Lost in Contradiction: A critical analysis of Human Rights and Minority Rights NGO's

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Submitted to
Central European University

Sociology and Social Anthropology Department

In partial fulfillment for the degree of Masters of Arts

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Budapest, Hungary 2010

Abstract

Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) continue to proliferate globally as key players in the negotiation of human and minority rights. The spectrum ranges from reservations regarding their neutrality given their dependency on corporate funding all the way to accusations of being agents of imperialism. This thesis looks at the constraints facing Human Rights and Minority Rights NGOs as they are caught between advocating for the disenfranchised in the context of elite political institutions and maintaining meaningful relationships with the poor and marginalized. It outlines the various critiques of NGOs under three broad categories: their dependency on donors and the state, addressing imperial ideologies and practices and issues of representation with their beneficiaries. As human and minority rights are personal in that they involve individuals advocating for the rights of other individuals, this paper argues that more ethnographic research on the personal dimension and experiences of those working within this field will give greater insight into the abstract issues that the arena faces globally. Challenges and experiences are explored from those that work within the field, from three sample case organizations.

Acknowledgments

I extend my deepest gratitude to the staff at the Human RightS Initiative, Minority Rights Group and Roma Democratic Development Association for granting me their time and individual thoughts on the challenges of working in the NGO field. I am particularly grateful to HRSI and MRG for welcoming me into their organizations and allowing me to learn and experience their work, this was invaluable to my research. My project would have not been possible without your generosity.

I thank Dan Rabinowitz, my first advisor, for his continuous support and ingenious methods of helping me unpack and articulate my goals and hopes for this project. I extend my gratitude to Don Kalb, my second advisor, for his insights into the framing of my thesis and critical approaches. I also thank Eszter Timar for working with me in the end to ground and strengthen my arguments.

Lastly, my dearest thanks to the staff and my colleagues in the Sociology and Social Anthropology Department at CEU for the challenging and friendly atmosphere they generated throughout the year.

I dedicate this thesis to every activist who is working for social change.

Table of Contents

Introduction

Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) continue to proliferate globally as key players in the negotiation of human and minority rights. However, their identity, methods and actual impact have been extensively criticized. The spectrum ranges from reservations regarding their neutrality given their dependency on corporate funding (Hulme and Edwards 1997, Mercer 2002, Mendelson and Glenn 2002) all the way to accusations of being agents of imperialism (Petras and Veltmeyer 2001). Of particular relevance to this inquiry is the critique of under-representation of target groups in the decision-making procedures of NGO's purporting to work on their behalf. NGOs are criticized for being too close to the state or corporate donors and too distanced from those they are advocating for.

This thesis looks at the constraints facing Human and Minority Rights NGOs and their staffs as they are caught between (a) advocacy for the disenfranchised in the context of elite political institutions and (b) maintaining meaningful relationships with the poor and marginalized.

A concrete definition of what constitutes NGOs and the sector in which they operate, 'civil society,' are still under debated. NGOs were first defined in 1945 by the United Nations as part of an attempt to specify the role of 'societal consultants'. The form and content of organizations that qualify as NGOs was left open, which no doubt contributed to the confusion and definitional variation that lingers up to date. With time, organizations sprouted globally and the term became more inclusive than was originally intended (Srinivas 2009). Now NGOs differ widely in terms of sizes, missions, donors,

affiliations, organizational culture and structure.[1] I utilize The World Bank's definition of NGOs as "organizations that pursue activities to relieve suffering, promote the interests of the poor, protect the environment, provide basic social services or undertake community development."[2] Their funding can range from the state to private foundations to international financial institutions (Wade 2009). [3] NGOs function within a sphere that is equally disputed.

Civil society is recognized as a crucial component of democracy, which fills the gap between the state, the market and the private. This 'third sphere' is seen as taking over civic duties from the state with a growing responsibility to handle social problems (Piotrowski 2009). Civil society includes a variety of organizations such as religious groups, farmer coalitions or grass roots organizations, which were created from the bottom-up. Given its supposed separation from the state and market, social movements are said to occur in this sphere (Hulme and Edwards 1997). Marx believed that civil society was created by the bourgeoisie with the interests of civil society only benefiting its creators. Gramsci, who reinterpreted Marx, saw civil society as the reproducer of cultural and ideological hegemony of capitalism. However, Gramsci also saw civil society as the arena where those could challenge that very same hegemony and defend themselves against the market and the state (Piotrowski 2009). I analyze NGOs and civil society under this contradictory framework as a sphere with conflicting capacities to both challenge and reproduce authority. This thesis views NGOs as key actors in civil society,

[1] For more detailed information on the various classifications of NGOs see Fisher's "Doing Good? The Politics and Antipolitics of NGO Practices" (1997).

[2] http://www.ifc.org/ifcext/enviro.nsf/AttachmentsByTitle/pol_Resettlement/$FILE/OD430_InvoluntaryResettlement.pdf

[3] This definition needs more specification and arouses questions as to if organizations that work for causes such as white supremacy qualify as NGOs.

making this contradiction closely linked to the current debates on the role and implications of these organizations.

The contradictions prevalent in civil society and NGO work allude to underlying power dynamics and structures that can be explicated with the help of Bourdieu's notion of *capital* and concept of *fields.* Bourdieu argues that power imbalances are present in every aspect of society, from individual relations to the construction of institutions and language. "Symbolic power is that invisible power which can be exercised only with the complicity of those who do not want to know that they are subject to it or even that they themselves exercise it" (Bourdieu 1991: 164). Power dynamics are classified by your *social capital*, who you know and your *cultural capital*, what you know, such as intellectual knowledge and skills which define your assets (or lack of assets) in the social world (1991). The concept of a *field* defines the boundaries where *social* and *cultural capital* exists and functions in relation to each other imposing "upon their occupants, agents or institutions" (1992: 97). The NGO sphere could arguably be classified as a *field.* NGOs work across and within various fields that have established interests, ideologies, and structures, such as donors, the state and the marginalized. Histories of power imbalances are therefore inherent in NGO relations and constructs which are important to bring to the forefront when analyzing specific contexts and relations between various agents.

This work takes two NGOs as the main case studies. The first, Minority Rights Group, (MRG) is a western based organization that receives funding from large donors both independent and tied to the state, such as the Ford Foundation, Soros Foundation and the European Commission, a variety that has a bearing on the organization's political

involvement. MRG lobbies governments and the United Nations "alongside and on behalf of minorities" raising the issue of representational relations with their target groups and declares itself as a minority rights advocacy NGO.[4] A key aspect of MRG is that it works primarily with local grass roots NGOs where some activists who speak English were willing to cooperate with my attempt to get a more holistic view of their challenges, modus operandi and working relationships. Thus, the Roma Democratic Development Association (SONCE), a partner Roma organization in Tetovo, Macedonia since 2003, is consulted as a sub-set of the MRG case. Its staff is entirely Roma, which gave me a chance to gather information from the minority perspective on work with a western NGO and on the challenges that arise from this cross-cultural alliance. This working relationship also addresses power dynamics power between the two and issues with accessing the community.

The second case, Human RightS Initiative (HRSI) at Central European University (CEU) was chosen because of its unique role as a human rights organization within an academic framework. The staff at HRSI are activists who have recently graduated from masters programs at CEU, and are transitioning to work in the larger field of human rights. Being closely affiliated with an academic institution creates particular and more simplistic constraints that also cross over into the complex arena in which MRG works. This simplicity brings to the surface core challenges of working in the field as a whole. HRSI's mission is "to raise awareness and build capacity" of their target group, which is mainly the students at CEU. This rather abstract mission indicates some detachment

[4] http://www.minorityrights.org/548/our-work/our-work.html

from the issues they are advocating for, leading to a compelling inquiry as to how they feel about their impact.

Entering the field, I hypothesized that NGO staff members given their constraints would be too engulfed in their daily work with all its challenges to consistently reflect on broader, more abstract critiques. However, I was certain their experiences and insights would deepen the complexity of their position. I found that there was truth in this hypothesis, and through my research within both organizations, it became clear that there was a personal dimension inherent in the human rights field that was absent from NGO critiques and research. Human and minority rights are personal in that they involve individuals advocating for the rights of other individuals. Through interviews with staff members from MRG, SONCE and HRSI, I explore the constraints they face as an organization, but also individually on a personal level as advocates for social change. I highlight the thoughts and experiences of those that have devoted their time and career to working in this complex arena.

My research questions are: What constraints do NGO staff face in their work both individually and as organizations from being caught between advocating for the disenfranchised in the context of elite political institutions and maintaining meaningful relationships with the poor and marginalized? Further, what are the personal opintions of NGO staff on the consistent critiques of NGOs, do they show up in their work? Finally, how do they feel about the constraints of working within this complex paradigm, the pace of social change and the actual impact they are capable of generating?

This thesis comes from the perspective that human rights NGOs and staff members are coming from the place that their mission statements envision. Consistent

academic critiques of NGOs reveal the inherent challenges of working across fields with established histories and frameworks resulting in complex relations and contradictory practices. Instead of critiquing what they have not done and what they are not capable of, I will look at the limitations encountered when attempting to embody a third sphere of social responsibility and holding states accountable for good governance. NGO staff members work within and across various convoluted systems simultaneously and have personal involvement with the challenges, but also successes. This thesis explores what insights these individual experiences can bring to NGO ideology. I argue that more ethnographic research on the personal dimension and experiences of those working within human and minority rights will give greater insight into the abstract issues that the arena faces globally. Asking those that work within the sector daily to step back and think critically about the global system in which they are entrenched may contribute to formulating practical micro solutions in every day work that can translate to broader civil society and global governance.

An Overview of the Critical Literature and Applied Theory

Dependency

Scholarly literature reveals three broad areas that attract the most critical attention and have withstood over the years, Dependency, Imperialism and Representation. In regards to dependency, the very term 'non-governmental' suggests a level of neutrality that was assumed in NGO ideology from their origin as 'consultants.' Over time as NGOs mushroomed across the globe with various structures and focus. An increasing number of scholars began to examine how organizations dependent upon the state and corporate funders could be entirely neutral. DeMars (2005) along with Srinivas (2009), Ghosh (2009), Mendelson and Glenn (2002), Mercer (2002), Hulme and Edwards (1997) stress the need to recognize NGOs relationship to their donors and the state and how this affects their decisions and impacts their mission . "The vulnerability of their position as beneficiaries of outside funding and support may make NGOs less willing to advocate positions that run counter to those taken by the agencies funding them or their home governments (Fisher 1997: 453). Ghosh discusses how political institutions "are a set of constitutive rules, norms, procedures and routines recognized formally or informally" (2009:475). Organizations that work within the framework of political institutions experience constraints that shape their structure and standards of change. Therefore, organizations that work with political institutions are entwined in the political practices and ideologies making their neutrality unfeasible.

