

“ONLY A DEAD FISH FLOWS WITH THE STREAM”: NGO FORMALIZATION, ANARCHOFEMINISM, AND THE POWER OF INFORMAL ASSOCIATIONS

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It has become commonplace in the last decade to find the face of contemporary civic participation in much of postsocialist Europe represented as that of a nongovernmental organization (NGO), not only by international supranational sponsors of NGO projects but by many scholars of “civil society” as well (see Hann 1996, Mandel 2002, Sampson 1996). The scholarly attention that had accompanied the groundswells of mass public participation that were symbolic of 1989 has shifted to analyses of the ways in which foreign donors, state structures, and supra-national governing bodies have influenced the shape and direction of the so-called non-governmental sector (Sloat 2005, Wedel 1998). Analyses of these relations from the perspective of gender inequalities, which are also reflected in recent analyses of women’s organizing in the Czech Republic, have focused on the ways in which women’s participation in civic associations, rather than formal political participation or mass mobilization, is becoming a dominant mode of their participation in public life (Gal and Kligman 2000a, 2000b; Hašková et. al. 2004a, 2004b; Ishkanian 2003; Kay 2000; Lang 1997; Sperling 1999).

This paper came about as the result of brainstorming by three researchers engaged in these questions from diverse angles on the relationships between increasing formalization of Czech women’s and feminist NGOs and the activities of lesser-studied informal feminist groups within the context of a lack of wider feminist social movement. In it we would like to offer

some thoughts on the contours of Czech feminist and women’s organizing in recent years by presenting a case study of an oppositional group of anarchofeminists within the context of increasing pressure on organizations to professionalize and become project-and reform-oriented.

In the first section we sketch the landscape of Czech women’s organizing and discuss some of the reasons for and consequences of changes in funding and orientation that have accompanied European enlargement. With these issues in mind we then turn to a closer look at the interplay between those women’s and feminist NGOs that have become increasingly professionalized and explicitly anti-institutional groups of anarchofeminists. We also offer some thoughts about why the preoccupation with the absence of a mass-based Czech feminist movement is justified and suggest that the constraints that both formal organizations and oppositional groups face are in part due to this lack.

The Contours of Czech Women’s Organizing

Czech women’s organizing after the revolution of 1989 consisted of the creation of small informal groups, largely in urban centers, and made up chiefly of women with higher levels of education. These groups were directed at addressing various social and environmental problems, such as professional associations, humanitarian groups, ecological initiatives, organizations fighting for lesbian or Roma women’s rights, hobby groups, groups focusing on motherhood and family life, and groups

studying the position of women in Czech society (Marksová-Tominová 1999; Hauser 1995).¹ These small, tightly-knit groups relied on voluntary participation and an exchange of skills and know-how among members in service of their agreed upon objectives. As has been the case elsewhere in central and eastern Europe, these groups were most often funded through donations from foreign foundations aimed at sponsoring women's issues or what was usually presented, with or without explicit mention of women's issues, as "promoting the development of civil society," or as local offshoots of western "parent" NGOs. Funding from these sources tended to be in the form of small grants that could be used for a variety of aspects of organizational development and, as such, allowed individual organizations a large degree of flexibility and independence in how they internally allocated the garnered funds (Hašková et al. 2004a). By the late 1990s, however, funding bodies and policies had begun to change.

In the late 1990s, concurrent with Czech preparations for EU accession, donors that had previously given flexible grants to Czech NGOs limited the kinds and amounts of funding available to them as they moved their attention away from the sphere of EU influence. For example, donors such as the Open Society Fund have limited the amount of money as well as the range of topics that are available to Czech organizations through its grants.² Such donors no longer support

open-ended and flexible uses of money, and although they still offer some support to Czech NGOs, these organizations are no longer able to rely upon these funds as they had done in the past. Instead, organizations are put into competition for a small number of larger grants. Large grants are offered especially by the new funding body in the region – the European Union. Some of these grants need a contribution from the Czech state, which also offers smaller (i.e. ministerial-level) grants to NGOs. Thus, differently from the first half of 1990s, organizations are currently being channelled into competition for a smaller number of larger grants offered in particular by the European Union and the Czech government. These grants cover a narrow range of gender issues that donors have determined to be of top priority (such as employment discrimination and domestic violence, anti-trafficking, promotion of women into politics, and the harmonization of work and family life). They are also being channelled into "development partnerships," formal networks of registered organizations created with the purpose of carrying out proposed projects.³ The appeal for donors of funding projects rather than organizations is that projects are easily monitored. For example, project proposals and reports can be quantified in terms of concrete outputs, such as the production of recommendations provided to the state or the provision of services in a specific predetermined area, or statistics on the number of people served within the project framework, and so on.

