Local scholars categorize such groups as "traditional" women's organizations to indicate that they do not challenge the gender system.³⁰ The Ukrainian Women's Confederation, for instance, openly expressed skepticism about whether feminism was relevant to furthering the political interests of Ukrainian women, who, Pashko argued, had been oppressed more by the consequences of statelessness and colonization than by Ukrainian men. Organizations espousing such a nationalist agenda grew in public prominence in the 1990s. As the regime became more concerned about controlling the outcomes of elections, women's groups that were allied closely with President Kuchma were also employed during election campaigns to influence voters by distributing

²⁹) For a detailed discussion of women's political representation, see Alexandra Hrycak, "Gender and the Orange Revolution," *Journal of Communist Studies and Transition Politics* 23, no. 1 (2007): 152-79.

³⁰) The designation "traditional" was widely used in this way by those I interviewed in Ukraine. It is also the main designation used by the primary local scholars of women's activism in Ukraine. It is used, for instance, in the only scholarly monograph that examines the role of different forms of women's activism in Ukraine in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. See Liudmyla Smoliar [Lyudmyla Smolyar], ed., *Zhinochi studii v Ukraini: Zhinka v istorii ta s'obodni* (Odesa: AstroPrynt, 1999). The vast majority of women's groups fall into this category. They typically focus on the welfare of children and families and view women's activism as an extension of maternal carework. Among the best known of these are such groups as the Soiuz Ukrainok (Union of Ukrainian Women) and soldiers' mothers organizations, but several other less publicly visible groups that were offshoots of Rukh and have remained closely allied with center right political parties and politicians also fall into this category. For explorations of the role motherhood and maternal values play in motivating participation in several different women's organizations, see Sarah D. Phillips, "NGOs in Ukraine: The Makings of a 'Women's Space'?" *Anthropology of East Europe Review* 18, no. 2 (Autumn 2000): 23-29; Sarah D. Phillips, *Women's Social Activism in the New Ukraine: Development and the Politics of Differentiation* (Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 2008); Alexandra Hrycak, "Foundation Feminism and the Articulation of Hybrid Feminisms in Post-Socialist Ukraine," *East European Politics and Societies*, 20 (2006): 69-100; and Alexandra Hrycak, "Seeing Orange: Women's Activism and Ukraine's Orange Revolution," *Women's Studies Quarterly* 35 (Fall-Winter 2007): 208-25.

gifts to needy children and hosting events representing their party's commitment to family values. These efforts were intended to attract voters away from the Western-leaning political blocs that were vying for power against Kuchma.

In the mid 1990s, young scholars also laid the foundations for the first women's and gender studies centers and women's rights groups.³¹ But women's rights activism initially lacked public influence and made little impact on state policy. This changed in the late 1990s, as new access points were created by the rising political prominence of Western-leaning domestic political parties as well as by international pressure on Ukraine to address its worsening human rights record.³² A key initial outcome of these advocacy efforts was the passage in 1999 of new legislation against human trafficking that was viewed positively by international observers.³³ A second crucial outcome was the 2001 passage of the Law on the Prevention of Domestic Violence, the first legislation of its kind in the former Soviet Union.³⁴

Initially, few steps were taken to promote gender equity legislation and implement policies to protect women's rights. Several initial drafts of equal opportunity legislation were introduced in the Rada by Western-leaning lawmakers, but all were rejected due to the opposition of conservative lawmakers aligned with the left, who argued that Ukraine could not afford to adopt Western-style laws that placed women's equality before children's

³¹ Solomea Pavlychko, the daughter of Rukh leader Dmytro Pavlychko, helped to found the Women's Community (Zhinocha Hromada), which articulated commitments to both national liberation and women's rights. She and other Rukh-allied intellectuals went on to establish Ukraine's first gender studies centers.

³² Politicians such as Viktor Yushchenko, who, as prime minister from 1999 until 2001, began looking for ways to move Ukraine closer to joining the EU, learned that prospective members must show respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms and harmonize their legislation with that of the EU. Domestic women's rights organizations that worked in close partnership with international organizations on anti-violence campaigns were very eager to help them start the European harmonization process through new policies protecting women's rights and laws based on gender equity principles.

³³ Olga Pyschulina, "An Evaluation of Ukrainian Legislation to Counter and Criminalize Human Trafficking," *Demokratyzatsiya: The Journal of Post-Soviet Democratization* 11, no. 3 (Summer 2003): 403–11.