Mendelson and Glenn question NGOs neutrality particularly those that operate in Central and Eastern Europe, where their role is to spread democracy (2002). They discuss how in many cases, strategies for building democratic institutions are not carefully thought out and were planned in western capitals by those who have no expertise in the regions where projects are implemented. The concept is that a strong civil society is the foundation for a sustainable democracy. However it is debatable whether a solid civil society can be implanted by outside organizations or if it needs to be created by local actors who are directly affected. They question the strategies executed by international NGOs when the organizations grow "closer to their transnational partners than to the constituents whom they are meant to represent or the governments that they hope to influence" (2002: 22)

NGOs are increasingly dependent on large-scale donors, which "redirects accountability toward funders and away from the group's grass roots constituencies: NGOs become contractors, constituencies become customers and members become clients" (Fisher 1997: 454). The dependency on outside funding steers the direction and location of their work, giving NGOs little say in what projects they implement (Srinivas 2009). Mercer discusses another impact of working with institutions that have a self-serving agenda. NGOs have become institutionalized and are managed like a business. The theory is that this type of institutionalization can stifle grass roots-based actors and other local civil organizations preventing the possibility of a social movement. Overshadowing these local actors can depoliticize the situation placing their service over the advocacy of rights in the political sphere (2002). Fernando and Heston address this argument, "that the plurality of interests and forms of resistance associated with NGOs

privileged group in producing social transformations and reflects the popular disenchantment with political parties and unions as forums for expressing social dissent" (1997: 9). This local fragmentation is also said to be a product of the method of implementing through projects.

NGO work is referred to as 'project society' where the critique lies in their fundamental processes of implementing 'projects.' Projects are viewed as something that end, which suppress activist groups and prevent the mobilization of a community or group of people (Comaroff 1999). Due to small grants, it is common practice in the NGO field to conduct projects that only last two to three years. From a Neoliberal framework social change is then broken down into controlled bureaucratic projects eliminating possibilities for mobilization. The notion of Neoliberalism is highly debated as it is an ideological paradigm spanning a global system. "The word describes what many perceive of as the lamentable spread of capitalism and consumerism, as well as the equally deplorable demolition of the proactive welfare state" (Thorsen 2009). The complexity of this notion will not be addressed fully in this paper,[5] however the concept of 'project society' is applicable to the challenges that NGOs face.

Imperialism

Harsh critiques of NGOs claim that they are servants of imperialism[6] and are used to control exploited people deflecting their discontent towards trivial debates instead of

[5] For further reading see: *The Anti-Politics Machine: "Development," Depoliticization and Bureaucratic Power in Lesotho* (1994) by James Ferguson

[6] The Oxford English dictionary defines imperialism as "a policy of extending a country's power and influence through diplomacy or military force."

against the state or imperialist powers (Petras 1999, Petras and Veltmeyer 2001). Srinivas discusses that NGOs are foundational, in that they are created in direct relation to something, being *non*-governmental, they are founded and labeled by their relationship to the government and the for-profit sector (2009). This relationship, along with their need for donors, could very well force NGOs into an imperial framework (Edwards and Hulme 1995). Further it is no secret that colonialism, which was based on imperial practices, occurred in our not so distant past. The basis of colonialism was to "help" and "save" those that were biologically and socially inferior (Friedman 1999). Friedman argues that even though times have changed, the concept of the west being more powerful and intervening to save the less fortunate, still exists. It is arguable that the western NGOs based globally, even with the best of intentions, can have residual practices and mindsets from this framework (Young 2001).

NGO directors and staff are criticized as being a new class of bourgeoisie capitalizing on poverty and intellectualizing 'solutions' that rarely translate on the ground. They are viewed as having a 'populist vocabulary' that resonates through the advocacy ideology, but does not relate to those they are claiming to assist. Intellectual language and academic procedures of writing reports and documentation take up time and resources that could be spent on improving the communities (Friedman 1999, Petras and Veltmeyer 2001). Other theorists address specific terminologies such as 'target population'[7] used in the NGO rhetoric which positions a group as an 'obstructing force to global and national progress" (Stoler and Cooper 1997). Within this critique is a divide in the NGO community. Well-funded 'western' organizations are accused of being

[7] I use 'target group' in this paper for lack of a better term, however I will look for more appropriate language and take this critique into consideration when writing my thesis.

patriarchal and narrow-minded in their relations with smaller 'southern' NGOs (Murazzani 2009). Many see a danger in the professionalizing of human rights where the original goal and mission can get lost amongst the bureaucracy. The more influence and funding an NGO has the more likely it is for them to be engulfed by the very system they are attempting to change. There is emphasis on 'playing the rules of the game.'

Critics not only question the language and lifestyle of NGO staff members, but also the concept of 'doing good' or 'gift giving' in general. "The motivation for gift giving is founded on universalistic ideals of humanity as well as on recognizing and maintaining the difference between the giver and the receiver, which in turn reproduces the dichotomies between the rich and the poor, the powerful and the powerless and the blessed versus the unfortunate" (Fernando and Heston 1997: 18). Therefore, the very notion of helping the poor and marginalized reproduces this dichotomy. This critiques also leads to the relationship between NGO staff and those they are advocating for. Critics state that there is a gap between the organizations and their beneficiaries.

Representation

Another prominent critique is that there is a lack of communication and collaboration between NGOs and their target groups. Employees of NGOs are expected to solve problems in a community with little input from the local people. "Experts" are consulted, but the actual community is not. They are forced to make decisions on behalf of aid recipients without the time and resources to know the whole picture and what would be most beneficial for the group (Srinivas 2009). This perceived gap between the

acting organizations and the local communities, prevents NGOs from making a sustainable impact. The argument is the more inclusion a group is given in the process of improving their community, the greater the chance to build social solidarity that will last beyond the project. Empowering a local group can only occur when they are given the authority to make decisions for themselves and their community (Mercer 2002). "Representation and democratic participation - are mechanisms by which an organization can be made accountable for itself and its actions – provided that meaningful ways exist for those being represented to exercise participation in and, ultimately control over the organization. But this is rarely the case with NGOs" (Anderson 2009:9). Participation is closely tied to issues of representation. Critics claim that there is a gap in regards to representation in decision-making between the acting organizations and the local target groups. The claim is that this divide muffles the local voice preventing the organizations from making an optimal impact locally. The critique further looks at the demographic within organizations, which are primarily from the dominant culture. The argument calls for more minorities and marginalized people working within the organizations (Hulme and Edwards 1997). The representation and participation of minorities is not a new issue and comes with its own set of complexities.

By definition, minorities are a smaller percentage of the population, which statistically speaking guarantees their representation will be minimal under any circumstance, from governmental legislation to positions on a school board. The unfortunate phenomenon is that minorities are typically ethnically or racially different, which leads to racism, discrimination, marginalization, and in most circumstances they are the poorest group in a community. These factors compound an already complex

dynamic of deciding who has the right to speak for whom, but what does 'representation' actually mean and entail?

The main literature on minority representation is confined to legislation and the realm of politics, which shows a greater need to address critiques, suggesting a lack of representation of target groups within human and minority rights NGOs. This literature does however touch on the core issues, which are outlined in the report on the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) and Inter Parliamentary Union (IPU) Consultation on Minority Representation in Parliament. The UNDP views minority representation as an action "to establish conditions of equality and non-discrimination and to ensure effective participation of minorities in public life" (2007). This action is directed toward "effective and meaningful participation" of minority groups within the Parliamentary system thereby viewing representation as the physical involvement of minorities in the legislative process. However the document clearly states "representation has not always translated to greater inclusion" (2007). The report affirms challenges in this approach, 'self-identification', 'language' and whether 'representation translates into power.' These three areas have been explored extensively in the legal arena under primarily concrete terms. Identity is discussed as the placement of people under specific categories created by the state, in which the problems arise from cross-cultural ties and inaccurate census calculations (Pande 1999, Espino 2005). Language is addressed only on the macro level where official languages are barriers that can be rectified with translators. Power is looked at as which group holds most of the legislative positions that sway decisions (Lauer 2008, McGarry 2009). These interpretations are crucial to acknowledge and can be practically applied to the NGO sector, however,

deeper understandings of these three areas are crucial to fully comprehending dynamics in minority representation.

Symbolic Domination

As all of the critiques above pertain to imbalances of power, Bourdieu's notion of *symbolic power* address underlying forms of domination that could exist in NGO relations with their donors, the state and target groups. For Bourdieu, power is embedded in the construction of both the *habitus* (our cultural being) and language, present in all interactions and transmitted through non-verbal communication, from a way of standing or speaking or even looking. These *symbolic* forms of power and underlying inequalities are constantly present in all relationships. This is Bourdieu's notion of *symbolic violence*, which can be analyzed within the contexts and relations that NGOs have with the various actors in their field. *Symbolic violence* imposes categories and class distinctions upon agents who accept the social structure as just.

Underlying domination is produced not only through *social* and *cultural capita*l, but also through *linguistic capital*. For Bourdieu there are "no longer any innocent words," which suggests that authority and domination are inherent in language. The use of language mirrors hierarchies in and amongst social groups revealing the structure of class relations and legitimizing those that have access to the educational system. Domination is therefore produced and reproduced through social interactions and by the construction of a dominant language legitimized by the state and reproduced through institutions. This notion of a legitimized language is directly applicable to the plethora of

English speaking advocacy NGOs prevalent throughout the world where marginalized populations would have no resources to learn English.

The question arises, do NGOs reproduce inequalities and keep the represented separate from the state to in fact preserve their role as mediators and ensure the survival of their institutions? Bourdieu discusses the 'professionalization' of aid and representation, which further alienates the beneficiaries, as the profession requires one to have a set of skills and legitimatized language *(social and cultural capital*). NGOs are professionalized institutions of representation and minority support, which in this framework may reproduce inequalities and sustain dependency. Is their commitment to the role as 'helpers' and 'representers' of oppressed groups in fact contributing to the subordination of their target groups? Does this *symbolic violence* account for the gap between their target group and their organization? According to Bourdieu "we have to be able to discover it (power) in places where it is least visible, where it is most completely misrecognized" (1991:163).