Further, NGOs go through regimented and complex application procedures that document the minute ways in which project funds will be expended. These characteristics make projects transparent and easily evaluated. Thus, project-based funding is currently the leading form of funding provided by national, international,

¹ Several women's groups were also created in connection with political parties and churches, some of which had comparatively large membership bases. Between 1989 and 1990, more than 70 officially registered women's groups were formed (Čermaková et al, 2000). Women's NGOs disseminate their ideas to the public either through the media (such as television and radio programs, newspapers, or the internet) or they organize seminars, lectures, workshops, and conferences for the public or selected groups of public (e.g. students, teachers, politicians, media representatives, PR representatives of Czech businesses, etc.). Less often, they carry out direct action such as public protests or street demonstrations.

² <http://osf.cz/> accessed 12/15/2004

³ EU funds include, for example, Daphne, Leonardo, Structural Funds, and European Social Funds, which include for example the initiative Equal and Joined Program for Development, and for pre-accession countries the PHARE program.

and supranational governing bodies and it is the leading form of funds that women's and feminist organizations in the Czech Republic receive. Although the conditions and restrictions placed upon NGOs by project funders are there ostensibly to regulate the process and discourage corruption and misuse of funds, recent scholarship has shown that the effects of these initiatives go far beyond the level of quality-control to impact the very shape and scope of the NGOs themselves. Project-based funding is currently the leading form of funding provided by national, international, and supranational governing bodies (Hašková et al. 2004a).

Project-Orientation

The increased availability of project-oriented funds coupled with a sharp decrease in organizational support grants has had the effect of pushing NGOs toward increasing formalization. By this we mean organizations that are *professionalized*, that is, they are formal, registered entities with office space that have staff with expertise and skills that are recognized and supported by foreign, state, or European Union donors. They are also *project-oriented*, in that their activities consist of conducting specific projects with clearly defined objectives, budgets and timelines. They are also *reform-oriented*, in that they work to improve existing legal or institutional structures, or to provide services and gender sensitivity training for different groups of the public that are not provided by state-run facilities, which might be supported by state funds. In concrete terms, this has meant that organizations have come under increasing pressure to conform their activities to donor priorities. While it is certainly true that donors have always influenced NGO development, as documented by the extensive scholarship in the area (see Ferguson 1990, Fisher 1998, Edwards & Hulme 1996), the above-stated changes in NGO funding patterns moves beyond the explicit power to determine which organizations are and are not part of any given thematic rubric in any given grant

cycle to influence not only the aims but also the structure of recipient NGOs. Project-orientation brings with it a host of requirements, some explicit and others implicit, that an organization must fulfill in order to be eligible for funding. Within the framework of European Union-funded project initiatives, for example, in addition to being able to propose a project that falls within a prioritized thematic area, organizations must have the resources to support themselves independently of project funds, they must have staff members with familiarity with computer databases and complicated budgeting and accounting procedures, prior documented experience with project-oriented funds, and be formally registered entities. Requirements like these preclude not only informal, unregistered, or radical groups, but also many smaller registered groups from access to many of the funds currently available.

The process of increasing project-orientation has influenced the strategies, structures, associations, and successes of many women's and feminist groups and organizations in significant ways. Under this pressure, some women's and feminist NGOs created new positions and organized special meetings specifically for the purpose of communicating and navigating through the bureaucratic labyrinths associated with the new grant application processes. Whereas at the beginning of the 1990s most women's NGOs had relied almost exclusively on the donated time of members, this has become almost impossible to do, given the complexity and scope of vast EU funded projects. An NGO's ability to build capacity and prove competence affects its ability to gain funding, which in turn affects not just the types of projects that it carries out, but in many cases its continued existence as well. This process puts pressure on organizations to professionalize, to reassess their organizational goals, and to realign with donor priorities, in order to gain access to these lucrative funding sources. For example, a member of a well-known women's NGO explains that whereas in the

beginning their basic operations were supported in a basic way by a group of German foundations, they lost that funding two years ago and were forced to search for new funding. What they discovered was that all of the available funding was in the form of grants dedicated to specific projects and they were forced to tailor their vision and plans to what was called for in the grant applications:

Then [after they lost funding from the German foundation for operating costs] we had to immediately begin to search and search for grants, which is an extremely difficult activity. This is because when you have a clear vision and structure of what you want to do and you want to carry out a specific activity, then it is almost impossible to survive because grants are always configured a bit differently. Each grant is written, the grant has its own character; there is always a definition that you have to fit into. This means that you are then required at that moment, even if you have a clear vision of a certain project, to make the project fit the needs of the funding institution. I consider this a serious problem and it will simply become a bigger problem in the future.

