Where is the 'State' in Albania? The Unresolved Contradictions Confronting Civil Society in the 'Transition' from Communism to Free Markets

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Abstract

Twenty years after transition, the political sphere in Albania is becoming increasingly authoritarian despite the extensive development agendas promoted by many international organisations. This paper analyses the problems confronting civil society, one of the sacred pillars of democracy promotion, and the reasons it has been largely unable to facilitate early hopes of a democratic transformation. Three primary components converge to inhibit the impact civil society has so far been able to exercise on the political sphere: 1) The un-addressed legacy of a brutal totalitarian dictatorship; 2) the parallel, non-intersecting, distinctly gendered tracks along which civil society and government have developed; 3) the complicity of international structures in inhibiting the deeply analytical culture of knowledge production necessary to shift the relation of the individual to the state.

Keywords: Albania, civil society, democratisation, gender, nongovernmental organisations.

Introduction

While much of Southeast Europe has had difficulty developing democratic structures and processes, "Gallup Balkan monitor surveys have shown that Albania is the only country in the region where foreign institutions are seen as the most reliable, much more so than domestic, elected institutions" (Bertelsmann Stiftung, 2012, pp. 12-13). Seen as key to "fostering stability, security and respect for democracy and human rights," the international organisations promoting a multi-party electoral system, rule of law, and economic privatisation have invested substantial sums in developing an effective civil society sector (Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights [ODIHR], 2013, para. 2).[1] While the sector achieved limited progress through 2005, many of the advances made through NGO support from multi- and bi-lateral donors have been lost as donors shift funding agendas and withdraw from the country. According to the USAID sustainability index, democratic development in Albania has in fact declined over the last several years in many key areas (including in the electoral process, national and local governance, and independent media) (United States Agency for International Development [USAID], 2011, 2012). Where it has not outright declined, it has remained

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1 There is much discussion about what civil society actually means as well as about the nature of the relation between a broadly conceived civil society and civil society organisation (CSOs), non-governmental organisations (NGOs), faith-based organisation (FBOs) and labour organisations. For the purposes of this paper – which remains interested in but does not engage a theoretical discussion of the nature of civil society and its relation to formal governmental structures – we are considering civil society as the broadest configuration of organised groups. Within Albania, we argue that civil society is functionally limited to non-governmental organisations funded by international donors and driven by the economic and crisis aid that has guided development during transition.

stagnant, leading the European Commission (EC) in its 2010 and 2011 opinions on Albania's progress towards EU membership to cite serious deficiencies in the "stability of institutions guaranteeing democracy, the rule of law, human rights, and respect for and protection of minorities" (Gjipali, 2011, p. 50).

This decline poses important questions for both international and domestic actors as we consider the future course of civil society development in Albania. Clearly, the strategies so far employed have not been sufficient to overcome the structural and technological deficiencies confronting the Albanian government and society in the wake of transition. In the first place, they have failed to sufficiently understand the emotional and psychological factors impeding individuals from developing informal social capital at the social and political levels (Polese, 2009). While a small group of the Albanian civil society sector has made important strides in advancing human rights and providing social services, these organisations are donor driven NGOs following funding agendas established by the large multi- and bi-lateral donors. Indeed, it is more appropriate to speak of the 'NGO sector' than of civil society in Albania, where the vast majority of organisations participating in the public sphere are "donor-driven NGOs rather than genuinely local interest groups and grassroots movements in touch with local priorities" (Bertelsmann Stiftung, 2012, p. 14).

The lack of a grass-roots civil society sector or initiatives coming from the bottom up point to the larger problems of Albania's developmental history, which significantly differs in many respects from its SEE/ CEE neighbours, as well as how this history shapes current political crises. This paper analyses three particularly important factors inhibiting civil society development: 1) The un-addressed legacy of a brutal totalitarian dictatorship; 2) the parallel, non-intersecting, distinctly gendered tracks along which civil society and government have developed; 3) the complicity of international structures in inhibiting the deeply analytical culture of knowledge production necessary to shift the relation of the individual to the state.

The first section, legacies of dictatorship, examines how attitudes and behaviours in Albania have been shaped by extreme oppression under a brutal totalitarian regime that left the country with few institutions, organisations, or intellectuals with a history of democratisation on which to draw. The second, third, and fourth sections deal with NGO development and decline. In the section on early NGO development and the state/ civil society divide, we examine how NGOs developed along a distinctly gendered, non-intersecting track parallel to the post-transition formation of political parties. Two subsequent sections map the growth and stabilisation period and the decline of civil society. Finally, we end with an analysis of international complicity in the problems confronting civil society. In certain respects, the structure of international aid, rather than helping Albanians overcome the many challenges facing them, has in fact been complicit in perpetuating divides. We conclude by arguing that, in order to overcome these problems, future strategies must facilitate a culture of knowledge production that can move from project implementation to the critical analysis and theoretical cultural debate necessary for a truly democratic civil society.