³⁴ The Law on the Prevention of Domestic Violence calls for the state to provide funding to nonprofit crisis centers, shelters, hot lines, and other facilities that provide medical and social rehabilitation services to victims of domestic violence. It specifies conditions under which temporary restraining orders are to be issued. It also requires perpetrators of domestic violence to attend training sessions on non-violent behavior patterns.

welfare.³⁵ Implementation of the provisions of the law on domestic violence prevention also did not occur at first. For instance, the law requires the government to operate a shelter and to support crisis centers in every major city, but in practice, during the presidency of Leonid Kuchma, municipal authorities failed to do so. The few shelters or crisis centers that existed had been established prior to the law's passage through Western grants and supplementary funding from municipal authorities that were sympathetic to women reformers.

The situation changed for the better soon after the Orange Revolution brought Western-leaning political elites into power. After President Yushchenko assumed office, state authorities increased the number of state-run hot lines, shelters, and other forms of practical support for victims of domestic violence. They also opened six new shelters for victims of domestic violence, eighteen new crisis centers that provided a wide range of services to women going through crises, such as divorce or domestic violence, and twenty-four new centers for psychological and medical assistance. Gender equality legislation was passed, and gender advisory bodies were created within government ministries in order to provide expertise from women's rights groups on how to further harmonize Ukrainian and EU policies. Women's and human rights groups also were given the opportunity to discuss the shortcomings of the implementation of laws and policies with lawmakers and state authorities through a Parliamentary Hearing on Gender Violence held in November 2006.³⁶ In February 2007, the Ukrainian parliament held the first discussion of a new draft law to amend the law on domestic violence to bring it in line with the recommendations made by women's rights advocates and Amnesty International.³⁷ The Rada passed this law in 2008. The amendment was heralded by women's rights activists as an important step forward for protecting women from violence, as it deleted language which could lead women to be blamed for provoking violence, and thus permit perpetrators to avoid prosecution. The improved public climate has not resulted in a dramatic new wave

³⁵ A draft law "On the equal rights of men and women," prepared by the Gender Initiative Group of the Parliament of Ukraine (Verkhovna Rada) with the participation of lawyers and women's NGOs, was first submitted in 2001 but failed to pass.

³⁶ Women's rights advocates were concerned by the lack of state support ensuring adequate short-term and long-term alternative housing for victims of domestic violence as well as elements of the original law that they deemed harmful to women.

³⁷ "Ukraine," *Amnesty International Report 2008*, <http://thereport.amnesty.org/eng/regions/europe-and-central-asia/ukraine> (accessed November 8, 2008).

of women's activism. But the Orange Revolution appears to have encouraged a revival of interest in feminism, particularly among the "Orange Generation" of young women who participated actively in the Orange Revolution. Since the Orange Revolution, new forms of feminist-inspired women's activism have emerged within and around universities. In Kyiv, dramatic street theater performances have been used by a newly established group of university students, FEMEN, to publicize the impact of human trafficking on Ukrainian women. Discussions of feminism have entered public intellectual forums where feminism was treated with ridicule in the past. Courses exploring gender issues have been taught at every level of the educational system, including secondary schools. Women's and gender studies perspectives have been added to the university curriculum in such fields as American studies, sociology, journalism, and Ukrainian history. New gender textbooks have been published for use in a variety of academic programs.³⁸ Engagement with feminist principles is now reflected in discussions that young Ukrainian women and men conduct in various public contexts, including Internet sites and listservs (while only a few sites and listservs are devoted exclusively to feminism or gender studies, informal but in-depth and lively discussions of feminism and such issues as gender equality and women's reproductive health are now becoming common on Ukrainian discussion boards on LiveJournal). A new genre of creative writing called *zhinoche pysmo* (women's writing) has vastly expanded discussions among intellectuals of the complex, contradictory situation of women in Ukraine. And a new field of scholarly literature has come into existence that uses a gender lens to explore popular culture, Ukrainian literature, the women's movement, and the role of women in Ukrainian nation building and contemporary politics.

Women's activism within Russia

Efforts by women's NGOs to challenge gender subordination and engage women as citizens have experienced mixed success in Russia.³⁹ Several

³⁸ A 2004 gender studies text that was given an official stamp of approval (*hryf*) by the Ministry of Education is now officially recommended for use by all universities, where it is inspiring spirited discussions of whether it is better than comparable Russian-language sources. See Marta Skoryk, ed. *Osnovy teorii genderu: Navchal'nyi posibnyk* (Kyiv: K.I.S., 2004).