As a result of limited funding availability, some organizations have moved toward supported issues and, to greater or lesser degrees, away from others, while some others have shut their doors completely.

Formal and Informal Partnerships

Being a large, formalized NGO has been an advantage in applying for new large funds such as those available through the European Union because the conditions attached to these funding sources have also required the formation of new partnerships and associations across disparate organizations and sectors. These few organizations have the resources available to build an extensive consortium of partner organizations, manage them, and finance

them throughout the project. One such example is that of a large grant provided by EU funds dedicated to projects that help women more effectively balance work and family life. The structure of this grant was such that it was coordinated by one established NGO who then contracted out tasks to a large number of partner organizations in the NGO, academic, state, trade union, and business sectors (currently 27 partner organizations). The result was that women's NGOs partnered with organizations and businesses in a variety of areas in ways that they might not have done otherwise because the previously available smaller funds did not require (and often due to their smaller size they also did not give the opportunity for) the creation and management of extensive networks of partners. In addition, larger NGOs are able to use the requirement to create formal networks within the framework of a project to support organizations that, although registered, do not have the resources or experience to be project coordinators. Although the implications of this recent procedure of creating extensive networks of project partnerships have yet to be investigated (our interviews did not address this issue directly), it is possible that this grant structure (i.e. the demanding of inter-sectoral project networks) could serve to mandate cooperation across interests with the goal of broadening responsibility for gender equality from the domain of women's NGOs to that of larger society. Further, once established, such partnerships could provide a mutual exchange of contacts, advice, and information within knowledge-sharing networks. It is also possible, however, that those partnerships may be only "strategic": hierarchical, temporary project-based partnerships without a mutual ideological standpoint and thus productive closeness, which was the case of at least several contracted organizations within one large EU funded project.

Another example of an EU-funded project just getting underway, however, indicates a

different picture: one feminist NGO, which focuses on domestic violence from the perspective of gendered power relation, could no longer afford to pay its office rent when their foreign sources of money became diminished and was able to survive only by joining a larger feminist NGO in a successful EU project application. Their association with the larger NGO (who could afford to successfully apply for the EU project grant) is based on long-term friendship and mutual support. Even though the focus of the large EU project application is different from the focus of the small feminist NGO, currently the NGO has a chance to survive as a formal entity with office space from which to provide (in addition to new tasks) their previously provided public services based on voluntary work and smaller governmental grants. Thus, formal networks are sometimes used to ends unanticipated by the donor agencies, in this case, to assist struggling organizations.

It is important also to note that some NGO members are truly committed to the expansion of alternative feminist groups and encourage informal cooperation among groups, even those that are critical of NGO activities, in the hope that a wide range of voices will be heard. These NGO members create informal partnerships not for instrumental or project-dictated reasons but out of a sense of solidarity and friendship. While in and of themselves these tactics for acquiring the material needs of an informal group are not remarkable, indeed much has been made of people's ability to procure goods and services during the socialist era and afterward through networks of family and friends (Caldwell 2004, Verdery 1996, Možný 1991), their deployment within the context of the formalization of the non-governmental sector suggests that although the national and supranational governing structures strive for transparency within the non-governmental sector and its entities, in the case of these informal support networks, opacity works in ways beneficial to sustaining the variety of civic life.

Reform-Oriented and Political Contacts

Not only funding of women's and feminist groups and organizations has changed during the process of political and socio-economic transition of the Czech Republic. Due to the pressure of the process of EU enlargement, the Czech state was pushed to create governmental offices for promotion and implementation of gender equality, as well as to transpose EU equality directives into the Czech legal system. Even though the EU was the main force pushing the Czech state to adopt these processes, women's and feminist non-governmental organizations have influenced both the speed of their adoption and the specific forms they have taken by tailoring them to life in the Czech Republic. As regards the successful strategies used to achieve concrete legislative, structural, and governmental changes, we have found that formally registered and professionalized women's and feminist NGOs have been more successful in influencing policy directions than have their informal or non-professionalized colleagues. One of the reasons for this is the fact that these organizations have the resources to follow an issue throughout the drawn-out legislative process. As a member of one such established NGO explains:

We submitted a proposal to make changes to maternity leave legislation, so that it would be possible for a parent on leave [who receives a parental allowance] to work at the same time. [But] it was rejected. Parliament didn't accept it, and now, two or three years later, it has finally been accepted. So even when an organization is well off it's still going to take maybe three years at least before something seems to even get somewhere. And as long as these [women's] organizations are really based on voluntary work, then, well I admit that our organization has an advantage in that it has some paid employees, so that

we can in some way follow things up...we can afford it.

