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The Dialogics of Development: NGOs, Ethnopolitics, and Roma in Ukraine

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In November 2003, the Ukrainian talk show *Podviïnyï Dokaz* (Double Proof) aired a one-hour broadcast on the television station 1+1 titled *Tsyhany—Who Are They?* The commentator, Dmytro Korchynsky, introduced the program with these remarks: “Tsyhany—you all know them. There are 350,000 of them in Ukraine, but they are not like us. In the West, they are called Gypsies. In politics, they are known as Roma. Yes, they sing and dance. But they also steal from you and deal drugs to your children. They live for today and do not care about tomorrow.”

Whether one knows “them” as Tsyhany (pronounced “Tsihani” in Ukrainian), Gypsies, or Roma, similar stereotypes abound about this minority.¹ Knowledge of them is predominantly based on misconceptions, such as those repeated by the talk show host. The more romantic stereotypes portray them as wild, carefree, freedom-loving nomads who possess a natural ability to play music. Ukrainians also view them as apolitical, unwilling to work, and incapable of learning. Elsewhere, I have discussed the historical, political, and cultural reasons for and repercussions of such

The author thanks Paul D’Anieri and Margaret Paxson for detailed comments on this chapter. She also gives special thanks to the participants in the “Democracy in Ukraine” workshop at the Kennan Institute of the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, as well as to Dominique Arel and the participants in the Second Danyliw Seminar in Ukrainian Studies at the University of Ottawa, October 12–14, 2006, for their insightful debates on the issues raised in this study.

stereotypes in Ukraine.² In this chapter, I analyze another increasingly common stereotype repeated by the talk-show host: “It seems nongovernmental organizations have done very little to solve the problems Ukraine has with Tsyhany today. With all the grants the International Renaissance Foundation has given them over the last decade, why do so many still beg on the streets?”

The talk-show host’s polemic articulations were aimed to stir reactions from the show’s invited respondents—Petro Grygorichenko, president of the All-Ukrainian Union of NGOs [Nongovernmental Organizations] Roma Congress of Ukraine; Josyp Adam, director of the Romani organization Roma, an NGO based in Uzhhorod, Transcarpathia; and Serhij Dioma, director of the Roma of Ukraine program sponsored by the International Renaissance Foundation (IRF), an autonomous organization within the network of Soros foundations.³ The postindependence rise in xenophobia, coupled with the Ukrainian government’s lack of strategy, willingness, and resources to address ever-increasing Roma “problems,” has made Western aid organizations such as the IRF key players in the struggle against the overwhelming socioeconomic challenges that many Roma face. Some, such as Grygorichenko and Adam, have benefited from growing opportunities for middle-class mobility, particularly in post-Orange Revolution Ukraine. A significant percentage of the Romani population in Ukraine, however, continues to be trapped within ethnically marked, impoverished, spatially segregated ghettos referred to by Ukrainians as *tsyhanski tabory* (singular, *tabir*), Gypsy camps, that serve as reminders of detrimental Soviet assimilation policies.⁴ The marginalized Roma poor, who are positioned outside postsocialist civil society and the emerging class structure, form what János Ladányi and Iván Szelényi refer to as an “underclass.”⁵

In the context of these issues, and the themes of this volume, a number of key questions arise about Roma in Ukraine. How does financial intervention by Western donors affect processes of identity construction and socioeconomic integration among the poorest of Ukraine’s most marginalized ethnic minority? How do these communities engage with the notion of civil society as it is propagated via international networks of financial aid? How do such processes influence the cultural and political conceptualizations and representations of Tsyhany/Roma in the public sphere? This chapter seeks to answer these questions.

I base my arguments on fieldwork conducted among Romani communities in Transcarpathia in the period 2002–4. Transcarpathia is home to the largest Romani population in Ukraine—the region’s 168 *tsyhanski*

tabory number between 200 and 2,000 persons. Contrasting perspectives inform my analysis of the negotiation of allegiance between the communities that Romani NGOs serve and the Western organizations that fund their projects. During the period of my fieldwork, I worked as a grant writer and translator for the Uzhhorod-based *Romani Yag* (Romani Fire) Internet newspaper (www.romaniyag.uz.ua), the largest Romani newspaper in Ukraine, Russia, Moldova, and Belarus, which is sponsored by the NGO Romani Yag. Concurrently, I lived among Romani communities allegedly “benefiting” from Romani NGO projects funded by the Open Society Institute in Budapest, the IRF in Kyiv, the European Council, and the International Organization for Migration in Geneva.