Methodology

Background Information

Human RightS Initiative

Students at CEU in the Legal Studies Human Rights Program created HRSI in 1999 with the similar mission it has today: "to promote social engagement through awareness raising and capacity building." Their main target groups are CEU students and alumni as well as local and regional students, activists and NGOs. HRSI's funding comes from the Open Society Institute[8] (fifty percent), CEU (twenty percent) and they are responsible for fundraising the remaining thirty percent. HRSI has been affiliated with the CEU Special Extension Program (SEP) for five years where the Program Coordinator is an employee of CEU. Before this association all staff were at the same level, where as now, the Program Coordinator manages two Project Managers. The process is that each year one of the Project Managers will then become the Program Coordinator, so there is a constant change of staff. HRSI is generally seen as a transition point where recent graduates gain experience to then enter the larger field of human rights. New Project Managers have the summer to get acquainted with the work and many have already been involved in HRSI in some way or another throughout the previous year.

There are two distinct aspects of HRSI's work, which is stated in the mission, 'awareness raising and capacity building.' For capacity building, they organize a number of workshops throughout the year to teach skills for working in human rights

[8] The Open Society Institute (OSI) is part of the Soros Foundation Network. http://www.soros.org/

organizations or other NGOs, such as "Fundraising for NGOs," "Human rights advocacy and campaigning" and "PR and communication for NGOs." They also organize internships for CEU students in NGOs both regionally and internationally. While capacity building is with the intension of building skills for future activism in the world of human rights, it is more removed from the politics associated with the field. Awareness-raising is an area where political positions are more likely to come through, making it more difficult to maintain the neutrality instilled in the organization. Examples of awareness-raising events are "Understanding the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict: Interdisciplinary perspectives on the recent crisis in Gaza" and "Neo-slavery in the United States: trafficking of migrant workers from India and their Gandhian campaign for freedom."

Minority Rights Group

MRG began in the 1960's founded by a group of activists and academics. Today it is an international NGO with around one hundred and thirty partners in over sixty countries. Their goal is to "ensure that disadvantaged minorities and indigenous peoples, often the poorest of the poor, can make their voices heard."[9] They provide trainings, educational documents and guides, legal support and through campaign and media support and equip the marginalized to defend their rights. They also lobby governments and the United Nations with minorities to enact policy changes.

MRG has around twenty staff members in London where they are based and about five staff in their Europe office in Budapest. They have one regional office in

[9] Accessed through Minority Rights Group International website: http://www.minorityrights.org/575/about-us/about-us.html

Uganda, in which I did not have the opportunity to interview anyone. They have an international governing council that meets twice a year and have consultative status with the United Nations Economic and Social Council and observer status with the African Commission for Human and Peoples' Rights. The receive funding from the European Commission (EC) and other private foundations. There are a variety of areas in which staff members work. Program officers are assigned to new projects, which begin through calls from donors. The finance team searches for calls and then programs are developed under the topic and regions of focus within the call. There is a Donor Reporting Finance Officer that handles those relations. There is a Conflict Prevention sector as well as a International Human Rights Officer for Africa. Media and Events Officers monitor media output and work within this arena to publicize issues. Of course there is a Fundraiser for acquiring extra funds and an Advocacy specialist for legal cases. A role is also dedicated to managing Policy and Communications as well as the various Publications produced by the organization.

Roma Democratic Development Association (SONCE)

SONCE is a grass-roots organization that began in a Roma neighborhood in Tetovo, Macedonia in 1996. A group of the wealthier Roma began collecting funds from the community to put aside for the poorer members for various needs, such as education and health. In 1997, the Open Society Institute began supporting SONCE through their Roma Participation Program, which began with building community centers. Over time with continuous support from OSI, they stabilized and began entering advocacy work with MRG in 2003. "SONCE contributes to the democratic integration and effective participation of the Roma community into the society through capacity building direct

support and advocacy for Roma." [10] There are currently four employees, an Executive Director, Roma Rights and Interests Advocacy Program Manager and Local Co-operation Program Manager and a Youth Education and Culture Program Manager. They also have about ten volunteers that teach various subjects, such as math, computer skills and English in the community center in which they are based.

Ethnographic research

My findings are based on an interpretive analysis of qualitative data gathered from semi-structured interviews, which were conducted with MRG, SONCE and HRSI staff members. I chose interviewees from a range of job positions and hierarchies to get a variation of expertise and perceptions. In addition to interviews, I interned at both organizations. I spent eight weeks at HRSI and six weeks at MRG's Europe office in Budapest where I engaged in participant observation and gained practical experience in their work. I also attended and helped in the planning of various events, activities and meetings in both organizations. For MRG, I analyzed various documents, program evaluations, guides and reports. HRSI's main out-put is through emails intended to raise awareness and advertise events. They also recently began publishing a bi-monthly newsletter highlighting their activities.

Interviews lasted between 45 and 65 minutes, were recorded and based off of my knowledge from working within the organization as well as the academic critiques from which my thesis is based. I utilized a prepared 'interview guide,' which encompassed the

[10] Accessed through SONCE website: http://www.sonce.org.mk/History.htm

various topics that I wanted the interviewee to address. The main themes, were constraints faced both as an organization and individually from working in the field of human and minority rights. I also reviewed the academic critiques of NGOs to explore whether they saw them in their work specifically or in the NGO sector overall. The order of these topics varied depending on how the conversation flowed. Within the constraints I focused specifically on the issue of dependency and what impediments are imposed upon them from their relationship to their donors and the state. Another focus was the tension between this dependency and their relationship with their target groups and partner organizations to gain insight into the suggested gap between NGOs and their beneficiaries. Finally, I put particular attention towards their personal feelings about the limitations and why they are in this challenging line of work.

Before I entered the field, I hypothesized that those working within the organizations given the difficulty of the profession and lack of resources available, would be to some extent, engulfed in their work to such a degree that they rarely had the time and capacity to think about the grand abstract critiques that analyze the global civil society system. Although I was certain that once asked about these critiques, they would have valuable insight into if and how they translated on the ground. However, I expected that they would have to a degree surrendered to the system with the conception that there is no other option. My research found that although there were some facts to support this hypothesis, the dichotomy of the framework was too simplistic. There were some common themes, various interpretations and perceptions that seemed to give clues to different pieces of the pie, so to speak. I was therefore drawn to the personal dimension of who are the people that choose this profession and their feelings about the reality of

working within this complex paradigm. I began to explore if a personal approach could give insight into the complexity of civil society and the current status of NGOs as the 'third sphere,' which is committed to improving inequality and promoting the rights of the poor and marginalized. Due to the personal nature of my questions, the comments below do not represent the organizations in which they work and names have been changed to preserve anonymity.

Interviews and Analysis

Between the 'Crystal Chandelier' and the 'Guerilla'

Obtaining funding is an obvious constraint for all NGOs. However there are various levels to this structural system of dependency: stipulations on political involvement, donors steering the focus of projects and time and resources are spent on generating money, which can detract from the core mission.

HRSI must comply with certain guidelines through their affiliation with CEU both as recipients of funding and as participators in university activities. Because CEU is a 'non-political' institution, HRSI has to ensure that their activities and events fall under the same criteria. There are no clear written rules on what is and is not considered political given that this is contextual and can be interpreted and perceived differently. This creates a bit of tension within the organization, since human rights are inherently political. They are constantly considering where the line is drawn and are careful not to cross it.

Alasia-

> To me, most human rights issues are political, but because we are part of CEU we cannot be political because the university is a non-political entity. I think this only comes up when there are events that we think will be particularly debated, mainly by CEU students or embassies in Budapest, so that's when we consider whether it's too political, in that case we would go the SEP at CEU to first get their Ok.

Jessica –

In a sense we are semi-independent, we cannot say we support one side or another. Also, CEU is such a diverse community that basically every issue you touch on is personal to someone in a way, so therefore we have to be especially careful.

Alasia-

It also depends on the current situation in the world, we were supposed to screen movie about Chechnya, which normally would have been ok, but it was supposed to be the day after bombings in Moscow back in April, so we postponed that indefinitely because we thought at that time it would be too political.

Tobias-

Sometimes, it is difficult to differentiate or to separate a human rights violation with politics. For example in Chechnya, there are many ongoing human rights violations but unfortunately, they are very much politically-driven, and since we are a non-political organization, we cannot even sponsor a movie screening because it would be "too one-sided." This is why it sometimes limits us, because there are certain "issues" that we cannot cover due to this (unless, we also show the "other" side and we provide space for discussion, but this is not always possible).

Michael-

In the beginning you are frustrated, you feel like you can't say this or that and that your hands are tied. Especially when it comes to Human Rights issues, you have to call things by their name. But at the same time, I think about how I have this limitation and how do I work around it. We are not an advocacy organization. The mission of this organization is awareness raising and capacity building, so I have to think about this mission and remind myself. Before I was thinking more as an individual and now I'm in this organizational framework, so I have to do whatever I can within this framework, but it is frustrating especially when you really care about a topic.

Given the political tightrope that HRSI has to walk, how do they know where the line is? There was one particular time where a HRSI staff member crossed the political boundary and jeopardized the organization.

Jessica-

> In 2005 HRSI was structured differently, there was no boss or direct supervision and all three staff members were on the same level. One staff member decided to screen a movie about the Azerbaijan / Armenian conflict (The Khojali Massacre in Azerbaijan), but it was very one-sided and she was Azeri. Everyone advised her against screening the movie, but she went on with it. There was a huge uproar afterwards and they wanted to close HRSI.

Alaisa –

> My understanding is that students, Armenian and others got really upset, which is justified, and brought it to the administration's attention.

Tobias-

> The line was definitely crossed, and a person representing HRSI that has a specific issue very much at heart compromised the entire organization, which was obviously not professional and very risqué. This is why we have so much bureaucracy going on in the organization, and we are much more careful. Does it bother me? No, it actually helps, at least from my point of view, because a few times students have approached us wanting to make presentations that seemed very good and non-political at the time, but then, when the presentation actually happened, the outcome was very much political and it was a good thing we didn't officially support the event.