Legacies of dictatorship

As O'Brennan and Gassie (2009) argue, "Albania has faced problems of both nature and magnitude quite unlike anything experienced in neighbouring countries" (p. 65). While all of the countries in the region endured varying degrees of isolation and repression, Albanians were subject to extreme forms of these: they suffered the highest percentage of executions, imprisonment, and political exile, and the enduring effects of this continue to impact social and cultural development in Albania. Albania did not declare its independence until 1912, and shortly thereafter, like the rest of Europe and the Balkans, it lost years to the ravages of WWI, although neutral itself. In the interwar years, Albania experienced a short period of growth under the authoritarian rule of King Zog, though there was minimal

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industrial development and no development of forms of democratisation, labour or community-based organisation, or of a middle class (Krasniqi, 2012, para. 3–8). Repressive violence, both during and after WWII, further eroded the potential for pluralist socio-economic-political structures to evolve. The Partisans began wiping out political opposition during WWII and consolidated their power after the war through a series of brutal purges that effectively wiped out any remaining political opponents.

The almost total absence of the social and material structures that might support political opposition converged with an exceptionally high degree of state terror to virtually eliminate the formation of a viable dissident movement.[2] This is one of the most important factors generating what many call a unique communist mentality in Albania. As Krasniqi (2012) explains, without a dissident community or a legacy of democratic intellectual and cultural production inside the country,[3] there was little possibility for effective civil opposition to the emerging state apparatus during the formative years of the communist regime.[4] As this history indicates, the notion of 'civil society' did not exist as a concept in Albania. While strategic uses of informal social capital certainly helped individuals and families survive extreme repression (Polese, 2009), this social capital was family and clan based and not organised at a community level. Indeed, state laws criminalised the independent action of citisens in the public sphere. As informally organizing around any social issue was a criminal act, the very notion of civil society upon which development theory relies to build democratic structures today was, twenty years ago, criminal activity for which people would be labeled enemies of the state, exiled, or jailed (Krasniqi, 2012, para. 3-7).

After the 1985 death of Albania's dictator, Enver Hoxha, criminal prosecutions relaxed somewhat under the government of Ramiz Alia, and by the early 90s student groups and a small cadre of the political elite rode the wave of the changes sweeping through the Soviet bloc and forced the government to accept political pluralism. However, with no conceptual frameworks and lacking any of the material or intellectual infrastructure with which to develop a political and economic system of pluralism and free markets, there was a great deal of emotional as well as intellectual opposition to changing the structures of a one-party totalitarian state. As Eglantina Gjermeni, formerly the Executive Director of the Gender Alliance for Development Center and currently a Member of Parliament for the Socialist Party, describes the situation:

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2   Krasniqi (2012), citing data from *The Black Books of Communism*, estimates that as much as 18% of the total population was subject to direct and massive oppression, including imprisonment and exile (para. 4).

3   This point of knowledge production is crucial as it is a microcosm for the fragmented, oppositional history of knowledge production in the country. Albania did not have a university until 1957; when the University of Tirana was finally inaugurated, the communist power structures had consolidated and the institution functioned exclusively as an arm of the state, with little possibility for catalysing critical analysis or intellectual opposition to the regime. Under the communist regime, the communist elite was educated in universities in Russia and southeastern Europe, as well as in western European countries under the umbrella of communist parties that maintained good relations with the Hoxha regime. The likelihood of an education abroad translating to dissidence at home was largely prevented by the extensive surveillance networks monitoring Albanians' movement and the threat to family members at home should those abroad show signs of free-thinking or dissent. Currently, the intellectual elite is still being educated outside of the country, primarily through Western initiatives for 'development.' Albania hence still lacks the intellectual as well as the material infrastructure *inside of the country* necessary for a culture of sophisticated knowledge production.

4   As early as 1946, a law forbade the establishment of any organisation independent of the party (where, in the one-party system, the communist party was the only instrument of government). Laws also forbade the formation of any contracts or economic cooperation with other states as well as the free movement both inside of the country and between countries. Political opposition through religious/ church organisations became increasingly more impossible following the 1967 law criminalising religion; as part of a broad-ranging 'cultural revolution' parallel to the cultural revolution of Albania's then-ally communist China religious communities were outlawed, a series of purges carried out against the clergy, and all religious institutions closed. This effectively shut down any possibility of the churches functioning as a site for social organisation outside of governmental frameworks (Krasniqi, 2012, para. 3-7).

There was no basis from which civil society could develop. We started from scratch. The political parties were established on the same models of centralised power and control as the communist model – this is what the men organizing the new party system were trained in and it is what they repeated. Even the civil society organisations were not free from this – they had to establish from scratch something that did not exist before and they had few resources for establishing new ways of thinking, feeling, behaving. They were in the dilemma of trying to meet the new demands of the internationals who were providing money, training, and offering western models of political economy, but trapped in the mentality of the communist past.

