

INTRODUCTION



If it wasn't for the NGOs here, this whole country would extinct! We were the only genuine democratic force against Milošević and even if we were working in impossible conditions, we managed to throw him down. I am talking here about genuine activism. And it's not only during 2000, when at times we risked our lives. Then the situation was "it's either now or never." But things started much earlier. *We* started much earlier. I remember we had these walks for months with thousands of Belgraders and of course students ... it was so exhausting! Sometimes I look back and I still do not know how we made it, walking all day every day around the city. It was freezing. Here, if you do not believe me, I will show you my shoes from 1996. You should see the soles, totally melted. I kept them as ... as a souvenir! They are Italian by the way. As we used to say, *Samo Setnja Srbina Spasava* [only walk can save the Serbs].

—Goran, personal interview, June 2006

Only Walk Can Save the Serbs was a parody of the national saying *Samo Sloga Srbina Spasava* (Only Unity Can Save the Serbs) that had taken on ultra-nationalistic tones during the violent Yugoslav conflicts in the beginning of the 1990s. The new twisted version became the slogan of marches that started in November 1996. Serbia had already been transformed into a multiparty system back in 1990, and the Socialist Party of Serbia (successor to the League of Communists of Serbia), having led rallies against corruption and bureaucracy but also promising national security and economic recovery, occupied both parliament and presidency (Goati 2000; Sotirović 2009). Yet in 1996, a year after the signature of the Dayton Peace Accords putting an end to the tragic wars, the oppositional pro-democratic coalition Zajedno (Together) managed to out cast the Socialist Party of Serbia during the local government elections, winning in thirty-two municipalities, including the capital of Belgrade. The attempted electoral fraud of the regime prompted massive mobilizations that lasted for three months and ended with the official recognition of the electoral results.

This was the first time a serious internal threat was posed to the President Slobodan Milošević, otherwise known as Europe's Last Dictator. Goran, a forty-five-year-old lecturer and my Serbian language teacher when I first arrived in Belgrade in spring 2006, recalled these events with pride. Being involved back then in an educational NGO network, he felt like that pair of old brown boots was the epitome of his youth achievements, his small-yet-vital role in writing the democratic history of his country. As it was with most of the older NGO staff I met, he took part in numerous pro-democratic protests held in Belgrade after the outbreak of the war. The sociologist Marina Blagojević, herself involved in various NGO activities, has characterized the 1990s as a history of protests (2006), culminating in a series of demonstrations in 2000 and the final overthrow of Milošević during the so-called Bulldozer Revolution on 5 October 2000. Local NGOs played an important role in these events. Based on experiences from the pre-election campaigns OK98 in Slovakia and Vote 99 in Croatia, they organized the Izlaz 2000 [Exit 2000] campaign, encouraging people to get out and vote so that "the sun would exit and no bigger dark would reign" (Paunović et al. 2000). Yet, their political actions had started much earlier with many newly established organizations running civic and human rights initiatives during the late 1980s and anti-militarist campaigns during the early 1990s (e.g., Stojanović, Zajović, and Urošević 2013). By the time I started my research at the end of 2006, Serbia had already experienced its own associational revolution.

This book seeks to understand the emerging social realities wedded to the NGO phenomenon in post-socialist and post-conflict Serbia. I refer to local NGOs as a phenomenon, because I consider them part of the remarkable wave of the worldwide NGO boom, manifested through the sheer proliferation of their number, the staggering enlargement of their budgets and size, the expansion of scale and of thematic areas of their intervention, and, last but not least, their growing integration in global governance structures, such as their granted consultative status in the UN.

Indeed, such an NGO upsurge has even been referred to as an associational revolution that has swept the world for the last thirty years. Lester M. Salamon, a political science professor at Johns Hopkins University and a leading figure in the civil society field, has saluted such developments, arguing that this striking rise in organized voluntary action "may be permanently altering the relationship between states and citizens, with an impact extending far beyond the material services they provide" (1994: 109). He went as far as to state that "we

are in the midst of a global 'associational revolution' that may prove to be as significant to the latter twentieth century as the rise of the nation-state was to the latter nineteenth" (1994: 109). For this school of thought, the NGO boom partakes in the "third wave" of democratization. As categorized and defined by Harvard's political scientist Samuel Huntington, after the first (from early nineteenth century until the rise of fascism in Europe) and the second democratic wave (from the end of World War II until early 1960s), the third wave has seen new democracies rise around the world starting in 1974, including democratic transitions in Portugal, Greece, Latin America, and more recently Eastern Europe and former Soviet Union.

The underlying cause of the associational proliferation is considered as twofold: first, influenced by institutionalism and economic paradigms such as the public good theory and the contract failure theory, explanatory frames are built around the notion of need. Forming NGO appears to be a normal institutional answer for people with complex needs that exceed the existing public goods and services. NGOs are thus perceived as "an adaptive response to the constraints of the majority rule and the equitable distribution criteria of the state" (Paul and Israel 1991: 4, quoted in Tvedt 1998: 43). From a similar perspective, NGOs arise as a result of state and market failure to cover citizens' needs. They are said to function as remedies, filling the gaps in social provision created by governmental and market shortcomings. This applies to both developed and developing countries, as the rise of NGOs coincides and is correlated with the crisis of the welfare state "in the West" and economic shock therapies, governmental downfalls, and belly politics "in the rest."

Such narratives are widely reproduced in political science literature and are meant to give historical weight to the NGO phenomenon—yet they cannot. The historical weight needs to have an explanatory dimension and reveal social complexity. The above accounts, however, echo functionalist approaches, leaving historical causalities unpacked, and questions of power unaddressed (Tvedt 1998). NGOs appear as natural societal responses, while the actors and social conflicts that produce these social realities remain invisible. We cannot help but wonder: why do people from incredibly diverse sociohistorical and cultural settings respond with such similar institutional patterns to state/market failure? Given such failure always existed, in a way, why is the NGO boom such a recent phenomenon?

