Interrogating Women's Activism in the Age of Neoliberal Democratization in Mongolia

A thesis submitted to Auckland University of Technology in fulfilment of the requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Undariya Tumursukh

Institute of Public Policy

2018

Primary Supervisor: Professor Marilyn Waring

Second Supervisor: Sue Bradford

Abstract

This thesis interrogates the emergence and evolution of a small number of women-led Mongolian NGOs committed to human rights, women's rights, substantive democracy and social justice. It relied on a feminist activist auto/ethnographic approach. The data came from a two-month field work in Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia, participatory research workshops, interviews, NGO archival material, and over twenty years of collective experiences of women activists. The thesis argues that the NGOs provided a new and dynamic avenue for well-educated and politically active women to channel their energies towards promoting democratic reforms and social development in the country. This energy, supported by limited international funding, gave rise to a number of women-led advocacy NGOs, which grew to form the backbone of Mongolia's emergent civil society. However, in the neoliberal donor funding scheme and overarching discourses on civil society and voluntarism, the women-led sub-sector of the broader NGO sector became established as an unpaid/underpaid sphere dependent on competitive small grants provided by international funders. 'Voluntary' came to primarily mean 'free labour' rather than 'free choice.' Women have been corralled into this under-funded sector, locked out of the political society, constantly knocking on the door of the male-controlled state. More activist auto-research is needed to further explore these issues in order to chart our alternative strategies.

Table of contents

Attestation of authorship

I hereby declare that this submission is my own work and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no material previously published or written by another person (except where explicitly defined in acknowledgements), nor material which to a substantial extent has been submitted for the award of any other degree or diploma of a university or other institution of higher learning.

Undariya Tumursukh

Date: 12/07/2018

Acknowledgments

I am profoundly grateful to my supervisors Dr. Marilyn Waring and Dr. Sue Bradford for their unfailing support for me on this journey. They challenged my thinking and breathed confidence into me. I also thank our wonderful 'Potluck' Community at the Institute of Public Policy who have been an integral part of my research process and who will continue to be a part of my life.

I thank my husband Zorigt Bayantur and my two sons Arikhat and Anand who bravely moved their lives with me to New Zealand and to our extended family who patiently waited for our return to Mongolia. Without their love and support, I would never have embarked on this journey.

I am deeply indebted to my fellow activists who graciously accepted my invitation to participate in the research workshops and other colleagues who generously agreed to be interviewed. Without their inputs, this thesis would not have materialized. I also thank MONFEMNET National Network's wonderful staff for their consistent support for this research.

I thank the Ethics Committee of the Auckland University of Technology (AUT) for the Ethics approval No. 15/261 dated July 20, 2015, and all others at AUT who provided institutional and specialized support, especially the faculty and library staff. I am grateful to David Parker for his careful proofreading and thoughtful suggestions on writing.

Special thanks are due to AUT's Scholarship Office and, specifically, NZAID scholarship officers Sacha Pointon and Margaret Leniston for the fantastic support they provided me as a NZAID scholar.

Last but not least, deep thanks to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade and all the people of New Zealand for the NZAID scholarship, which has granted me this valuable opportunity to take time out of frantic activism, to pause and to critically reflect on my/our practice and history as Mongolian pro-democracy human rights/women's rights activist/s.

I stand honoured and humbled by your kindness and generosity.

Abbreviations

1. Mongolian mass and non-governmental organizations, civic movements

AFE coalition — "All for Education!" National Civil Society Coalition

CAV — Center against Violence, later NCAV

CCA — Center for Citizens' Alliance, former CEDAW Watch

CCE — Center for Citizenship Education

CCWA — Civil Courage and Women Association, CCP's women's wing

CEDAW Watch — National CEDAW Watch Network Center, later CCA

CGE — Center for Gender Equality

CHRD — Center for Human Rights and Development

CHS — Center for Human Security

CMHS — Citizens' Movement for a Healthy (Ethical) Society

DEMO — Democracy Education Center

DWA — Democratic Women's Association, MDP's women's wing

GCSD — Gender Center for Sustainable Development, previously WIRC

LEOS — Liberal Women's Brain Pool

MDU — Mongolian Democratic Union

MFCIPA — Mongolian Federation of Consumer Interests' Protection Associations

MFDJU — Mongolian Free Democratic Journalists' Union

MFOS — Mongolian Foundation for Open Society, later OSF

MFSA — Mongolian Free Seniors' Association

MLF — Mongolian Liberarian Foundation

MNNWNGOs — Mongolian National Network of Women's NGOs, later MONFEMNET

MNOC — Mongolian National Olympics Committee

MONES — Mongolian Women's Fund

MONFEMNET	MONFEMNET National Network, previously MNNWNGOs
MRCA	Mongolian Red Cross Association
MRYL	Mongolian Revolutionary Youth League
MSDWA	Mongolian Social Democratic Women's Association, MPRP's women's wing
MSU	Mongolian Student Union
MWC	Mongolian Women's Council, later MWF
MWF	Mongolian Women's Federation, previously MWC
NCAV	National Center against Violence, previously CAV
NPU	New Progress Union
OSF	Open Society Forum, previously MFOS
PEA	Political Education Academy
PIM	Press Institute of Mongolia
SDM	Social Democratic Movement
SDWM	Social Democratic Women's Movement, MSDP's women's wing
SMF	Sant-Maral Foundation
VEC	Voter Education Center, established by the WSP
WIRC	Women's Information and Research Center, later GCSD
WLA	Women Lawyers' Association
WSP	Women for Social Progress Movement

2. Political parties and coalitions

CCP	Civil Courage Party
CMP	Citizens' Movement Party
DUC	Democratic Union Coalition, 1996-2000
MANAN	MPP+DP (Mongolian People's Party + Democratic Party)
MDC	Motherland-Democracy Coalition, 2004

MDP	Mongolian Democratic Party, founded in 1990, merged into MNDP in 1992
MDP	Mongolian Democratic Party, formed in 2000 by a merger of MNDP, MSDP and four other small parties
MGP	Mongolian Green Party
MNDP	Mongolian National Democratic Party, founded in 1992 by a merger of MDP, MNPP and the Mongolian United party; merged into MDP in 2000
MNPP	Mongolian National Progress Party, merged into MNDP in 1992
MPP	Mongolian People's Party, founded in 1920, renamed MPRP in 1925, renamed back as MPP in 2010
MPRP	Mongolian People's Revolutionary Party, was MPP until 1925 and was renamed back as MPP in 2010
MPRP	Mongolian People's Revolutionary Party founded in 2010 by a splinter from the MPRP/MPP
MRDP	Mongolian Religious Democratic Party
MSDP	Mongolian Social Democratic Party, a party that merged into MDP
MSDP	Mongolian Social Democratic Party founded by old MSDP members

3. Government

GEC	General Election Committee
MIS	Ministry of Internal Security
MOLHA	Ministry of Law and Home Affairs, i.e. Mongolian Ministry of Justice
MPDL	Ministry of Population Development and Labour
NCGE	National Committee for Gender Equality

4. Foreign, regional and international non-governmental organizations

ARROW	Asian-Pacific Resource and Research Centre for Women
ADRA	Adventist Development and Relief Agency, USA
APWIP	Asia Pacific Network for Women in Politics

AWID	Association for Women's Rights in Development
APWLD	Asia-Pacific Forum on Women, Law and Development
APRN	Asia Pacific Research Network
ASPBAE	Asia South Pacific Association for Basic and Adult Education
CIVICUS	World Alliance for Citizen Participation
Forum-Asia	Asian Forum for Human Rights and Development
GAATW	The Global Alliance Against Trafficking in Women
GWF	Global Fund for Women
IBON	IBON Foundation, Philippines
IRI	International Republican Institute, USA
IWRAW-AP	International Women's Rights Action Watch – Asia Pacific
KAS	Konrad Adenauer Foundation, Germany
NED	National Endowment for Democracy, USA
OSI	Open Society Institute
PAN-AP	Pesticides Action Network – Asia Pacific
SI	Socialist International
TAF	The Asia Foundation, USA
UAF	Urgent Action Fund, USA
VSO	Volunteer Services Overseas

5. Multilateral and bilateral entities

ADB	The Asian Development Bank
AusAID	Australian Agency for International Development
Comecon	Council for Mutual Economic Assistance (1949-1991)
CTC	Commission on Transnational Corporations
DANIDA	Danish International Development Agency

ESAF	Enhanced Structural Adjustment Facility of the IMF
G7	Group of 7 in the United Nations
G77	Group of 77 in the United Nations
GTZ	German Technical Cooperation Agency
ICNRD	International Conference of New and Restored Democracies
ILO	International Labour Organization
IMF	International Monetary Fund
JICA	Japan International Cooperation Agency
NAM	Non-Aligned Movement
OPEC	Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries
SIDA	Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency
TACIS	Technical Aid to the Commonwealth of Independent States
UN	United Nations
UNCTAD	United Nations Conference on Trade and Development
UNCTC	United Nations Centre on Transnational Corporations
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UNIDO	United Nations Industrial Development Organization
UNDP	United Nations Development Program
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
UNIFEM	UN Women's Fund, later transformed/merged into UNWOMEN
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
WB	World Bank
WHO	World Health Organization
WTO	World Trade Organization

6. Other

CEDAW	UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women
CEU	Central European University
CIA	Central Intelligence Agency, USA
CSI	Civil Society Index, a participatory tool developed by CIVICUS for evaluating the state of civil society
CSO	Civil society organization
DGI	Democratic Governance Indicators
DKK	Danish krone
GATT	General Agreement on Trade and Tariffs
GDP	Gross domestic product
ICSF	International Civil Society Forum, later ICSFD
ICSFD	International Civil Society Forum for Democracy, previously ICSF
IFI	International financial institution
INGO	International non-governmental organization
LDC	Least development country
LLP	Limited liability partnership
MDGs	Millennium Development Goals
MNT	Mongolian *tugrug* (currency)
MNTV	Mongolian National Television
MNU	Mongolian National University
MP	Member of Parliament
MPR	Mongolian People's Republic, now Mongolia
NGO	Non-governmental organization
NIEO	New International Economic Order