³⁹ See Valerie Sperling, *Organizing Women in Contemporary Russia: Engendering Transition* (New York: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1999) and Lisa Sundstrom, "Women's NGOs in Russia: Struggling

thousand women's groups have been established. Among the earliest groups were organizations of mothers concerned with the violent abuse of military conscripts. Hundreds of new groups were registered annually in the 1990s. Some of these have focused their activities on defending the rights of women or addressing long-ignored issues, such as domestic violence, although many more focus primarily on providing aid to families, particularly needy children.⁴⁰

Two distinct cohorts of women's activists became involved in challenging neotraditional laws. Women's rights activism, focused explicitly on improving the status of women, first emerged in the early 1990s within universities and academic institutes. In 1988, a small group of young scholars employed by the Russian Academy of Sciences founded the League for Society's Liberation from Stereotypes (LOTOS). In 1991, LOTOS became the basis for the Moscow Center for Gender Studies. That year, women representing the Moscow Center for Gender Studies, and over forty other new women's groups held the First Independent Women's Forum. The Forum was the first women's conference organized independently of the state. In 1992, the second such conference hosted five hundred women from nearly seventy groups.

A second and somewhat older cohort of women's activists emerged from Soviet official women's organizations. In 1991, after the collapse of the Soviet Union, official women's organizations reorganized. In 1993, their leaders founded the Women of Russia party (WOR). The party won 8 percent of the vote and 22 seats in the Duma. WOR employed a neo-Soviet discourse focused on protecting motherhood and the family. Nevertheless, once it entered the Duma, WOR initiated important legislation to defend women's rights.⁴¹

from the Margins," *Demokratizatsiya: The Journal of Post-Soviet Democratization* 10, no. 2 (2002): 207-29.

⁴⁰ Alexandra Hrycak, "From Mothers' Rights to Equal Rights: Post-Soviet Grassroots Women's Associations," in *Women's Community Activism and Globalization: Linking the Local and Global for Social Change*, ed. N. Naples and M. K. Desai (New York: Routledge, 2002), pp. 64-82.

⁴¹ For a discussion of the Women of Russia party, see Sperling, *Organizing Women in Contemporary Russia* and Amy Caiazza, *Mothers & Soldiers: Gender, Citizenship, and Civil Society in Contemporary Russia* (New York: Routledge, 2002). Caiazza argues that the Women of Russia party and the Union of Russian Women, which utilized the national motherhood frame, focusing on the traditional cultural gender roles of women, took up much of the institutional space in Russia to women's organizations. Other groups employing different frames, such as the Moscow Center for Gender Studies, felt they had to work around them. Nonetheless, despite their differences, in the 1990s these two wings of the women's movement participated side-by-side in the articulation of crucial new policies and laws.

In 1994, for instance, WOR introduced the first draft law on the prevention of domestic violence. When conservative lawmakers later proposed changes to the Constitution and new policies that threatened to curtail women's rights (for instance, by defining the family, not the individual, as the basic unit of law), WOR proposed amendments and often succeeded in staving off curtailments of women's rights. But in 1995, WOR lost nearly all of its seats in the Russian Duma. At first, legislation continued to promote women's rights. In 1997, for instance, the chair of the Duma Committee on Issues of Women, Family and Youth, introduced the Legal Framework on Equal Rights and Equal Opportunities, outlining legal strategies for achieving equal rights and opportunities for men and women. But later reforms stalled.

In the mid-1990s, despite considerable ideological differences, these two wings of the women's movement both worked on key legislation to strengthen women's rights and participated in shaping the government's policies dedicated to improving the status of women in the country.⁴² But as the country's political system became more closed and autocratic, the women's rights agenda became more marginal in public life and also lost its earlier political salience. Under the presidency and then premiership of Vladimir Putin, a pronatalist, nationalist discourse has become a central determinant of state policy toward women.⁴³ Rather than acting as an independent force representing women's interests, Women of Russia merged with Putin's party, United Russia, which has controlled the Duma for several years. Conservative lawmakers belonging to United Russia have introduced new restrictions on abortion and announced plans to introduce laws on behalf of "fetal rights." Women's rights organizations have done little to publicly challenge such moves.

Rising conservatism among lawmakers and growing state regulation of civic groups have made it more difficult to raise women's rights issues within state agencies. Women's advocates have not been able to draw the attention of state authorities to the issue of domestic violence, which for nearly fifteen years has

⁴² The 2001 Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women concluded that in Russia, women "had taken an active part in the reform process, resulting in the expansion of the women's movement, especially over the past three years. Women's non-governmental organizations had participated in all major national events and discussions on socio-economic and political issues." See "Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, Concluding Observations: Russian Federation (2002)," <http://www1.umn.edu/humanrts/cedaw/russia2002.html> (accessed October 29, 2008).