The second underlying cause of the so-called associational revolution appears even more problematic because it grants NGOs a strong normative character. NGOs are treated not as simple organizational

realities but as key symbolic operators of a distinct ideological field. Their discursive power derives from their almost taken-for-granted equation with plurality: a plurality of actors, voices, interests, representation, participation, responsibilities, and control mechanisms in the public realm and decision-making processes. Plurality, as understood here, is far from provoking fragmentation with undesirable outcomes; on the contrary, it is presumably leading to a more equal social equilibrium, enhancing social consensus among competing actors/interests/voices. Plurality means, in this sense, democracy.

When related to the post-communist world, civil society and NGOs as its main actor or representative reached an axiomatic status. Within the hegemonic analytical framework of Dictatorship vs. Democracy, they acquired both political and moral significance for providing a space for free thought and expression outside the reaches of communist states. And, at the same time, they have managed to rise and significantly contribute to the struggle against authoritarian regimes through political activism. Today, NGOs are celebrated for their vital integrative role in consolidating democracy. Democracy is to be understood as liberal democracy and NGOs as active, concerned citizens reclaiming responsibility for their lives. Liberal democracy is of course a specific political project defining power relations among individuals and groups through a system of institutions, legislations, sanctions, rights, obligations, and distributive, representational, and executive mechanisms. But democracy is not conceived of as one among several other systems of governance. After the fall of the Berlin Wall and the pronounced end of history, democracy became a morally sanctioned universal acquis.

Problematizing the Field

If civil society became a compelling political slogan propagated both by dissident intellectuals in Eastern Europe and their Western interlocutors and audiences (Hann 1996; Verdery 1996), it acquired an even more powerful demarcation in Serbia. Civil society, often reified as a homogenized collective actor, was not just fighting a “communist monster” but also—or more explicitly—ethnic nationalism. As Catherine Baker stressed:

The fall of socialism alone would have exposed Yugoslavs to the same threats that affected other (post)socialist countries after 1989: the end of secure employment and housing; the loss of savings to inflation as the country adjusted

to the free market; the distortion of social inequality as entrepreneurs with connections to the new political elites enriched themselves. In Yugoslavia, these pressures intersected with escalating armed conflict fought on ethno-political terms as leaders competed for the resources of the fallen state and mobilized populations by propagating existential fear. (2012a: 857)

Indeed, the reform efforts of the last Yugoslav prime minister, the liberal technocrat Ante Marković, to rescue the federation in 1989 and 1990 were thought to be too little and coming too late. Socialist Yugoslavia was founded after the liberation struggle of World War II, led by the partisan National Liberation Army and their allies. After a first short period of applying the soviet political and economic model (1944–1948), the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (SFRY) took its own particular road to socialism, both in terms of domestic and foreign policies. This shift was marked by the Tito–Stalin split and the expulsion of the Yugoslav Communist Party from the Communist Information Bureau (Cominform) in 1948. The so-called third way implied a more open and flexible regime, combined with political repression and Josip Broz Tito's personality cult.

In terms of governance, SFRY was based on a rather decentralized political system, with the League of Communists gradually dissolving into party national branches. Political fragmentation was fostered after the constitution of 1974, giving greater powers of autonomy to its six republics (Slovenia, Croatia, Serbia, Bosnia Herzegovina, Montenegro, and Macedonia) and, for several scholars, marking the beginning of the end of Yugoslavia (Dimitrijević 1995; Jović 2009; Lampe 2000). On the economic sphere, and from the 1950s onwards, centralization policies gave way to alternative models of modernization. In agriculture, collectivization of land efforts were abandoned in 1953, after low productivity results (Tochitch 1959) and vigorous peasant resistance (Bokovoy, 1998). New agricultural cooperatives were functioning along a stratum of small peasants, cultivating their own land. At the same time, the vast project of industrialization was now to be governed from the bottom up through the self-management system, introduced at the factory level and promising workers' empowerment. The economic reforms of the 1960s and 1970s further decentralized planning, introducing market socialism through the so-called basic organizations of associated labor—a model that was later expanded beyond companies to public institutions.

Finally, SFRY also deployed its own foreign policy strategies. Following Tito's foundation of the non-aligned movement in

mid 1950s, together with Jawaharlal Nehru of India, Sukarno of Indonesia, Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana, and Gamal Abdel Nasser of Egypt, Yugoslavia aspired to a more neutral position in the Cold War, keeping economic relations with both poles. Indeed, the country was highly integrated in the Western markets mainly through trade—becoming a Contracting Party of GATT agreements in 1966—and visa-free Yugoslav workers had been staffing the growing European industries since the 1960s. Even if inter-republic trade and capital flows were of primary importance (Petak 1989), export was central to several production lines (particularly in Slovenia and Croatia). Together with the growing Adriatic tourism and *gastarbajteri* (guest workers) remittances, it was fueling Yugoslavia with hard currency that offset potential balance of payments deficits.

Such a model of so-called Yugoslav exceptionalism had some admittedly spectacular outcomes. It achieved an impressive reconstruction of and economic take-off in the region after the destruction of World War II, a considerable rise in living standards and educational levels, and the expansion of a consumer culture similar to that of the Western peripheries. Socialist Yugoslavia became, in fact, a role-model and transitologists's favorite candidate for a successful post-socialist restructuring after the fall of Berlin Wall. However, this system had equally deep inherent contradictions that, in the wake of international political economy shifts, exploded along national lines. SFRY was constantly trying to balance self-management policies targeting the "withering away of the state," the need for central planning for macro-economic stability, state's control mechanisms over the economy, and the need of political decentralization to achieve national stability and legitimacy (Horvat 1984; Allcock 2000; Sørensen 2009).

By the end of the 1980s, the post-World War II Yugoslav experiment had already lost its legitimacy, both in the political and the economic realm. Its mythical foundational idea of *bratstvo i jedinstvo* (brotherhood and unity) was in deep crisis with regional political elites questioning the *raison d'être* of the Yugoslav federation, getting ready to embark on nationalist projects of self-determination (Korošić 1988). The socialist promises of equality and well-being were severely questioned too (Archer, Duda, and Stubbs 2016; Mencinger 1989; Vujović 1995; Županov 1983). Rising unemployment along political and economic exclusion (Woodward 1995a), monetary instability, stunning regional inequalities between the more prosperous north-west and the sluggish south-east, a growing chasm between elites and working class and massive migration¹ were all telling signs of reduced social

mobility patterns within a more and more rigid system of class reproduction (Lazić 1987).