NPO	Non-profit organization
ODA	Official development assistance
PAE	Political activist ethnography
PAR	Participatory action research
ROC	Republic of China
RTD	Round table discussion
SASA	SASA (Start Awareness Support Action) community mobilization toolkit for preventing VAW, developed by Raising Voices NGO, Uganda, adapted and spread in Mongolia by MONFEMNET
UDHR	Universal Declaration of Human Rights
US	United States of America
USD	US Dollar
VAT	Value-added tax
VAW	Violence against women

List of Tables

List of Figures

Chapter 1 : Introduction

1.1 Impetus for the research

The impetus for this research came from a sense of being bone-tired in 2012, Mongolia. I looked around and I saw similar signs of burn-out in my long-time colleagues in the small community of NGOs dedicated to promoting women's rights, human rights, substantive democracy and social justice. After over two decades of intensive activism, I felt that our emotional, physical and political energies had been exhausted. Women's activism started in the early 1990s, buoyed by the general sense of excitement and optimism about a humane, democratic and wealthy future that we envisioned as being in store for Mongolia. We mobilized our energies to bring this future closer, to dismantle the authoritarian power structures and culture, to strengthen the new institutions that would allow Mongolians to govern themselves democratically, to learn and spread the new values of human rights and democracy to create the popular culture that would sustain the democratic politics. The 1990s was a decade full of promises.

As another decade passed, despite the institutionalization of the liberal democratic architecture, the promise of a humane and democratic future seemed even further away. As the dust settled after the so-called 'dual transition to democracy and market economy,' we 'woke up' to a deeply distorted society, with a neo-feudal patriarchal oligarchy parading as a multi-party system, periodically engaging in outrageously expensive electoral shows and taking turns in controlling state power. Instead of abating, the authoritarian tendencies were growing stronger, often couched in populist and ethno-nationalist rhetoric. As poverty persisted, becoming inter-generational, the society became increasingly polarized between the disadvantaged masses who self-identify as *borchuud* (the brown ones), and the privileged groups referred to as *tomchuul* (the big ones) or *bayachuud* (the rich ones).[1] The dream of

---

[1] While class inequalities and these classed identities have existed before the 'transition,' they have become more pronounced and rigid alongside the deepening structural inequalities and the active cultural production of the 'elite.' These categories have taken on not only capitalist but neofedual undertones as in the use of the words *deedes* or *deedchuul* (those above, higher up) in reference to high-level politicians or powerful and wealthy people in general.

democracy in which all were equal had resulted in Mongolia's transmogrification into an increasingly autocratic regime in which the state's monopoly of violence in society was used to serve the interests of the rich minority at the expense of the majority.

The liberal promise of civil society, a richly networked body of self-confident and efficacious citizens that would emerge as the authoritarian state receded and that would ensure the functioning of democracy, in reality generated a constantly expanding murky field of motley actors. As established leaders in the emergent NGO sector, women activists were quick to assume an additional responsibility to guide this heterogeneous field towards the kind of a civil society that would strengthen democratization. The field continued to expand, proliferating perverse relations with the state, political parties, domestic and foreign corporations, donors and other powerful actors.

We redoubled our efforts, articulating our missions, visions, values, principles and strategies. We strengthened our focus on critical analyses, people-centred approaches, participatory methodologies, solidarity networks, coalition- and movement-building, popular education and policy advocacy, community mobilization and activist training. Propelled by our dreams of a better future for Mongolians, we mobilized all our resources, aided by intermittent project funding of a few international organizations. Yet, a quarter of a century into post-socialist democratization and development, with civil society and gender equality proclaimed as key to both processes, we faced a grim prospect of withering away as organizations, activists and human beings.

Although we had grown programmatically influential and continued to expand our networks and movements, we had not become institutionally stronger. This has meant that for over twenty years, our activism had been fuelled and maintained by our individual commitments, self-sacrifice and a large amount of unpaid and underpaid work. Given poor prospects of improved funding, especially after Mongolia 'graduated' from the low-income country rank to the lower-middle income country rank in 2008 by the World Bank classification (Government of Mongolia, 2015), the situation was unlikely to change. With our energies depleted, we could not go on as before. It was high time to reflect on our practice and the conditions of our struggle for social change and organizational survival.

1.2 The turning point – March 2012

March 2012 made me realize this more deeply. At the time, I was the Coordinator of MONFEMNET National Network. I had had that responsibility since April, 2007. Every March, since 2006, MONFEMNET had organized a public forum "Through Women's Eyes." Over the years, the forum grew into an important public platform for sharing critical analyses on policy and strategic issues, bringing together an increasingly diverse group of some three hundred participants. In 2012, the forum was held on March 7. Under the theme of the "Human Rights-Based Development Policy," we talked about distortions in the political system, deepening structural inequalities, the destructive effects of the mining-led economic growth, and the impact of the government's pronatalist policies and ethno-nationalism on pernicious gender-based discrimination and violence against women.

Four days earlier, on March 3, young women's groups had held their "Young Women's Voices" forum, bringing together some one hundred participants, including young mothers, students, working women, lesbian and transgender women, women from ethnic minorities and women with disabilities. They engaged in a collective analysis of women's political participation, economy and property relations, culture and discrimination, sexual and reproductive rights from their specific perspectives. MONFEMNET had supported this 'daughter' forum since 2010.

Two days after the 'mother' forum, on March 9-10, the Government-Civil Society Working Group on Developing the Concept of State Policy on Supporting the Sustainable Development of Civil Society held the first National Civil Society Forum with some five hundred participants in the State Palace.[2] The working group was led by women activists. While my colleagues shouldered the bulk of the drafting work and the organization of the national forum, they entrusted me with the task of delivering the main presentation on behalf of the civil society. The presentation was on the state of civil society development and I was to speak right after the Prime Minister.

---

[2] The State Palace is *Turiin ordon*, which houses the parliament, cabinet and the president of Mongolia.

The conference hall was packed with civil society representatives from all over the country, many of them women from the *aimags* dressed in colourful *deels* (traditional garments), with ministers, vice-ministers, state secretaries and other public officials present. This was the first time we held a civil society forum of this magnitude in Mongolia. The occasion was solemn. The Prime Minister gave his speech and stepped down. My name was announced. I waddled to the stage, in my drab borrowed dress and ill-fitting pants, with my long fizzy hair brushed but still untamed. I laboriously climbed up the few stairs, walked around to stand behind the lectern and tried to get closer to the array of microphones… I couldn't. Startled, I exclaimed: "Oh! I can't get closer to the mike, my belly is in the way!" The hall roared in laughter… I was nine months pregnant. My belly was huge… I could barely walk. I was dead tired.

I gave my forty-minute presentation, taking care to mention some of the most contentious issues, including the way rural people were beginning to turn to militant activism as a last resort in their struggle to defend their rivers and pastures from the onslaught of mining. I also mentioned the latest struggle of the "All for Education!" National Civil Society Coalition (AFE Coalition) to stop the Ministry of Education from legalizing the elitist and divisive school system under the guise of introducing Cambridge education. And, of course, I had to mention the way in which the state had consistently violated the constitutional principle of the separation of the state and religion by engaging in various religious ceremonies, including the Lighting of the State Fire Ceremony inside the State Palace. This ceremony was conducted on December 29, 2011 in a ceremonial *ger* (a round felt tent often known as a *yurt*) that was especially built for the occasion. The participants included the President of Mongolia Mr. Ts. Elbegdorj, MPs and ministers, representatives of the Buddhist religion, shamanists and the private sector. Women were expressly excluded on the pretext that Mr. N. Batbayar, best known by his business nickname as 'Fortuna' Batbayar, an MP from the Mongolian Democratic Party (MDP) and the mastermind behind this ceremony, had brought rocks from *Deluun Boldog*,[3] the supposed birthplace of Chinggis Khaan, where Mr. Batbayar claimed women were not allowed to step in.

---

[3] The site is located in Dadal soum of Khentii *aimag*.

After my presentation, I clumsily walked back down to my seat, muttering "I nearly gave birth standing there!" Those sitting nearby laughed. However, my health and my baby's health were no laughing matter for me and my family. In the months preceding March, my workload was enormous. While preparing for the public forums, I sat for long hours in consultative and analytical meetings, scrambled to raise funds for the forums, guided the staff and partners on organizational and financial matters, advised the analytical teams, researched and wrote my presentations. At the same time, I attended various advocacy meetings as a Coordinator of the AFE coalition that MONFEMNET had been incubating and leading. In the last months of my pregnancy, it hurt to walk. One day, I discovered that I was unable to pull my legs into or out of the car, another day that I could not walk upstairs unaided.

My contractions started on the second day of the National Civil Society Forum. I went to the hospital in the evening of March 10 and my baby was born at dawn on March 11. While I was still lying on the birthing bed, my MONFEMNET colleague called, apologetically, to discuss urgent organizational matters. After the childbirth, I discovered that I could not walk or sit up independently. Compared to his older brother who was born in 2006 before I assumed the burden of running an activist NGO, my youngest was much weaker. A few days later after the birth, an older colleague called requesting I come to an important advocacy meeting. I told her I could not, that I was too weak, she tried to insist, saying that childbirth is not a sickness. I remembered that in 2006, the very day I gave birth to my eldest, I also got a call from a colleague. They wanted me to give a presentation on a civil society study at a conference. They had hoped that I would push myself forward for the cause. My inability to continue my activism at the same level of intensity was, I felt, met with disappointment and even doubt about my commitment. I felt hurt and betrayed.