⁴³ Janet E. Johnson, "Gender under Putin," paper presented at the American Political Science Association Annual Convention, August 30, 2008.

been a central focus of many women's advocacy NGOs.⁴⁴ More than forty drafts of a civil law against domestic violence have been rejected by the Duma.⁴⁵ State funding of crisis centers and hotlines has been promised by state authorities, but remains woefully inadequate.⁴⁶ There are roughly twenty-five crisis centers and six shelters providing support for victims of violence. Not only are there too few such organizations to serve a population of 142 million people spanning eleven time zones, nearly all are NGOs. As foreign funding opportunities decline in response to Putin's new policies to discourage Western funding, and the rising conservatism has closed off earlier political access points, women's rights NGOs face an uncertain future. In 2007, the NGO Anna National Center for the Prevention of Violence reported that 22 of the 170 domestic violence prevention groups it works with in Russia had closed, primarily owing to lack of financing.⁴⁷

Western donors have helped women's NGOs develop and become more professional.⁴⁸ They have created institutional space for numerous women's initiatives, including gender studies centers, hot lines, and crisis centers. Through their support, representatives of the Russian women's movement have established ties with Western women's rights groups. Academics conduct research and advocacy work that contributes to understanding gender issues in

⁴⁴ Janet E. Johnson, *Gender Violence in Russia: The Politics of Feminist Intervention* (Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 2009).

⁴⁵ Radhika Coomaraswamy, "Russia," in *Integration of the Human Rights of Women and the Gender Perspective: Violence Against Women, Report of the Special Rapporteur on Violence against Women, Its Causes and Consequences, Submitted in Accordance with Commission on Human Rights resolution 2002/52* (New York: United Nations Economic and Social Council, 2006), p. 378.

⁴⁶ According to Amnesty International, in 2007 "Government support for crisis centers and hotlines was totally inadequate. No measures under Russian law specifically addressed violence against women in the family." See "Russia," *Amnesty International Report 2008*, <http://thereport.amnesty.org/eng/regions/europe-and-central-asia/russian-federation> (accessed November 8, 2008).

⁴⁷ "Russia," *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: 2007*, released by the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, U.S. State Department, March 11, 2008, <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2007/100581.htm> (accessed November 14, 2008).

⁴⁸ Explorations of the impact of Western initiatives on women's activism conclude that, in some cases, they have also led to an artificial inflation in the number of women's groups, for instance, by encouraging the establishment of "paper organizations" by individuals who simultaneously operate several different organizations in order to maximize funding streams. Laura A. Henry refers to these as "NGIs," or non-governmental individuals. See Laura A. Henry, "The Greening of Grassroots Democracy?: The Russian Environmental Movement, Foreign Aid, and Democratization" (Berkeley, CA: Working Paper, Program in Soviet and Post-Soviet Studies, Univ. of California at Berkeley, 2001), p. 10.

Russia. NGO professionals also provide new social services to help women and families. Through their support, Russian women's activism has sustained itself despite an inhospitable political climate.

Women's activism in Belarus

Women's organizations' efforts to challenge gender domination and empower women as civic actors have experienced little success in Belarus since the late 1990s.⁴⁹ Around forty non-governmental women's organizations have been founded to date in this country, twenty at the national and twenty at the local level.⁵⁰ The first new organization was the Committee of Soldiers' Mothers,

⁴⁹ For the most current information on women's rights activities in Belarus, I have relied on a 2005 report from the government of Belarus to the United Nations. See "Information from the competent bodies in the Republic of Belarus concerning the implementation of Commission on Human Rights resolution No. 2003/45," Office of the United Nations High Commissioner on Human Rights, Special Rapporteur on Violence against Women, Its Causes and Consequences, <http://www2.ohchr.org/english/issues/women/rapporteur/Belarus.pdf> (accessed March 31, 2009). I have also reviewed Amnesty International, "Belarus: Domestic violence – more than a private scandal" (Amnesty International, 2006), <http://web.amnesty.org/library/index/engneur490142006> (accessed December 26, 2008). It is difficult to get more current information because Belarus has not been conducting reports on its treaty compliance and obstructs the activities of human rights observers. Belarus is required to submit periodic reports detailing its compliance with and implementation of several international conventions that concern women's rights. Its First Periodic Report regarding the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict was due on February 25, 2008 and is overdue. The country's Fifth Periodic Report on the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights was due on November 7, 2001 and is overdue. The country's Fourth Periodic Report on the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights was due on June 30, 1999, and the Fifth Periodic Report was due on June 30, 2004. Both are now overdue. Its Seventh Periodic Report on the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women was due on September 3, 2006 and is now overdue. The country's Fourth Periodic Report on the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment was due on June 25, 2000 and the Fifth Periodic Report was due on June 25, 2004. Both are overdue.