Indeed, the shifting political economy in the 1980s left Yugoslavia in deep recession. This was a period when Yugoslavia had to respond to the global economic crisis by freezing incomes at a time of growing prices and by applying export-led development and sub-contraction. In addition, external debt had become unsustainable. Previously, the inflow of petrodollars after the first oil crisis and the demise of the dollar-gold standard had created favorable conditions for extending credit to many peripheral countries as Yugoslavia. However, monetary restriction and increased protectionism after the second oil crisis made Yugoslavia's industries expensive and less competitive, trying to balance the rising prices of imported industrial components and raw materials. Re-evaluation of interest rates and loans meant entering into a dangerous debt-trap (Dyker 1990). Living stands fell by thirty percent, worsened by the IMF's intervention, which imposed strict austerity measures, targeting, as usual, lower state expenditures and devaluation of labor. The federal demands for greater fiscal centralization for regional redistribution was this time met with further economic fragmentation and economic nationalism (Ocić 1983).

For Slovenia and Croatia, the way to recovery was equated with secession, whereas Serbia and Montenegro, having under their control the Yugoslav People's Army, initially claimed to be the defenders of the Yugoslav state. Therefore, while in other parts of Eastern Europe and former Yugoslav republics, anti-communism was to some extent conflated with nationalistic projects, in Serbia nationalism and communism were considered as the two sides of the same coin. Soon, rescuing the federation was translated into the project of *Velika Srbija* (Great Serbia), and an impressive symbolic production, propaganda, and ideological reinterpretations of history were set in motion for this goal (Colović 2002; Dragović-Soso 2002).

In 1991 Slovenia declared independence, followed by Croatia, Macedonia, and Bosnia-Herzegovina, and their immediate international recognition. The Yugoslav wars in Slovenia, Croatia, and particularly Bosnia lasted for five years and were among the most violent ones in the post-World War II era, with mass murders escalating into genocide. Stability after the 1995 Dayton Peace Accords was fragile and the outcomes of international intervention and Bosnia's institutional solution were heavily questioned (Bougarel, Helms, and Duijzings 2007). Peace in the region was short-lived with war erupting this time in Kosovo, the autonomous province of Serbia,

after years of repression of the Albanian community. The final act was played by NATO's decision to bombard Serbia and Montenegro in 1999 and place Kosovo under the control of the United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK), and the so-called peacekeeping Kosovo Force (Sörensen 2009). According to estimations of the total number of casualties over the 1990s—in the midst of ethnic cleansing, war-rapes, massacres, city-sieges, and bombing—around 140,000 people were killed, around two million persons were internally displaced, and even more fled as refugees (Ewa Tabeau 2009).

Serbia came out of the wars politically defeated and economically and socially devastated. The total damage of NATO bombing in 1999 alone was estimated at \$30 billion (Dinkić 1999), and by 2000, public debt reached 14.17 billion euro, equivalent to 169.3 percent of GDP.² The humanitarian crisis and the massive influx of refugees from the former-Yugoslav republics had to be managed in conditions of wild pauperization and shortages, in a country that was under ambiguous international sanctions for the best part of the decade (Dimitrijević and Pejić 1995). Sanctions went hand in hand with the development of a full-fledged speculative criminal economy, based on human trafficking and trade or rather smuggling of oil, cigarettes, pharmaceuticals, foreign currency, drugs, and arms (Kaldor 2007; Obradović 2007: 50).

The 1990s were also a period of “state-sponsored robbing” of social and pension funds, radical redistribution of wealth, and restructuring of social stratification (Lazić 1995), made possible through rent seeking, war profiteering, mafia privatizations, and inflation. The latter, reaching world-record rates in 1994, proved to be an impressive mechanism of wealth expropriation and its allocation to the regime’s loyal subcontractors. “Technically,” as Sörensen describes, “it would function so that a bank’s minimum reserve (as ordered by the National Bank) would be left uncontrolled for a period of time, during which it could trade out some of the reserve to local dealers, who would exchange dinars for Deutschmarks (or other currencies), give some of the cash return as payment to the dealers, and then later trade it back to dinars after a period when inflation would have eroded and balanced out the ‘rent’” (2009: 170).

From 2001 and the change of the regime, typical post-socialist political, social, and economic neoliberal restructuring gained momentum (Verdery and Burawoy 1999; Hann 2001; Dunn 2004). It was enforced under the neutral label of *reforma* in view of a desired integration into the European Union (EU). Reform encompassed

almost all aspects of life, and its outcomes included, among others, the end of secure employment and social housing; the end of free education; massive privatizations or liquidations of formerly social-public enterprises and rescaling of social security schemata (during only the beginning of the post-socialist transition, between 2002 and 2004, over 1,100 enterprises, employing over 150,000 employees, were privatized, see Ristić 2004); liberalization of capital flows and trade; deregulation and internationalization of financial services and banking, along with rising household debt; scattered foreign investment; growing unemployment, precarity, and poverty. Ironically, the current financial crisis was perceived by political and financial elites as a symptom of reform's failure: not the direction of the so-called transition to the market, but its very incomplete character, along with an oversize and overspending public sector, was supposedly at the heart of these new Balkan tragedies. As it usually happens with debt crises worldwide, new rounds of austerity measures and new waves of market integration brought more recession, more inequality, and, finally, more debt (Živković 2015).