This experience prompted me to reflect on several issues that I thought were interconnected: consistently poor funding for our NGOs, our persistent organizational fragility, our acceptance of and even insistence on self-sacrifice, and our continued reliance on women's unpaid and underpaid work. Through my own experience, I felt the extent of the fragility of the women's rights/human rights NGO community and the high level of burn-out among the leadership. Yet those outside our community, both foreigners and Mongolians, viewed us as strong and influential. Furthermore, the quality of the support given to us by international organizations did not match their hyped-up rhetoric about the critical importance of civil society and

women's empowerment. For decades, we had worked under conditions of chronic under-funding. At the same time, we were constantly criticized for the limited reach of our work and were perpetually suspected of enriching ourselves by 'eating' project money. In addition, we were being accused of 'importing' foreign ideas and corroborating western imperialism.[4]

1.3 Research questions

I felt deeply that we needed to take the time to critically sift through these incongruities and raise some honest and uncomfortable questions:

- Have we, as women, been empowered or exploited through the NGO sector?
- Is working through civil society the right strategy to achieve our goals for social change?
- Have we unwittingly corroborated the neoliberal reforms through our activism?
- Have we been sufficiently savvy about the interconnections between patriarchy, democracy, market economy, and neoliberal globalization?

Gradually, the theme of neoliberalization became more prominent. It is an area that we had discussed since the 2000s and determined as strategically important for our critical analysis. However, with the exception of the Center for Human Rights and Development (CHRD), most other NGOs in our small community had had little opportunity to explore this area. Thus, this research process has evolved into an exploration of our activism in the context of neoliberal democratization in Mongolia. I took a multi-disciplinary approach, taking advantage of my prior academic training in political theory, comparative politics, feminist theory and postcolonial theory and venturing into areas such as anthropology, history and political economy.

I felt strongly that the questions posed by this research can only be answered by taking an in-depth look inside the world of women activists and by looking from the inside out to the larger structures of power and policies and practices of the state and international organizations. Therefore, to undertake this study, I adopted a feminist activist auto/ethnographic approach,

---

[4] The list of criticisms and accusations does not stop there. See Appendix 5 for a list we drew up in one of our research workshops.

formally and informally incorporating participatory elements, archival research and critical reading of relevant scholarship and theories, especially on neoliberalism, democracy, postsocialism. I conducted two months of field work in Mongolia in 2015 and anchored my research on the five analytical and strategizing workshops I held then with five of my activist colleagues. I sought to ground my research in our collective experiences and perspectives and interlaced my auto-ethnographic narratives with our collective stories. I have used a variety of textual strategies, including story-telling to convey the richness of the activist world. I have also sought to deeply contextualize my analysis so as to facilitate the understanding of the important nuances of our activist labour.

This thesis represents only a part of my research journey and describes only a small fraction of our activism. Due to time and space limitations and privileging depth over breadth, I focused on the period from the early 1990s to the late 2000s.

1.4 Structure of the thesis

In the second chapter, I provide a historical and current context of Mongolia. The third chapter presents the intellectual journey I travelled to develop a theoretical and a political perspective on neoliberalism. Chapter four presents the methodological considerations that informed this research. The next three chapters delve into the activist world. Chapter five tells the story of how the first independent women's NGOs emerged. Chapter six looks at the changing political context and the expanding NGO sector, associated challenges, and different approaches to NGOs and civil society in currency in Mongolia. Chapter seven seeks to highlight the evolution of women's rights/human rights activism and the activist labour we engaged in with a focus on broader cooperation and women's rights. Finally, the last chapter brings together the various strands of analysis and reflection.

1.5 Note on language, transliteration and translation

Mongolian language, just as our history and culture, is a contested terrain. Until the 1940s, Mongolians used the top-down script adapted from the *Uigur* script during Chinggis Khaan's time. In the 1940s, under the Soviet influence and after a brief experiment with a Latin alphabet, Mongolia adopted a Cyrillic alphabet and the *Uigurjin* Mongol script was nearly forgotten. From the late 1980s, the government launched an intensive campaign to

reintroduce the *Uigurjin* script, nowadays referred to as *Mongol bichig* (Mongol script), in reaction to the pervasive Russification during the state-socialist period. In the early 1990s, after the 'transition,' the government replaced the Cyrillic with *Mongol bichig* in the secondary education curriculum only to change back to the Cyrillic a few years later, having wrought havoc in the educational prospects of thousands of young students who were subjected to this heavy-handed experiment inspired by linguistic nationalism.[5]

Despite attempts at standardization of the written language during state-socialism, ambiguities and discrepancies have remained, especially given the multiplicity of ethnic and regional dialects, the vast differences between written and spoken Mongolian, and between *Mongol bichig* and Cyrillic writing styles and grammar. These matters complicate transliteration and translation tasks between Mongolian and other languages.

In this thesis, I have consciously chosen to frequently use transliterated Mongolian words in order to convey the cultural and linguistic nuances of the Mongolian context. In doing so, I have generally based the transliterations on the commonly used Cyrillic spelling of the Mongolian words rather than *Mongol bichig*, which is often further away from the spoken Mongolian. Thus, I opted for *egch* (older sister, auntie) over *egchi*, *khaalga* (door) over *khagalga*, *khuduu* (countryside) over *khudege*.

Translation, especially between English and Mongolian, has been a major part of the post-socialist transformations in Mongolia. As the era of Soviet control ended, the English language replaced the Russian as the dominant medium for transferring 'new knowledge' onto Mongolians. Coming under the new, Western regimes of knowledge, Mongolians were faced with a plethora of new concepts in nearly all spheres of our lives but especially in the economy, politics, public administration and the emergent civil society. For pro-democracy and human rights/women's rights activists, translation and interpretation has certainly been

---

[5] Bulag (1998) provided an interesting discussion pertaining to *Mongol bichig* and linguistic nationalism in his *Nationalism and Hybridity in Mongolia* (pp. 226-227). As a result of this policy, my niece's cousin who is four years older than my niece could barely read in Cyrillic by the time my niece went to school. A year later, their reading abilities were level. The AFE coalition boldly brought up this and other cases of heavy-handed policy-making in the education sector as examples of harmful top-down decisions.

an important part of our activist labour under the paradigms of international programs on democratization and development.

Now, nearly three decades since the 'transition,' there are accepted ways of translating terms such as 'NGO,' 'civil society,' 'human rights,' 'gender equality' and 'capacity.' However, using English terms to describe Mongolian phenomena can create deceptive familiarity and a false sense of equivalence. For instance, the word 'public' in terms such as 'public administration' and 'public service' is usually translated as *turiin (state/of the state)*. The Mongolian term *turiin zakhirgaa* (state governing/administration) is then translated back to English as 'public administration' and the term *turiin alba* (state office/corps/duty) as 'public service.' The political effects of 'public' and 'state' are different as the term *tur* (state) in Mongolian evokes a potent symbol of the Mongolian nationhood and sovereignty and a powerful entity that is above citizens.

Possible alternative adjectives are *niitiin* (common, everyone's) as used in *niitiin teever* (public transportation) but this word has a strong association with *niitiin uilchilgee* (common/public services) such as dry cleaning, tailors, plumbing and canteens that were developed during state-socialism. Hence, a compound word *olon niitiin* has sometimes been used to translate the English 'public' as in *olon niitiin kheleltsuuleg* (public discussion). However, the same word has been used to mean 'mass' as in *olon niitiin baiguullaga* (mass organization), *olon niitiin khevlel medeelliin kheregsel* (mass media), and *olon niitiin oron zai* (public space). Often, the choice of *niitiin* or *olon niitiin* over 'state' expresses a political position to assert the primacy of the people/citizens over the state apparatus. As these examples show, those without access to the Mongolian language and cultural knowledge will remain ignorant of the underlying fundamental difference in the way political relations and concepts are encoded in the Mongolian language.

This is not merely a matter of appropriate translation or representation. The process of translation is intimately linked to the process of theorization in Mongolia and in Mongolian about various phenomena such as neoliberal democratization and development and concepts such as the state, civil society and NGOs. Translation is a process of political struggle and resistance. For activists, translation is a creative and political process of constructing meanings. Our long-term engagement with the term 'human dignity' is a good example. From

the mid-2000s, several of us, human rights/women's rights and pro-democracy activists, began to engage in informal discussions on various key concepts such as 'human rights,' 'democracy,' 'movement,' 'social change,' and 'social justice.' One of the key concerns for us was that we felt our human rights education was not really reaching the hearts and minds of the people. We felt that the term 'human rights' remained *khuurai* (dry), *albany* (formal/official) and *khundii* (removed) just like the official propaganda during state-socialism. We reflected on our public education and training content and methodology, and resolved that we are not starting at the core when we start with the enumeration of various human rights. We concluded that the core is really about affirming the dignity and value of each and every human being and this is precisely what the previous authoritarian regime had trampled on. We decided that if we could get people to understand and feel deeply the concept of human dignity, we would achieve more in our public education efforts than we would by lecturing about human rights as legal constructs.

However, the term 'dignity' contained in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) (United Nations, 1948) was translated as *ner tur* by the government ("Khunii erkhiin tugeemel tunkhaglal [Universal declaration of human rights]," n.d.).[6] In its everyday meaning, *ner tur* primarily means 'reputation,' i.e. it is a more superficial and much thinner concept than 'dignity.' We discussed how Mongolians express the concept of 'human dignity' and came up with *khun shig amidrakh* (to live like a human), *khunii zeregtei/daitai yavakh* (to walk/live at the level of a human)[7] and similar phrases. We discussed about more spiritual concepts that convey the sense of freedom, dignity and the innate desire and right to participate in the fullness of life. We came up with traditional concepts such as *khiimori,* which may be literally translated as a 'spirit horse' and approximately means the life spirit, the vital energy of a person. While all of these were valuable and potentially helpful in getting the concept of human dignity across in training settings, they could not be easily used as translations/designations of the term 'human dignity.'