Considering that human rights are political by nature, HRSI must depoliticize the awareness-raising topics through academic involvement and debate procedures. Michael, a previous HRSI fellow recalls a particular event that he organized.

Michael-

> I really wanted to do a panel about this topic (Gaza) because it was current and very urgent, so I thought we should do some educational awareness-raising activity. The board was concerned, we have to present this in a way that we're being neutral where were not taking sides because it's about an extremely sensitive topic. We framed it in a way – 'this is a panel discussion about the recent conflict,' we couldn't say 'this is a panel about the invasion in Gaza.' Even though in my personal opinion, taking off the HRSI cap, I thought this was an invasion. We framed it in a very neutral way, on the panel we had the Red Cross which is neutral and then we had professors from the Sociology and Social Anthropology and Legal Studies Departments and we had a CEU professor from IRES moderate the panel and in the beginning of the event we said a disclaimer that we are not on one side or the other

Tobias -

> On the other side, I do think that it is better to have a debate in order to really grasp the entire story, because every story, like every human rights violation, has two sides, which have to be heard. Being non-political also helps us do more and not be caught in political debates but rather be trusted by everyone due to our neutrality.

MRG is also given criteria regarding the involvement of political organizations.

Jane-

> You cannot fund political parties and you have to be careful if you involve political entities and activists.

However, they are in a much more vulnerable position than HRSI as they support minorities and indigenous people to advocate for the rights within their local governments and the EU. MRG has much more at stake if the line is crossed, making their restraint from crossing lines beyond a funding issue. However, pulling on Tobias's

comment above from HRSI and the various quotes below from MRG, members in both organizations acknowledge the constraints, but rationalize the value in upholding a less radical stance.

Jane-

I am the Europe and central Asia Programmes officer and I work on the Balkans and we hope to move into the Caucuses in Central Asia and Russia and those countries are extremely politicized. I think international organizations should not be too politically involved in order to have a higher aim to stipulate good laws and implement good governance. I'm happy not being too political or too radical, in Transparency[11] there is a phrase of being an 'angry NGO' and being an 'NGO' and I quite happy to not work for an angry NGO and part of it is that you need to conduct extensive research and have proper data to advocate for social change, you can not just go on the street and make demands, you have to have a strong back –up. I worry that demands pile up on each other and there is no sense of realism any more and you discredit the cause by making demands without any basis. But I do think that you need both, you need those angry NGOs and you need the more constructive NGOs.

Samuel-

The only constraint I suppose is that I can't be a little more extreme, but that's everyone's constraint. Someone would like to go running down the streets in their shorts in the winter, but it's too cold, so you can't always do what you want because circumstances don't allow you to.

Steven-

Another constraint that keeps us from chaining ourselves to the fences of parliaments or embassies, which I would dearly love to do at any moment, is that we have programs on the ground in different countries and we have to get access to these countries. We have partners who

[11] Jane previously worked for Transparency International: the global coalition against corruption. http://www.transparency.org/

> could be in grave danger if we did do something spectacular, like chain ourselves to the fence of their embassy. Our partners could be at risk of being shut down. So it is a balance, I used to say in Amnesty, between the "crystal chandelier" and the "guerilla", metaphorically speaking. It's true, we have to balance the appeal of grass-roots activism with being able to communicate in a manner suited to being under the crystal chandeliers. This is the reality in any sector, it's to do with communication and identifying your audience and speaking to that audience.

The reality of maintaining a level of political diplomacy within a field that is intrinsically political reveals the contradictory nature of civil society and the NGO field. On the one hand there is a need to penetrate political systems and change policies and ideologies, but on the other hand, NGOs have to work within certain boundaries and abide by particular rules to make any impact. According to Bourdieu, the protocol necessary for entering the political field imposes categories of class distinctions regulating behavior, which exerts domination over all that enter. The acceptance to follow the conventions of the political field is a form of surrendering to this domination (Bourdieu 1991). In the case of HRSI who does not practice advocacy work, the suppressing of their personal beliefs can be viewed as a form of *symbolic domination*. The institution in which they work and are affiliated to limits their actions, and considering that their funding comes from that very institution shows a level of power exerted over their small organization.

MRG's dependency on donors and the state (EC) causes other challenges, which touch on a core issue in the NGO field as well as the common critique that donors steer projects.

Hannah-

There are huge constrains, a lot of projects are donor driven. Often we design proposals answering to a call put out by a donor rather than designing an ideal project that would help the beneficiaries. It's not that it's not going to help them, but it might not be their biggest priority. If you went with your own issue that it is impossible to get money for, even if you know it's important. But in the end, people cannot be helped at all if you don't get the money. It's a real dilemma, you try to get the money and help people, if you fought against it you wouldn't get the money so you have very little choice.

Jane-

Because we depend on calls for proposals, which specify a particular topic and regions to work with, we have to create and adapt our projects to them, which means we have to shift our focus. A constraint is we have a good idea for project and we have the right local partners, but we cannot have a funder at that certain time. Then we find a funder and the partner has a different focus. The projects that we create within the focus areas of the calls are still aligned with our mission, however the projects may not turn out as successful and productive because you have to include another subject or country where the partner organization is not as strong and you haven't built a relationship with.

Thomas-

Sometimes donors are not assessing what the situations in countries or regions are actually like. They'll say that we need to do a project which 'improves developments for the implementation of human rights and participation of groups,' which is good and if someone like us can adapt a clever enough program to that, it will have a very good benefit, but we're always being clever to adopt a program towards their focus. Any program that we do is not going to have a negative outcome

because we use the rights-based approach.[12] But is it the most important thing in the region, maybe not, if it's not looked at coherently, could it distract NGOs from collaboration between themselves? Does it mean that NGOs are putting more of their resources to donor projects than what they identify as core needs?

HRSI staff has a considerable amount of flexibility in which areas of human rights they can focus on due to their stable funding from CEU and OSI. However they acknowledge the reality of this constraint and do grapple with altering their organization in order to procure more funding.

Jessica–

I think especially when it comes to project based NGOs they tend to tailor their projects to the needs of donors. They have a project they would like to do, but here is not a donor that fits into this and they change their project to fit in, in some ways they are selling themselves to their donor. But, there is no other option, this is the tradeoff.

Alasia-

For example HRSI considered the possibility of starting research and thus would be able to qualify for research-based grants. To me, that's not HRSI, we don't do research, is it worth changing to get this money? We decided not to change as of now, I personally don't think that we should change HRSI.

Jessica-

If we started research we'd lose a lot of what we are doing now because there's only so much we can do. We'd have to completely change the profile of HRSI. I think there's a lot of trade off, it's

[12] In 1997 the Secretary-General Kofi A. Annan called on all agencies of the United Nations to mainstream a "human rights-based approach" into their activities and programs. This approach states "people are recognized as key actors in their own development, rather than passive recipients of commodities and services" (2003). See: http://www.unicef.org/sowc04/files/AnnexB.pdf and http://www.un.org/depts/dhl/humanrights/toc/toc9.pdf

> just the reality, its really hard for NGOs to find money. It's very uncertain work, its not that easy, like we're just going to sell ourselves to this donor, its difficult.

Firstly, in regards to the critique that donors steer projects, this is a truism for MRG and a core challenge, which inhibits making an optimal impact. There is agreement that this constraint is not necessarily doing harm and they are still able to contribute to communities and regions in need through their ability to design projects, however there is a clear gap between the needs of a community or group and the focus areas of the calls for proposals. There is a power dynamic between those that have the funds and those that need the funds. The donors legitimize their authority by qualifying what a suppressed group or unsettled region needs without proper assessment. "All symbolic domination presupposes, on the part of those who submit to it, a form of complicity which is neither passive submission to external constrain nor a free adherence to values" (Bourdieu 1991: 50). Both Jessica and Hannah reluctantly submit to the reality of the system. They know their limitations and stick within whatever leeway the state and donors grant them. However, in theory donors and NGOs should be 'one the same page.' If both of their goals are the same, for instance improving the lives of a certain community, why is there a disconnect and why do NGO staff succumb to procedures that are not the most effective? The simple answer is available funds, but are other power dynamics at play which make NGO staff surrender to a flawed system? Although MRG is able to design their projects and implement them under their human-rights based standards, is *symbolic domination* exerted over them by their funders through a lack of communication and inclusion in call subject areas?

NGO staff could speak out more to their donors, but from working within both organizations, time to think about this is minimal to non-existent, as they seem to be caught in a vicious cycle of needing funds to survive. HRSI's funding from OSI and CEU is not enough to cover their entire salaries, which are by no means extravagant. Therefore they have to generate money on their own through various fundraising events. While interning at HRSI, the need to fundraise for their survival did put a strain on their work and detract at times from their core mission. Events such as the Halloween party are purely for fundraising. Although these events place HRSI amongst the students, their main target group, it could add to the confusion about HRSI's identity and role at CEU, which is feedback they received. Do they throw parties or are they focused on human rights? This constraint is seen as the reality in which they must work. MRG is also impacted by the complexity of fundraising and 'project based' grants.

> Steven-
>
> A diminishing number of donors give core funding for the overall work of the organization. What that means is that, at any given time, all of the colleagues are being funded by a patchwork of programs, some that are ending and others that are beginning. Colleagues also have to split their time so that they end up a few days a week working with one program and a few days a week working in another. So that means one is constantly thinking ahead, when does a program finish, and when do we have to start fundraising, This also means that there is little flexibility in allocating staff resources, as each person's time is like a jigsaw puzzle of these programs and the donors and what they require in terms of reporting back. This is a constraint, but this is the reality quite simply that almost all NGOs work with.

Susan-

> Changes come in ten years time. But programs are funded only for 2 or 3 years and it's not enough time. The group starts to get to know each other and the partners begin to understand what the program means. When we finally build a solid working relationship, the funding is gone. And then, when you apply for new funds, of course you have to incorporate an extra element and extra target into the program because the EC won't fund the exact same program, it makes no sense to them. This is hard, this makes this situation a bit unstable, which can lead to inconsistency.