In order to be successful in its lobbying goals, this organization needed to have the capability to devote several years to follow up and permanently try to influence not only public but also preparatory political debates within parliament on the certain issue it wanted to influence, in addition to carrying out their other activities. Such dedication, with the aim of reaching organizational as well as lobbying success, requires a sufficient amount of time and personnel, as well as the funds to support it.

However, organizations that have been successful in policy reform usually have more than time, staff, and money. They also have personal connections to policy makers and actively participate in decision-making forums in the form of committee membership or governmental advisory positions, which they are put in because of the fact that they represent a formal, registered, and professionalized (officially recognized as expert) non-governmental (and, even better, umbrella) organization. For example, one of the leaders in the area of Czech women's and feminist NGOs has been highly successful in achieving important changes over the last few years. She is a representative of an established feminist NGO that emerged soon after the revolution as an informal group of highly educated women who at the time lacked even office space. She is also a member of one of the leading left-wing political parties and has gradually managed to reach the post of government advisor on issues of equal opportunities for men and women. Like several other representatives of professionalized women's and feminist NGOs she is also a member of the Government Council for Equal Opportunities. She provided us with a specific example of her lobbying success:

While the idea did exist even within the department of Equal Opportunities for Men and Women at the Ministry of Labor and Social

Affairs, it was as though no one really wanted to carry it through. When I briefed Špidla [the left wing former prime minister] in the spring of 2001 on the "Government Priorities and Procedures for the Promotion of Equality for Men and Women" [the Czech national action plan for promoting gender equality produced in response to the Beijing Platform of Action, produced annually since 1998] just before it went to the government, I said to him that as long as there isn't at least one part-time position at each ministry exclusively focusing on equal opportunities then this will go nowhere. I thought though that it was already too late to add that in. And Špidla said: ok, so we'll write that into the resolution, so I sent him an email with a proposal for the formulation and he added it. My guess is that that sped things up by at least 1-2 years.

Even though the success in influencing legislative and decisive processes by members and organizations from the non-governmental sector is driven through channels of participation in formal professionalized organizations, in many ways success is also a matter of personalities, personal contacts, and being at the right place at the right time. One member of a women's NGO describes the strengths and weaknesses of these intersectoral personal contacts in the following way:

Most of it is about personal contacts and it is a process. It's not possible to generalize judgments about political partners – who is at which post is what matters... On the whole these active opportunities are always about contacts, and as soon as an employee (governmental officer with whom the NGO member has a personal contact) changes, at that moment you are out, you don't get

anything. You're just not in the system.

Therefore, the combination of needing to be a recognized part of formal structures while at the same time needing to continually cultivate new and foster existing informal inter-sectoral contacts seems to be the reality of successful lobbying for legislative, policy, and structural changes. The establishment of governmental and decision-making structures for implementing gender equality at the end of the 1990s and the beginning of the new millennium have strengthened the ability of women's non-governmental groups to influence legislative and decision-making processes because new potential partners and arenas have been created for them in the establishment of governmental departments, posts, and committees, which use the knowledge and expertise of women's NGOs and have selectively started to recognize some of them as experts. Those newly created partners and arenas are more suitable to formal and professionalized women's organizations (those recognized as experts by state officials) than informal and smaller women's groups and thus create additional pressure to professionalize in order to be recognized as legitimate. Therefore, this aspect of the process of EU accession has strengthened both the need for inter-sectoral contacts and the professionalization of women's groups

Examples of successful lobbying by women's or feminist NGOs, however, are an exception rather than the rule and they depend primarily on the personality that manages to combine the above-mentioned strategies and positions and, of course, on the general constellation on the political scene at the time of the lobbying efforts. Most other examples of lobbying mentioned by members of smaller (and topically marginal) women's non-profit organizations were generally unsuccessful.⁴ One smaller,

although very active in lobbying, women's NGO expressed it in the following way:

If I may contribute one experience... we have tried, we have always lobbied actively. That means that we always had to obtain contacts, force ourselves to the committees and various meetings and this always concerned laws that in some way aimed at allowing civic associations to enter proceedings and influence social events. That means not only the women's question but in general building civic society. So we have never had problems getting ourselves there and saying our opinion but the end-play, which is whether our voice was heard and answered, well, nothing came out of it.

Once again it has been proven that being a part of decision-making structures, being recognized as an expert, and having enough organizational capacity to carry out the requirements of these tasks are needed once a non-governmental organization determines the goal of legislative and decision-making structural changes they would like to make in order to help Czech women. Having enough organizational capacity is limited, however, by the available funding. Project-oriented funding leads women's NGOs to use a labor force that is paid but limited to projects (in addition to the use of volunteers) and thus is unstable because these employees or volunteers do not have the capacity for long-term lobbying or building inter-sectoral connections.