---

[6] See Appendix 6 for the table of comparison.
[7] Interestingly, in Article 23, the term *khunii zeregtei* is used instead of *ner tur* in the Mongolian translation of the UDHR in the last of the five appearances of 'dignity' in the text (See Appendix 6).

We discussed further, continuing to dig in our own senses, our motivations for engaging in human rights activism and our deepest desires for the kind of life we wanted to see taking shape in post-socialist Mongolia. We said what we really desired was for all Mongolians to live *tseej duuren amisgalj* (breathing fully into their lungs), *nuur duuren ineej* (with a face full of smile), *magnai teneger* (forehead clear of worry lines) and *tolgoigoo/terguunee gudailgahgui* (with a head held high). In sum, we wanted people to live *erkhemseg* (approximately proudly, respected, valued, dignified) and resolved to settle, provisionally, for a long term *khunii erkhem chanar* (a person's most valued quality) for 'human dignity.' We began to consistently use this new term from the late 2000s and it became broadly accepted, including among progressive lawyers (Munkhsaikhan MC Odonkhuu, 2014, April 4).[8] Officially, there is still no 'standard' translation for the term 'human dignity' but the term *khunii erkhem chanar* will be recognized by those who engage with human rights and translated into English as 'human dignity.' The English term will then mask the specific struggles that mark the concept in Mongolian.

Similarly, a consistent use of established or common terms, e.g., names and descriptions of specific activities such as a training or a public discussion, can mask the underlying transformation of the phenomenon described or obscure differences that exist between similarly named phenomena. While the form of the activity may look like one familiar to non-Mongolians, there may be subtle or not so subtle differences in the underlying rules, processes, meanings and functions. In the thesis, I have elaborated on such nuances in a few cases but it would be too cumbersome to do so for every term used. Hence, with this note, I invite the reader to bear in mind that the English text presented in this thesis unavoidably masks many cultural and political nuances in and the dynamism of Mongolian society and the activist world within it. I have provided a selective glossary of Mongolian words used in the thesis, which may be of use to those without access to the Mongolian language. Lastly, all translations in the thesis are mine unless otherwise indicated.

---

[8] In 2014, O. Munkhsaikhan, Lecturer at the Law School of the Mongolian National University, gave a public lecture entitled "Khunii erkhem chanar (Human Dignity) [sic.]" The lecture was organized by the National Law Center and the Free Society Institute (Amartuvshin Dorj, 2014, November 30). The latter is run by Mongolian libertarians.

Chapter 2 : Navigating Mongolia's pasts and presents

The country context

> Truth isn't outside power or lacking in power. … Truth is a thing of this world. … Each society has its regime of truth, its "general politics" of truth – that is, the types of discourse it accepts and makes function as true …
>
> - Michel Foucault (in a 1976 interview)[9]

As a Mongolian from the country formerly known as the Mongolian People's Republic (MPR), I am accustomed to being regularly asked where I come from, when traveling or living abroad. What people in different parts of the world know about Mongolia, mis-know and/or mis-name is a comment on who has had the power to 'know,' 'name' and represent Mongolia internationally. In many European languages, versions of 'mongol' (e.g., mongoloid) mean 'idiot' or 'imbecile' and still refer, informally, to people with a Down's syndrome (Ramsay, 2014; Rodriguez-Hernandez & Montoya, 2011). Mongolians are largely seen as obscure descendants of infamous ancestors, still roaming the steppes on horseback and living in *gers.* That Mongolia is largely unknown outside the former Second World is a comment on Mongolia's place in the global hierarchy and its relatively recent entry into the Anglo-Eurocentric international order. In view of these geopolitics, and given my current location at a Western university, writing in English, this chapter has been developed to give a short overview of Mongolia's history and current context, primarily with a Western audience in mind.[10]

Writing Mongolia's history, or even the present, in broad strokes is tricky. It is a post-Foucauldian maxim that history does not speak the truth, that knowledge is not devoid of power but, on the contrary, "woven together with it" (Foucault, 1994a, p. 32). What counts as historical knowledge and what becomes truth are thus a function of power, a product of political struggles. More often than not, history is a selective collection of subjective descriptions of 'events' that are represented in a seemingly logical progressive causality (Foucault, 1991b). As a rule, histories, sanctioned by the state, taught in schools, and

---

[9] The transcripts of this interview are included in a 1994 collection of Foucault's work on power under the title of "Truth and Power" (Foucault, 1994b).

[10] Chapter 3, on the other hand, was developed primarily with a Mongolian audience in mind.

reproduced by the mainstream media and cultural industry, have been written by men for men in power. Far from aiming to objectively document the past, histories have always been aimed at the present. History is a constituent of the regimes of truth (Foucault, 1991b, 2008), a technology for controlling public remembering (Kaplonski, 2004) as well as forgetting (Buyandelger, 2013), and for (re)producing identities and subjectivities (Foucault, 1994a). The very appearance of history as a science that produces an objective and truthful record of 'facts' is a social construction that is laced with power (Foucault, 1994b).

This nature of history is perhaps most visible in times of fundamental societal changes brought about by revolutions, bloody or not. With the present unstable and the future uncertain, the past seems to become the site of pilgrimage by people looking for meanings, for directions, and for comfort. And *this* is history too. As all former socialist/communist countries, Mongolia has engaged in an intense process of historical reappraisal since the 'fall' of communism. Our history is in flux, as it were, as *we* are in flux. Our history is contested. At last. During socialism, Mongolian history was written to fit the Soviet Russian worldview and communist ideology (Bawden, 2009; Bulag, 1998; Steiner-Khamsi & Stolpe, 2006). The onset of *perestroika* and *glasnosti* in the 1980s, followed by the 'transition' to a liberal democracy, made it possible to reassess the past. However, much of the post-socialist reconstruction of pre-socialist and socialist histories has been inflected by the need to legitimate the new order: market-based liberal democracy integrated into the international community.[11] Analyses of the 'transition' and the post-socialist period have been predominantly performed within a hegemonic neoliberal democratic framework by Mongolians and outsiders alike.

What I present below as an overview of history and the current context, therefore, are only the contours of plausible stories. I have chosen to highlight aspects that spoke to me given the focus of this thesis and my political commitments and theoretical perspectives (as explicated to some degree in the next chapter). I first give a very short sketch of Mongolia and then provide a more detailed discussion of the historical background and the post-socialist context. The history covers three periods: Mongols during the empire, Outer Mongolia under the Manchu rule, and the state-socialist MPR. I write the following sections

---

[11] All these are social constructions in and of themselves. In most invocations of this vague term 'the international community,' it really only refers to the West.

fully aware that representations of the past, present and the future are always full of silences, violence and struggle.

2.1 Mongolia at a glance

Mongolia is a landlocked country in the heart of Inner Asia, surrounded by two giant neighbours: Russia to the north and China to the south. It is the ancestral home of the nomadic warriors who established the Mongol Empire in the thirteenth century and the birthplace of Chinggis Khaan. Mongolia, "approximately coterminous with what always used to be known as Outer Mongolia" (Bawden, 2009, p. 2), is the only independent Mongol[12]-majority political entity. Until 1989-1990, Mongolia was part of the Second World as a state-socialist republic tied tightly to the Soviet Union. It is now formally a free market-based parliamentary democracy with a unitary state, administratively sub-divided into twenty one *aimags* (provinces).

Although dwarfed on the map by the two intimidating neighbours, Mongolia's territory of 1,566,600 sq. km. is an equivalent of 5.8 New Zealands, 2.8 Frances and four Japans. The population, however, only reached three million in 2015 but nearly half of it is now concentrated in the capital city of Ulaanbaatar (National Statistical Office of Mongolia, n.d.).[13] Ethnically, the population is rather homogenous. Khalkha Mongols constitute 84.5%, and Kazakhs, a group of Turkic origins, is the largest ethnic minority at 3.9% (National Statistical Office of Mongolia, n.d.). The remaining population consists of Tuvans (of Turkic origins), small numbers of local Chinese and Russians, and other ethnic Mongols such as Buryads, Durvuds, and Bayads. The Mongol ethnic groups are predominantly Buddhist-shamanist, Kazakhs are mainly Muslim, and the number of Christians has been rising since the 1990s.[14] The official language is Mongolian, written in Cyrillic, based on the Khalkha dialect.

---

[12] In Mongolian, there is only one word *mongol.* In English, however, it has become largely customary to use the adjective 'Mongol' in reference to the pre-modern people of Mongol ethnicity and the broader ethnic category that goes beyond Mongolia's national boundaries. The adjective 'Mongolian' primarily refers to modern-day Mongolia, Mongolian nationality/citizenship (including non-Mongol ethnic minorities) and people of Mongol ethnic origin, residing in or originating from Mongolia and, often, Inner Mongolia.

[13] The population density in Ulaanbaatar is 306 persons per sq. km. compared to only two persons per sq. km. at national level.

[14] As religion was suppressed during state-socialism, these outlines mask a more complex picture.

2.2 Pre-socialist Mongolia

2.2.1 The Mongol Empire

Many nomadic peoples have roamed the Eurasian steppes, their civilizations rising and falling. The Mongols gradually emerged in the seventh-to eighth centuries (Schwarz, 2006), increasingly posing threat to the southern sedentary civilization. The first Mongol state was founded in 1206 by Chinggis Khaan, born Temuujin, who had successfully united the contending tribes and led them on a world conquest that established the largest land empire in world history (1206-1368). The demise of the Mongol Empire was followed by a period of internecine wars. From the middle of the sixteenth century, Tibetan Buddhism or Lamaism began to spread among Mongols, incorporating some elements of Mongolian shamanism. By the mid-seventeenth century, the reincarnations of Javzandamba Khutagt, the highest ranking religious figure among Khalkhas, had become the locus of popular loyalty (Bulag, 1998). Until the Manchu rule set in, the spread of Buddhism initially stimulated a cultural renaissance in Outer Mongolia (Bawden, 2009; Ochir & Enkhtuvshin, 2003). Cities began to emerge, including *Ikh Khuree*, which later became *Urga* and then *Ulaanbaatar* (Schwarz, 2006).