Civil Society and the Rise of NGOs

Since Ukraine achieved independence in 1991, Western-funded NGOs have worked to fill the gaps in social welfare left behind by the collapse of the Soviet state, a situation augmented by the economic stagnation of the 1990s. In working to promote human rights, gender and ethnic equality, and civil liberties, NGOs have been perceived in the public sphere as fighting on behalf of those who do not have the power to speak for themselves. Anthropologists, however, have begun to assess the darker side of this “rights talk,” analyzing the cultural, economic, and political consequences of such interventions among segments of the population targeted as needing assistance from Western donors.⁶

Analyses of the on-the-ground processes for disseminating international financial aid can bring understanding of how relations of knowledge and power are produced, perpetuated, and challenged in society. In one such study, Michele Rivkin-Fish bases her analysis of women’s rights organizations in Russia on her experiences as a consultant for the World Health Organization in Saint Petersburg. She analyzes Western NGOs’ interventions with regard to reproductive issues as a way to advance women’s equality in Russia and as an attempt to counter the state’s push for racialized demographic growth.⁷ She explores how Russian women’s views on feminism clash with those propagated by the NGOs and how women’s personal backgrounds and demographic factors influence their relationships with NGO programs and with each other.⁸ Similarly, Julie Hemment, in her book *Empowering Women in Russia: Activism, Aid, and NGOs*, ana-

lyzes interactions between international foundations and Russian women's groups in the provincial city of Tver and offers insights based on her collaborative experience with members of the group Zhenskii Svet (Women's Light).⁹ Similar studies of women's social initiatives in Latin America reinforce the argument that through NGOs, "the terms of gendered citizenship and community are being increasingly established by some women in the name of all."¹⁰

In the discourse on human development, categorizations of people according to gender, race, class, and ethnicity make NGOs viable players in how postsocialist society is shaped. The varying understandings regarding the role of NGOs in mediating human rights, public representation, and access to resources can serve as a case study for a broader analysis of what I understand as the "dialogics" of development—the cultural, political, and economic engagements with Western aid and surrounding discourses that have meaning in aid recipients' public and private lives. The term "dialogics" is associated predominantly with Mikhail Bakhtin, who argued that people experience and represent the world through numerous overlapping and often-conflicting meanings within a shared language.¹¹ Research such as that by Rivkin-Fish and Hemment confirms that a multiplicity of interacting intentions is at play among donors, recipients of aid, and the broader populations for which aid is intended. Because texts predominantly take on meaning for people in relation to their current concerns, *dialogics* indexes the ways in which meanings are constructed out of competing modes of language usage. In the donor-recipient discourse, different groups of actors have diverging understandings of policy documents, grant applications, and what the financial aid should help accomplish.

The rise of the NGO sector in postsocialist Ukraine has been reinforced by corruption in government on the one hand, combined with an attained level of society's democratization and its practical implementation through a network of Western aid organizations on the other.¹² NGOs emphasize social organization beyond the influence of the state and argue that the public sphere should be autonomous and independent of government control to ensure democratic reform and progress. Such discourse was necessary, for instance, in light of the Ukrainian government's antidemocratic tendencies under President Leonid Kuchma (1994–2004). The ineffectiveness of Kuchma's regime—which was marred by corruption, the curtailing of free speech, and an abhorrent lack of improvement in the lives of Ukraine's citizens—was perhaps most succinctly captured in a popular

Ukrainian saying: “My ne zalezni vid vlady, a vlada nezalezna vid nas” (We are not dependent on the government, and the government is independent from us).

The role of NGOs in the postsocialist sphere has many parallels with NGOs that take on the welfare roles of the “shrinking state” in light of neoliberal processes around the world, particularly in Latin America.¹³ The neoliberal project aims to eliminate poverty in developing countries through free markets and free trade. By being couched in rhetoric regarding the protection of human rights, the role of the state is minimized to serve the interests of private property owners and business entrepreneurs. Institutional reforms, cuts in welfare expenditures, and privatization equate citizenship with individual integration into the market. In this context, the anthropologist David Harvey argues that in a competition for resources, everyone is assumed to be an equal player and to have access to the same information.¹⁴ In reality, elite class power is strengthened, the organized power of the labor force is usurped, and the poor become poorer.¹⁵ The state no longer comprises both a political and civil society but rather positions civil society in opposition to governmental rule and charges it with the responsibility for social betterment.¹⁶ In the postsocialist sphere, oligarchic corruption augments such neoliberal agendas. Thus, within Romani communities in Ukraine, an elite circle of grant recipients has managed to reap control of development-based financial aid and representational power while the majority of impoverished Roma—for whom, in theory, the grants are intended—continue to live in marginalized shantytowns on the edges of towns and villages.

Western Aid and the Economics of Ethnicity

The Soros Foundation is the main philanthropic source through which representatives of Ukrainian Romani NGOs gain access to resources to implement economic development and education projects in Romani settlements. This aid is allocated according to ethnic criteria, which raise a number of questions. How do internationally sponsored development projects influence conceptualizations of ethnic identity and determine meanings imbued in categories such as “national minority”? How do discourses of ethnicity—contextualized within local, national, and transnational relations of power—shape local understandings of “equality” within ethnically segregated communities in Ukraine? How do different segments of the Romani

population engage with the idea of civil society as it is propagated via and in relation to international networks of financial aid?