⁵⁰ See United Nations in Belarus, "Belarusian Women as seen Through an Era" (no date), <http://un.by/en/publications/thema/belwomen/19-02-04-4.html> (accessed October 29, 2008). See also Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, Thirtieth session, "Consideration of reports submitted by States parties under article 18 of the Convention (continued), Combined fourth, fifth and sixth periodic report of Belarus (CEDAW/C/BLR/4-6; CEDAW/PSWG/2004/CRP.1/Add.1 and CRP.2/Add.1), Summary record of the 643rd

focused on protecting military conscripts from hazing. In 1991, after the Soviet Union's collapse, the official women's organization (the Belarusian Committee of Soviet Women) renamed itself the Union of Women in Belarus. The Belarusian Popular Front served as a second crucial channel through which women entered public life. Women who first became active within the front later went on to establish or join new women's organizations as well as human rights organizations, such as the Belarusian Helsinki Committee.⁵¹

The peak of activity among women's organizations was the second half of the 1990s. During this time, programs funded by various Western governments, private foundations such as the Belarus Soros Foundation, and the United Nations Development Program acted as incubators for the country's nascent women's movement. With their assistance, in the mid- to late-1990s new women's organizations were founded. Conferences, seminars, and other public events were held to assess the status of women and examine gender discrimination in the workplace, domestic violence, and other problems that had been taboo in the Soviet era. New projects were developed to bring Belarus into compliance with its international treaty commitments regarding women's rights.

In the late 1990s, state repression intensified against civic associations and critics of the government. Harassment by state authorities forced the Soros Foundation to leave the country, cutting domestic groups off from a main source of funding. Women's rights projects continued to exist, despite increased restrictions, but made little impact on the state's handling of gender issues. For instance, in 2003 a draft law against domestic violence was developed by domestic advocates with assistance from UNIFEM. It called for measures that were consistent with the state's policies as well as with its neo-Soviet gender ideology, which define the state's main aim as protecting women in their capacity as mothers.⁵² However, this law was never passed because there was insufficient support among lawmakers for addressing the issue of domestic violence. In a 2004 review, the United Nations Committee on the Elimination

meeting held at Headquarters, New York, on Friday, January 23, 2004, <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/cedaw/reports.htm> (accessed October 29, 2008).

⁵¹ See Valentina Kovtun, "Belarusian Women Defend Human Rights and the Environment," *Give and Take: A Journal on Civil Society in Eurasia* 2, no. 1 (Winter 1999): 6, <http://www.isar.org/pubs/GT/GT2-1.pdf> (accessed November 10, 2008).

⁵² Amnesty International, "Belarus: Domestic Violence – More Than a Private Scandal," <http://www.amnestyusa.org/document.php?lang=e&id=ENGEUR490142006> (accessed October 29, 2008).

of Discrimination against Women noted that Belarus had made little progress toward meeting its commitments under the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, as “any initiative to promote gender equality and equal rights comes up against traditional, stereotypical concepts of the role of women as being confined to the family, while professional activities are widely considered to be unfeminine or anti-family.”⁵³ Similarly, Amnesty International reports, “official documents and policies tend to reinforce the stereotypical view of women as mothers and wives rather than individuals in their own right.”⁵⁴

Since the Orange Revolution, women’s organizations have been subjected to systematic harassment by state authorities.⁵⁵ The government’s increasingly adversarial stance toward civic groups and their main sources of foreign support has compelled women’s advocates to cease, narrow, or redirect their activities to bring them into conformity with the government’s increasingly traditionalistic gender politics.⁵⁶ Since 2005, the United Nations Development Program – the main remaining local source of support for the women’s movement – has discontinued its activities promoting gender equality.⁵⁷ The

⁵³ Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, Thirtieth Session, “Consideration of reports submitted by States parties under article 18 of the Convention (continued), Combined fourth, fifth and sixth periodic report of Belarus (CEDAW/C/BLR/4-6; CEDAW/PSWG/2004/CRP.1/Add.1 and CRP.2/Add.1), Summary record of the 643rd meeting held at Headquarters, New York, on Friday, January 23, 2004, <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/cedaw/reports.htm> (accessed October 29, 2008).

⁵⁴ See “Draft law,” in Amnesty International, “Belarus: Domestic Violence – More Than a Private Scandal,” <http://www.amnestyusa.org/document.php?lang=e&id=ENGEUR490142006> (accessed October 29, 2008).

⁵⁵ For an analysis of these difficulties, see “Belarus,” in *Women 2000 – An Investigation into the Status of Women*, International Helsinki Foundation for Human Rights, http://www.ihf-hr.org/documents/doc_summary.php?sec_id=58&d_id=1456 (accessed November 12, 2008).