So, how to understand civil society and its organizations within such a post-socialist and post-conflict context? One could start in deconstructing the celebratory slogan of civil society as a political symbol, but to simply assess that such discourse is normative and ideologically biased is certainly not enough. Another direction would be to try and define the multiple meanings of civil society so as to figure out if it corresponds to specific social constellations and then embark on an endless debate about universalisms and particularisms, ethnocentrism and culturally bounded relativisms. Last but not least, we could start by problematizing the usefulness of civil society as an accurate sociological tool. Does this revived concept, with its perplexing historical and theoretical weight, allow us to purchase any analytical gains? Or is it another euphoric catchword, that like "fine old wines can stimulate but they can also make you drunk, lose all sense of discrimination and clarity of purpose" (Kumar 1993: 376)?

I decided to treat civil society as a historically grounded empirical question and start with ethnography. Between 2006 and 2010, I spent three years in Serbia trying first to understand what an NGO actually is and does; who are the people engaged within them and why they are there in the first place; what are their feelings, ideas, hopes, and frustrations; what their everyday life looks like. Answering the above questions is not though an end in itself. My interest was rather to understand the relational fields of power around NGOing (how

they are produced, legitimated, or/and contested), the ways local NGOs took part, affected, and got shaped by wider social reproduction and global transformation processes in this particular part of the world. This mission entails that the qualities and properties of the NGO phenomenon cannot be grasped without their dialectical constitution with global systems of political economy, global trends of state restructuring, and shifting hegemonies after the end of the Cold War.

One would be surprised by the general scarcity of such global ethnographies (Burawoy et al. 2000) in a place currently undergoing such tremendous transformations as the Balkans. On the antipodes, just a simple Google search would reveal an abundance of intellectual production on issues dealing with ethnicity, nationalism, religion, minorities, refugees, and borders. Certainly, such works are contributing to the richness of our insights in the Balkan region, but the problem is that they overstress cultural meanings and practices at the expense of more integrated analyses that would take into account questions of regulation, distribution, class, and other structural factors that underlie people's social lives, not to mention the ways that cultural identities are dialectically wedged with such factors. These gaps appear to the extreme in the literature on ex-Yugoslavia, with the exception of some important research on post-war Bosnia (Jansen 2015; Coles 2007; Bougarel Helms and Duijzings 2007; Stefansson 2010; Selimović 2010).

Concerning Serbia, the vast majority of academic focus, both in local and international scholarship, was set to unravel the ethnic wars and understand the so-called irrational upheavals of ethnic nationalisms. Only in the past years did an anthropological interest start to re-emerge to study Serbia's current political and economic restructuring (Rajkovic 2017; Thelen, Thiemann and Roth 2014). The Yugoslav wars in the 1990s not only monopolized scholars' attention but, most importantly, their characterization as ethnic led to a production of culturally informed explanatory frameworks for understanding identity-based claims and conflicts. Hence, social divisions or whole social phenomena were primarily conceived of in terms of ethnicity, cultural, and political orientations and values associated with nationalism's advocates or its democratic opponents.

Certainly, this was a dramatic period for this region. Yet, *kriza* (crisis) did not suddenly appear in the 1990s, nor was it solely linked to ethno-national questions. As we saw, its roots were embedded in the systemic properties of Yugoslavia and its positioning within shifting global political and economic reconfigurations. The whole

trajectory of Yugoslavia can be read as a continuum of multilevel fragmentary and integrating processes, with crisis being more and more evident since the late 1970s. These processes of dispossession were to explode during the violent state dissolution, under sanctions and along the radical wealth redistribution of a criminal war economy with disastrous consequences for the political, economic, and social nexus of the society. The illusions of the promising post-socialist land also collapsed very early after the regime change in 2000, followed this time by a new period of vast “transitional” dispossession, erosion of previous rights/entitlements, skyrocketing inequality—but also, more recently, social unrest, protests, and revolts all around former Yugoslavia (Horvat and Štikš 2015).

It is in this turbulent context that the NGO sector emerged. In this research I suggest an analysis of the NGO phenomenon within a framework of historical realism as described by Susana Narotzky and Gavin Smith (2006). This does not just indicate the need to contextualize NGOs within current “transitions.” The context here is not a simple chapter to situate the research-protagonists. Rather, the context is itself a research question; it is a context in-the-making. I understand the global structural properties constituting and enabling everyday life not as faceless abstractions, but embodied by real actors and institutions implicated in concrete power relations. The rise of local NGOs in Serbia did not simply manifest (if they did at all) in an idealist transition from dictatorship to democracy. Neither were they just spectators in the political project of neoliberalism à la Serb. As I will explore in the following chapters, NGOs partook considerably in the ongoing social transformation in numerous ways: by producing labor patterns of a flexible—see precarious—labor power in the flourishing aid industry and offering educational trainings to all sectors needing reform; by endorsing project work and promoting self-empowerment translated as entrepreneurial culture; by providing a social realm for elite-formation processes through the institutionalization of expertise; finally, by actively contributing to state-crafting, building new (dis)articulations between state and citizens. The emerging NGO realities certainly raise questions of responsibility, representation, accountability, and redistribution (material, symbolic, and moral).

This book has a double ambition. First, it promises to contribute to a more dynamic understanding of post-Yugoslav social transformations. Shedding light on class-based processes in post-socialist Serbia over the last twenty years is of vital importance in a space overwhelmed by identity-focused studies. However, by doing so I

do not wish to add just another demarcation line—such as class—in order to add to the plurality of the list of sociocultural cleavages (for example among ethnicities, nationalists, and democrats and so on). Following Eric Wolf (1982, 1998), I argue that we can better understand cultural frameworks, meanings, and significations only within their underlying instrumental, institutional, and ideological logic and within their interdependences with the very material processes through which people try to organize their survival and life projects. NGOs cannot simply be discussed as anti-nationalist and democratic associational revolutions; they have to be analyzed within wider mechanisms of social power, defined by various unequally positioned actors including state institutions, aid donors, and political elites.

In fact, a class-informed analysis of NGOs and a close look at these actors' discourse, practices, and legitimizing strategies can give us more in-depth insights about the cultural divisions cited above: NGOs are at the same time heavily engaged in the very social construction of such differences and categorizations, actively producing dichotomous frames for reading social realities (ex-Democrats vs. Nationalists). The same approach is urgently needed to unpack (in order to politically address) the so-pronounced "nationalist paranoia" (Kalb and Halmai 2011). Such a theoretical and methodological stance means bringing together ethnographic insights and political economy analysis and might be of great significance for understanding a vast array of social phenomena both in their complexity and dynamic trajectories through space and time—hence the second ambition of this book.