Internationally funded NGOs play an important role in shaping ethnic minority movements in postsocialist Ukraine. However, a closer examination of the repercussions of employing ethnicity as the main criterion for the distribution of aid reveals that the minoritization of specific segments of the population within the international development discourse encourages various forms of internal stratification within minority groups and, more broadly, encourages and confirms a certain stratification between different ethnic groups. In turn, such processes contribute to the further marginalization of those members with the least representative power within this discourse, namely, an ethnically marked underclass. Do ethnically based approaches to the integration of minorities serve as the most effective strategy to help guarantee equal access to social goods?¹⁷

Despite having received international financial aid for more than fifteen years, Romani settlements in Ukraine continue to reflect high (and, in some cases, increasing) levels of unemployment, poverty, malnutrition, and disease. Today's network of Romani NGOs has been responsible for implementing this aid to diminish the negative effects of overwhelming social maladies. Yet research shows that NGOs do not always help the people who are in greatest need. The Ukrainian government does not recognize the autocratic nature of Western-funded NGOs within Romani communities and often mistakes Romani NGO leaders for *barony* (singular, *baron*), that is, the elected elders who historically maintained order among nomadic Romani groups.¹⁸ In contrast to *barony*, Romani NGO leaders are not elected by Romani communities but instead rise through the ranks with the aid of grants provided by Westerners. In many Romani settlements in Transcarpathia, for instance, access to Western financial aid has allowed Romani NGOs such as Romani Yag to usurp the traditional authority of community elders. *Barony* in Perechyn, Velyka Dobron, Svaliava, Velyki Kamiati, and some other Transcarpathian towns now double as representatives of Romani Yag, which has emerged as a regional supra-Romani organization that has representative power on the national level. To a degree, the present system of intervention has kept poorer Roma impoverished and has denied them agency for political and socioeconomic community-based development.¹⁹ Simultaneously, it has allowed a small percentage of educated, affluent Roma to reap the benefits of philanthropic aid. This phenomenon mirrors a general trend in postsocialist Ukraine, whereby a small number of politically and economically powerful people

have been able to manipulate numerous state and social mechanisms for their personal benefit.

George Soros has published numerous articles on the paradoxes and unintended consequences of the Soros foundations' philanthropic activities in the region. He admits that financial aid often turns "recipients of charity into objects of charity" and that intervention often meets the objectives of donors rather than the needs of recipients.²⁰ Nevertheless, he attempts to justify and clarify his philanthropic activities by stating that the policy of his Central and Eastern European foundations is "to collaborate, to pull resources and talent from different places, and to allow people from the region to determine their own areas of focus and decide on methods of implementation."²¹ Though Soros-funded projects appear to operate within a Habermasian "ideal speech situation," whereby actors are assumed to be oriented toward reaching a mutually beneficial understanding, actors with more power and financial backing will reap bigger benefits from the exchange.²² International donors make decisions without taking into consideration the effects of particular policies on the groups for which they are intended.

Romani NGOs in Ukraine receive grants for administrative purposes, and the staff of NGOs such as Romani Yag, based in Uzhhorod, and the Association of Roma in Transcarpathia, based in Uzhhorod, regularly attend training programs in Uzhhorod and Kyiv. Romani NGOs—such as Ame Roma (We Roma), based in Zolotonosha; Romen (Roma), based in Kharkiv; Terni Zor (Youth Power), based in Brovary; Romano Foro (Romani City), based in Cherkasy; Amaro Deves (Our Days), based in Kremenchuk; Romano Kkham (Romani Sun), based in Zhytomyr; and Bakh-tale Terne (Lucky Youth), based in Pereiaslav-Khmelnytsk—utilize grants from the International Renaissance Foundation to run educational and vocational programs and Romani culture clubs. Some Romani NGOs, such as Kale Yakkha (Black Eyes), based in Novomoskovsk, work with Romani women's groups and use grant money to provide obstetric and gynecological services and help fight the spread of tuberculosis, which has reached epidemic proportions given the prevalent impoverished and unhealthy living conditions. Other Romani NGOs, such as Romano Drom (Romani Road), based in Vynohradiv, apply for IRF support to run Romani Sunday school programs in Transcarpathian villages that provide instruction for Romani children in the Romani language and Romani traditions. Romani Yag, among other things, utilizes IRF aid to sponsor Romani students at various universities in Kyiv, L'viv, Uzhhorod, Odessa, and Kharkiv, par-

ticularly at the Faculty of Law. In return for their education, Romani Yag asks these future lawyers to participate in the national Romani rights organization Chachipe (Truth) (headed by Romani Yag's director, Aladar Adam), which provides free legal counsel to poor Roma.

In the Transcarpathian region, Roma are one of twelve officially recognized minorities, along with Hungarians, Romanians, Slovaks, Poles, Germans, Jews, and others. Representatives from these groups often express anger that donors allegedly give more funds to Romani organizations in comparison with similar organizations run by and for other ethnic groups in Transcarpathia. International funds that favor minorities are often perceived as unfair by the majority and further aggravate already-tense relations among the various ethnic groups in Ukraine. Such sentiments are evidenced in the sarcastic statement shared with me by an official in the National Minorities Council in Uzhhorod: "Tsyhany tse naïbilsh pochesna natsmenshyna na Zakarpatti" (These days, the Gypsies are the most lauded national minority in Transcarpathia).²³

Researchers have documented a similar resentment among the Ukrainians and Russians living on the Crimean Peninsula, who feel that the Crimean Tatars, the indigenous Muslim population of Crimea that began returning in 1989 from forced deportation under the Soviets in 1944, are receiving preferential treatment from international organizations.²⁴ From the point of view of financing institutions, marginalized groups such as Roma and the Crimean Tatars deserve and are in desperate need of preferential treatment. Such a policy shows that politics pervades every aspect of life. That said, it also seems that "what is and is not political at any moment changes with the emergence of new questions posed by new modes of subjectivity."²⁵