In the military-cum-nomadic lifestyle, women's labour was essential in raising the livestock, moving the household from pasture to pasture, processing animal products and producing items of personal and household use (Ochir et al., 2003; Rossabi, 1979). Women accompanied men on military campaigns, sometimes participating in combat, and some royal women led military campaigns. With men at war, noble women took over the ruling of their clans, raised the future *khaans*, and held the tribes together. Royal women functioned as influential advisors, judges in criminal cases, protectors and advocates for the innocent and patronesses of literacy and scholarly work. Women also raced horses, competed in archery, and at least one princess is said to have been a wrestling champion.[15] At the same time, there were

---

[15] Princess Khotol-Tsagaan or Khotolon was Khubilai Khaan's niece. That she may have been a wrestling champion has important cultural significance as traditional wrestling in modern Mongolia is restricted to men although women are active in judo and have won in important championships. According to the oral tradition, the wrestling outfit was changed to expose most of the body, including all of the front, to exclude women from wrestling championships so that men did not lose face by losing to a woman.

oppressive tribal practices such as polygamous and arranged marriages (Ochir et al., 2003). It is highly likely that most common women were excluded from public life and had a low status outside their households.

Significantly, the Mongols built their tribal alliances and the empire through exogamous marriages of their daughters (Bulag, 1998; Onon, 2001; Weatherford, 2010). Given small numbers of the Mongols, exogamy was also of vital importance in preventing inbreeding. There is a strong indication in the *Secret History of the Mongols*, an important thirteenth-century historical record,[16] that the Mongols did not hold rigid notions about the illegitimacy of children even though, as Bulag (1998) stressed, they held their lineage/clan system as very important. The military nomadic pastoral lifestyle, when abductions and rape were common and population was low, appears to have forged a cultural attitude of valuing fertility over virginity and patrilineal heredity.[17]

2.2.2 The Manchu period: Outer Mongolia

By the end of the seventeenth century, southern and central Mongol tribes had fallen under the rule of the Manchu Qing dynasty,[18] which had conquered China. The northern tribes (Oirads/Kalmyks and Buryads) fell under the control of the expanding Tsarist Russia. The Manchu banned trade with Russia, introduced administrative divisions that fragmented the aristocratic power and restricted the mobility of the Mongols, and established a bureaucracy and a complex system of taxation, extracting not only money and livestock but also labour and military service (Ochir & Enkhtuvshin, 2003).

From the mid-nineteenth century, the Qing dynasty, beleaguered by the Opium Wars[19] and the rebellion in China, exponentially increased their taxes and removed entry restrictions for Chinese merchants (Ewing, 1980). Backed by the Manchu, Chinese-controlled markets

---

[16] *The Secret History* is an influential text in the imagination of modern Mongolians and is constitutive of modern Mongolian national identity.

[17] This is not to say that this attitude was among Mongols or is among modern Mongolians.

[18] Inner Mongolian clans had submitted earlier, by 1636, and the Khalkha Mongols swore allegiance to the Manchu Emperor in 1691 (Bawden, 2009, p. 47). The Manchu were culturally closer to the Mongols. Technically, Mongolia was not subjugated by China but had sworn allegiance, in a feudal manner, to the Manchu. Some western authors do not make this distinction, which is an important one.

[19] The British started the first Opium War (1839-42), then joined forces with the French in the Second Opium War (1856-60) (Roblin, 2016, August 6).

expanded rapidly and Chinese firms monopolized the finance and the economy of the Mongolian *khoshuus* (administrative units created by the Manchu). Outer Mongolia was soon swallowed whole by debt through a system of credits[20] extended at exorbitantly high usury rates[21] and highly unequal terms of trade[22] (Ewing, 1980; Ochir & Enkhtuvshin, 2003). The private debt of Mongol lords was driven up by the extortionist practices of the corrupt Manchu officials and the wide-spread sale of offices as well as by the spend-thrift habits of the lords themselves (Ewing, 1980). Ultimately, the burden of debt, whether official or private, fell onto the *ard* (the common people/herders) who were buckling under a quadruple economic burden: supporting the feudal lords and the massive clergy while servicing debt to Chinese merchants and paying taxes to the Manchu state (Ewing, 1980).

Mongolians' resistance to the Manchu oppression intensified and took many forms, including armed rebellions, moving out of the *khoshuu*, becoming *sain er*[23] (highwaymen/outlaws), spontaneous street fights with Chinese traders, refusing military draft, and, interestingly, *zarga* (petitions) through the formal administrative mechanisms (Ewing, 1980; Ochir & Enkhtuvshin, 2003). The latter involved collecting people's grievances, usually against the *khoshuu* lord's illegal and excessive taxation, and formally petitioning the higher administrative levels to rectify the wrongs (Ewing, 1980; Ochir & Enkhtuvshin, 2003). Petitions took a very long time to be resolved (eighteen years in one case), often were not, and the petitioners regularly faced extremely severe punishments, including torture. Nevertheless, the petitioning became so frequent that it grew into a spontaneous movement, involving diverse social strata – the rich, the poor, small lords, commoners, poor lamas, clerks and lower-level administrative functionaries, etc. (Ochir & Enkhtuvshin, 2003). Ard Ayush, a common herder, emerged as a prominent leader of such a movement with support from local nobles (Ochir & Enkhtuvshin, 2003). He joined the armed movement for national independence in 1911.

---

[20] Which was due to the seasonal character of the pastoral economy.
[21] In one case, the interest was nine times the principal (Ochir & Enkhtuvshin, 2003, p. 233).
[22] As Boikova mentioned, Russian merchants too often "traded dishonestly in bad goods" (Boikova, 2002, p. 17). According to Boikova, Russian trading in Outer Mongolia resumed after 1858.
[23] The words literally mean "good man."

From 1901, the Manchu, reduced to a semi-colony by Western powers, sought to modernize, which involved making Inner and Outer Mongolia into Manchu provinces through administrative integration, economic colonization,[24] and cultural sinicization (Boldbaatar, Sanjdorj, & Shirendev, 2003). This policy angered feudal lords and religious nobility, giving momentum to the movement for national independence. In 1911, taking advantage of the Qing demise, Outer Mongolia announced itself an independent theocratic state headed by the Eighth Javzandamba Khutagt who was declared as the Bogd Khaan.

However, in 1915, the tri-partite Khiagta treaty formalized the Sino-Soviet agreement to recognize Outer Mongolia as an autonomous region of the Republic of China (ROC). In 1919, the Chinese invaded Outer Mongolia.[25] They were ousted by the infamous White Russian general Baron von Ungern-Sternberg who nominally restored the theocracy. The same year, in 1921, the newly formed Mongolian Revolutionary Army aided by the Red Army expelled the Baron's forces, overthrew the existing government and established a nominally constitutional theocracy headed by the Bogd Khaan. As the Manchu rule disintegrated, for a short period from the 1860s to the 1920s, before the Soviet control set in, Mongolia was relatively open to the outside world.

2.2.2.1 The 'woman' question

As Bulag (1998) incisively analysed in his *Nationalism and Hybridity in Mongolia*, the proliferation of Lamaism and Chinese commerce had a profound combined effect on the fabric of the Mongolian society. At the dawn of the twentieth century, the total Mongolian population was about 600,000 (p. 150). One-third of the adult males were *lamas* (monks), many of whom were sworn to celibacy but engaged in informal sexual relations (Bulag, 1998). Some *lamas* lived family lives.[26] The number of Chinese men in Mongolia had reached almost

---

[24] Including taking over land for Chinese farmers.
[25] The leaders of the ROC fled to the island of Taiwan where they continued to consider Mongolia as part of the ROC. In 2002, they informally recognized Mongolia's independence by opening a representative office and instituting travel visas.
[26] These included the *arash* whom John DeFrancis (1993) described as follows: "a monk who leaves a monastery, abandons his vows of celibacy, and sets up his own tent with a wife, although she is not socially recognized as such and does not put up her hair in the style of a married woman" (p. 23). My father's father was such a *lama* until he was killed in the Stalinist repressions of the 1930s when lamas were executed *en masse*.

100,000 (Bulag, 1998, p. 150).[27] As Bulag (1998) wrote, the "informal sexual liaisons" of unmarried Mongolian women with *lamas*, Chinese men and travellers resulted in a large number of female-headed households and children with unclear paternity (p. 150). The gender imbalance loosened sexual mores and shifted the burden of the pastoral economy even more onto the shoulders of women and their children (1998).

Furthermore, with the traditional exogamy made inaccessible by restrictions on mobility and the disintegration of the clan system, sex with travellers seems to have been a resort to avoid inbreeding (Bulag, 1998). As quoted by Bulag (1998), Larson thus described a Mongolian woman:

> The Mongolian woman is not the property of her husband, but a free and independent personality who can and does do exactly as she pleases. She takes the passing lama or friendly traveller as lover without shame or censure (Larson, 1930, p. 71).

As clarified by Bulag (1998), this was not a long-established practice for Mongols. Such a practice was heard of among non-Mongol people and prohibited by Munkh Khaan during the Yuan Dynasty (Bulag, 1998).