In the transition from "first generation" to "second generation" NGOs (Sampson 2003), women's and feminist NGO effectiveness has been focused and intensified in certain areas with significant effect (for example, important legislative changes connected to the harmonization of work and family life and prevention of domestic violence have been made) and weakened in others (i.e. that such interdependent positions make it more

⁴ For example, women's ecological non-governmental organization or women's organization fighting for mother's rights during childbirth.

difficult to challenge or bypass existing institutional structures). However, as long as there is no tradition of public support of women's organizations in the form of participation or philanthropy, and the forms of funding are limited to projects that require staff and expertise, the danger remains that gender equality will come to be perceived within the narrow realms established by funding bodies to the exclusion of marginalized needs and viewpoints.

Identity in Opposition: Anarchofeminism at the intersections

When the contemporary anarchofeminists arrived on the scene in 2000, they inserted themselves into the dialogue about the pitfalls of NGO professionalization and weighed in on the meanings of gender equality in a way that marks them as singular.⁵ Although they formed ostensibly as a reaction to what they saw as a lack of commitment to gender equality within the anarchist community, the formation of the most recent and explicitly anarchofeminist groups occurred at a point when the trend toward the professionalization of women's and feminist groups was readily observable. In December 2000, as a result of the desire of a group of women and men involved in the anarchist movements (some were self-proclaimed feminists, others anarchists) to

celebrate International Women's Day 2001 (March 8), a day that had been an official state holiday during socialism but that since 1989 had been labeled a communist relic, the informal, unregistered, Feminist Group of March 8 (*Feministická skupina 8 března*) was formed.⁶ Their goal was not to revive the sentiments of the Communist Party, but rather to tap into the international effort to fight against injustices perpetrated upon working women throughout the world in a Global Women's Strike.⁷ The inaugural event itself consisted of a daylong set of activities aimed at raising awareness of global social injustices and celebrating alternative perspectives. Dozens of young people, many with the brightly dyed hair or dreadlocks, piercings, and patches that were (and to a great extent remain) the alternative youth fashion of the time, gathered on a square in central Prague to watch a theater performance, listen to music, dance, and eat the free vegan food provided by the group Food Not Bombs, while their children were entertained on an improvised playground. Among the musical acts was a performance by two former members of the influential all-female rock group "Teeth and Nails (*Zuby nehty*)," one of whom was a well-known feminist and cultural activist. They performed in a white tent in front of a banner that read, "Against Sexism, Against Racism, Against Fascism (*proti sexismu, proti rasismu, proti fašismu*)." After dark, a

⁵ Czech anarchofeminism began, as did most other forms of contemporary Czech social organizing, in the wake of the political revolution of 1989. Although no continuity between membership bases exists, contemporary anarchofeminism has its roots in a small number of female anarchist or anarchofeminist activities that occurred within the anarchist and squatting movements of the 1990s. As is the case in the contemporary movement, independently published magazines (zines) served as a central forum for the expression of their ideas. These short-lived alternatives to mainstream anarchist thought included the zines *Wicca* from 1993 to 1995 and *Esbat* from 1996 to 1997, both of which had witchcraft and ecofeminist orientations. While not identifying themselves specifically as anarchofeminist, these groups set the stage for the explicitly anarcho- and punk-feminist groups that sprang up in the year 2000, the Feminist Group of March 8 and the Bloody Mary zine collective.

⁶ They were assisted in hosting the event by the punk feminist zine collective Bloody Mary, whose members were also invested in the ideas of anarchofeminism. In 2001, after discussion on the ideological directions the group should take after the strike was over, the Feminist Group of March 8 started the newsletter *Siren* (*Siréna*) and zine *Direct Way* (*Přímá cesta*) from a position explicitly within the anarchist movement. In 2004, they decided that the name of the group should reflect the dual positioning of its members as anarchists and feminists who are critical of many aspects of each of these perspectives, as well as their desire for a broader scope of activities beyond that of March 8, reaffirmed their allegiance to the anarchist movement, and renamed themselves the *Anarchofeminist Group* (*Anarchofeministická skupina*—AFS). We use the acronym AFS to refer to both incarnations of this group throughout the text.

⁷ www.globalwomenstrike.net/

group of young anarchist women put on a “fire show,” where they twirled and juggled flaming batons. Beginning with this inaugural event, it was clear that AFS brought with them a host of innovative and unconventional approaches to gender equality and feminist activism in the Czech Republic. Their participatory approach to activism, which was direct and public yet creative, their position that injustices are interlinked, and their anti-institutional stance were not prevalent within established anarchist groups or women’s organizations.