In post-Soviet Ukraine, the government and international aid foundations have transfigured notions of the political with regard to ethnic identity in minority rights discourse. They use "ethnicity" to determine a political approach to one or another group of people. To an extent, ethnicity has become an avenue to better economic and social standing and a ticket to countries where living standards are higher. Countries that border Transcarpathia have developed minority outreach programs to assist their respective ethnic groups in the region in light of Ukraine's struggling economy. This process of ethnicization has revealed the reemergence of a biologically defined understanding of culture. Proponents of the *jus sanguinis* (right of blood)²⁶ believe that culture is not learned and/or acquired socially—it is in the genes. In 2002, the Hungarian government announced

the issuance of Hungarian passports to all Ukrainian citizens living in Transcarpathia who could prove Hungarian descent. Because *jus sanguinis* was the only criterion for acquiring Hungarian passports that would facilitate border crossings between Ukraine and Hungary, ethnic affiliations became negotiable in response to policy. Thus, in 2002, the number of my informants and friends in Uzhhorod who began to identify themselves as “Hungarian” during my fieldwork almost doubled.

Ethnicity as a Marker of Citizenship

Why has ethnicity reemerged as such an important criterion in the positioning of an individual in post-Soviet society? Some scholars view this present phenomenon as a lagging extension of the Soviet government’s use of ethnicity as a marker of difference and power.²⁷ Others argue that in the post-Soviet era, class distinctions are being transferred to ethnic signifiers.²⁸ The central role that ethnicity plays in sociopolitical rhetoric may also be a reaction to the ways in which nationalism was demarcated as a factor in the collapse of the Soviet Union by scholars, the media, and politicians. For instance, conflicts within and alongside Ukrainian borders, whether political or cultural, continue to be interpreted largely in ethnic terms.

International aid has also contributed to the present heightened sense of ethnicity in post-Soviet society. Consider, for instance, the International Renaissance Foundation’s assistance program named Roma of Ukraine. Such a name presupposes that there are people who identify as “Roma” in Ukraine. The name also assumes that “Roma” can be identified through a set of recognizable signifiers and that they have greater needs than other segments of the population because the program is aimed to help only them. Steven Sampson, in analyzing the politics of development aid in Albania, refers to such linguistic codes of intervention as “project-speak.”²⁹ The language of aid is codified by Western donors and is utilized to constitute the needs of “recipients,” who are identified as such by outside actors. Policymakers objectify the intended recipient groups and deny them agency by requiring them to work within the parameters of financed projects.

“Project-speak” is particularly fruitful for analyzing Roma in Ukraine because the nominator “Roma” was introduced into Ukrainian government policy via NGO discourse in the 1990s. The bigger question today is who

feels represented by this label. The answer has become less and less clear to me as an ethnographer who has researched Romani musical traditions and has worked as an activist within the Romani movement in Ukraine since 2002. On numerous occasions, when I ask to speak with “Roma” in Transcarpathian villages, people answer, “We are Tsyhany—to speak with Roma, go to Uzhhorod.” The fact that Uzhhorod is home to some of the biggest and most influential NGOs working on behalf of Roma in Ukraine makes one wonder about the cultural effects of development aid at the local level—and a comment by Aladar Adam, the editor of the Open Society Institute–funded *Romani Yag* Romani newspaper in Uzhhorod, underlines the national and transnational processes that influence the politics of representation: “Without George Soros, there would be no Roma.”

In reality, “Ukrainian Roma” comprise culturally and linguistically diverse groups, including Servy, Karpatski Roma, Ungrika Roma, Kalderary, Lovary, and others. Servy, the largest in number in Ukrainian territories, were migrants from Wallachia and Moldova and settled in Eastern and Southern Ukraine in the middle of the sixteenth century. Karpatski Roma, who live in the Western regions of Ukraine, differ from Servy in that they speak Carpathian dialects of Romani. Ungrika, Kalderary, and Lovary live in Transcarpathia and share cultural and linguistic characteristics with the Romani groups in Hungary.

The scholar Arturo Escobar has laid the groundwork for a theoretical framework for analyzing the local effects and politics of international intervention. In showing how development intervention by Western countries in Latin America has influenced the making of imaginative geographies such as the “third world,” Escobar’s work is applicable to the study of philanthropic aid in postsocialist Ukraine on many levels. For him, development is a cultural space where power differentials play a crucial role in creating, disseminating, and implementing knowledge: “Money, representation, and power intertwine and produce powerful truths and ways of creating and intervening in the world.”³⁰ Because Western donors define the nature of the giving and receiving of aid, they claim power in the context of such interventions. In Ukraine, the label “Roma” as a political signifier is an import from Western Europe. Because the majority of the Romani NGOs in Ukraine receive funding from Western philanthropic organizations such as the Open Society Institute, the representation of “Ukrainian Roma” is constructed via Western cultural and political models of minority group identity.