Early NGO development and the state/ civil society divide

As with other SEE / CEE countries, after the fall of communism the government quickly withdrew from public and individual life.[5] The large-scale dis-investment in the public sphere under the dictates of privatisation, especially in the realm of social services, left an enormous gap in which no institutions or organisations assumed responsibility for defining or addressing the many social problems accompanying transition – domestic and family crises of internal migration and displacement, violence against women and children, human rights abuses, sexual violence and trafficking, the increased insecurity of the individual and family in states of emergency (such as the 1999 Kosovo war and civil crisis following the 1997 economic collapse). The void left by the state's withdrawal from the public sphere was filled by the emerging NGO sector. NGOs developed, initially, through the women's and human rights organisations trying to provide emergency and crisis relief to those who had suffered the worst human rights violations under communism as well as to the populations most vulnerable to the economic ravages of transition.

The divide between the emerging state and the newly forming civil society was immediately and distinctly gendered, and this bifurcation has been one of the obstacles limiting the impact of civil society on the emerging state.[6] As Gjermeni, one of the first post-communist intellectuals trained outside of the country and an early front-runner in NGO development, describes it: "While the men were forming the political parties, women, who were responsible for the continuity of life, used the NGO sector to benefit and contribute to the development of society and culture." Women were logically positioned to fill the gap left by the state's withdrawal from the public sphere in the early days of neoliberal shock therapy, both because they suffered such high job losses and because the economic ravages of transition brought new social problems that had to be addressed. Most of the big factories that were administered by the communist state and that closed in transition had employed women,[7] and the private sectors that dominated the new economy, such as construction, excluded

5   For a more comprehensive analysis of social hardship in the Balkans, central, and southeast Europe, see Alexi Gugushvili (2011).
6   For a comparative look at gendered difference in the labour market in Baltic states, see Rein Vöörmann (2009).
7   The "immediate consequence of the economic transformation was a very sharp decline of production – output declined by about 50% between 1989 and 1992 while inflation rose to triple digit figures" (Hoxha et al., 2008, p. 11). The "dismantling of several state owned companies and the privatisation process" slashed the number of jobs in the public sector from "850 thousand in 1991 to just 238,850 in 1996 and 175 thousand in 2005" (Hoxha et al., 2008, p. 24). A 2006 study by the International Labour Organisation shows that "the industrial sector (particularly extraction of minerals, metallurgy, equipment, chemicals, paper and textiles)" was the hardest hit, and that the "gap in employment between men and women has been increasing" in recent years (Fortuny, Gundacker, Tomei, Kempf, and Roland, p. 19). At the same time, women lost ground in the political arena. "Whereas before the transition women were well represented politically on both the national and local level, they now find themselves pushed out of public life" (International Fund for Agricultural Development [IFAD], 2007, para. 2).

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women (Hoxha, Jorgoni, Plaku, Agolli, Lama, Xhumari, Kalo, Gusmari, Muhedini, and Gjermeni, 2008).[8] Added to the exclusionary forces of the emerging market economy, women lost the childcare facilities formerly provided by the state as well as the educational infrastructure necessary for them and their children. Rapid unregulated privatisation was accompanied by the rise of criminal networks and the trafficking of women and children as well as the health and safety risks of unplanned urbanisation (such as problems with sanitation, clean water supply, and unregulated traffic that are the inevitable consequence of no urban planning). It was thus in the context of a political economy dominated by men and a market economy that brought massive unemployment with few opportunities for reeducation that women became key actors in the emerging NGO sector.

Hence, there was a parallel development of political parties and NGOs, where the NGOs were concerned with maintenance of daily life and dominated by women, while political parties were dominated by men, intricately bound to international trade, and frequently linked to the organised criminal networks so integral to the emerging political economy. Assisted by the international agencies structuring development aid, the NGOs assumed primary responsibility for basic social services, health, and welfare resulting from the government's withdrawal from the public sphere. Understandably, the first NGOs in the country focused on issues of human rights and cultural violence; in 1991, the Forum for Protecting the Foundational Human Rights of People was established, followed by the first Women's organisation, the Independent Forum of Albanian Women (IFAW). By the end of 1991, an additional 20 NGOs were established, primarily focusing on political and cultural development (Krasniqi, 2012, para. 9-18). In 1992, The Forum for Protecting Human Rights was recognised as a full member of the Helsinki Federation of Human Rights and re-named the Albanian Helsinki Committee. Other women's organisations that formed in 1992 included Refleksione and the Albania Family Planning Association, followed by the Women's Programme in the Open Society Foundation for Albania in 1994 and the Women's Centre (later renamed the Gender Alliance for Development Centre) in 1995 (Xhillari, Çabiri, and Frangu, 2008, pp. 12-13).

Primarily women-led and focused on human rights and social services delivery, these NGOs struggled to adapt to a new order. In the early years, international organisations expended considerable time and money training NGO directors and staff in models and practices that had, until 1991, been not only alien to the culture but, in most cases, criminal. Understandably, then, NGOs had difficulty explaining the importance of their work to local communities, much less to the evolving political parties. Added to this, an extremely poor communications infrastructure (internet, telephone, fax) impeded their ability to effectively network or disseminate information, so that neither the population nor the government had a clear idea of what NGOs were operating in the country or what they were doing (Gjipali, 2011, p. 16). At the same time, the emerging NGOs did not have the skills or the infrastructure that would allow them to coordinate with one another. The government, meanwhile, was either openly antagonistic towards or dismissive of the emerging NGO sector. Moreover, the NGO emphases on social service work and humanitarian assistance of the poor, vulnerable, and exploited were (and remain) delegitimated by neoliberal economics that excise social services and prioritise capital.