Anti-Institutionalism and Strategic Associations

The *Bloody Mary* ‘zine slogan, “only a dead fish flows with the stream,” captures the spirit of the anarchofeminists’ oppositional position. Although Czech anarchofeminists are critical of gender relations within the wider anarchist movement and advocate a feminist perspective in proposing solutions to gender inequalities, they also take a critical stance toward legislative reform and are skeptical of the ability of what they term “institutional” or “liberal” feminism to create meaningful change. In a leaflet in which they explain the precepts of anarchofeminism and describe the differences between anarchofeminism and institutional feminism, they state:

To us, feminism does not mean to reach the highest possible position and prestige, but rather to live our lives fully and to make decisions for ourselves while accepting all consequences. While the important part of liberal feminism is to insert as many women as possible into leading positions in all areas of social and economic life, our goal is to abolish hierarchy itself. Privileges are unjust not only in the hands of men but in women’s hand as well. [Anarchofeminist Group 2004]⁸

The Anarchofeminist Group (Anarchofeministická skupina—AFS) is skeptical of reform-oriented activities like those undertaken by formalized women’s and feminist NGOs in the Czech Republic because, anarchofeminists argue, these activities over-emphasize the role of existing institutions in creating equality, put too much priority on what they see as superficial legal reforms, and devote an insufficient amount of attention to needs arising from below (*zdola*) at the community level (see Anarchofeminist Group 2004). However, although they are skeptical of the work that NGOs carry out, they also argue for continued support of the work of the NGO sector, in particular the provision of services, in the absence of widespread grassroots initiatives. They write, “Their work, most of all in the social sphere (women’s shelters (*azylové domy*), work with victims of domestic violence or trafficking in women), is currently unfortunately irreplaceable because there is very narrow solidarity among people and hardly any cooperation among people exists on the community level” (Anarchofeminist Group 2004). NGOs are thus seen as placeholders standing in for the local self-organization that AFS considers a more equitable way to address women’s needs. Despite these official sentiments, in daily practice anarchofeminist group members also garner support from select NGOs on an informal and strategic basis.

The strategic association of anarchofeminist groups such as AFS with sympathetic women’s NGOs allows them to circumvent some of the dangers of professionalization, which would be unacceptable given their explicitly nonhierarchical and anti-institutional stance, while providing them with the opportunity to express their views in a wider range of settings. Despite their marginalized status (or perhaps because of it) as an informal group whose members are connected through a disperse network of friends and allies, AFS draws upon the resources that are accessible through these channels. For example, the musical

⁸ www.anarchofeminismus.ecn.cz/ accessed 12/10/2004

equipment for the 2001 event described above was acquired through friends in the alternative music business and the food was provided by a group closely allied with AFS through ties from within the anarchist movement. As some of its members work or have worked at such organizations, AFS gains needed resources such as space for lectures and group meetings, a forum for selling their zines and publicizing their activities on organization bulletin boards and websites, as well as donations of printing costs and other material necessities through the accessing of members' personal networks. These networks include contacts within professionalized NGOs, thus allowing the group to negotiate for their needs in an informal, non-monetary context.⁹

Although they collect small membership fees and organize benefit concerts, their events are publicized to a wider audience by being displayed in prominent places in material and virtual spaces and the amount of money made by the sale of merchandise or the recruitment of new members is augmented by access to these institutional resources. Although informal association with professionalized NGOs through individual friendship networks serves some of the material needs of anarchofeminist groups, however, there remains a conflict between their practice of arranging for limited assistance in the form of NGO resources garnered via informal networks and their critical stance toward NGOs as institutions. As AFS positions itself rhetorically in opposition to hierarchical and institutionalized structures, some members take pains to emphasize that their utilization of NGO resources is not indicative of any sort of formal cooperation with the NGO sector. As one AFS member explains: "We do not cooperate with NGOs crucially, we have only passive contacts with them, but our magazine is sold in [a prominent

feminist NGO] and we have been allowed to do our lectures there recently, so there is this focused cooperation but it is not wider."

Because their ideological position situates them in opposition to NGOs, they are careful to avoid anything that might indicate cooptation by institutions. Thus, in order to remain loyal to their critical stance, AFS cannot participate in anything beyond informal "focused cooperation" with women's and feminist NGOs and thus remains outside the sphere of influence of institutional decision-making processes.