The issue above addresses the critique that the NGO methodology of implementing projects is ineffective. From interviews, it is clear that NGO staff have few options in this area and would prefer funding for a longer period of time as building relationships with partner organizations is difficult and social change is a slow process. So the question must be asked, why do donors continue to break up their grants into smaller amounts and scatter their focus? Is there pressure to distribute their funding over more areas considering the seemingly endless regions and peoples in need? Some argue that this imposed dependency is a Neoliberal agenda to steer the field of human and minority rights away from social and political mobilization towards the implementation of small bureaucratic projects (Feldman 2004, Ferguson 1997). NGOs end up chasing after funds and in sense spinning their wheels through using their resources on constant fundraising, proposal writing and reporting. When analyzed critically it appears to be the perfect system to actually slow down change. The unfortunate factor is that this challenge combined with the actual work advocating for rights, leaves staff overworked and with the ideology that "this is just the way it is."

Imperial Baggage

Some critiques claim that imperial practices and ideologies are ingrained in all aspects of western politics and social practices (Said 1993). Given that NGOs take money from western corporate funders and the state to implement projects in 'underdeveloped' regions of the world, it is not surprising that they will be critiqued in light of a historical practice of domination and subordination. How does this theory translate on the ground in every day NGO work?

Samuel-

> On the one had as a minority rights NGO you are an upholder of a supposedly moral standard, but the real world is quite cut throat, people bribe who they have to bribe etc. If you want to do mining in a certain country and someone who is a mining minister can be bought with 300,000 Euros and you want to do it because you're going to make 10 billion dollars, you're going to pay it and they're going to take it and any constitutionally protected rights of the minority group on that land will most likely be trampled upon. So there are two different worlds that always have to interact.
>
> NGOs could be reproducing imperialism, but they are not obliged to be. This is very hard to determine, to what extent people carry around the baggage of their own culture. You can't help an engrained cultural background. I cannot, that's why I listen to rap and hip-hop music, *laughs.* You have to know who you are. One of the responsibilities of life is to know that you actually do have cultural baggage. And knowing when that baggage is kicking in and knowing when you want to keep it and when you want to let it go, because it could be very valuable in some instances.

Hannah-

> A lot of people have been working in developing countries for years and I see many that do really want to see change. I do see white westerners that go in and look down on the people and they actually think they are the saviors, it is some sense a continuation of a colonial attitude and that they are there to change the problem or that its their systems that work. And they're not understanding of their systems. You can't be sure about the agendas in all cases. I wouldn't necessarily go with this post-imperialist agenda that they want to rule the world in a different sense. I think that they haven't gotten rid of this kind of attitude that we are superior and they are inferior. It might be something like not valuing cultures, religions or systems because they don't recognize the value in the people's life. I can't articulate this frustration properly enough, because I haven't had time to develop it in my head, but it's a feeling I have. I see this north south divide quite significantly.

Samuel first discusses the unfortunate reality of NGO work that has to battle against capitalism and continuing imperial practices, for instance, the exploitation of resources from poorer countries by large-scale multi-national corporations. He suggests a concrete dichotomy between the exploiters and the exploited with NGOs somewhere stuck in between, attempting uphold a standard of rights. This speaks directly to Bourdieu's *symbolic violence*, in which the dichotomy is created by the amount of *social* and *cultural capital* one has. However, Samuel shifts to a more personal question as to whether NGOs and those working within them could unconsciously be perpetuating imperial practices. He acknowledges that individuals as well as organizations that were shaped within the very same dominating framework that they are challenging have a strong chance of falling into the age-old practices. Hannah expresses her disappointment with the reality that she has seen many instances were people are not consciously aware of their ingrained superior ideologies and by not valuing local systems, they in turn are

perpetuating this paternalistic attitude. Below, Susan illustrates her thought process to avoid the reproduction of imperial practices and manage this contradiction.

Susan-

First it's a question of differentiating between human rights and cultural rights. What you can consider a cultural right, a tradition that should be protected or what should be considered a tradition that should be abolished tomorrow. Of course you eventually come to the answer: traditions that do not contribute to the development of a human being should not be maintained. Even if NGOs do their best, they can prepare the soil for western business. It's an issue that is hard to decipher whether you are pushing a value from above to a community or when it's really evolving from the grass root level. In my opinion to address this dilemma, you should intensively work with the communities, introduce the principle of human rights, engage with them in dialogue about human rights, and through empowerment and capacity building, you can help them to develop their own understanding of what human rights are. Let them integrate these values into their own society and change their traditions and way of life in a way that won't harm any members of the society. Of course this can be subject to manipulation as can everything, but this seems to me the best way to avoid this imperialistic critique of being a western NGO. And let the community reflect on human rights as well as on your methods, learn from them and bring the knowledge back to your own country.

Steven-

I take the imperial hegemony question quite seriously, I think it is very important in the human rights field to approach the work with a great dose of self-criticism and self-evaluation and it's really important to keep thinking about that. What's really the answer for me, is what we see in the room. That may have been true 30 or 40 years ago. But we see that there are people working for human rights from all kinds of cultures in all kinds of community settings. It is no longer, thank god, white middle class males, balding, with glasses, who are going around telling people what to do.

The above interviewees raise the method of being self-conscious and self-reflective as a way to avoid imperial practices. This personal approach is a continuous theme throughout my research and is imperative when working in and across these complex fields with dramatic differences in *capital*. Bourdieu's notion of *symbolic domination* directly addresses how our cultural background impacts our perceptions and ideologies, which are unconsciously recreated through all of our interactions (1991). Because western NGO staff members work within a very clear power structure and have significantly more *social* and *cultural capital* than their beneficiaries, they have seen this *symbolic domination* in the field and recognize the need to be self aware to ensure that they do not fall into their cultural baggage. This is not an easy task however, as western NGOs have become professionalized institutions. They are critiqued for capitalizing on aide, which reduces their crucial role as watchdogs to just a job.

Hannah-

> I see that it is a system that has to run and there are very little alternatives. Electricity and rent in London costs more than in Africa. But if you think about it, if all that money went straight to Africa, a lot more people would be fed and a lot more would benefit. The problem is that they may not have the expertise of an organization to be able to help them benefit. It's an issue and personally it bothers me. All the costs are justifiable and I see how an organization like ours offers a name, a reputation and expertise that a small organization in Latin America or Asia requires. Unfortunately because the disparity is so big, we need so much more funds to manage.

Susan-

> The professionalization and institutionalization per se do not make NGOs ineffective. However, it is of course a concrete threat that after a while you can lose the point as to what you are working for. You work a lot, you want to sustain the life of the NGO, and NGOs have to take care about

> their public relations and appearance to the outer world in order to get funds. They can get funds if they can tick the boxes, if they can show the results, for example a certain number of articles produced. This reporting system that donors require does not oblige you to also make an extensive qualitative assessment of your work;. Actually, in some cases it is up to you to what extent you show a critical approach to your own results,
>
> The best work is done on a voluntary basis, however, I do not think it is a problem that NGO people are paid for their job., It's an important work for the health of the society, just like the government and official positions should be. The government should be the main civil society organization, but now NGOs have emerged as another sphere to be critical and hold them accountable. And I wonder if we will reach a point where there will be another arena that will be critical of NGOs. So I don't think it's bad that we are paid, I think we are quite conscious people. We spend our funds justifiably and even with our salaries, all of us contribute to charity work in some way or volunteer work. We can turn our money back into the system in which we work.

Hannah first addresses a core area of the critique, the amount of money that is spent on western wages and overheads, which would translate into much more money if used directly within regions in need. Although this bothers her, she knows that advocacy work within governments, which is to make a lasting impact, takes a level of expertise that local NGOs and communities cannot provide. Donors also are not going to simply give money to a community; they require systematic results and reporting, which would require further training of local NGO staff. Susan also acknowledges that the professionalization of NGOs can make one loose sight of the core mission. She brings up a crucial flaw in the systems of reporting and evaluating that donors require. The way that donors measure success is disconnected from what her ideas of a successful project are, which is a by-product of this professionalization. Below, Thomas discusses further

both the necessity for professionalization and ways to manage the risks involved in such institutionalization.

Thomas-

> We benefit from poverty; I don't know about capitalize on it. I certainly have a good lifestyle out of this job. My job is to make my lifestyle redundant, but I know that's not going to happen. We have to be very careful of this, but that doesn't take away from the fact that we should get proper wages for our jobs and that professionalism will produce better results. Do you want volunteer doctors, soldiers or politicians that don't have time to prepare for their jobs and develop the necessary skills? To be sustainable you need a decent means of living. This is a question of the responsibility of NGOs, are they genuine about their intervention, that their intervention is needed. Are they willing to turn down donor money when they think that their intervention is an inhibition to getting money to the ground. MRG can only justify taking fifty percent of a donors budget on salaries and overheads if we can genuinely say that our intervention is needed to act as mediator between the donor and community. And we have to be committed to the idea that our intervention is temporary. The problem is, our intervention should only be temporary where we can then turn things over to a sustainable structure, but donors are looking for goal results and building sustainable structures are not tangible. More donors are saying that funding should go directly to the countries and not through MRG So donors are making this intervention a lot more, which is justified. Although I don't take it cynically that NGOs are just going in for the money, I think it's that you don't know, and you have to make a judgment whether to go in. Sometimes its down to whoever has the skill and capacity to argue better or longer, will decide who is right. An NGO like MRG has that power at times and its that ability to say, actually no, maybe we're not needed here. I think MRG is quite good at that, but sometimes we get desperate and we don't think and we do a proposal at short notice.

Thomas raises the issue of accountability and ensuring that as an NGO your skills and expertise are needed to improve the current situation. He alludes to instances where

calls for proposals focused on areas where an intervention by an NGO may not be beneficial for that region. NGOs have to be honest about this reality and put the regions first over attaining funds, however this can be difficult given the system of dependency and the continued urgency for funds. He also admits to the power that western NGOs have over local NGOs. If they are competing for funds, the western NGOs with the more *legitimate language* and *capital* will most likely win the debate. There is a commonality in the responses above that, although this falls from context to context, there is a need for western NGOs expertise and professionalization to be able to work with corporate funders and within state institutions. The professionalization allows them to 'play the game' and that they can contribute to social change by working within these frameworks.

HRSI staff members discussed how they manage the non-political clause in their awareness raising through academic involvement and the presence of both sides of an issue. Given that they have personal opinions about the issues they raise, they are maneuvering within the framework to still address the controversy without being controversial. They are playing according to 'the rules of the game' within CEU. This strategic approach is also relevant to MRG's work within the broader context of working with corporate funders and the state.