Toward Cultural and Social “Integration”

The international donors that finance Romani NGOs in Ukraine have helped promote certain images of “Roma” in society and to a certain extent in politics. Because aid from Western agencies is need based, Romani groups in Transcarpathia receive a proportionally larger amount of financial aid than Romani communities in other parts of Ukraine. Pictures taken in Transcarpathian Romani communities that are featured in the *Romani Yag* newspaper reinforce stereotypical images of Roma as poor, uneducated, marginalized, and living in unsanitary conditions. Representatives of Romani NGOs in Eastern Ukraine who come to Uzhhorod for conferences hosted by the Romani Yag NGO argue that the level of Romani poverty is most drastic in Transcarpathia. They fear that the newspaper overemphasizes issues related to Romani poverty and does not open Romani rights discourse to other forms of representation.

Donor aid has made Romani citizens increasingly dependent on a growing network of Romani NGOs for representative agency. Because Romani NGOs are the most visible community-based structures, they function as gatekeepers between the state and the people. A *romskii lider*—that is, the director of a Romani NGO (*lider* has been borrowed from the English word “leader,” another example of project-speak)—offers social and judicial protection for Roma who live in settlements that fall under the purview of grant projects supported by one or another Romani NGO. Thus, a curious socioeconomic phenomenon has emerged. Although, under the Soviet Union, Roma worked independently of their community and had much more freedom to follow individual paths separate from the community, the economic crisis in Ukraine today and increasing anti-Roma discrimination now make them highly dependent on the Romani NGOs in their search for work and during run-ins with the police. As was the case in many of Transcarpathia’s *tsyhanski tabory* during the 2004 presidential election, Romani NGO leaders exerted great influence over how the members of their respective *tabir* cast their votes.

To better understand how Romani NGO leaders garner local power, it is fruitful to analyze the historical caste divisions in Romani society that have been exaggerated by the donor network. As Ladányi and Szelényi explain, castes are social cleavages that form within ethnically marked groups whose exclusion from mainstream society is extreme.³¹ From the late nineteenth century until the fall of the Soviet Union, in the Transcarpathian region, the highest caste among Roma was that of the musician

families that performed for non-Romani restaurant patrons. The middle caste was composed of Roma who made their living selling and trading goods. The lowest caste were the Romani untouchables, the poorest rung of society. This division of castes was relative. For instance, the musician caste was considered representative of the Tsyhanska elita, the Gypsy elite, only in Transcarpathia and not among other more affluent or educated Roma in other parts of the country. In the mid-1990s, when donor organizations began to offer cultural development grants, the Romani musicians in Transcarpathia capitalized on the situation and founded organizations to benefit from this financing. Romani musicians, who are generally more accepted in non-Romani society, had better skills for engaging with donors because they had greater access to education and work experience than others in their community.

The majority of Romani NGO leaders hail from the traditional higher castes but use statistics from and images of the lower castes to gain grant aid. However, a Romani NGO leader will rarely enter the impoverished settlement of lower-caste Roma. According to Sasha Latsko, the *baron* (or *birov*) of the poorest Romani settlement in Uzhhorod, representatives from Romani Yag come into the *tabir* only when escorting international donors and human rights activists. In an interview, Latsko referred to poor Roma as “caged animals,” drawing parallels between donors and visitors to a zoo.³² Elaborating on this metaphor, he referred to the representative from the local Romani NGO who accompanied the donors as the “gatekeeper.” Though there is a high rate of tuberculosis in this settlement, the local Romani NGOs have not used the grant money allotted for it to secure running water. The NGOs present data that appeal to Western donors, but they use many of the financial resources allotted for “Roma” for people of Romani ethnicity who might not relatively be in need of aid, such as the family members of certain Romani NGO leaders. This structure further marginalizes the poorest segment of the Romani population. Meanwhile, the Romani NGOs, functioning within an internal set of sociocultural hierarchies and politics, recognize that as long as there are “poor Roma,” they will continue to receive donor aid.

Ethnically based grants assume a level of homogeneity among minority groups in need of financial assistance. The structure of the development network bases itself on the premise that individuals—namely, the Romani NGO directors—are able to represent the needs and views of the ethnic communities where they work and put aside their self-interest. Such attitudes result in simplistic approaches on the part of NGOs, donors, and lo-

cal governments in addressing people's needs. Further difficulties arise because the Romani NGOs compete against each other for a limited amount of financial resources within ethnically defined funding categories. As a result, factions have arisen in Romani communities based on which NGO a person supports and benefits from. That is to say, money has contributed to a rising tension both within Romani communities and in relation to the general non-Romani citizenry on the local and national levels. This tension is most often evident when the directors of other national minority organizations compete against Roma for funding from region-specific donor organizations such as the Carpathian Foundation, which was established in Uzhhorod by the East-West Institute and the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation in 1994.³³

During my fieldwork, I too was forced to negotiate my relationships and allegiances with various Romani NGOs that supported the musical initiatives that constituted the basis of my ethnomusicological research. This negotiation escalated during the Orange Revolution, when two interlocutors from rival NGOs supported opposing presidential candidates. Because I had returned to my field site as an international election observer, one organization used me as a political pawn against the other—without my knowledge and permission, one Romani NGO leader printed my picture in the local newspaper with an article in which I allegedly accused the other of election fraud.³⁴ Following the revolution, this situation was resolved through legal means. However, such nuances, guided by both political and cultural differences, are ignored by grant givers. Thus I was shocked to learn that a grants manager for the International Renaissance Foundation was aware of the situation I had experienced yet proceeded to fund both Romani NGO leaders in the following fiscal year. In response to my “Western and naive” question regarding the IRF's support of Romani NGO leaders involved in shady business tactics and political corruption scandals, the grants manager stated, “That is not my concern. As long as a person of Romani ethnicity submits a reasonable budget plan and sends timely reports on monies spent, he will receive a grant from us.”³⁵