Multiple Injustices

Anarchofeminist rhetoric strongly advocates a view of social injustice as interlinked rather than hierarchical and this interpretive framework infuses all of their activities and speeches. The notion of intersecting oppressions that must be fought against simultaneously is significantly different from the priority that the mainstream anarchist movement places on anti-capitalist action. As demonstrated by their Global Women's Strike 2001 slogan of "*proti sexismu, proti rasismu, proti fašismu*," AFS espouses the framework of multiple oppressions working upon both women and men in ways that are intertwined in anarchofeminist oratory. The feminist notion of fighting patriarchy is placed within this matrix and explained to be a significant part of all people's lives:

At first sight patriarchy seems to have a negative impact exclusively on women, but according to us patriarchy also has a negative impact on men through the inequalities and roles that it creates. We claim then that the struggle against patriarchy is not only a women's issue, but that it has to go hand in hand with the struggle against the state and capitalism. [AFS speech on May Day 2002]

In their activities, AFS tries to raise awareness about the ways in which injustices work together and to draw attention to the existence of patriarchy and

⁹ This fact also indicates that although they may be increasingly constrained by project-based funding, some feminist NGOs also find ways to support radical or critical activism through informal networks.

sexism as problems to be faced both inside and outside of the anarchist movement. The zines *Bloody Mary* and *Direct Way* are aimed at integrating this worldview into Czech anarchist, punk, and feminist discourses through a combination of reprinted articles from foreign books and magazines translated into Czech and original articles and interviews on a variety of topics.¹⁰

The main reason that anarchofeminist groups separated within the anarchist movement was that some female members felt that gender or women's issues were dismissed as marginal or put off for later ("after the revolution") within the movement. Czech anarchism continued to prioritize worker issues and class struggle and some anarchists claimed that inequalities between men and women were not important. Some issues, for instance pornography, had not been addressed by anarchists at all prior to the advent of Czech anarchofeminism, while others considered fascism to be a more severe problem than sexism. In other cases, women complained that men did not take them seriously at meetings and that they considered women unable to carry out certain movement activities, such as fighting neo-Nazis. As an anti-fascist girl put it, "If there is no gender equality, there won't be any other equality. Many people speak about it devotedly but the reality is different. Being overlooked and underestimated is not an exception." Anarchofeminists began to organize because they considered it important to bring gender issues and feminist activities into the movement. According to the writers of *Bloody Mary*, the "problem of Czech anarchism is also the fact that it is not equal anarchism, but rather still very patriarchal, like all of Czech society. Women's spaces are missing" (*Bloody Mary* no. 1). Among anarchists, most believe that gender equality already exists *de facto* within the movement, but women's experiences within the

movement have shown that while equality may exist in theory and rhetoric, it decidedly does not exist in practice (Kolářová 2004). Although sexism is often considered something to be eradicated, its position as a tertiary problem whose solution is determined to be dependent on the eradication of core issues prevents activists from integrating an anti-sexist stance, thus limiting the scope of those activities generally considered to be quintessentially anarchist.¹¹ Some women did not want to wait any longer for the movement as a whole to address the problem and started to deal with discrimination and sexism directly. According to them, oppression based on gender will not end with the defeat of capitalism, as is often suggested by members of the wider anarchist movement. Czech anarchofeminist worldview considers patriarchy and capitalism to be equivalent causes of the exploitation of both women and men and rally against both of them. Anarchofeminists try to work within the movement because they see feminism as a part of anarchism and stress that, in the words of one anarchist woman, "those who say otherwise are not anarchists."

Public Activism and Movement Maneuvers

Anarchofeminists often carry out public activism, activities that take place in public venues and are open to a wide range of participants, in order to present and receive support for their goals. Events such as the Global Women's Strike in 2001 demonstrate a desire to present the group's views in a way that is directly accessible to participation by the general public in ways that lobbying and media interaction are not and are more appealing than traditional anarchist marches and demonstrations to segments of the population that anarchofeminists feel are not adequately

¹⁰ Common topics covered include family, pornography, sexuality, men in patriarchy, globalization, anti-fascism, and abortion.

¹¹ Due to issues raised by anarchofeminists, anarchist publications have begun using both the male and female forms of words (i.e. *anarchisti/ky* instead of only *anarchisti*), and debates have begun about the importance of feminism within anarchism as some male anarchists have taken up the cause.

targeted by other existing groups and organizations. For example, in addition to participating in what has become the traditional anarchist May Day celebration that includes a demonstration, speeches, a march, and street fights with neo-fascists, AFS put flowers on a gravestone in memorial to the history of May Day, sang songs, and floated boats draped with banners on the Vltava river. Their theatrical performance, children's playground, vegan food, music, and evening fire show are creative in a way that is less often demonstrated within the mainstream anarchist movement (Kolářová 2004).