⁵⁶ See “Obstacles faced by NGOs,” in Amnesty International, “Belarus: Domestic Violence – More Than a Private Scandal,” <http://www.amnestyusa.org/document.php?lang=e&id=ENGEUR490142006> (accessed October 29, 2008); see also Yuri Zagummenov, “Belarus Civil Society: In Need of a Dialogue” (Belarus Support Centre for Associations and Foundations, Civicus, 2001), p. 11, <http://www.civicus.org/new/media/belarus.pdf> (accessed November 10, 2008).

⁵⁷ “Women’s Empowerment” is one of the seven focal areas of the UNDP in Belarus. However, no new activities have been initiated to promote gender equality in Belarus since its earlier projects were concluded in 2005 and 2006 (see <http://un.by/en/undp/focus-areas/women/>, accessed April 1, 2009). Harassment of Western aid providers intensified at that point. In 2006, for instance, foreign women’s rights advocates from Sweden, Lithuania and Ukraine were detained and the organizer fined for organizing a seminar on gender equality in Belarus. See

government has permitted relatively few Western women's projects to remain active. Several small-scale international projects provide social and psychological services to victims of violence and human trafficking.⁵⁸ In the capital, one shelter and crisis center assists women and children who are the victims of violence.⁵⁹ There is also a mini-shelter for women victims of trafficking, with a capacity of two. It was established at the Belarusian Young Women's Christian Association in Minsk and operates with support from the anti-trafficking NGO La Strada, which is based in the Netherlands. Some state social service agencies provide assistance to women victims of domestic violence or trafficking.⁶⁰

Women activists that challenge the government's human rights record have been subjected to even harsher repression. Authorities have taken action to close down or restrict the activities of women's groups that are associated with the political opposition. On February 8, 2005, the Supreme Court of Belarus, acting upon a case filed by the Ministry of Justice, liquidated the "Revival of the Homeland Belarusian Women's Movement."⁶¹ In 2006, the activities of the Women's League of Belarus were suspended temporarily by a court order

"Public Activists from Sweden, Lithuania and Ukraine Detained in Mahilyou," (Radio Svoboda reported by Charter 97, November 27, 2006), <http://www.charter97.org/eng/news/2006/11/27/mogilev/> (accessed January 8, 2009).

⁵⁸ However, even social service projects have experienced severe pressure. In 2004, state authorities closed down a local association that worked with the International Red Cross to operate hot lines and other activities devoted to domestic violence prevention activities.

⁵⁹ It is located in Minsk and operated by Radislava, a voluntary association. The initial start up costs for this shelter were provided in 2001 by TACIS in order to aid battered women. The shelter later broadened its focus and currently works to aid victims of human trafficking. The costs of victims' stay in the center are covered by the International Organization for Migration (IOM) under the project entitled "Combating trafficking in women in the Republic of Belarus." See "Sluzhba pomoshchi grazhdanam, postradavshim ot nasiliia," <http://stopnasilie.org/> (accessed April 1, 2009).

⁶⁰ With the support of the IOM, a day-and-night care division has been established at the local social service center in Pinsk and a rehabilitation department for victims of violence and trafficking has been attached to the Mogilev oblast diagnostic center. See "Information from the competent bodies in the Republic of Belarus concerning the implementation of Commission on Human Rights resolution No. 2003/45," Office of the United Nations High Commissioner on Human Rights, Special Rapporteur on Violence against Women, Its Causes and Consequences, <http://www2.ohchr.org/english/issues/women/rapporteur/Belarus.pdf> (accessed March 31, 2009).

⁶¹ See "The Assault on Human Rights Defenders in the Russian Federation, Belarus and Uzbekistan: Restrictive Legislation and Bad Practices" (International Helsinki Federation for Human Rights, 2006), <http://www.ihf-hr.org/> (accessed December 26, 2008).

initiated after a Ministry of Justice raid revealed irregularities in the group's registration documents. The group was later issued a warning but allowed to resume its activities after submitting its registration documents for review.⁶² In 2007 state authorities closed down the women's party "Nadzeya" for failure to comply with registration requirements.⁶³ This wave of repression has been largely directed at regime critics, but it has also negatively affected academic projects to empower women. For instance, in 2004 the country lost its only gender studies program, the Center for Gender Studies, when the European Humanities University was forced to terminate its activities in Belarus and relocate to Lithuania.