The Limits of Difference

In Western development discourse, civil society is defined by pluralism, multiculturalism, and the celebration of diversity. In theory, each person, regardless of gender, race, ethnic background, or creed, has the right to be

treated with dignity, have access to equal representation, and be allowed to express a measure of self-identity. The policies instituted may include antidiscrimination and immigrant legislation, affirmative action programs in employment, education and cultural funding for national minorities, and policies for ethnic reconciliation and indigenous restitution.

Nevertheless, social theorists have argued that multiculturalism's emphasis on differences appropriates many of ethnic discrimination's themes and often reproduces the very assumptions upon which this discrimination has historically been based. In the post-Soviet sphere, physical and cultural attributes now serve to position the individual in society and are applied as tools to deconstruct and delegitimize old Soviet hierarchies and put new ones into place. This emergent form of what I term "bioculturalism" associates particular cultural values and biological attributes with one or another ethnic group and divides segments of the population according to essentialized characteristics that are reinforced through ethnically delineated development projects. For instance, non-Roma in Ukraine share a socially constructed belief that Romani children do not succeed in school because they have a natural inability to absorb complex information. Such a stereotype finds evidence in the indirect segregation of the school system between Roma and non-Roma in Uzhhorod. Grants from the IRF allotted for the establishment of Romani Sunday schools reinforce the popular notion that Romani children cannot succeed in non-Romani schools. According to this misconception, not only can they not pass the allegedly lower-standard educational curriculum in the Romani schools, but they must also seek extra help in Romani Sunday schools.

Such culturally and biologically based stereotypes inform peoples' attitudes toward numerous minority groups in Ukraine. The director of the Tatar Cultural Organization in L'viv, Khamzha Kashaiev, felt compelled upon first meeting me to explain that his family was not descended from warring Mongol hordes and that the Tatars in L'viv are a peace-loving people.³⁶ Kashaiev's fears about my alleged stereotypes are similar to those experienced by Roma who are aware that most non-Roma view them as biologically lazy, thieving, and gifted only in music and dance. In countless interviews and conversations, non-Roma have stated that they believe these traits to be "in the Gypsy blood" and that Roma live in poverty "because they want to." Romani NGOs attempt to intervene and to alter such stereotypes among the population by publishing a Romani newspaper and books, and by issuing media releases for Ukrainian television. These efforts, however, have done little to change the sentiments of the public and

of the Ukrainian government in particular. This is because “the Roma problem” is considered the internal problem of Roma and not also one of the non-Roma majority. Though international foundations offer financial aid for Romani projects with good or perhaps even ambivalent intentions, this aid effectively cuts the Romani population off from other social services from the state.

Social scientists have critiqued multicultural discourses and practices that function as “modes of containment and control,”³⁷ within a broader project of national cohesion.³⁸ Such critiques are relevant in Ukraine because the emphasis on ethnic difference within the development network works in opposition to development policies that claim to support an agenda of inclusiveness. In other words, the ethnicization of the population in Ukraine through the eyes of private Western foundations with neoliberal ideological agendas reinforces existing ethnic hierarchies in the post-Soviet context rather than offering new opportunities for sociopolitical and economic involvement. Though minority social movements help constitute public spaces in which conflicts gain visibility, any gain in minority rights hinges upon the actions of existing public institutions in society and of the state. Well-connected organizations such as the Open Society Institute and the IRF have stepped in where the state allegedly failed or was unable to provide services in the past. Thus, Romani NGOs sponsored by the IRF provide services that are in fact the responsibility of the Ukrainian government. These include the protection of human rights, access to unbiased media, support for Romani cultural endeavors, and access to education, social security, and other benefits. However, there is a great danger that the presence of ethnically based NGOs and the government’s reliance on them will continue to make it possible for the state to avoid what should be its responsibility toward members of minority groups that are in greatest need of assistance. The situation is exacerbated by the fact that the people who give and receive aid rarely contest the ethnocentric norms that pervade the Western-dominated development network.

In one of the most complex reactions to international support for Roma, particularly in Transcarpathia, local government officials now address “Roma problems” solely through NGO representatives. They have made little effort to develop direct relationships with the Romani citizens who live in the numerous *tsyhanski tabory*. Many city councils no longer consider these shantytowns part of their jurisdiction and leave most responsibility for the welfare of these citizens to the Romani NGOs. According to Volodymyra Kravchenko, director of the Terni Zor (Youth Power) Ro-

mani organization in Brovary, “The government never helped and they won’t help. The difference is that now they can just take credit for it. The government thinks ‘why should we help them if they are helped by foreigners?’”³⁹

Indeed, the presence of foreign aid has allowed the Ukrainian government to wash its hands of responsibility with regard to the various challenges faced by minority communities. The official statements issued by the Ukrainian government with regard to Roma in particular reveal a great lack of awareness and care for the problems at hand. According to the official report provided to the United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination in 2001 by the government of Ukraine, “Racial discrimination in all its forms has been eliminated in Ukraine and the equality of every person before the law has been secured, without distinction based on race, skin color or national or ethnic origin.”⁴⁰ However, the government report also states, “In many cases, we face outrageous facts of non-observation by the Roma of the basic rules of conduct, and violations of community life’s laws.”⁴¹ Rather than take responsibility, the government blames the Roma themselves for the substandard conditions in which many live, as well as for their “inability” to advance economically, socially, and politically.