Mapping the NGO Field

Mapping the field of local NGOs in Serbia appeared to be an extremely complex task, even in a simply descriptive manner. By the time I finished my fieldwork in 2010, there was no single unified register for non-profit associations working within Serbia. After the dissolution of Yugoslavia and the creation of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (including only Serbia and Montenegro until 2006), citizens' associations could register both at the republican and federal levels. According to the Federal Statistics Office, by 1994 there were 18,132 associations in Serbia and 19,129 by 1999. The term "associational revolution" in Serbia refers to the last two decades, even if the majority of the registered associations were founded during Socialist

Yugoslavia. As available data from the registry show, in 1994 there were 196 new citizens' associations registered. This number grew to 2,800 by 2001, 7,000 by 2004, and reached 10,500 by 2006 (Paunović 2006: 49). In 2009, the Serbian parliament adopted a new law regarding associations and, when the re-registration process for associations was completed by December 2012, Serbia counted 18,923 registered local associations (excluding sports associations), forty-five international NGOs (INGOs), and 402 foundations and endowments. According to the Business Registers Agency in 2011, civic associations had 6,572 regular employees and, according to research estimates, around 4,500 casual honorary staff (Paunović 2012). Finally, there was a significant regional imbalance, with the majority of associations being located in bigger cities of central Serbia and Vojvodina, while approximately 11,500 associations were registered in Belgrade alone.³

Numbers, as always, matter. Who does the counting matters, as well as what is conceived as countable and what is left aside. Numbers matter because they provide categorizations, significations, or even explanations; in other words, they tell stories. For example, in various policy discourses (both in Serbia and beyond) the number of citizens' associations serves for measuring the level of democratization. Policy-making is heavily embedded in a modernist developmental framework of transition, even if it often presents as tailor-made. Transition in post-socialist policy means gradual achievements and the passing through of linear steps or levels in order to reach the final stage of democracy and free markets. In Serbia, one of the last countries left out of the European project (together with Bosnia, Macedonia, and Albania), the ultimate goal was EU integration. In this context, more associations basically mean a stronger democracy. The logic is the following: the more the NGOs, the stronger the civil society; the stronger the civil society, the stronger the democracy; the stronger the democracy, the closer to membership in the EU.

Yet, local NGOs did not form out of the blue. In fact, there is an impressive production of national reports on Serbian civil society, along with a few academic works (Stanisavljević 1995; Petrović 1999; Lazić 2005; Kolin 2005; Milivojević 2006; Paunović 2006 and 2012), that account for the deep historical and cultural roots of NGOs in Serbia. Practitioners and scholars are situating NGOs within local cultural traditions and organizational models, historical legal systems and state policies, political legacies and local solidarity patterns and values. By following this approach, we gain a far more

historically informed analysis, even if the cultural aspect is often left a bit foggy, unpacked, or sometimes essentializing or politically abused (see Chapters 2 and 3). These authors divide the development of the nonprofit sector in Serbia into three historical periods:

A. Village Solidarity and Serbian Liberalism

During the first period (whose beginnings are lost in the Ottoman past), the historical conditions for the emergence of the nonprofit sector and voluntarism are to be found in the traditional reciprocal forms of life in the countryside. The most referred-to examples are *moba* and *zadruga*. *Moba* is described as an old Slav folk custom of mutual help, where neighbors and family members voluntarily join collective activities like harvesting a big farm, helping to build a house, preparing a wedding or funeral. *Zadruga* was a patriarchic socioeconomic organizational system of rural communities based on extended family and clan with common land, property, and herds (for an overview see Novaković 2005). Religious endowments were also organizing educational and charity activities—the Serbian Orthodox Church being particularly influential since the end of nineteenth century (Ruziča 1998). The Jewish burial society *Hevra Kadiša* was founded as early as 1729.

However, the real ancestors of NGOs are to be discovered at the developing scene of funds, heritages, and societies within the Principality of Serbia and later the Kingdom of Serbia. The principality of Serbia, established first as a vassal state within the collapsing Ottoman Empire after the two Serbian uprisings (1804 and 1815) and Napoleon's defeat (1815), finally became an independent state in 1867 and acquired full international recognition in 1878 with the Treaty of Berlin that ended the Russo-Turkish War. In 1882, the principality was raised to a kingdom under the Obrenović dynasty and lasted until the end of World War I when, along with the State of Slovenes, Croats, and Serbs, it became the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes, renamed as Kingdom of Yugoslavia (First Yugoslavia).

In 1881, the law on freedom of associations was adopted and numerous associations were registered at the municipality of Belgrade or various ministries, defining their status and working principles. Among them feature the first student association *Druzina Mladezi Srpske* (Association of Serbian Youth, 1847); the Serbian cultural association *Matica Srpska* (1826); numerous important women's associations like *Žensko Društvo* (Women's Society, 1875), *Društvo*

knjeginje Ljubica (Society of Princess Ljubica, 1899), *Kolo srpskih sestara* (Circle of Serbian sisters, 1903), and later *Društvo za prosvetiovanje žene i zaštitu njenih prava* (Society for women's enlightenment and protection of their rights, 1919); the humanitarian society *Sveti Sava* (Saint Sava, 1886); and the invalid association *Sveti Đorđe* (Saint George). This period is considered the origin of liberalism in Serbia (Ress 2006). According to Stanisavljević, "the majority of voluntary organizations were patronized by the royal family while making donations and endowments had become the matters of social status among the newly civil class" [*sic*] (1995: 97). In parallel, trade unions of the first industrial workers, professional organizations, and agricultural cooperatives emerged, enriching civil society at the turn of the century.