In short, NGO work was the work of homes, families, and children, NOT the work of politics and government. The problems posed by this development of civil society along a distinctly gendered, non-intersecting trajectory parallel to the state were somewhat obscured by the shift in the structure of international aid after the 1997 economic collapse, when the country lost over a billion dollars and nearly 2000 lives to pyramid schemes (Hoxha et al., 2008; USAID, 1998, 2011; World Bank, 2002; Gjipali,

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8   As Hoxha et al. note, "the low share of the employment in the construction industry" as compared to the contribution to GDP reflects the "high level of informality of labour in this sector, which is believed to be one of the highest beside the informality in the trading sector" (2008, p. 14). While under-the-table work in the construction industry engages a "large share of the labour force and provides a survival income for many unemployed males," it does not build the state apparatus to harness private sector growth to national development or improve the quality of life for sector employees (Hoxha et al., 2008, p. 14).

2011; Krasniqi, 2012). Rioting, looting, armed revolts, and the near total collapse of the government "alarmed the world and prompted intensive international mediation" (USAID, 2011, para. 12). A United Nations (UN) Multinational Protection Force restored order, and the major bilateral donors, including the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the World Bank, and USAID, met in October 1997 to consider an emergency aid program (USAID, 1998). Similarly, in 1999 when the war in Kosovo was flooding neighbouring countries with refugees, NGO development responded to the increased emphasis on humanitarian needs. Over 100 new NGOs were registered following the war, in partnership with internationals to deal with refugees and camp management, special needs of women and children, human rights violations, and de-mining (Krasniqi, 2012, para. 13-15).

Increases in funding from bi- and multilateral donors to address regional security interests thus contributed to the growth and stabilisation period of NGO development (Krasniqi, 2012; Gjipali, 2011). Particularly important donors in this period included USAID, the Dutch organisations NOVIB, ICCO, HIVOS, Cordaid, and SNV, the UNDP, and the SOROS Foundation. Additionally, in 2002 the World Bank and the UK's Department for International Development (DFiD) initiated the Social Services Delivery Project (SSDP); administered by the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs via the General Agency of Social Services, the SSDP was designed as a "joint initiative between local government and NGOs" intended to implement long term joint projects (Xhillari et al., 2008, pp. 23-24). This influx of emergency and crisis aid allowed the more established NGOs to broaden their impact and reach and consolidate; as a consequence, they developed institutional and bureaucratic structures, including fiscal management and accountability, that were still seriously lacking in government.

The growth and stabilisation period

This shift in development and aid agendas following the Kosovo war and economic collapse helps to explain how a short period of apparent growth obscured the fault lines along which state and civil society evolved. Far from being inexplicable, the decline in the NGO sector following a period of growth and stabilisation is the logical, albeit delayed, consequence of the structures and processes through which the NGO sector formed. Immediately after transition, NGO work was, literally and figuratively, 'women's' work, centred around women's and human rights issues and social services. During this time, funding agencies devoted considerable resources to socialising the NGO elite into the discourses, genres, and norms of development. NGO training included English-language training, teaching aspiring civil-sector workers the genres and norms for writing grant proposals, and providing workshops on the mechanisms of funding (including explaining donors' country missions and priorities, defining projects and matching projects to funding entities, training in project proposal development, and grant writing).[9] By 1997, donors had begun to fund projects on NGO management, including how to run NGO boards and steering committees. Thus, by the time crisis aid flooded the country in 1997, the NGO elite had begun to form and was poised to capitalise on emergency aid and provide crisis relief. From 1997 – 2005, the NGO sector continued to build institutional and intellectual capacity, and, for a time, seemed as though it might in fact be a leading force in democratisation.

During this period – understood by Krasniqi (2012) as the third phase of civil society development and by Xhillari, Çabiri, and Frangu (2008) as the post-crisis stabilisation and maturation period[10] –

9   Examples taken from a review of the annual reports (1995 – 2009) of one of the leading NGOs of the period, the Gender Alliance for Development Center (http://www.gadc.org.al/v2/).