Conclusions: Taking the “Ethno” Out of Politics

Ukrainians often say that Roma are *zamknuti v sobi* (closed within themselves). Cultural practices are cited as reasons for Roma self-marginalization and used as justifications to release the government from blame for particular situations. The Ukrainian government approaches all minorities through the lens of the cultural sphere. Ukraine’s first official Roma integration program, named the Program of Spiritual and Social Renaissance Among Roma in Ukraine 2003–2006, targeted 75 percent of its funding and substantive emphasis on Romani cultural development.⁴² However, given that 90 percent of Roma have been struggling with poverty since the early 1990s, questions of music and dance are among the least of their problems. The parameters of the program, which ended in December 2006, were quizzically similar to the Moldavian government’s Roma integration program. And according to the editors of the *Romani Yag* newspaper, both programs were copies of the Roma integration program developed by Soviet policymakers, who averted discourses on social inequality by drawing

attention to staged representations of “equality” within the performative cultural sphere.

In emphasizing the “unique” characteristics of different cultural groups, philanthropic donor programs reinforce the notion of national minorities as homogeneous communities that have markedly different needs than the majority population. The growing importance of ethnicity as a key to entitlement for goods and services has contributed to numerous separate “cultural” struggles of individual minorities, such as Roma, Crimean Tatars, and others in Ukraine. Though these movements are successful on one level in procuring much-needed national and international political recognition and foreign financial support for educational and cultural projects, they do not function as collective actions along class, gender, or social lines. They are ethnically differentiated and thus inadvertently mirror and encourage political processes that determine individuals’ social standing based on ethnicity. Ethnically based development initiatives reinforce a power framework that contributes to further forms of marginalization. Ethnicity cannot, however, function as a determinant of rights and civil liberties. Each group faces its own particular challenges. Therefore, both internationally funded and national initiatives must reorient themselves along civic lines if their efforts are to yield concrete results and improve the standard of living and level of political integration for all segments of national minority populations in Ukraine.

Notes

1. Due to the culturally derogative connotations implied in the term *Tsyhan*, I use “Roma,” meaning “person” in Romanes, a term promoted by rights activists in Ukraine and abroad.

2. Adriana Helbig, “‘Play for Me, Old Gypsy’: Music as Political Resource in the Roma Rights Movement in Ukraine,” PhD dissertation, Columbia University, 2005.

3. For a reaction from the Roma community in Transcarpathia to this segment, see Julia Zejkan, “Roma: Joke of Ukrainian Talk Show on 1+1,” *Romani Yag* 23, December 24, 2003, <http://www.romaniyag.uz.ua/en/?what=paper&number=42&article=doubletrouble>. Zejkan interviewed Oleksander Shyvak, a Romani musician from Mukachevo, Transcarpathia; Mykhajlo Tsybaliuk, head of the police in Rivne; and Dr. Roman Nykyforuk, chief of staff at the Kyiv Central Psychiatric Clinic No. 1. She pointed out that the most common stereotypes of Roma in Ukraine are those of musicians, thieves, and social misfits.

4. Zoltán Barany, *The East European Gypsies: Regime Change, Marginality, and Ethnopolitics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002); David Crowe, *A His-*

tory of the Gypsies of Eastern Europe and Russia (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1994); Michael Stewart, *The Time of the Gypsies* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1997).

5. János Ladányi and Iván Szelényi, *Patterns of Exclusion: Constructing Gypsy Ethnicity and the Making of an Underclass in Transitional Societies of Europe* (Boulder, Colo.: East European Monographs, 2006).

6. Arturo Escobar, *Encountering Development: The Making and Unmaking of the Third World* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1995); Sonia Alvarez, Evelina Dagnino, and Arturo Escobar, eds., *Cultures of Politics, Politics of Cultures: Re-Visioning Latin American Social Movements* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1998).

7. Michele Rivkin-Fish, *Women's Health in Post-Soviet Russia: The Politics of Intervention* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2005).

8. See Valerie Sperling, *Organizing Women in Contemporary Russia: Engendering Transition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

9. Julie Hemment, *Empowering Women in Russia: Activism, Aid, and NGOs* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2007); see also Julie Hemment, "The Riddle of the Third Sector: Civil Society, International Aid, and NGOs in Russia," *Anthropological Quarterly* 77, no. 2 (2004): 215–41.

10. Veronica Schild, "New Subjects of Rights? Women's Movements and the Construction of Citizenship in the New Democracies," in *Cultures of Politics, Politics of Cultures*, ed. Alvarez, Dagnino, and Escobar, 93–117; the quotation here is on 95.