A final manifestation of the assault upon women's activism is the invention of what scholars sometimes call a "virtual opposition" consisting of loyal civic groups that take the place of the challengers who have been driven out of public life.⁶⁴ Various new forms of government initiated "virtual activism" emerged after the "colored revolutions." Pro-presidential women's activism appears to focus on upholding the government's patriotic ideology while countering the concerns raised by women's groups. For instance, state-controlled groups of soldiers' mothers have been established to organize patriotic rallies in support of military service, thus countering criticism from independent groups of soldiers' mothers that have uncovered severe forms of abuse.⁶⁵ Even pro-presidential groups have come under more direct control from above. In 2006, for instance, the government appointed state officials to take over the leadership of the semi-official women's association, the Union of Women of Belarus.⁶⁶ Much like Soviet-era women's activism, official groups stage events that allow them to praise the government, for instance, for its "generous" support of "mother heroes" who have given birth to more than five children. The activities of such pro-presidential women's groups are featured prominently in

⁶² "Verkhovnyi sud priostanovil deiatel'nost' Belorusskoi zhenskoi ligi," September 22, 2006, <http://news.tut.by/society/74576.html> (accessed April 1, 2009).

⁶³ See "Nations in Transit 2008: Belarus," released by Freedom House, <http://www.freedomhouse.org> (accessed October 25, 2008).

⁶⁴ Andrew Wilson, *Virtual Politics: Faking Democracy in the Post-Soviet World* (New Haven, CT: Yale Univ. Press, 2005), p. 187.

⁶⁵ "Rally of Soldiers' Mothers Took Place in Mogilev" (Radio Belarus, March 27, 2007), <http://www.radiobelarus.tvr.by/eng/news.asp?id=3883&date=27.03.2007%2010:18:00#26> (accessed January 8, 2009).

⁶⁶ "Public Organizations Turn into State Ones," October 10, 2006, Charter 97, <http://www.charter97.org/eng/news/2006/10/10/gos> (accessed January 8, 2009).

the media, while the views of oppositional women's groups appear mainly on websites based outside the country.

Conclusion

In their influential analysis of post-communist countries, *The Politics of Gender after Socialism*, Susan Gal and Gail Kligman argue that the analytical category of gender helps to clarify general processes of change that occurred as state socialist countries underwent nationalization and marketization.⁶⁷ In their view, one could explain many puzzling aspects of national ideology, for instance, its power to mobilize support among publics that were deeply disengaged from politics, by showing how it relied on gendered metaphors of birth, death, and belonging to legitimize the re-imagining of political community. In addition, they note that a gender lens allow one to observe that the transition from socialist states to nation-states made very different demands on women and men as citizens or subjects. State socialist gender regimes premised on principles of abstract equality were consequently being fundamentally questioned, and demographic policies were among the first aspects of the political order that were challenged by novice post-socialist lawmakers. They also pointed to the countervailing tendencies introduced by Western and international policy models as well as ideas about “turning toward Europe.” And they predicted that, rather than adopting international or Western paradigms and converging on Western gender regimes that had no cultural roots there, Eastern Europe would remain true to the institutional foundations created by socialist states while selectively incorporating certain new approaches, such as hotlines for abused women.

Nearly twenty years after the transition started, we can see that notable differences have emerged, even among neighboring post-Soviet countries, in how new ideas about gender are being incorporated into civil society and political institutions in post-socialist countries. The gender regimes that are being established in Belarus, Russia, and Ukraine differ from each other as well as from the Soviet gender regime in key respects. A return to a quasi-Soviet gender regime has occurred in Belarus under Lukashenka. The understandings of gender institutionalized in the legal and criminal justice system remain substantially the same as in the Soviet era. But in contrast to the Soviet era, women

⁶⁷ Gal and Kligman, *The Politics of Gender after Socialism*.

face an increasingly patriarchal public culture that views motherhood as their primary role. Nongovernmental advocates of new women's rights issues exist but play no role in determining policy. Women are discouraged from becoming active in public life. Just as in the Soviet era, this country's government signs international treaties but does very little to implement them. Indeed, it supports virtual forms of activism undertaken by pro-presidential "civic" organizations that serve as its mouthpiece, and harasses civic groups and international organizations that monitor and assess the state authorities' handling not only of women's rights but also, more generally, human rights and civil liberties. The state and its definition of reality dominate public life, much as in the Soviet era. A culture of fear pervades all types of civic organizations, leaving them largely unable to challenge the government's monopoly on public life. Even those groups that are government controlled and act as extensions of the state seem to have suffered from the consolidation of authoritarian rule, as participation in them appears to be coerced.