B. Civil Society under Socialism

According to the local scholarship, the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, established right after the liberation war, brought "a complete reversing in volunteer organizations and a long-lasting discontinuity in civic activities" (Kolin 2005: 134). Paunović (2006) notes that there is no research on associational life during this period. This is unfortunately true—but the reason he gives for such a gap is the impossibility of studying something that does not exist. Not only were the endowments of the previous era nationalized (Avramović 1992), but, as Paunović stresses, there was no classical division of civil society from the political state (2006: 43). These views echo the theories of social vacuum, arguing that under the communist regimes the clear dichotomization between the state and family did not leave any middle ground for institutionalized connections between the private and the public sphere (Wedel 2001: 103).

To be fair, Serbian authors do nuance such totalitarian projections of the past by referring to the famous Yugoslav exceptionalism, in order to explain the existence of a few relatively independent associations (mainly professional organizations such as *Advokatska komora Srbije* (Bar association of Serbia) and *Srpsko lekarsko društvo* (Serbian medical society). Actually, the majority of today's registered NGOs were founded during Socialist Yugoslavia and mainly included three types of organizations: sports and hobby associations, such as football, hunters, and folk groups; professional associations consisting of artists, engineers, lawyers, and writers; and finally, some social humanitarian associations serving mainly the needs of their

members, such as organizations for the blind, pensioners, paraplegics, etc.

However, all the other numerous associations linked directly or indirectly with the socialist political project are either selectively forgotten by this scholarship or discredited on the grounds of a lack of autonomy. The authors assume that no association could operate independent of the state and its parastatal organizations such as *Socijalistički Savez Radnog Naroda* (The Socialist Alliance of Working People) or *Savez Omladine Jugoslavije* (Youth Alliance of Yugoslavia). The organizations that did exist were thus considered as poly-nongovernmental or governmental-nongovernmental organizations (GONGOs), as the influence of the Communist Party was evident in their structure, the selection of their management, and the distribution of their finances. As indicated by the law on social organizations and associations of citizens, nonprofits should function within the official ideological regime, either by fostering its priorities or simply by being politically neutral like sports, leisure, and professional groups.

Obviously, the above understanding of Socialist Yugoslavia appears quite reductionist. Following an anthropological understanding of the state, it is hard to believe in Weberian iron-cage societies, homogenizing and disciplining their constituencies to the extent of negating individuality. Not to mention that the very notion of individuality (and freedom) should be problematized and politically situated as the central myth of (neo)liberalism (Rose 1999). As I will discuss later in Chapter 3, the ideas of an omnipresent and omnipotent state are more of an ideological construction of their intellectual producers than existing realities of the past. In fact, the roots of today's NGOs seem much closer to various social movements of contestation/protest and their legacies in the former Yugoslavia than to the royal endowments of the nineteenth century: such as the student movements, women's organizations dating back to 1920s, and strong feminist or ecological movements, marking various historical periods throughout the existence of SFRY (Stojčić 2009). Stubbs is absolutely right to point out that "the struggle between remembering and forgetting regarding the historical continuities of 'civil society' in Croatia [and beyond], takes us to the heart of the political uses and abuses of the concept in the 1990s" (2001: 91). As he reminds us,

The "Yugoslav exception" in terms of "civil society" covers at least four different elements, in addition to the most obvious one of socialist self-management, none of which has been researched extensively in terms of their relevance for contemporary debates. The first is the direct experience of

activism during and in the aftermath of the Second World War and, in particular, the formation of Partisan clubs and veterans' associations which continue to be active today. The second, in part directly linked to the first, is the formation of women's organisations [*sic*], initially the Anti-Fascist Front of Women (AFŽ) during the Second World War, and later Active Woman (AŽ) which, whilst formally linked to the Party structure, and increasingly forced into the role of a Communist "mass organization," did provide specific experiences of organizing for women throughout Yugoslavia (Jancar-Webster 1990). Fourthly, youth organisations [*sic*] formally linked to the Party became increasingly sites of relatively autonomous actions and positions, notably student groupings. (2001: 93)

C. From the Dissolution of Yugoslavia to EU (Pre)Integration

During the 1990s, when Croatian civil-society promoters were being labeled as Yugo-nostalgic within the official nationalistic politics of Croatian independence, in Serbia, on the contrary, they were framed as antipatriotic, as part of the anti-Milošević forces. Again, according to Paunović, "the war acted as an impetus for the emergence of new types of associations and civic groups" (n.d.). The first human rights organizations actually appeared in the late 1980s and were linked to wider political developments of particular importance that followed the Helsinki Accords in 1975. Tito signed them as well, including a declaration on the respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. Although the accords were not binding and, in reality, reaffirmed the established territorial integrity and status quo, they nevertheless provided space for the creation of various NGOs monitoring compliance with human rights principles in the Eastern Bloc, such as the Moscow Helsinki Group and other regional committees or the Helsinki Watch (the future Human Rights Watch). As a result, human rights initiatives emerged in Serbia as early as 1984 with the foundation of the Yugoslav Helsinki committee. This group, initially organized to oppose the trial of six dissidents known as the Belgrade Six, was part of the international Helsinki Federation for Human Rights.

Following the legalization of pluralism and as the war escalated, the number of organizations attempting to stop the violence, assist the victims, and protect basic human rights, along with educational and women's associations, increased significantly. It is these NGOs that played an important role in the October 2000 revolution that forced Milošević, in the face of massive mobilization and

protests, to accept his electoral defeat by the Democratic Opposition of Serbia (Demokratska Opozicija Srbije, DOS). The direct and indirect political action of these organizations caused them to be the target of severe accusations and, at times, even physical harassment. Widespread conspiracy theories and propaganda, diffused mainly by state media, portrayed local NGOs as anti-Serb national traitors and foreign missionaries/spies. For the nationalist regime, this image of NGOs as the enemy was heavily justified by their foreign aid support. The exact amount of funding directed to them during the 1990s is impossible to account for, as this financing was mostly illegal. Indeed, most donations arrived as cash and stayed outside NGOs' bank accounts, in order to avoid the Serbian banking system. Legally registering donations would have meant supporting Milošević regime with foreign currency, while risking the actual "evaporation" of the grants due to hyperinflation). Yet, even after donations were long-ago legalized and democracy was established, similar allegations of NGO malpractice could still be heard, reaching a momentum in 2003, when a controversial debate appeared in the weekly magazine *Vreme*, following Slobodan Antonić's provocative article "Missionary Intelligentsia in Contemporary Serbia" (2003; for an analysis see Omaljev 2013).