11. Mikhail M. Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, ed. Michael Holquist and trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2004; orig. pub. 981).

12. Adrian Karatnycky, Alexander Motyl, and Amanda Schnetzer, eds., *Nations in Transit 2003: Democratization in East Central Europe and Eurasia* (New York: Freedom House, 2003).

13. Alvarez, Dagnino, and Escobar, *Cultures of Politics, Politics of Cultures*, 1.

14. David Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 68.

15. *Ibid.*

16. *Ibid.*, 78.

17. For a broader critique of Western understandings of civil society, see Chris Hann and Elizabeth Dunn, eds., *Civil Society: Challenging Western Models* (New York: Routledge, 1996).

18. Many Roma groups on Ukrainian territories maintained a nomadic lifestyle until forced settlement under Soviet rule. An official decree issued by Nikita Khrushchev in 1957 outlawed the Romani traditional way of life.

19. Nidhi Trehan, "In the Name of Roma? The Role of Private Foundations and NGOs," in *Between Past and Future: The Roma of Central and Eastern Europe*, ed. Will Guy (Hatfield: University of Hertfordshire Press, 2001), 134–49.

20. George Soros, "Building an Educational and Cultural Network for Eastern Europe," in *The Arts in the World Economy: Public Policy and Private Philanthropy for a Global Cultural Community*, ed. Olin Robison, Robert Freeman, and Charles A. Riley (London: University Press of New England, 1994), 81–94; the citation here is on 81.

21. *Ibid.*, 85.

22. Jürgen Habermas, *Theory of Communicative Action* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1984). Habermas argues that communicative action is successful to the degree that agreement is achieved cooperatively. He recognizes that in order for an “ideal speech situation” to take place, communication must occur in a public sphere that is free of institutional coercion.

23. Author’s interview with a worker (identity withheld) at the National Minorities Council in Uzhhorod, Transcarpathia, October 17, 2002.

24. In 1944, the Tatar population in Crimea (200,000 people) was deported to the Urals and Central Asia on fabricated charges regarding alleged cooperation with the Nazis. Soros-funded NGOs run repatriation programs for Tatars returning to Crimea. For more on the return of Crimean Tatars, see Elizabeth Gomert, “After the Return: The Crimean Tatars,” in *When Things Fall Apart: Qualitative Studies in Poverty in the Former Soviet Union*, ed. Nora Dudwick, Elizabeth Gomart, Alexandre Marc, and Kathleen Kuehnast (Washington, D.C.: World Bank, 2002), 301–32.

25. David Slater, “Rethinking the Spatialities of Social Movements: Questions of (B)orders, Culture, and Politics in Global Times,” in *Cultures of Politics, Politics of Cultures*, ed. Alvarez, Dagnino, and Escobar, 380–404; the quotation here is on 384.

26. This contrasts with *jus soli* (right of territory), the principle that a person’s nationality at birth is determined by the place of birth. In postsocialist Ukraine, nationality is defined by *jus soli*.

27. Julia Lerner, “‘Ethnicity’ Contests ‘Ethnos’ and ‘Nationalities’: Recruiting a Global Category in the Post-Soviet Russian Academic Discourse,” paper presented at Eleventh Annual World Convention of the Association for the Studies of Nationalities, Columbia University, New York, March 23–25, 2006.

28. Vladimir Malakhov and Valery Tishkov, *Multiculturalism and the Transformation of Post-Soviet Societies* (Moscow: Russian Academy of Sciences, 2002).

29. Steven Sampson, “The Social Life of Projects: Importing Civil Society to Albania,” in *Civil Society: Challenging Western Models*, ed. Hann and Dunn.

30. Escobar, *Encountering Development*, 20.

31. Ladányi and Szelényi, *Patterns of Exclusion*, 11.

32. Author’s interview with Sasha Latsko, Uzhhorod, August 21, 2002.

33. The Carpathian Foundation encourages cross-border and interethnic approaches to promote regional and community development and to help prevent conflicts in the bordering regions of Hungary, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, and Ukraine.

34. Adriana Helbig, “Ethnomusicology and Advocacy Research: Theory in Action among Romani NGOs in Ukraine,” *Anthropology of East Europe Review: Special Issue on Roma and Gadjé* 25, no. 2 (2007): 78–83.

35. Interview with a grants giver (identity withheld) at the International Renaissance Foundation in Kyiv, September 4, 2006.

36. Author’s interview with Khamzha Kashaiev, director of the Tuhan II [Native Land] Tatar Cultural-Educational Organization in L’viv, August 14, 2006.

37. Homi Bhabha, *Identity: Community, Culture, Difference*, ed. Jonathan Rutherford (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1990), 208.

38. Elizabeth Povinelli, *The Cunning of Recognition: Indigenous Alterities and the Making of Australian Multiculturalism* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2002).

39. Author’s interview with Volodymyra Kravchenko, Kyiv, August 24, 2006.

40. Quoted by European Roma Rights Centre, "Ukraine: UN Racism Committee Hears Testimony on Oppression of Roma," August 11, 2006, <http://www.errc.org/cikk.php?cikk=2614>.

41. Ibid.

42. Author's interview with Evhenia Navrotska, editor of the *Romani Yag* newspaper, Uzhhorod, August 17, 2006.