Russia at first seemed to be developing in a very different direction. The official party-based women's structures and academic institutes served as a foundation for a relatively unified women's movement that gained considerable political leverage in the early years after the Soviet Union's collapse. Russian women reformers made significant positive steps toward empowering women and strengthening their rights. They introduced draft legislation against domestic violence many years before this occurred in Ukraine and Belarus. But after this swift rise, women's NGOs have plummeted in influence in recent years since the rise to power of Vladimir Putin, who has brought neo-traditional values back into policy domains and places limits on the independence and activities of NGOs that espouse "foreign" or "Western" values. In Russia, the gender regime is a hybrid of Soviet, neo-traditional, and Western elements. A culture of professionalism defines women's activism. NGOs work within specialized niches on donor-defined activities but they have not established broader ties to the public at large. New issues like protecting women from domestic violence have been raised by women reformers but have not, however, gained salience among state authorities or lawmakers. Consequently, in contrast to Ukraine, such issues are still not incorporated into the Russian legal or criminal justice system at the national level.

The case of Ukraine is no less surprising. There one can observe a convergence within much of the women's movement as well as among virtually all politicians and public figures on a patriarchal discourse stressing motherhood, yet policy has moved consistently in the direction of gender equality rather than following a logic of separate spheres and capacities for women and men.

The new gender regime that is taking shape is also a hybrid both more patriarchal (in so far as women are widely viewed through conservative gender stereotypes) and more Westernized than the Soviet gender regime.

What do these strikingly different policy regimes tell us about the relationship between the overall health of civil society and the capacity of women or other marginalized groups to overcome cultures of powerlessness and organize around their interests? The inspiration for policy regimes in these countries does not come directly from civil society. Indeed, it appears that the relative power of conservatives and Westernizers in the political system is a principal determinant of the geopolitical orientation of new policy regimes that emerged in the political contest between regional authoritarian regimes and their Westernizing opponents. However, once the geopolitical orientation of a country is established, it appears that opportunities for women's mobilization increase in pro-Western political cycles and shrink when the pendulum swings away from the West. Ukraine provides some support for expectations that a healthy civil society nonetheless indirectly creates a more conducive environment for certain kinds of women's empowerment. But this case also demonstrates that the shape of a country's gender regime is not in any simple way determined by the political discourse or culture that is most pervasive in public life. Indeed, the gender regime in Ukraine would look very different today had it not been that Western-leaning domestic political blocs – who very badly want to advance Ukraine's candidacy for the European Union – looked to women's rights as an easy way to signal to Europe that Ukraine embraces its values.

Both Belarus and Russia as cases suggest further support for the conclusion that a country's degree of openness to Western influence is an important determinant of its policy regime, perhaps as important as the collective action capacity of its women's organizations. Women's organizations in these two countries attempted to restructure state institutions along Western lines. Their progress toward achieving these policy reforms was determined by their ability to develop and maintain a presence in the legislature. Women reformers in Belarus failed to advance their legislative proposals because their closest allies were driven out of politics. Meanwhile in Russia, women reformers initially formed a party that advanced new legal interpretations of women's status. But progress toward further legal changes slowed and then stopped altogether after women reformers lost their parliamentary seats and decided to merge with United Russia, the incumbent's political party, which now controls both the legislative and executive branches of government. Once these conservatives came to power, both the Russian government and the Duma redirected policy in a more traditional direction.

A final note on the role of protest in post-Soviet public cultures: Much has been said in discussions of post-Soviet public life about the cultural legacies of Soviet rule, in particular, about the prevalence among the majority of citizens of political alienation and what earlier scholars would have called anomie, or normlessness. A culture of “non-participation in politics” can, the above analysis suggests, be overcome. And, as many scholars have observed, the strength of civil society does seem to be an important factor in the emergence and development of new public cultures. The above analysis suggests that the healthier and more vibrant a civil society, the more complex and contradictory is a country’s public culture. Ukraine’s public culture is increasingly defined by patriarchal discourse that views women and men as fundamentally different kinds of citizens, even though the understandings of gender institutionalized in the country’s legal, criminal justice, and welfare systems are based on gender equity principles. During the Orange Revolution, hundreds of thousands of people on the Maidan responded to the calls of a nationalist discourse rooted in the family – they came together, in the words of the Orange Revolution anthem, as “sons and daughters of Ukraine.” Thus we see that democracy movements in post-Soviet countries draw on deeply resonant cultural themes and traditions that appear fundamentally patriarchal. Paradoxically, however, such public displays of national unity can also, in today’s geopolitical context, give birth not only to new patriarchies but also to new feminisms. Women (and perhaps, men) who participate in such solidarity-building protests might one day find themselves in a better position to achieve a new sense of solidarity through the mutual recognition of their confinements to a “separate sphere” that renders them second-class citizens. But again, ironically, before they can think of themselves as second class citizens, they have to become mutually aware of themselves as citizens.