10   Krasniqi argues that, in its first phase, civil society functions as individual/group initiatives critical towards the government; in the second phase, civil society organisations are important agents in the political sphere that, because they are not part of the political party structure, are not subject to the polarisation and divisiveness of the contested political domain; in the third (and, as Krasniqi admits, utopian phase), civil society becomes a mechanism to link government and the private sphere (2012). However, as Xhillari et al. (2008) point out, this post-2005 slippage differs on both the second and third phase criteria cited by Krasniqi (pp. 26-29). As the World Bank's 2012 progress report on social services delivery points out, Albania's overall implementation progress

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international organisations began emphasising policy and analysis and pressuring the government to begin capitalising on the intellectual and human capital of the NGO sector. A number of "new advocacy networks were created and advocacy actions increased" (Xhillari et al., 2008, p. 24). Efforts to combat corruption were a crucial component of this shift – over 100 anti-corruption NGOs were formed by 2001 (Krasniqi, 2012, para. 14). In 2002, the Citizens Advocacy Office (CAO) was established "with the aim of providing legal assistance to citizens facing pressure to engage in corruption by public officials" (Xhillari et al., 2008, p. 34), and in 2003 Mjaft, formed by the first group of young people educated outside of the country, brought new practices of community mobilisng and consciousness raising to civil society development (Krasniqi, 2012, para. 17). In addition to these developments, the Carter Center promoted a "broad based participation approach to civil society in the development of the national strategy" (Xhillari et al., 2008, p. 50), and some key NGOs shifted work from primarily seminars and training to concrete actions with participation of interest groups involving the general citizenry. For the first time, coalitions were formed for electoral monitoring, hearing sessions included NGOs in Parliament, and there were initiatives to partner government and civil society and include the intellectual capital from the NGO sector in drafting laws.

These shifts from service delivery to policy formation seemed to poise the NGO sector to become an active force in the democratic development of the country. Between 2002 and 2005, international stakeholders and key donors strongly encouraged Albanian civil society to move from a focus on "the protection of civic, political, economic, social and cultural rights" and to prioritise, instead, "improving the quality of governance and its outcomes" (Xhillari et al., 2008, p. 23).[11] Significantly, during this time key personnel from the NGO community were involved in task forces and working groups responsible for designing new laws as well as improving existing laws. Indeed, ministries worked collaboratively with NGOs to develop legislation on reproductive health, the law on NGO development, the family code, and the laws on domestic violence and gender equality (Krasniqi, 2012; Xhillari et al., 2008; Gjipaldi, 2011;Winship, 2004; GTZ, 2010).[12] The NGO sector was also largely responsible for training (of policy makers, lawyers, advocates, media representatives, local government staff), media campaigns, and raising public awareness about the new laws. Indeed, NGO-led public awareness campaigns were especially important in mobilising community pressure on the government (Gjermeni, 2012; Krasniqi, 2012).

The decline of civil society

Through 2005, international organisations helped to forge an elite cadre of NGO workers who conducted training, provided resources, and began creating the infrastructure with which to address serious social problems. Indeed, the NGO sector provided most of the social services available in the country – functions for which the state had previously been responsible – as well as a range of other 'cognitive' functions necessary to the state.[13] Crucially, performing this work required developing the intellectual capacity and administrative structures necessary to the functioning of a state, but this

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rating declined from "moderately satisfactory" to "moderately unsatisfactory" on the following registers: policy development, monitoring and administration of social services; community-based social services; and project management, information systems, and monitoring (Kostallari, 2012, p. 1).

11 Xhillari et al. (2008) argue that there are "four phases to the development" of Albania's third sector: early transition (1991-1996); crisis period (1997-2001); post crisis and NGOs maturation period (2002-2005); NGO slippage period (2005-onwards) (p. 5).

12 However, even when the government has invited NGOs "to participate in strategy formulation," their role has been "limited" (Xhillari et al., 2008, p. 50).

13 Chalmers (2001) argues that we need to better understand the complex interplay of political parties, civil society actors, and international players in the cognitive processes of comprehension, reasoning, and decision making; this analysis of the "cognitive side of politics" is crucial for supporting civil society initiatives that actually contribute to democratisation (para. 5-9).

was something that the political parties, having abandoned the public sphere, ignored. However, the initiatives begun during this period did not, by and large, take root. Laws were not followed, policies were ignored, and the intellectual resources cultivated by international training and education remained largely confined to an NGO sector that, despite some accomplishments, had overall little impact on formal governmental processes and structures. The sector seemed to function as long as international organisations were providing the road maps and funding for a core group of NGO elites to follow. As these structural supports were removed, the NGO sector lost much of the ground it had gained (Xhillari et al., 2008, pp. 26-29).

By 2005, the NGO sector began to decline as the political sphere became increasingly authoritarian. A number of factors converged in this decline. First, reallocations of international aid had an adverse impact on the sector. "Important NGO financial supporters cut their funding," including key Danish and Dutch organisations (Xhillari et al., 2008; GTZ, 2010; USAID, 2011; Krasniqi, 2012). The World Bank SSDP ended, and USAID shifted its funding priorities to government anti-corruption reforms.[14] At the same time, the UNDP, the umbrella organisation for funding in the country, faced funding deficiencies from the limited number of bilateral donors operating in the country. The EU, "the largest development donor in Albania, did not fill the gap because of a diminished focus on civil society services," and the Open Society Foundation for Albania (OSFA) funds decreased substantially as part of OSFA strategy for the region (Xhillari et al., 2008, p. 27).[15] Organisations such as the Citizen's Advocacy Office cut activist activity and shifted their focus to research, membership in the Albanian Coalition Against Corruption dropped by 70%, and internal friction either dissolved or seriously disrupted the work of many other organisations (Xhillari et al., 2008, p. 28).[16]