Samuel-

> Sometimes in an organization you have to be politically correct. Sometimes you wish you could be more cutting-edge, but you can be sued. We advocating for rights and many times are working in dangerous circumstances. You yourself can become a target, Rights defenders have a very dangerous life. They can be carried off in the middle of the night; you can lose your license to operate as an NGO, and not be able to return to an area or you can be prevented from leaving the

country altogether. You have to play by the rules because if you disappear while you are on a mission for example, you will depend on your organization to defend you and you need to have not done something overly wrong for them to do this. You can then more readily prove that it was really just persecution on the part of the state against you because of your beliefs and what have you. It is a constraint on one hand but it is also a requirement that helps to maintain your own credibility. You don't want to get so marginalized yourself that you can't defend the marginalized. You can be denounced and demonized, and then you don't get to sit at the table.

Susan-

If you approach government officials, you have to suppose that he or she wants to do his or her best that they are capable of and therefore, it's a good step to ask what their difficulties are in their position and then you can understand what their limits are and you can advocate more successfully. If you do not approach them this way, they can start acting in a defensive manner to try to protect themselves, but if they see that you support them and not attack them, it is more productive. You have to be strategic in this, there are points when it is better to knock on their door to understand their difficulties and help and work with them and build their relations with partner organizations and then there is also a point when you have to reveal the authorities' inefficiency in the press and organize demonstrations in front of their door - this latter is not the profile of MRG.

Samuel addresses the dangers inherent in human and minority rights work as a practical reason for constraining radical behavior. He and Susan state that there are other more strategic rationales that highlight the benefits of playing by the 'rules of the game.' To enact social change within state institutions, you have to 'sit at the table,' which is not possible if you do not follow certain protocol. Some scholars agree with the interviewees that it is necessary for NGOs to play "according to the rules of the game" if they are to achieve any influence within the state (Murazzani 2009: 506). Functionalist

ideologies came up repeatedly in my research when inquiring about elitist structures and the institutionalization of NGOs. Murazzani recognizes the limitations of working with the state, however, the activist NGOs that reject professionalism and refuse to play the game, have a difficult time penetrating the system and are viewed more as 'trouble makers' (Murazzani 2009). Many see the way to social change as gaining knowledge of and experience within the structure you are attempting to influence. Those that have greater *social* and *cultural capital* from the outset are more likely to work their way into the dominant institutions, "it goes without saying that the capacity to manipulate is greater the more capital one possesses" (Bourdieu 1991:71). This correlates with the critique of NGO staff as a new class of bourgeoisie advocating for the rights of the poor and marginalized. All of the staff members that I interviewed came from secure backgrounds. To get down to the crux of this critique and reality, I centered my questions on why these educated middle-class staff members chose this line of work.

Hannah-

> Personally I am from an elite background, I had a certain privilege of education that enabled me to do this job and do it successfully and I can't hide from that. Perhaps, when you are in a privileged position you learn to value what you have and you want to give something back from it. It also might be easier to do when you have the resources then when you are stuck in the problem. I don't think everyone can be classified, there are some patterns and I can see where the critique is coming from but I don't think it is that simplistic. Not everyone I know that works in this field is passionate about rights. Everyone will have their own individual narrative as to why they got into it. Its very personal, its something that I enjoy doing, I really have no reason to do it, except that its passionate for me. I have a huge frustration that I'm not doing enough.

Thomas-

We are a new class of something; this is clearly a middle class occupation. I think most people in human rights have a concept of justice, whether they've experienced injustice themselves or not. I was raised in a family that was always socially active, although it was more for conventional politics. So I always thought that I would do something socially active, but never quite knew what that was. For me, I tap into an experience I had as a child growing up in a mining town in Britain. The mining workers went on strike for two years two-year challenging Margaret Thatcher's attempts at opening up a free market. I saw a complete sense of powerlessness; that is the emotion that I really identify with human rights even though its nothing compared to what we deal with in other countries; I can have a tangible sense of that. Another friend of mine talks about a time when she was little saw her dad get into a fight, which wasn't his fault. He was beat up and accused for something that he was not responsible for. She remembers that he was very disempowered by that injustice and she connects to this.

Steven-

I think that one should remember that each person carries with them their own individual story. Even if my external appearance is that of a privileged upper middle class white male, the truth is that I am gay, I tried to come out in the 80's during the AIDS crisis, government leaders were calling me and my kind a cancer on society, I was chased by right wing neo-Nazis down the streets of my home town. That too is an experience that for me now is past history, I feel very comfortable with myself and I realize that I do have a privileged place in society as a white male. This was an experience that certainly informed the whole of my life and I hope that I keep tapping into to understand the situations and stories of the communities and people we work with

Samuel-

I came from a relatively privileged background; I did not have to struggle or anything. My family were teachers, maybe that's where the whole idea of community service originated. It's not

> something that someone drums into you, but you see that there are other ways to live and work without just taking. Even when I opened an art gallery, I ended up working with artisans in Latin America. I sold their goods because I wanted to help them. There is something that resonates within you because you realize the world does not have to be the way it is. Why do those with a more privileged background become an activists, maybe there are a number of answers to this. You have to want to give something back. In my case, I don't think I even thought of it in those terms. It seemed like something that I wanted to do and would get some benefit and satisfaction from doing. I could use my talent and knowledge to improve somebody's life and it was as simple as that. You do not even think about it too much, in terms of justice or truth or morality, you kind of just do it. A project sounds like fun, I get to work with these people and make their lives better, this is why I would say you are more born with it.

Hannah first addresses the practical answer to this reality that the poor and marginalized do not have the education or resources to step out of their oppressed situation and help themselves. She then moves towards her own motivations for working within this field and although she acknowledges that some see NGO work as just a job, for her, it is a passion and a very personal decision. Thomas and Steven are both white males classifying them within the dominant culture. However, they both tap into a certain experience of powerlessness, which impacted them when they were younger. They do not suggest that these experiences are what made them want to defend the rights of the disenfranchised, they utilize it more as a place to empathize with those they are advocating for. Steven does have a more personal experience of being discriminated against, thought he is not certain that being gay is what compels him to work in the NGO field. Samuel attempts to articulate this rather unknown reason for being drawn to upholding universal human rights. Samuel is black, but does not ever mention this as reason for following this professional path. He told no stories or events where he

experienced discrimination that led to his life long career in the human rights field. Nikol, a staff member from SONCE, also resonates with the desire to give back. As a Roma, he is a minority, however he's part of the wealthier Roma class following the pattern of the more privileged advocating for the less fortunate.

> Nikol-
>
> By occasion I was part of a NGO training in 1998 and I saw this as attractive for my life**.** I was a musician at that time. For 17 years I was earning good, as I play a lot of instruments, and also I had my own recording studio. I decided to take the SONCE job, not for the money, but it was interesting for me that on long run, it provided more opportunities for brining positive impact to the group of the people around me, my community. This work was very familiar to my character, so I entered NGO activism.

None of my interviewees could articulate why they have an innate drive for justice. This enigma will be revisited later as some valuable insights could arise from researching this area further.

The critique that NGO staff is primarily middle class citizens of a dominant culture, is a reality in my research. Findings show that even with this truth, they have a hankering for justice and to a degree are able to empathize with their target groups. But does this compulsion translate into the authority to represent? Critiques suggest that there are gaps in communication and participation with their beneficiaries, leading to issues of representation.

Managing Barriers

Issues with representation span over various levels in the NGO field: the demographic of staff members, cultural and geographic barriers of communication and the gap between the organization and their target group. MRG's staff is multicultural and about one third are from a minority group. They would like to include more minorities on their staff, but experience difficulties in achieving this goal. Minorities and indigenous peoples are marginalized and not accustomed to western professional practices, making it extremely difficult to include them in their organization. NGOs are critiqued for not properly communicating with their target groups. MRG's mission is to educate partner NGOs to advocate for themselves, so they have a mindset that minorities and indigenous people's voice should be heard. They focus on including members from communities and local NGOs in state processes and make sure that a local representative is present when possible. Working from this framework reveals other challenges faced that cause a gap between them and their target groups.

> Jack-
>
> We face a lot of challenges; one is communication and being able to work out how to contact people. We try to set up field trips to go and visit one of the communities which is difficult to coordinate, some don't have any way of communicating besides walking by foot. Also, we train communities to create their own websites and films and we have a lot of web technology; every time we have to consider what their technical capacity is. Cultural differences are a challenge, we need to make sure MRG staff are thoroughly briefed on how to behave, how certain behaviors might be interpreted in another culture. Because of distance and cultural barriers when working with partner organizations on a project, it can be difficult to specify roles and coordinate who does what.

Steven-

When you head out to a community to gather information, interview and so on, your first priority is to make sure the people you meet are safe, both during and most importantly after that contact that you don't put those people at risk. Minorities and indigenous people often live in quite remote areas. So a lot of our conversations in the office are about safety of staff, communication, making sure they're able to communicate with us if they get into problems. Contingency planning. For us there is a reality that there could be a kidnapping or something like that, and that is a serious issue.

Jane-

We address this gap by creating partnerships with local NGOs and supporting them to build capacity through capacity building trainings and knowledge of EU procedures. They are required to bring these skills directly to the community. I think this one removed system works fine; in some countries it is more difficult than others. You are dependent upon the local NGOs and many challenges of accessibility, from geographic to cultural differences, impact the efficiency of the partnership. It takes years to build solid partnerships, establishing new partnerships is a high-risk issue for us.

Susan-

Partners need a lot of nurturing and we need to talk to them a lot even after the media trainings and this is hard because we have a lot to do to organize these media trainings and we don't have time to call partners every second week. They need initiative and support from us, but it is a lot of time and therefore, it is hard to ensure sustainability.

Thomas-

> There's always a certain gap, which is one of differing responsibilities. We have a fiscal responsibility to donors, partners and ourselves. Partner organizations have a responsibility to their community directly and these pull you in different directions.

A clear reason for the gap between NGOs and their target groups is geographic and cultural differences. From the comments above, it is evident that my interviewees are aware of this limitation and focus on improving communication. Steven addresses a critical challenge within their work that is not mentioned in research and analyses of NGO work; the dangers in working in the field of human and minority rights. This issue has been raised numerous times in my research through personal experiences, however it is not mentioned in the critical literature. Another key issue is the need to build meaningful relationships with partner organizations and the difficulty in doing so given the other constraints of working within the field. Interviewees mention their desire to spend more time interacting and getting to know their partner organizations, however funding does not cover these activities. It is assumed that building relationships is more an enhancement and not a necessity for working together, something that from my research is simply not true.