John DeFrancis (1993) related a telling story about Mongolians' attitude to children, women and reproduction. A local prince, riddled with syphilis (which was wide-spread in the population), could not father a son and had his brother lama become *khar khun* (lay man)[28] and marry so as to continue the line. They approached a local high-ranking *lama* for assistance in finding a wife who could bear children (DeFrancis, 1993). The lama pointed to an unmarried but pregnant daughter of a local rich man. When the brothers approached the girl's father, he was "furious at the thought of losing a prospective heir" as he had been "overjoyed at the prospect of obtaining a grandson to inherit his wealth" and was "quite unconcerned… about the uncertain paternity of the child" (DeFrancis, 1993, p. 162). The parties were able to reach a solution by agreeing to give the first male child to the girl's father and "(t)hings worked out

---

[27] Bulag quoted Sanders (1987) for the numbers of Chinese: 75,000 traders, 15,000 workers and craftsmen, and 5,000 agricultural labourers (p. 47).

[28] Lay men did not shave their heads, so they were called *khar khun* (black person) as opposed to *lamas* who were *shar khun* (yellow person). In contemporary Mongolia, expressions such as *turiin khar khun* (black man of the state) have been used, reinforcing the construction of the spaces of the state and politics as masculine.

even more auspiciously" as "(t)he girl turned out so prolific that the ex-monk… also came to be supplied with a male heir" (DeFrancis, 1993, p. 162).

An important part of the story is the economic power of married women (Humphrey, 1993). As Bulag (1998) put it, Mongol women "passed between patrilineal groups" (p. 143). A woman married *away* to join her husband's paternal family group. Given the nomadic lifestyle, the 'away' could be very far and for a very long time. In anticipation of her hard life as a married woman, a girl child enjoyed a special status in the natal family, allowed more freedoms and given more affection than sons (Humphrey, 1993; Onon, 1972). As Humphrey (1993) described in detail, the life of a young daughter-in-law was indeed hard under the authority of her mother-in-law. However, she retained economic power through her *inj*, an endowment of cattle, received from her father after her marriage. These cattle were not passed onto her husband or her father-in-law but remained her property. On subsequent visits to her natal family, usually during the Lunar New Year, the woman may be gifted with more cattle by her father, thus increasing her economic power as well as the father's influence over the in-laws.

The Manchu and the post-Manchu pre-socialist periods are some of the least researched areas in Mongolian history. Most eyewitness accounts accessible in English come from western male visitors, including Christian missionaries (DeFrancis, 1993; Gilmour, 1976; Lattimore, 1935, 1941). They may have exaggerated and over-generalized certain aspects of social life such as the sexual promiscuity of Mongols and the independence of women, obscuring the physical violence and sexual and economic oppression many women likely faced. Given the levels of impoverishment and the hardships of nomadic livestock husbandry, many women and children must have lived their lives as slaves or semi-slaves, starving throughout the year and freezing to near death in the cold months. Nevertheless, some women do appear to have had a measure of personal freedom due to having economic power if they came from wealthy families, the cultural and economic value attached to children regardless of their paternity, and, in many cases, simply being single mothers. Women's sexuality became increasingly problematized as Mongolia set out to build a modern nation-state (Bulag, 1998).

2.2.3 State-socialism: the Mongolian People's Republic

Mongolia has been known as the second country in the world and the first in Asia to become a Leninist state. This 'fact,' a source of pride during the socialist period, is now highly contested. According to postsocialist Mongolian historians (Boldbaatar et al., 2003), the 1921 revolution was a *national democratic* one, which sought to do away with not only foreign but also domestic oppression and pursue a non-capitalist (but also non-socialist) path of development. Some of the leaders of the revolution sought to establish a system in which "every person became wealthy equitably without exploiting anyone" (Boldbaatar et al., 2003, p. 146). The revolutionary force, the Mongolian People's Party (MPP)[29] was formed in 1920. After Bogd Khaan's death in 1924, the first constitution was adopted after extensive consultations in the newly formed *Ardyn Ikh Khural* (parliament), founding the Mongolian People's Republic (MPR) (Boldbaatar et al., 2003). According to Batsumberel (2014, June 12), the word *khuvisgalt* (revolutionary) was added to the MPP name in 1925 as an alternative to 'communist,' which the party was being pressured to use by Comintern. The MPP thus became the MPRP: the Mongolian People's Revolutionary Party.[30]

Mongolia's options were severely limited: submit to the Soviets but survive as a nation or be swamped by the Chinese and dissolve (Bawden, 2009; Lattimore, 1935). Independence from China was secured "by a huge internal sacrifice" (Bulag, 1998, p. 13), which involved a resolute elimination of all 'feudal elements' and 'bourgeois ambitions' and a violent production of a firm commitment to the communist ideology. Stalin demanded that the MPR leaders go far beyond the initial 1920s campaign of forced collectivization and *tegshtgel* (equalization)[31] *via* confiscation of the wealth of feudal lords, rich *lamas* and wealthy commoners, and redistribution to the poor *ard* (Boldbaatar et al., 2003).

---

[29] The original word is not *khumuus* (people) but *ard,* which at the time meant the herdspeople, clearly denoting a socio-economic status. During the state-socialist era, the meaning of the words seems to have become stretched to be synonymous with *people*, an all-inclusive term. In today's Mongolia, the word is used in both meanings.

[30] In 2010, the party dropped the word 'revolutionary' to break from its communist past, becoming the Mongolian People's Party (MPP) again.

[31] This is an important moment. In post-socialist Mongolia, equality has become associated with this form of forcible equalization, especially when the discussion is about socio-economic equality/rights. The word *tegsh* means 'equal,' 'equal rights' are *tegsh erkh*.

A totalitarian regime was established in the MPR in the 1930s (Boldbaatar et al., 2003). Non-compliant heads of state were exiled to the Soviet Union and five of them were executed in 1937-1940 (Boldbaatar et al., 2003). In 1930-1934, 37,700 people had fled the MPR over the southern border and 6,000 people had been killed in the suppression of the 1932 rebellion (History and Archeology Department of the Mongolian Academy of Sciences, n.d.-c). Stalinist purges peaked in 1937-1939 when 36,000 people were repressed as counter-revolutionaries and Japanese spies, including large numbers of the MPRP members and army personnel[32] (Bawden, 2009; Boldbaatar et al., 2003; Kaplonski, 2011). The purges decimated not only the Buddhist establishment but also the Buryad ethnic group and intellectuals (Bawden, 2009; Buyandelger, 2013).

Soviet-Mongolian 'friendship' was cemented over the 1939 Khalkhyn Gol war against the Japanese (who supported the pan-Mongolian movement led by Inner Mongolians) and the Second World War through mutual military support (Bulag, 1998). In 1945, based on the Yalta agreement negotiated by Stalin, a universal referendum was held whereby Mongolians overwhelmingly voted for independence (Boldbaatar et al., 2003, p. 10; History and Archeology Department of the Mongolian Academy of Sciences, n.d.-b). However, in the 1950s, China, now communist, demanded the 'return' of Mongolia based on the 1920s Sino-Soviet agreements, driving Mongolia to bond more closely with the Soviet Union (Bulag, 1998). Mongolia's sovereignty was secured only in 1961 when it became a member of the United Nations (Boldbaatar et al., 2003). Mongolia's economic development was boosted by its joining the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance (Comecon) in 1962.

The 1950s saw a brief period of 'thawing,' which was soon stamped out by the pro-Soviet MPRP hardliners through another wave of repressions, jailing or exiling of those identified as 'misguided intellectuals,' 'bourgeois nationalists,' and 'anti-party groups' (Boldbaatar et al., 2003; Kaplonski, 2011). According to Boldbaatar et al. (2003), the party's "leading and directing role," hence control over the state, was reinforced by the 1960 Constitution. From

---

[32] During this time, Japan was seeking to secure domination in the region *via* supporting a pan-Mongolian movement embraced by Inner Mongolians with a goal of establishing a unified Mongolian nation-state (Bawden, 2009, pp. 328-329; Bulag, 1998, p. 14).

then on until the late 1980s, Mongolia can be characterized as a heavily bureaucratized authoritarian party-state regime (p. 10).

The MPR pursued an intensive modernization agenda in all spheres through central planning of its economy. Mongolia had transformed from an impoverished pastoral society on the brink of extinction in the 1920s to a revitalized society with an industrialized agrarian economy, and relatively efficient modern administrative, public health and education sectors, and comparatively broader foreign relations (Bawden, 2009; Boldbaatar et al., 2003; Lattimore, 1962). This development, however, was heavily dependent on external aid: the Sino-Soviet aid competition of the 1950s, substantial Soviet subsidies, and considerable aid from Eastern European members of Comecon (Bawden, 2009; Bulag, 1998).

Mongolia remained import-dependent for skills, technology, machinery and many basic consumer products; its exports primarily consisted of meat and minerals and depended on the guaranteed markets in the Comecon countries (Bawden, 2009). Furthermore, nearly all spheres of industrial development followed Soviet standards, which were in themselves far behind the Western ones (Bawden, 2009). Bulag (1998) noted that, along with important achievements, the centrally planned economy had an effect of de-motivating workers and fostering a counter-productive type of competitiveness. Moreover, similar to other state-socialist contexts (Scott, 1989), the expansion of the public sector of ownership was accompanied by a rise of offences against 'socialist property,' ranging from shirking one's duties to the private use of publicly-owned resources and even racketeering (Bawden, 2009).