One of the most devastating factors impacting NGO functioning, though, was the fact that many of the activist and watchdog NGO leaders from the 2002 – 2005 growth period "became members of parliament or took high government positions, including ministerial positions" (Xhillari et al., 2008; Krasniqi, 2012; GTZ, 2010). Far from helping to transform government from within, civil society leaders who moved into government quickly accommodated to the rules of the game in the political sphere. The international community perceived the move of Western-educated civil society actors into the formal governmental structures as a positive development and failed to anticipate that the same people that had been trained in the concepts of 'open society' and 'democratisation' would become part of the political status quo. Given that today's political parties function much as the Communist Party did in the totalitarian structure, though, appropriation into, rather than transformation of, existing power structures was virtually inevitable. Each party has one 'leader' who demands strict ideological conformity and absolute party loyalty, and party members can be expelled for challenges to the party leader. Once in a governmental position, strict loyalty to the party and its leader is enforced.

Moreover, civil society organisations operate on the same principles of authoritarian power exercised by the former regime. Most organisations also have a single 'leader', and when that leader moves into politics, s/he takes the NGO along (Bertelsmann Stiftung, 2012; Xhillari et al., 2008; Krasniqi, 2012). Alternatively, should a leader depart for other reasons, the NGO often collapses. Hence, the

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14 Corruption remains a serious problem in Albania. Indeed, Mathesin (2003) argues that, in Albania, the state itself is captured by the collusion of political elites, business, and organised crime. The traditional anti-corruption policies attempting to reform public administration and public finance management have failed in Albania, as the political class lacks the will to trade profit from the status quo for democratic reform or the public good (p. 1).

15 In 2006, the Open Society Foundation (OSF) shifted its role from a primarily grant-making organisation to an operational structure, the Network of Open Society in Albania (NOSA) (http://www.soros.al/nosa/en/index.htm). An 8-member coalition of NGOs, NOSA aimed to develop strategic vision, impact public policy, and support civic activism. While important, NOSA had limited effect. At the end of 2008, OSFA discontinued the NOSA scheme, focusing more on working with "strategic partners according to areas of specialisation as well as other civil society organisations at all levels" (Xhillari et al., 2008, p. 27).

16 Currently, there are 11 multilateral donors (accounting for 58% of foreign aid) and 23 bilateral donors operating in Albania. The European Union and the World Bank are the two largest multilateral donors, and Italy, Germany, Japan, the United States and the Netherlands are the five largest bilateral donors (GTZ, 2010, p. 8).

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post-2005 migration of NGO elites into political positions created the dual problems of, on the one hand, leaving a void in NGO leadership, and, on the other, allowing newly minted government officials to use their former NGOs as tools for their political parties and ambitions.

This phenomenon has had especially destructive consequences for Albania's research capacities. Roughly 70% of the research and policy NGOs were established between 1997 and 2001. After the political chaos of the 1997 economic collapse, many of those forced out of politics and public administration went on to found think tank institutes. According to the Euclid Network's Human Development Promotion Centre, by 2008, these institutes comprised "90% of Albania's total research and policy institutions" (Xhillari et al., 2008, p. 22). Think tanks became, in effect, an extension of party politics: the research and analysis produced by think tanks is thus not only not independent and not available for public debate, but is, in fact, part of the propaganda machinery of the highly contentious political sphere. Indeed, "the open affiliation of many think tank leaders to political parties and their involvement in government bodies in 2005 was considered a contributing factor towards the weakening" of civil society in Albania (Xhillari et al., 2008, pp. 20-24).

International complicity

These historical and contextual factors point to the impossible demands on non-state actors to radically transform the structures and practices of the state, particularly when the old state apparatus maintains political power and informal capital is weak, confined to individual and family relations, and unable to organise at community levels or formalise into civic or political structures (Polese, 2009). In the face of escalating political crisis[17] and a deteriorating NGO sector, the legacy of brutal dictatorship and the fault lines along which governmental and nongovernmental organisations developed are increasingly apparent. However, Albania's political, social, and economic situation has not evolved in a vacuum in these twenty years of transition. In fact, the structure of international aid exacerbates some of the conditions obstructing the effective development of civil society.