AFS members express great interest in "communicating with people on the streets" and reaching people who they believe have been marginalized by NGOs' seminars, workshops, and conferences, which are usually attended by intellectuals and those with a university education, media representatives, and members of the government and business sectors, as well as by their services or education targeted to specific target groups.¹² One anarchofeminist woman who is also an NGO member expressed her dissatisfaction with the reach of her NGO in this way:

I don't know who the [NGO] wants to come [to the sponsored events], but who I want to come is just normal people, people from the street, if they are interested, because people who usually come to the presentations and the lectures are university students, intellectuals, or academics, which is the higher level of education, and this won't help to integrate gender studies into normal society, if you can call it normal; I mean, not academic society. I would like these people to come also, because it's always the same people

coming here, usually with the same level of education.

This activist sees the activities of the NGO of which she is a staff member as reaching only a small segment of the population that holds an elite position in society. She believes that this segment of the population is not representative of the whole and that, in contrast to groups of intellectuals, "normal people" are not best reached through lectures and presentations.

However, because activism is contentious terrain within Czech society, perhaps due to its association with the obligatory gatherings and shows of support for the socialist government of the past, direct action is not always successful with "normal people" either. While in earlier years members of anarchofeminist groups argued that activities that take place on the streets are the best method for involving "normal people" and stridently criticize what they see as NGOs' lack of direct contact with people outside of privileged circles, in the last year they also have begun to tend toward holding more lectures and seminars than public demonstrations. Given that anarchofeminist lectures are held at not only NGOs, high schools, and universities, but also night clubs and summer camps, as well as locations outside of major city centers, it is arguable that there could be potential for reaching a wider range of audiences. Nevertheless, most lectures are organized by local supporters from the alternative movement in alternative spaces, which thus restricts their potential impact to the like-minded. Further, people from outside of the anarchist movement or alternative culture scene might be discouraged from espousing anarchofeminism or participating in anarchofeminist activities because of their alternative look (dreadlocks, piercings, patches) or because they could be seen as too young and too radical. Along with this is the fact that in Czech society, as elsewhere, the word "anarchism" tends not to be associated with equality but with terrorism, violence and anomie.

¹² It is possible that NGO members might take exception to the anarchofeminists' characterization of NGO activities as elitist. Although it is not common, NGOs have also "taken to the streets" in demonstrations on various issues.

Anarchofeminist groups also face a lack of resources to widely publicize their activities, and while in the past they could count on the television and print media to give them some free publicity in the form of sensational news reports, media attention has waned. As they are explicitly anti-institutional and anti-hierarchical, anarchofeminist groups do not have paid employees or activists and instead take part in activism in addition to studying and working, so they cannot dedicate as much time to their activities or expect to have similar outcomes as can organizations with access to sources of project funds. In fact, in the four years of its existence AFS has not increased its membership but instead has declined in number. Group membership was at its height at the beginning when there was a perceived need in the anarchist movement to start to organize around gender issues.¹³ Without a wider base of support from a movement dedicated to eradicating gender inequality that includes critical, alternative, or even radical action, it appears that informal groups such as AFS will continue to be constrained by a lack of resources, limited impact, and potential relative marginalization within the larger social movements of which they may be a part.¹⁴

Conclusion

In offering these preliminary reflections on the pressures Czech women's and feminist organizations are experiencing to formalize and the effect on the proliferation of alternative, critical, or even subversive perspectives outside of its realm, we hope to spark a discussion about the ways in which organizing, particularly organizing around

women, gender, and feminism, continues to transform in the years since the heady days of the Velvet Revolution. This recent development in the saga of NGO-donor relations has yet to be fully explored, but as we have tried to show, it is a dynamic and forceful player in postsocialist Europe, whose effects are far from understood. In this paper, we have outlined some of the trends in Czech women's organizing and argued that changes in funding sources and structures have greatly affected its contours. We have suggested that despite the recent privileging of the formalization of organizations and networks by donor agencies, informal relations and personal connections continue to be crucial to the success of both NGOs and informal feminist groups. We would also like to suggest that further explorations of the (non)existence of a Czech feminist movement are necessary in order to more fully understand the relationship between organized activity and grassroots support in the postsocialist Czech Republic.

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¹³ Although there are signs that anarchist activists are more aware of gender issues (they have begun to reflect it in their publications), the participation of women in the movement has not increased. Generally, the anarchist movement is in decline now and is not gaining many new (including male) activists.

¹⁴ It is important to note here that as anarchofeminists do not consider themselves to be a "women's" group, they likely would not support a movement based on gender identity rather than feminist goals.

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