Mongolia's modernization occurred through the violent imposition of socialism, with many parallels between the colonial 'civilizing' projects of the European powers. Formal sovereignty notwithstanding, Mongolia's political and economic dependence on the Soviet Union was to such a high degree that Mongolia was variously referred to as the 'sixteenth Republic,' 'satellite state' or even 'a puppet regime' of the Soviet Union (Bawden, 2009; Bulag, 1998; Ochir & Enkhtuvshin, 2003; Sanders, 1987). In the 1970s-1980s, Soviet advisors had been appointed at nearly every Mongolian ministry, often enjoying more *de facto* power than the ministers (Sanders, 1987). Soviet professionals worked in all sectors as technical advisors and professionals, including teachers. One hundred thousand Soviet soldiers were stationed in Mongolia and were mobilized in the construction sector. Soviet people supplied much needed

professional expertise and labour power (Bawden, 2009). At the same time, most Soviet expats lived better provisioned and segregated lives, serviced by separate schools, shops and clubs where few Mongolians, e.g. the party elite, were admitted. The party-state punished those who complained about wrongdoings by the Soviets, so the Mongolians' dissatisfaction with the way the Soviet experts and advisors worked or treated them were effectively silenced in the public sphere.[33]

The Soviet-Mongolian propaganda machines[34] constructed an idealized Soviet communist as a model for emulation (Bulag, 1998), promoting intensive socio-cultural Russification and 'learning from the Soviet *akh* (older brother).'[35] Russification was systematic, including, *inter alia*, the adoption of the Cyrillic alphabet in the 1940s, introduction of the Russian language in all schools, training of professionals in the Soviet Union,[36] imposition of Russian as a professional language[37] and 'voluntary' adoption of Russian by party elites, professionals and intelligentsia (Bawden, 2009).[38] Mongolian customs and traditions, historical legacy and the nomadic lifestyle were criticized as 'residues of feudalism,' expressions of 'narrow-minded nationalism,' and simply backwardness (*buduuleg*).[39]

Russification undoubtedly broadened Mongolia's horizons but at a cost of denigrating its history and culture and nearly complete alienation from its past. According to Bawden (2009), this alienation from the past was experienced to a much higher degree in Mongolia than in Eastern Europe. Losing its cultural ties both to its historical past and to other Mongols outside

---

[33] My father was thus reprimanded for criticising a Soviet expert. He thinks this and the fact that he never joined the party prevented him from advancing in his career despite being recognized as one of the top geologists (as such he was 'invited,' i.e. 'summoned,' by Filatova, the Russian wife of the Brezhnev-era Chairman Yu. Tsedenbal, to advise on the winter garden (made of precious stones) she had been planning to create in the new Wedding Palace – also her initiative). Rossabi also discusses this aspect of life during state-socialism (Rossabi, 2005, p. 33).

[34] The Soviet film industry was extremely influential in this regard.

[35] In Russian, the expression used to describe Soviet-Mongolian relations was *bratskaya drujba*, literally meaning 'brotherly friendship.' However, there is no exact equivalent of the word 'brother' or *brat* in Mongolian. As a result, the phrase got translated into Mongolian as *akh duugiin nairamdal*, literally meaning 'friendship-peace between an older brother (*akh*) and a younger brother (*duu*).' The word *duu* is not gender-specific.

[36] Mongolians also studied at tertiary level in other European Comecon members but the majority were educated in the Soviet Union.

[37] For example, geologists wrote their exploration reports in Russian and doctors wrote their prescriptions and diagnoses in Russian.

[38] Undoubtedly, this facilitated the control of the Soviet Union in Mongolia. This is what the Manchu-Chinese strived to accomplish earlier in the century by establishing Chinese language schools and courses.

[39] Bulag (1998) mentions this briefly. However, this aspect of Mongolian history is not well researched although it is rather common knowledge among older Mongolians.

of the MPR has likely had a severe impact on Mongolia's self-confidence as a nation. In the late 1980s, a feeling of resentment at being treated as second class citizens on their own soil began to brew among many Mongolians, especially those educated in the Soviet Union and the more advanced European members of Comecon. Pro-democracy movements were fuelled, in part, by the desire to restore national sovereignty, dignity and pride.

2.2.3.1 Being socialist women

State-socialism profoundly transformed gender relations in Mongolia. From the onset, the 1924 Constitution declared that "all people (*ard tumen*) … should be ensured equal rights without discrimination (*yalgavargui*) by origin, religion or sex (*eregtei emegtei*)" ("Bugd Nairamdakh Mongol Ard Ulsyn ankhdugaar Undsen khuuli [The first consitution of the People's Republic of Mongolia]," 1924). Traditional practices such as arranged marriages, preventing girls from attending school, and kidnapping brides (among Kazakhs) were banned. The Mongolian Women's Committee (MWC) was formed under the MPRP as early as in 1924 to promote women's education, development and 'civilization,' and to mobilize women for the socialist modernization project (Mongolian Women's Federation, 2009). As formulated by the postsocialist successor to the MWC, the Mongolian Women's Federation (MWF) (2009), in the period 1924-1940, the MWC directed its efforts to improving literacy levels among women and mobilizing women into public meetings organized by the MPRP. From 1940 to 1960, the MWC focused on assisting war efforts and overcoming the difficulties of the war-time period and, later on, involving women in the development of cooperatives and collectives and promoting 'civilization' and 'cultural improvements' (including personal hygiene, Soviet-style homemaking and dressing, singing and dancing, etc.) (Mongolian Women's Federation, 2009). In the period 1960-1990, the MWC sought to support women's participation in education and employment, including sciences, and involve women in public affairs (Mongolian Women's Federation, 2009).

Women's position changed dramatically in a matter of a few generations. In 1985, women's participation in all levels of education and paid work was nearly universal (Worden & Savada, 1989). They made up 63% of the tertiary level students and 51% of all workers (Worden & Savada, 1989). However, the twin processes of socialist industrialization and urbanization created a vertical segregation of the emerging modern economy into 'feminine' and

'masculine' sectors. Women were channelled into health, care, services, education, trade, clerical jobs and light industries, while men were in defence, heavy industry and political decision-making. By 1979, women constituted 65% of doctors and 67% of secondary school teachers (Worden & Savada, 1989). This gender segregation was mirrored and reinforced by the educational system. At the national political level, women were provided a 25% quota in the 370-member *Ardyn Ikh Khural*, the unicameral 'showcase' parliament, but were mostly excluded from direct and meaningful participation in political decision-making.

The strong emphasis on women's equality in public life and workforce was tied to the Party-State's perennial worry about labour shortage. In the nine years from 1935 to 1944, the population increased by 21,300 people at an annual growth rate of 0.32%, reaching just over 759,100 (History and Archeology Department of the Mongolian Academy of Sciences). From then on, the annual growth rate increased to 2.5-2.8%, the population doubling by 1979 and reaching the two million milestone in 1989 (History and Archeology Department of the Mongolian Academy of Sciences). While remarkable improvements in public health and hygiene contributed to this celebrated achievement, it was largely due to the pronatalist policy of the party-state, which elevated childbearing to the level of a patriotic duty of women (Worden & Savada, 1989). The increase of population was also seen as important in the face of the continued threat from China. According to Bulag (1998), it is during this period that the modern Mongolian Khalkha-centered national identity was forged based on biologized notions of Mongolness. The Mongol identity, an overarching and inclusive one during Chinggis Khaan, became increasingly narrowly defined in the modern age.

In the reproductive and sexual life of the population, the party-state, in contrast to the pre-socialist attitudes, pursued a strict 'conservative' policy, which suppressed sexuality, imposed a nuclear model of a 'communist family,' condemned promiscuity and divorce as expressions of (feudal-era) backwardness and uncommunist consciousness (Bulag, 1998; Tumursukh, 2001). From 1960, the party-state pursued a strong pronatalist policy to increase the population size and strictly banned abortion and contraceptives (Gereltuya, Falkingham, & Brown, 2007). In effect, the paternalistic authoritarian party-state assumed control over women's sexual and reproductive lives (Tumursukh, 2001), achieving a total fertility rate of seven to eight children per a woman between 1963 to 1975 (Gereltuya et al., 2007). The ban on contraceptives was relaxed from 1976 for some groups of women based on the number

of children already produced, age and medical condition, and the strict prohibition of abortion was relaxed in 1985 (Gereltuya et al., 2007).[40] The population size increased from just over one million in 1963 to 1.6 million 1979, reaching two million in 1989 (Ochir et al., 2003).

The pressure on women to work outside the household *and* have a large number of children was accompanied by a provision of free childcare, education, and health services and a range of other incentives. These included a paid maternity leave (forty five days before and fifty six days after giving birth), protecting jobs for pregnant women and women with young children, childcare subsidies to women for the first six months after birth (MNT[41] 120 per month if women were covered by social insurance and MNT 40 if not),[42] cash allowances and subsidies to families with many children, and the *Aldart Ekh* (Glorious Mother) awards for women who gave birth to five or more children (Ochir et al., 2003; Worden & Savada, 1989).[43] As the quality and availability of kindergartens and other services was uneven and ill-tailored to the needs of children and their parents,[44] families with young children faced serious challenges in combining work with child-rearing (Bawden, 2009). In the case of many Mongolian families, children had to raise children and pick up other adult household chores.

Most feminist scholars hold that communist regimes did not advance equality within the household while advancing equality in the economy and society (Buyandelger, 2013; Schwartz, 1979, September). Certainly, this view has validity in the Mongolian context but it is not the whole picture. As part of its agenda to effect a cultural reform and promote women's equality, the party-state, through its party cells and auxiliary organizations, including the MWC, denounced patriarchal practices as 'residues of feudalism' and sought to

---

[40] Many women, especially in urban areas, resorted to illegal abortion, which often had lethal consequences, while rural women often gave birth to more than ten children.

[41] Mongolian currency is called *tugrug* and is abbreviated as MNT.

[42] This policy was effective from July 1, 1977 (Ochir et al., 2003, p. 299).

[43] There are many parallels between the MPR's and Nazi Germany's pronatalist policies, including awards for prolific mothers (Heineman, 2001; Rupp, 1977). A significant number of Mongolians are very attached to this medal, which is still awarded today. However, in the post-socialist period, the government had to reduce the number of children from five to four for the second-order award and from eight to seven for the first order award. Every March 8, the President of Mongolia addresses a hall full of *Aldart Ekh* awardees, all in colorful *deels* (traditional garments) and wearing their medals above their left breasts.