Nevertheless, the political changes of 2000 signaled a new era for local NGOs for two main reasons: first, because they left the camp of the political opposition to join the efforts of the newly democratic governments working towards an *uspešna tranzicija* (successful transition). Of course, this was not all roses, and many informants stressed that the cooperation between the government and NGOs got worse after the assassination of pro-European Prime Minister Zoran Đinđić in 2003 and during the formation of a more conservative government under Vojislav Koštunica's Democratic Party of Serbia (2004–08). The atmosphere seemed to slightly change again according to the more positive accounts of the next Democratic Party cabinet under Mirko Cvetković (2008–12). A law regulating NGOs was finally adopted in 2009 and a special state bureau, *Kancelarija za saradnju sa civilnim društvom* (Office for cooperation with the civil society) was formed the following year for further developing cooperation between the government and NGOs.

The second reason is related to the aid industry. Since 2000, both old and an impressive number of new local NGOs have been working on democratic consolidation, with the ultimate national goal of EU integration. This was a time of abundant funding for civil-society development programs, channeling aid both to NGO activities and

to their so-called capacity building. Indeed, the establishment of a democratic regime led to the entrance of new donors dealing not so much with humanitarian intervention but with developmental work and European accession. Local NGOs today navigate the social field of foreign aid, comprising a dense network of power relations among various actors: transnational public organizations (e.g., World Bank, UN, and EU agencies), national public development agencies (e.g., United States Agency for International Development [USAID], Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation, UK's Department for International Development), private foundations (e.g., George Soros's Open Society Foundation, Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, Robert Bosch Stiftung, Kvinna till Kvinna, Charles Stewart Mott Foundation), financial institutions (e.g., the World Bank, Erste Bank, Raiffeisen Bank), corporations via corporate social responsibility programs (e.g., VIP Mobile, Philip Morris, US Steel Serbia, Coca-Cola Hellenic), international NGOs (e.g., Save the Children, Mercy Corps, National Endowment for Democracy, Norwegian People's Aid, Institute for Sustainable Communities, Caritas, America's Development Foundation, International Relief and Development), foreign embassies, ministries, local and foreign think tanks, national public institutions and agencies, political parties, municipalities, regional and sub-municipal administration units, trade unions, media, universities, churches, and of course "uncivil" society's mafias (Sampson 2003).

The fact that considerable funds were entering Serbia to be absorbed directly by local NGOs, sidelining the state, obviously opened social spaces for new actors to emerge, bearing their own projects, legitimacy strategies, and political ambitions. The decentralization of aid, as I will discuss in the following chapters, incited new alliances and conflicts embedded in local histories and incorporated into global flows of people, knowledge, and resources.

The Aid Industry

To understand the new NGO realities that emerged we also need to historically situate them within the global trajectories of the aid industry and its focus on democracy promotion. Since the Marshall Plan and US President Harry S. Truman's symbolic announcement of the beginning of the "era of development"⁴ (and of the Cold War) in 1949, development has been part of a modern religion, promising secular salvation and novel mythologies of progress (Perrot,

Rist, and Sabelli 1992; Rist 1996). Most importantly, the aid industry has been closely following and shaping the shifts of the political economy, broadly speaking. Let's make a short detour.

The golden era of development lasted for almost twenty-five years. Faith in the self-regulated market had significantly weakened following the Great Depression of the 1930s. Although neoclassical economics and monetarism were reemerging around Friedrich von Hayek and the Chicago School of Economics in the 1950s, it was John Maynard Keynes' theories of full employment, imperfect competition, and the necessity of state regulation over prices, resources, and labor that were gaining momentum within development economics. According to Walt Rostow (1960) and Paul Rosenstein-Rodan's earlier theory of *Big Push* (1957), underdeveloped economies needed a generous initial investment (through foreign aid and loans) to kick-off new industries and metaphorically take off. Economic growth would not only help fight poverty but would eventually lead, as a social prerequisite, to democratic regimes.⁵

Obviously, at a time of huge public investment and when aid was still predominantly a state(s)-to-state transaction, NGOs were not among the major developmental protagonists, although there were plenty of them already organizing mostly humanitarian missions, especially during the decolonization period.⁶ By the mid-1970s, however, and following the oil crisis, both Fordism in the West and development economics abroad were facing a deep crisis. Eventually, the failing large "white elephant" programs of infrastructure and heavy industry gave way to developmental microprojects, destined to cover people's "primary needs."⁷ A new universal humanism pointed to some vital anthropological minimum that development aid should guarantee (e.g., nutrition, health, housing, clothing, etc.).

At the same time, a new type of NGO movement was emerging, criticizing state policies from another perspective but keeping in line with the bio-anthropological postulate: the *sans-frontiérisme* (Médecins Sans Frontières in 1971, Action Contre la Faim in 1979, Aide Médicale Internationale in 1979, Médecins Du Monde in 1980). These new NGOs signaled the return to emergency operations but this time realized in a hyper-professional way. The main mission was to save the body—with the risk of naturalizing in this way the social (Destexhe 1993). Both trends above had important implications for NGOs. Considered as well placed by being closer to aid recipients and having already much experience in managing microprojects, NGOs were more and more engaged as the implementers of programs.⁸ Aid was being slowly decentralized while development was

traversing its “lost decade,” featuring the heavy indebtedness and severe structural adjustment policies of the 1980s (Comélieau 1991).