Thomas views this gap in terms of responsibilities or it can be viewed as accountability, which brings up an interesting issue in representation. NGOs are crossing over into many fields and as individual organizations they are accountable to their donors, themselves and their target groups (for MRG, this is the community or partner organization depending upon the program). Although the core mission of the organization and personal determinations for justice from individual staff members would

suggest that more focus would go towards the target group. This critique comes from the fact that because of financial constraints and incessant reporting back to funders, the field that would suffer in terms of accountability would be the target groups. This is a result of the system, which staffs are aware of and some are frustrated by this reality.

Hannah-

> I would like to be a lot more hands on and work closer to the communities, but there are constraints and funding issues. I have different perspectives. I've worked in the grass-roots arena as well as the UN. The UN it is such a political body, you can't say anything or do anything until the governments are consulted. Development yes, health yes, gender maybe, but not human rights. Because with human rights you have to be able to criticize and if you have to consult the government before you criticize them you are very limited.
>
> I would like to do the grass-root level, but I don't know if I could do it entirely, I don't know if I would be accepted at that level. I might always feel that I am not from it, that I am not being legitimate in what I represent. The community might not consider me acceptable, they will always see me as coming from a different position, so that would be a struggle and this is not only class, there are cultural barriers to this. So I am kind of fitting in the middle and there is this frustration that I'm not doing enough.

SONCE has been partners with MRG since 2003. A staff member discusses below challenges and lessons learned in building the strong partnership they have today.

Janina-

> It was not so easy to build relationships with MRG in the beginning, there are always problems in this line of work with funding constraints and communicating from distances. However, many times we have relied on each other. For example, once for an advocacy event in Brussels, MRG produced a provocative press release before the event, which caused rage among the DG

Enlargement staff, and we were attacked at the beginning. But, we were prepared with arguments, and the situation finished excellent. Maybe this problem with the press release attracted their attention more. And these types of situations actually build trust. You have to put the effort in as well, I'm here in Budapest and I stop by the MRG office to visit. Slowly you become friends, but you need to spend time together and go through things.

Although SONCE is a local grass roots NGO where staff are entirely Roma working within a Roma community there are similar power dynamics and challenges.

Nikol-

I am fully aware of how the community perceived Roma NGOs. The problem is that most of the NGOs, not only in Macedonia, are not so welcomed in their communities. We cannot say that we are too detached from the community. It is because the problems are still almost the same in the community as ten to fifteen years ago. The community looks at the Roma NGOs as they are spending their money. That the money belongs to the community, which is not true, as the donors cannot simply give the money to the people. There has to be formal structure or hierarchy, rules on how to give these kinds of donations, but this is not known to ordinary Roma.

Janina-

Even the Roma community sees the people from the Roma NGOs as detached from them. I'm highly educated, I have a university degree. I'm not what others would say are a typical Roma. I can speak English. Even Rroma don't see the NGO representatives as part of the community, they look different, they act different, they go to different places. You can't say that the NGOs are really part of the community, but on the other hand, you cannot say that they are not. They are Roma, they speak the language, they know the problems they have grown up in these neighborhoods, they are part of the community. In other outside contexts, I am seen as part of the community. They see that we react many times emotionally, subjectively of course, because it is for our community and we are part of it. It depends on who you ask, for me, I am part of the

community, and since I have contacts with the rest of the society, it is safe to say that I represent some kind of a link between the community and other actors

There is a hierarchical tier of *symbolic power* from the Roma community in Tetovo, all the way to the state and funders. SONCE and MRG are two levels of authority separating the most marginalized to the most privileged.[13] SONCE staff members are upper class Roma creating a divide between themselves and the community. Janina discusses the challenges of working directly within the community and gaining trust.

Janina-

They have been failed by the system so many times, they don't trust me, even though I speak the Language. They don't think that you are lying. They think it is pointless. I can say 'go to school' and they will say, 'I won't get a job anyway afterwards, what's the point?' It is difficult because they do not see much tangible evidence of the advocacy work that we do. SONCE made a road in their community, and people helped. And they saw, on day there was mud and now there is a road. So they gained a little trust, but it's not consistent because not everything we do shows concrete results. And you are still the one talking to the government. Once we heard rumors, that SONCE provided a lot of money to act as investors and crush down the community and build our own investments. This is difficult to hear, you have to get over your anger or disappointment.

Lessons are that you can't give up. You have to be strong even though they may say a lot about you. You have to understand that they have been failed so much. We also have regular meetings at least once a week, even if for the sake of the community getting together. We do this once a week. We often ask the people 'What do you think we should do next or work on?' so that our work is relevant.

[13] This does not address the various levels of hierarchy within the EU and UN systems.

The critique that many western NGOs do not include their target groups sufficiently has been verified in my research, however the reasons for this gap are reveal a number of complexities. The gap exists because of the extreme difficulty in working with the poor and marginalized. Janina's experience of working within her community displays these challenges vividly. She is a Roma and she speaks Romani, however because of her class difference and relations with International Organizations (IOs) and the state, she is in a constant struggle to gain the communities trust. Bourdieu addresses this lack of trust from past experiences and how it's "impossible to see that intimidation, a symbolic violence which is not aware of what it is (the extent that it implies no act of intimidation) can only be exerted on a person predisposed to feel it, whereas others will ignore it" (Bourdieu 1991: 51). The community created rumors to verify their skepticism of SONCE's intentions, which was instilled in them from centuries of discrimination and marginalization. If those that are from a community have theses difficulties, the challenges for a western organization like MRG would be ten fold. MRG is aware of these difficulties and purposefully designs their programs to empower local partner NGOs. However ,their approach takes time and they consistently state their desire to have more contact with their partner NGOs and the community.

Thomas-

> Unless you can afford in country offices contact is limited; take Amnesty for example, if there's a problem in Uganda, Amnesty has an office there that will take care of it. MRG will find a partner and train a partner to take care of it. Ours is the more holistic, rights-based approach strategy, but Amnesty's works better. Ours is adding an extra tier into the process, an extra set of instructions and competing responsibilities and is dependent upon the capacity of partners. Although in the long term, in theory, ours is the more holistic system. So there's two ways of looking at it, with a

small organization like MRG, we don't have the outreach to communities, of course we want to monitor and have more contact with them, it's a problem with our projects.

Thomas is addressing a long-term strategic approach for improving civil society and global governance. Another steady theme throughout my research is the time it takes to create social change and the intangibility of the results. Hannah mentions the frustration she feels about not "being able to do enough." How do NGO staffs manage this challenging role?

Susan-

You have to learn how to be satisfied if you reach a tiny result, be happy with the smaller accomplishments and see the opportunity of progress in front of you. Of course it is really hard, psychologically and mentally, you keep on questioning your role and efficiency. So this is one thing that you have to learn, how to be glad about results. After you are satisfied with the result, you should be critical and assess whether you really reached what you wanted. It's very important to be critical and question always whether you managed to reach the community, to give the power back to the people, whether they really were empowered and included properly in the process. It's back and forth. Be glad and critical about your own role.

Steven-

I worked for the UN high commissioner for refugees for eight years and had the privilege of being involved in situations where lives were saved and hopefully having contributed to that myself. I draw a lot of energy and inspiration from that and the people we worked with, their stories and their strength, if nothing else, we can't give up because they don't.

In regards to positive gains we've had this past year, there are two major court cases, the Endorois decision regarding Kenya by the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights and the Finci case regarding Bosnia by the European Court of Human Rights. Hopefully if all goes well,

we can change the destiny of the whole community with regard to the Endorois and possibly the constitution in Bosnia to ensure that all Bosnian citizens can participate in political processes.

In general, I remain a naive optimist, and I think you have to be to work in this field.

HRSI's mission to 'raise-awareness and build capacity' are both intangible results and given that their target group are CEU students and not those directly affected by human rights violations, they also share this oscillation between doubt and optimism. HRSI has been critiqued for not being directly involved with human rights offenses where more discernable results can be measured. How do they feel about not working directly with victims of human rights violations and not having any concrete way to evaluate their impact?

Jessica –

A lot of our work is based on the conceptual belief that this is going to give back at some point. You do these things, you do a workshop and people leave. And you ask yourself; did I do a good job? Was I wasting time or not? You have to believe that this is going to give back.

Alasia –

That makes sense, Habitat for Humanity can measure how many houses they built in a year and we don't have anything like that. We publicized ourselves as an organization that creates awareness raising amongst students. Basically our target group is the students, so we work directly with them. Hopefully in the long run the idea is to get them thinking about human rights, so whatever type of human rights issue they become interested in, in the future, hopefully one day they will go out and be a grass-roots connection.

SONCE staff also discuss that a reason for the lack of trust from the community is that their work is not visible to them. This is a core challenge for SONCE as it coincides with the bureaucratic barriers they encounter and the time it takes to penetrate the system.

Nikol-

> In the beginning we were dealing with some humanitarian activities. We delivered a huge amount of food, clothes, housing materials. But it is a never-ending story as the needs remains to be there. Throughout the time we changed our mission in order to deal more with development activities, like education, promotion of employment and advocacy, because we believed that this is more feasible for a small organization and that it would make a more lasting impact. Advocacy is not tangible for Roma and you can't explain all the procedures, legal barriers and the standards required from us to advocate. We have to communicate our programs in the appropriate way to these structures, starting from community up to the state's standards and this is not easy task. They have different methods and approaches of communicating than us, but also amongst them. If you are going to speak to the UN forum, you have only three minutes time to submit your intervention, and planning process to bring you there lasts six to seven months just to register. If you are going to Brussels you have to plan in advance two three months and you are received by people at a very low level of hierarchy. Now being part of OSI after ten years of doing this job, I had the opportunity of meeting a European Commissioner, but only for a half hour. We have to accept that there are different levels of communication that we can reach.

Given the numerous constraints placed upon NGOs, there is a trend that activists find other ways to express more concrete dissidence. Many staff members at HRSI and MRG nurture their more radical dispositions with activism outside the institutional constraints in the NGO field.