Chief among these structural problems is the short-term nature of project cycles in the donor-driven sector. Those NGOs that are in fact working on behalf of democratisation (and not as an arm of a political party) devote substantial intellectual resources to responding to requests for proposals, understanding international funding priorities and country agendas, and shaping projects that fit the agendas of specific donor organisations. Indeed, the 1991 – 1997 socialisation period trained the NGO elite in precisely these tactics. NGOs capable of targeting the current fashion in funding receive more project grants and grow an institutional capacity centred on donor agendas. Moreover, donor dependency pits NGOs against each other in a battle to win projects. Because NGOs exist only by virtue of winning funding, they have to closely guard ideas (otherwise they risk giving fundable ideas to other organisations and so lose in the project competition). Hence, the intellectual resources of

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17 The always deeply divided and sometimes violently contentious political sphere has increasingly escalated into a state of crisis following the 2009 parliamentary elections; the opposition Socialist Party (SP) lodged a 6 month boycott in protest of election fraud by the ruling Democratic Party (DP) – a political strategy of shutting down the government also employed by the DP in previous years. In February 2010, the SP established a "conditional relation with the parliament /.../ resulting in their absence from voting on laws until the issue of the election's transparency was settled. The legislative agenda was heavily affected by this situation, and no laws or appointments of high state officials requiring a qualified majority were approved" (Gjipali, 2011, p. 50). This situation has once again left the country deadlocked in a struggle for power that offers no checks on the rampant corruption pervading every sector of society (including ruling and opposition party power structures). A "dangerous radicalisation between opposition parties" intensified after 4 people were killed in a January 2011 protest of government corruption. With a "weak rule of law and consolidation of a culture of impunity," Albania has seriously declined "in most measures of political participation, the stability of democratic institutions and political and social integration" (Bertelsmann Stiftung, 2012, p. 2). For a more comprehensive analysis of problems developing effective rule of law in post-communist countries, see Michael Hein (2011).

the NGO sector remain divided and not able to effectively collaborate. Instead of being able to use their understanding of social issues to define problems, creatively design collaborative projects and intervention strategies, grow coalitions, and evolve sustainable long-term projects, the NGO elite are compelled to compete against each other in a perpetual cycle of writing grants to fund short-term projects (generally, product-oriented projects are funded for only one – three years), and writing annual reports justifying their use of donor money.[18]

This has serious consequences on two registers. In addition to projects not being sustainable (both because of limitations on what kinds of services and activities can be funded and because funding is for short periods of time), chasing short-term project money stymies creative intellectual development. Development agendas do *not* cultivate the critical intellectual capacity to analyse, much less reconcile, the conflicts between the old communist paradigms still governing the political sphere and the nascent 'democratic'/market paradigms the country is expected to adopt. Moreover, funding formulas impede rather than facilitate collaboration amongst NGOs on long-term projects designed to incorporate multiple stakeholders and evolve over time. Under these circumstances, how could the NGO elite moving into the political sphere possibly be expected to change the structure of political power into which they and the NGOs they had been running were inevitably absorbed? Trained only in short-term, other-directed project cycles, unable to coordinate long-term plans with multiple stakeholders, and operating from a partial, fragmented knowledge base, how were they to exercise any real transformational effect? Structurally, they followed a logically consistent path from NGO management to political status quo, now part of the problem rather than the solution.

Furthermore, the report-writing genre required in the game of chasing project funding traps people into reciting data and outcomes for the donor agency. In other words, knowledge production is severely circumscribed: data reporting, outcomes, and conclusions are written primarily for the funding agency and circulated primarily through project-specific conferences, workshops, and training venues. Given that in Albania virtually all 'research' is conducted through NGOs – not, as is more typically the case in the countries overseeing 'development,' through university or academic institutions – NGO project work comprises the core 'research' base in the country. As previously discussed, much of this research is blatantly partisan and fuels destructive political divides. Those who genuinely want to engage in serious research thus have extremely limited opportunities for building broad-based intellectual networks through which to develop, disseminate, and evolve their research: they lack a critically engaged home-based network, and, as NGO workers producing reports for donor organisations, they have few outlets for engaging with an international academic audience. This inhibits their ability to produce the deep analysis and interpretation necessary for designing long-term, sustainable projects.

These problems are mirrored in the lack of donor coordination amongst the international organisations funding NGO work. Effectively coordinating multi- and bilateral project funding requires that analysts within donor organisations know the history of funded projects in their priority areas and design funding priorities that build off of prior successful projects so as to grow long-term, sustainable initiatives that evolve from projects to effective structures, systems, and practices. In order to do this, international organisations must cooperate amongst themselves to share information and analyse effectiveness. Currently, such practices are the exception rather than the rule. What's more, turf battles and ideological splits between donor organisations often result in project overlap and

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18   In 2008, of the 1,620 NGOs registered, only 365 were active (Krasniqi, 2012, para. 11); currently, only a few of the active NGOs have sound financial management plans (GTZ, 2010, p. 7). There are few mechanisms for helping even the best-functioning of NGOs to build sustainability (with, for example, training in forming partnerships with businesses, seeking alternative funding sources, or seriously facilitating the governmental and nongovernmental cooperation that would bring the expertise, best practices, and intellectual capital of the NGO sector to the governmental sector (Ekonomi, Gjermeni, Danaj, Lula, and Beci, 2006; Gjipali, 2011; Krasniqi, 2012; Sadiku, 2010).

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redundancy as well as gaps in identifying needed projects (Mathesin, 2003; GTZ, 2010; Xhillari et al., 2008). The international community thus confronts internal obstacles in its effort to strategically evolve the NGO sector from donor-dependency to institutionalised and autonomous entities.