The late 1980s/early 1990s saw another major shift within the aid world: a renewed focus on political transitions.⁹ The emergence and further institutionalization of democratization studies shifted the focus from so-called deterministic macroeconomic structures to the individual agency of political actors (mainly elites) and rational choice theories. The end of the Cold War relieved democracy programs of their previous ideological baggage while adding a vast new clientele for democratic transition. Most importantly, the 1990s witnessed two new entries to the aid scene: the state and the people. Considering the first, and far from some Keynesian restitution, this trend was advocating for the return of some reformed state according to New Public Management currents. From the 2000s, states became even more present in the aid world due to of the growing concerns with securitization and militarization after the events of 9/11 (Duffield 2001, 2007; Fisher and Anderson 2015). Furthermore, according to the UN’s Human Development Report of 1993 (entitled “People’s Participation”), “greater people’s participation is no longer a vague ideology based on the wishful thinking of a few idealists. It has become an imperative—a condition of survival” (UNDP 1993: 99).

These calls to re-humanize development led to the massive adoption of new bottom-up methodologies and grassroots projects. Most often, the people were conceived of as a collective social actor self-fulfilled within the frame of civil society, a social realm lying between the family and the state. As often happens with other buzzwords, civil society’s conceptual success derives from its abstract definition, its “promiscuity, polyvalence, and protean incoherence” (Comaroff and Comaroff 2000: 8). As a discourse, it offered a conceptual umbrella for actors stretching over a wide range of political positionings, from anti-capitalist leftist movements and welfare state advocates, to market liberals, corporatists, and conservative Christians.¹⁰ The concept itself is part of a Western political-thinking heritage that has its roots within its various philosophical interpretations (e.g., in Ferguson, Hegel, Marx, Tocqueville, Gramsci, and Habermas). Each school of thought is defining the conditions of civil society’s creation, its harmonic or conflictual relations with the state, and its potential political role in the making (or unmaking) of a desirable social order (see Cohen and Arato 1994). As Hann and Dunn remark, no matter how different the approaches, they “assume the universality of modern western notions of ... an autonomous agentic

individual ... none of these accounts leaves room for the exploration of alternative forms of social relationship" (1996: 5).

Within this new emancipatory discourse, the people were to rediscover their agency at a time when the demise of the Eastern Bloc in 1989 marked civil society's victorious come back. It was symbolizing a new political culture, a new ideal free of the subjectivity of totalitarianism. Apart from an ideological slogan, civil society acquired sociological weight with the introduction of social capital into aid's official tool kit. Based on the work of the American Harvard sociologist Robert Putnam, social capital came to signify the mutual ethos of trust and the shared understanding of norms and obligations among citizens, necessary for civic engagement and cooperation through networks of voluntary associations (1993, 2001).¹¹ Its accumulation, as its advocates argue, leads to social integration and harmony, revitalizing in a way American Tocquevillian theories of the 1950s and, more often than not, leaving conflicts and power relations outside their analytical frame (Harriss 2001; Fine 2001; DeFilippis 2001; Portes and Landolt 2000). Shattschneider's famous metaphor epitomizes very well the biases of such pluralist theories: "the flaw in the pluralist heaven is that the heavenly chorus sings with a strong upper class accent" (Schattschneider 1960: 35).

Today, and despite abundant critical accounts (Deler et al. 1998; Ferguson 1998; Comaroff and Comaroff 2000; Kamat 2002; Hilhorst 2003; Bebbington 2004; Hemment 2004; Elyachar 2005; Lewis and Mosse 2006; Heemeryck 2010; Schuller 2012; Petric 2015), civil society is still a development fetish. Considered a panacea to sociopolitical problems—not least economic ones when in the form of social capital (Blim 1990; Rankin 2004; Narotzky and Smith 2006)—civil society has been transformed from an anachronistic idea to a sort of global axiom (Comaroff and Comaroff 2000: 4). Its support through foreign aid, thus, emerges not only as wishful thinking but as pragmatic and technical goal. New aid departments, sections, programs, funding categories, and earmarks were created to undertake this task. Specialized research centers, interest groups, and networks *on* civil society/NGOs sprang up both within and outside the academic world.¹² And a massive number of related academic programs appeared, targeting those seeking to advance their careers in the non-profit management and administration.¹³

Programs set locally run under the label of building civil society. Although such titles can be very inclusive, the programs' targets were mainly restricted to officially registered NGOs and private, so-called free media. Political parties and labor unions were mostly covered

under state- or market-reform projects while social movements or informal groups were either too risky or lacking the necessary structures (bank accounts, boards, audits) to acquire funding.¹⁴ Building civil society, in most cases, meant forming local NGOs and raising their capacities. Herein lies the novelty of the democracy promotion framework: NGOs were not just engaged as project implementers, because of their perceived comparative advantages of flexibility and cost-efficiency; NGOs, and particularly local NGOs, became a development project in themselves. Today they are both a means and a goal of development intervention.

Chapter Overview

Aid is not just a simple transaction between donors and recipients. It is an arena where numerous multilevel struggles take place between various—and historically contingent—meanings of development, paradigms and ideologies over the distribution of various resources, and the very direction of social change. These struggles are not just solely discursive either. Above all, aid is a system of concrete social practices with real social effects. Here, I am not just referring to the results of microprojects, and this book, for better or for worse, is neither an ethnography of a particular organization nor an evaluation of one civil-society program. From the start, I was interested in several different (yet connected) aspects of wider social transformation that civil society aid has brought about in Serbia since the 1990s. Therefore, this book should be read as an attempt to a global ethnography, opening up wider questions about contemporary realities, power relations, and social change.

The book is divided in three parts, each containing two chapters. The first is entitled “Civil Society in the Making.” It addresses civil society as a concrete intervention and targets the more technical (and always political) aspects of such programs—what they actually are and what they actually do. Chapter 1, “Empowerment, Fast-Track,” is a critical glimpse of one training seminar focused on civic engagement and conflict reconciliation. The training, one of hundreds of its kind, reveals current epistemologies of conflict and change within the aid world. I examine how social realities are interpreted as cultural, psychopathological conditions and how the “exit strategy” translates to technologies of the self as a form of social intervention. Finally, I will show how the whole process of fostering civic awareness through contradictory uses of empowerment is

ultimately translated into entrepreneurial dreams and ventures of project-making.

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

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

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

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

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

In the Field

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Notes

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

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

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