Tobias-

> For me, in my position as a PM in an NGO that works at a university, activism is not so much what I do at HRSI but what I do outside of it, which is my personal activism. But also, I am not only advocating for "others" in my projects, but also for myself, because very often I base my projects on my own activism. But also, outside of CEU, many people still see me as HRSI and have certain expectations of me, of how I am supposed to act and react, so it is sometimes hard to keep the balance and be your true self.

While I was interning at MRG, Susan was arrested for protesting against the eviction of a family through an organization that she helped found, City for All, which is a campaigning org done by homeless and non-homeless people.

Susan-

> I don't think I could do my MRG work with such enthusiasm if that other work was not part of my life. Even if MRG is an NGO that is closer to the grass-roots level, with my work as a media-officer, I receive feedback in a very abstract level. I am very happy if I am able to reach media coverage, but after a few years, there are instances when you just become cynical about your own power, your own strength and you realize that a lot of other things have to work out well so that you can contribute to the change of any part of policy with media coverage – and this is a kind of work where changes come slowly. Basically, I started to establish this group because I wanted to be closer to the beneficiaries, I've been a member from the very beginning. Because I felt even in MRG but rather in my previous organization that I do not have extensive relations with those who are affected by the human rights abuse. My work in City for All helped me a lot to resurrect my enthusiasm and really helps me put more energy into my work in MRG where feedback comes at a more abstract level and change comes in a slower manner.

Managing the line between NGO work and activism is generated through personal motivation and expressed by devoting free time outside the boundaries of the institution in which they work. This reality reveals the variety of options within civil society, but

also the contradictions. To actually feel satisfied with their role of keeping the state accountable, some NGO staff members feel the need to hit the streets, join the protests and put more pressure on governments. How is it possible that given their role as state 'watchdogs' their power is so limited that they have to look outside of their organization to feel like they are making an impact? The contradictions within civil society and the constraints NGOs face reveal seemingly endless flaws in social systems of governance. What contributions can be made through analyzing the personal experiences of those caught in the middle of this contradictory framework?

Summary of Findings and Future Research

This paper intends to scratch the surface of the plethora of barriers and contradictions within civil society and the NGO field through an analysis of the personal dimension of individuals that work within this complex 'third sphere.' It explores what these individual challenges and experiences can disclose about this vast sector deemed as the main actors for upholding a universal standard of rights and global governance. I have approached this conundrum through summarizing NGO critiques and analyzing them in conjunction with constraints experienced in every day work.

A core contradiction of civil society is that NGOs are dependent upon the state and corporate funders for financial sustainability, when a main characteristic of this sphere is to be independent from the market and the state. The power is in the hands of the donors and NGOs are critiqued for implementing projects initiated by donor interests instead of the communities in which they work. This is a truism for my case organizations, which causes particular challenges. My findings show the core issue that donors are disconnected from the needs of the regions they wish to support and greater efforts should be made towards bridging this gap. Many MRG staff members and representatives of their partner organizations state that resources could be better utilized and desire for some input into decisions on how funds are allocated. My findings reveal that donor's requests measure the number of reports or articles generated, not on the ground sustainable impact. Therefore it is up to the individual staff members to internally weigh the success of a project. They do conduct evaluations and ask the communities when possible, but this process is not directly worked into the tight budget.

Solutions to this dilemma are more communication between the community, NGO staff and their donors amongst the calls for proposals and the creation of projects. Donors could broaden their subject matters and have more flexible criteria in proposals, which would allow NGO staff to tailor projects closer to the needs of the community. Not to over simplify or discount other possible variables given the complexity of state systems, still there appears to be many straight-forward solutions to this issue although a shift in mentality that those 'below' should be given more weight is perhaps a barrier. The question does arise however as to what criteria donors and states use to determine their focus and what other factors are involved besides the pure gesture of upholding a universal standard of rights for all individuals. Are there ulterior motives behind the implementation of some projects that focus on specific regions and subject matters? The answer to this question will range tremendously from context to context, however it is important to ask. Further ethnographic research that incorporates individual perspectives should be done on methods for upgrading feedback systems from the community to NGOs and from the NGOs to the state.

Another fundamental contradiction within the NGO field is that human and minority rights are political by nature, but stipulations from funders moderate their level of political involvement. NGO staff members are forced to accept this as a reality and manage this contradiction through strategic diplomacy. Some rationalize that there is 'no other option' than to work under these constraints, while others see the guidelines as maintaining professionalism. There is clear frustration from managing this opposing reality. Staff members channel this pressure through focusing on strategies for

maneuvering within and around this constraint. HRSI structures their awareness-raising activities like a debate and ensures to include both sides, but still ensures the topics address human rights violations and leaving the decision to choose sides up to the participants.

MRG works within a more complex arena managing relations with local states as well as the European Commission and the United Nations. Maintaining relations while advocating for rights within these bureaucratic systems can be viewed as 'playing the game.' This is crucial in the realm of human and minority rights, but comes with its own set of contradictions. Murazzani argues that all NGOs have to succumb to state institutions and behave "in agreement to the existing rules of the game" or the structures need to be reformed (2009: 507). Complying with state structures, languages and attitudes causes considerable criticism and raises the question as to whether NGOs have to behave like states in order to be respected by states. Through my interviews, it is apparent that 'playing the game' is viewed as necessary and involves a considerable amount of skill, reflection and awareness to keep grounded in the core intentions of civil society. There is an acknowledgement that you can get caught up in the game if you do not step back often and re-center your work around the organizations' mission.

Working within these elite systems requires a certain amount of *social* and *cultural capital* as well as professionalization, which also attracts criticism. Critics are skeptical of some NGOs' intensions as the field becomes more institutionalized and staff members from privileged backgrounds enjoy cushy lifestyles. My findings reveal various levels to this predicament. Because of the large discrepancy between those with funding and the disenfranchised, the system is such that western NGOs receive funds, take a portion for

their salaries and overheads and then put a portion towards implementing projects or to partner organizations. This system has contradictory attributes. On the one hand the mission of civil society is to promote equality and minimize power imbalances and on the other hand they are recreating this inequality by sustaining their middle class lifestyles, which limits funding to areas where some may not have enough money for food.

Interviewees react to this system in a similar fashion to other contradictions, some are frustrated and others accept it as 'the way it is.' Expertise and skills are necessary for working within and across the complex fields, which is typically accessible only to those with a certain amount of *cultural* and *social capital*. And why should promoting equality not be a job, like politicians or doctors? The challenges of working in this arena also cause a high burn-out rate; it is difficult to work amongst these contradictions for little money. Staff rationalize that despite any possible 'imperial' or 'neoliberal' agendas, it is better to do whatever they can with the funding than nothing at all. This connects to the question as to even if you reproduce imperial practices to a lesser degree are you challenging the grander imperial framework? This ties into the concept that 'doing good' and 'gift giving' are themselves imperial ideologies. But would the world be better off without any form of contribution to the poor and marginalized? The critical question is whether there are other options. MRG says their job is to eliminate their own role by equipping local partner NGOs with the knowledge and skills to represent and advocate for themselves. This is not an easy task and brings up another critique regarding the gap between NGOs and their target groups.

My findings do show a gap between NGOs and their target groups, but they also reveal the challenges inherent in their work of accessing communities and building

relationships. Interviewees discuss extensively the challenges faced when working with the disenfranchised and desire for more interaction and inclusion. We have to be aware that working with human and minority rights is a dangerous field. Staff members have to be particularly careful not to cause harm to themselves, their partner organizations and the local community. However, dealing with extremely sensitive areas is not their only obstacle. Some of the communities that need support are difficult to access geographically and once accessed, communication is difficult because of language and cultural barriers. MRG works at addressing these challenges in a variety of ways and holds that value of meaningful participation and empowerment.

Another finding is that 'participation' and 'empowerment' are overused in the NGO sector and raise questions. Can empowerment come from external actors or is it only effective when internally mobilized? Do these concepts by nature place the control in the hands of the NGO actors and take power away from those that 'need' to participate or be empowered? But then again, if NGOs did not seek out the poor and marginalized to teach them their rights and give them skills, would they be annihilated by corporate and imperial powers? This complex dilemma along with the various contradictions mentioned above keeps NGO staff questioning their role and significance. Many partake in more radical activism outside the boundaries of their institutions to appease their drive for social change.

For some NGO staff the level of impact achieved within the boundaries of their organization is not enough. Therefore many engage in more radical protests or volunteer for specific causes in their spare time. This engagement in activism generates the experience of being interactive and achieving tangible results. None of my interviewees

could articulate why they entered this field revealing an innate drive for justice. They describe it as 'familiar to my character' or 'something you are born with.' This compulsion is an untapped resource that could generate creative solutions to the limitations encountered when working in this sphere. Future research should be done on tapping into individual's core motives for working in the field of human and minority rights. Can a common drive for social justice from those that work within NGOs be tapped into and utilized to improve structures, approaches and methods? Perhaps stronger networks can be built outside the institutional boundaries based on this commonality. What can the combination of personal activism, a drive for social justice and the institutional knowledge of donors and states contribute to managing the plethora of contradictions?

The stark reality is that NGOs are in a position where they can fall into imperial practices and abuse their power. My interviewees warned that a level of reflexivity is necessary when working at this level to constantly check in with yourself and your work to ensure that imperial practices are not being reproduced. *Symbolic domination* is the underlying exertion of power over another, which is created through histories of inequality. However, given the skills and capital necessary to 'sit at the table' can you challenge authority without reproducing it? And are you still challenging power structures if you reproduce them to a lesser degree?

The imbalance of power inherent in civil society where individuals with certain capital advocate for the rights of others should be acknowledged and kept at the forefront of relations. This requires self-consciousness and a sensitivity of the impact you can have upon others simply because you are from the dominant culture. This notion of

reflecting on your role and work came up repeatedly, however it is always up to the individual to initiate this thought process for themselves. Given the pressures, constraints and professionalized culture, this crucial step in the process could be easily overlooked. I propose a more structured way to be critical and self-reflective within organizations amongst staff members and partners. The typical challenge to this proposal is 'time and money.' However, considering how important it is to those I've interviewed and given the massive constraints, I argue that the benefits will outweigh the costs.

I call for more systematic ethnographic research within specific organizations and NGO sectors (development, service, advocacy, humanitarian) to include the personal experiences, challenges and successes from the individuals who work within this contradictory arena. Personal stories and empirical examples allow for a more comprehensive scope of this challenging field, which will lead to developing practical steps towards improving civil society and the NGO sector.

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