Contradictions, fragmentation, and the need for a culture of knowledge production

Given these circumstances, many analysts question not just the present but also the future of Albania's civil society. Unfortunately, the problems we have outlined – the legacy of brutal dictatorship, the effects of an early divide between the governmental and nongovernmental sectors and the mutually hostile relations between them, the complicity of international structures in inhibiting the analytical frameworks necessary for shifting the relation of the individual to the state – remain pervasive. Albania is not alone in being disappointed in the ability of civil society to bring about democratic governments. As Kim Scheppele (2013) argues, authoritarianism is on the rise in south-eastern Europe (as in many other parts of the world). This forces us to reconsider how Western notions of civil society are applied in contemporary development theory. Indeed, Paffenholz and Spurk (2006) argue that "civil society has been an almost purely Western concept historically tied to the political emancipation of citizens from former feudalistic ties, monarchy and the state during the 18th and 19th century," and there is still debate as to whether these concepts are "transferable to non-Western countries or other historical contexts with different levels of democracy and economic structures" (pp. 4-5).

While a sustained critique of the centrality of 'civil society' to development theory is beyond the scope of this paper, we do maintain that the progressive weakening of democratic processes and structures in Albania challenges us to confront the contradictions of, on the one hand, training the NGO elite to follow shock therapy development agendas in the early 1990s and, on the other, expecting them to transform the authoritarian governments that evolved through transition. In the first years of transition, neo-liberal development models absolved the state of responsibility for social services and welfare (including education, health, sanitation, water supply, food quality and assurance, telecommunications, 'soft' services for children, minorities, and social 'protection') (Mitlin, Hickey, & Bebbington, 2006). NGOs were asked to step in and fill the void in social services left by the state's withdrawal, and in order to do this they substituted the ideological framework of development for the ideological framework of the communist state. They were *not* asked to critique the development models guiding transition. Indeed, to be winners in the cycles of project competition, they had to be advocates of the same economic policies that have left so many unemployed, homeless, and hopeless.

To stretch this point a bit, in many ways the imposition of 'civil society' agendas in the service of free-market ideologies (where 'free market' is not synonymous with democracy) simply substitutes one ideological dictate for another, structuring people to continue using the survival strategies with which they endured communism in the (sometimes brutal) struggle to survive transition. As Gil Eyal (2004) argues in his analysis of communist psychology, "to be a communist subject meant to conduct a double life of dissimulation, to say things one does not mean and be silent about certain things that were unmentionable; to do certain things as pure meaningless ritual" (p. 22). To the extent that the structure of international development invokes similar responses – positioning people to say what funders want to hear, to adopt donors' agendas so as to compete for scarce resources – it rescripts the dynamics of social and political life under authoritarian rule and represses the creative and intellectual energy necessary for shifting the relation of the individual to state necessary for a truly democratic political sphere.

Today, shifts in aid funding and benchmark requirements for European Union integration demand that the state take back the responsibilities that it had been allowed to ignore. Civil society is now given the impossible task of altering the fundamental structures of a state in which the government

has become increasingly authoritarian. That is, NGOs are being asked to collaborate with government to design social services, coordinate programs, and develop laws – an impossible demand given the political landscape in which NGOs operate. What's more, civil society is held partially responsible for this increasing authoritarianism, under the assumption that, had civil society been 'working,' the government would have become 'democratic.' Given that the government has evolved through a complex intertwined relation with multiple international stakeholders, this is an excessive burden for civil society to shoulder.

We are challenged, therefore, to rethink the strategies employed by development organisations for cultivating civil society. In the face of shifts in international funding priorities and a highly polarised political sphere, civil society workers have to overcome fragmentation, competition, and cycles of chasing money for short-term, unsustainable projects – impediments imposed upon them in part through the structure of international aid and global security agendas. We believe this is possible – there *is* a critical mass of social and intellectual capital that has been working in the NGO sector in Albania that may yet be able to effectively organise to tackle some of the most pressing social and poltical problems the country faces. However, as we have argued, significant structural and conceptual obstacles continue to prevent these potential allies from being able to effectively coalesce into organisations and institutions that can conceptualise, coordinate, and implement long-term sustainable solutions to the problems confronting political, social, and economic development.

In order to overcome these obstacles, international agendas have to be as concerned with facilitating a culture of critical analysis and knowledge production as they are with project implementation.[19] As Chalmers argues (2001), "most of the civil society organisations and groups that play an important role" do so, not simply by proposing an idea, but, rather, by participating in the "structuring" of "ever changing ideas" (para. 9). As we have argued, development strategies that focus exclusively on project implementation limit possibilities for cultivating the intellectual forces in civil society that can inspire a real paradigm shift in the political sphere. It is, rather, the "process of gathering information and participating in the many analytical, information and theory driven debates, discussions, researches, explorations and investigations going on in the political process" that promotes a democratic civil society (Chalmers, 2001, para. 9).

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19   For a more detailed analysis of the forces of denial and international complicity constraining knowledge production in Albania, see Lori Amy (2010).

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