[44] This is an important point as the poor quality of kindergartens was used to justify the retrenchment of the state child care sector in the early 1990s by forcing women to leave work to look after their children until the age of three.

change gender attitudes, behaviours and family lives, and encouraged men to share domestic burdens of housework and child-rearing.[45] Filatova, the Russian wife of the Brezhnev-era Chairman Yu. Tsedenbal was reported to have said that upon arriving in Mongolia, she was surprised to see that Mongolian men's participation in family life was much higher compared to Russian men.[46] This is indeed an experience for many Mongolians and possibly more so among urban intelligentsia. In the context of the suppression of sexuality,[47] the official stress on women's equality, the strict censorship of media and the absence of a competitive market, women were not subjected to the capitalist-type sexual objectification and commodification and oppressive standards of beauty. The ban on private property likely supported relative gender equality while the biggest structural inequality was possibly the one between urban and rural areas (Bulag, 1998; Ochir et al., 2003).

These egalitarian trends co-existed with the preservation and possibly reinforcement of patriarchal relations within households and at command levels. Most women did face a second shift after work, especially if their children were not old enough to assist or even take over some chores. Moreover, it is likely that violence against women was wide-spread but left unaddressed by the party-state and its auxiliary organizations. Buyandelger (2013) described a case of a rural Buryad woman who was brutally abused for many years by her husband, without receiving any support from her relatives, neighbours, government bodies, the party or mass organizations. The situation may have been similar, perhaps to a lesser degree, among urban intelligentsia. Both my parents, now in their mid-eighties, confirmed that domestic violence did happen but it was never taken up by the party, which routinely

---

[45] I and my colleagues also discussed this at length in one of our research workshops. This aspect of Mongolian history and culture is not well studied. The primary motivation of the party-state may have been to liberate women to effectively mobilize them into the workforce. However, the grassroots level propagandists may have been sincerely eager to advance equality and transform family lives.

[46] These cultural changes during state-socialism were discussed in MONFEMNET's Annual Analytical Discussions in 2009 with some seventy participants who were men and women of various generations.

[47] At work and in public, gender differences were supposed to disappear while at home, men and women were supposed to actively procreate. Sex education was absent in schools and girls were prohibited to wear their hair loose or wear make-up, jewelry, short skirts, form-fitting clothes, etc. Attempts to look attractive and sexy were condemned as frivolous and bourgeois. These rules relaxed somewhat as girls reached adulthood and towards late socialism. Still, I remember how the last secondary school I attended strictly disciplined our femininities and how many women in public service chose to wear drab suits.

interfered in private lives in cases of divorce and extramarital affairs.[48] The same was likely true of sexual harassment, especially given the arbitrary power of bureaucrats had increased in the late-socialist period and most of the *dargas* (bosses) were men. It is nevertheless safe to say that by the 1980s, the socio-economic status of Mongolian women was rather high. By the 1980s, 'residues of feudalism,' including women's oppression, were largely believed to have been eradicated and women's equality achieved[49] thanks to the 'beloved' and 'beneficial' MPRP.[50]

2.3 Postsocialist Mongolia

2.3.1 Political reforms in the 1990s

In the late 1980s, in the opening provided by *Perestroika,* clandestine pro-democracy gatherings began, allowed but monitored by the MPRP Central Committee (Rossabi, 2005)*.* The movement, led by young urban intellectuals (many of whom were members of the MPRP and children of the party elite), continued to gather momentum, growing nationally, involving different social strata, organizing mass demonstrations and hunger strikes, and increasingly demanding democratization. In 1990, the Central Committee negotiated a series of power-sharing arrangements with the democratic opposition, including the first popular elections in 1990 to form an interim government. The regime change to a market-based liberal democracy thus began through a process transitologists have named 'a pacted transition' (O'Donnel & Schmitter, 1986; Palma, 1990). According to Ts. Batbayar (1998), "the first priority for young democrats was how to get rid of Soviet dominance rather than how to introduce democracy" and since the MPRP rule was seen as a political mechanism for perpetuating Soviet control over Mongolia, "the removal of the MPRP's monopoly of power was seen as an act of political decolonization" (pp. 40-41).

---

[48] My mother worked for the Mongolian National Radio for over thirty years and she was a party member. She does not remember a single party meeting that took up a case of domestic violence although she remembers meetings when men and women were chastised for leaving their spouses or taking up a lover.
[49] We encountered the lingering effects of this propaganda in 2009: a number of NGO women responded in a survey that patriarchy has been abolished or that there were only some insignificant residues of it left (Tumursukh & Davaasuren, 2009).
[50] These are adjectives that were habitually attached to the MPRP.

The new democratic constitution was adopted on January 13, 1992 following a broadly consultative process inside and outside the parliament (Chimid et al., 2016). The country was named *Mongol Uls* (Mongol nation/country) and established as a parliamentary democracy with a seventy-six-seat unicameral *Ulsyn Ikh Khural* (State Great Khural) as the highest organ of state power, and with a popularly elected president with a limited role. The supreme goal of Mongolia as a nation-state was formulated in the preamble as follows:

> We, the people of Mongolia:
> - consolidating and strengthening the independence and sovereignty of our state,
> - respecting and upholding the human rights and freedom, justice, and unity of our nation,
> - inheriting and cherishing the traditions of our statehood, history and culture,
> - considering and respecting the accomplishments of human civilization,
> - shall aspire to the supreme goal of building and developing a humane, civic[51] and democratic society in our motherland ("Mongol ulsyn Undsen khuuli [Constitution of Mongolia]," 1992).

"Securing democracy, justice, freedom, equality, national unity and respecting the rule of law" were stated as the fundamental principles of workings of the state in Article 1.2. ("Mongol ulsyn Undsen khuuli [Constitution of Mongolia]," 1992). Chapter two enumerates a rather comprehensive list of human rights and freedoms, including the right to equality and non-discrimination, civil and political rights such as freedom of speech and assembly, and social and cultural rights such as the right to free basic education and assistance in old age. Importantly, it guaranteed the right to private property in the following wording in Para. 4 of Article 16:

> The right to fair acquisition, possession and inheritance of movable and immovable property. Illegal confiscation and requisitioning of the private property of citizens shall be prohibited. If the State and its organs appropriate a private property on the basis of exclusive public need, then there shall be [fair] payment of compensation and cost.

In 1992, the first parliamentary elections considered free and fair were held under the new constitution, returning seventy-two of the seventy-six seats to the MPRP. In 1996, the

---

[51] In Mongolian, the word is *irgenii* (of the citizen/citizen's).

Mongolian Social Democratic Party (MSDP) and the Mongolian National Democratic Party (MNDP) and two smaller opposition parties formed a 'Democratic Union' coalition to compete against the dominant MPRP. The International Republican Institute (IRI) and the Konrad Adenauer Foundation (KAS) aided the coalition to develop their election platform and plan their campaign (Rossabi, 2005). The second free and fair parliamentary elections resulted in a peaceful transition of power to the opposition, leading external observers to cheerfully conclude that, having passed the test of two peaceful transitions of power, Mongolian democracy was firmly on its way to democratic consolidation (Fish, 1998; Ginsburg, 1998; Severinghaus, 1999). Other changes in society such as opening up to the outside world, the rapid growth of independent (at least from the state) media, an emerging NGO sector as well as market-oriented economic reforms, seen as part-and-parcel of democratization, were regarded as supporting this conclusion.

2.3.2 Economic reforms

Mongolia's fragile economy had fallen with the Berlin Wall. The sudden dissolution of Comecon and withdrawal of Soviet aid, which alone accounted for some 30% of the GDP annually (Ts. Batbayar, 1998), left an enormous gap in the economy. Mongolia lost not only external subsidies that underpinned its social and economic infrastructure but also the guaranteed external markets for its exports. The country plunged into a deep economic crisis. The response to this crisis was a rapid marketization through 'shock therapy' as desired by passionate young Mongolian free marketeers-cum-democrats and supported by international financial institutions such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the World Bank and the Asian Development Bank (ADB) who also held strings to the much needed international aid (Assa.mn, 2014, December 7; Bayartsetseg, 2014; Rossabi, 2005; Tomlinson, 1998, December 7). Despite heated debates in both MPRP and opposition parties and in the parliament, the free market proponents won. As Rossabi (2005) characterized the situation, "the IMF, World Bank, ADB, USAID, and JICA, the Japanese International Cooperation Agency" rushed in to fill the empty space left by the Soviets and Comecon, conflating democracy with market economy and promoting rapid liberalization (p. 246). The deal was further sealed when Mongolia joined the WTO in 1997.

The administration of the 'shock' started early in 1991. Government Resolution No. 20 was passed on January 15, 1991, devaluing the national currency by half overnight and starting the first 'shock' of price liberalization (Bayartsetseg, 2014), plunging the population into poverty and driving them to the brink of a hunger crisis (Steiner-Khamsi & Stolpe, 2004). Three days later, the Government started the privatization of livestock and state-owned enterprises, resulting in a dramatic drop in livestock sector productivity and a disproportionate accumulation of assets in the hands of the party elites (Bayartsetseg, 2014). Four months later, trade was liberalized, wiping out 90% of the domestic production (Bayartsetseg, 2014). Privatization and trade liberalization had a combined effect of de-industrialization.

While some restructuring of the economy was unavoidable, the imposition of the neoliberal reforms on the uninformed population in one authoritarian gesture and in swift succession had a profoundly debilitating effect on society. Unemployment and poverty were exacerbated by the dissolution of state enterprises and the reduction in staff, combined with cuts in social spending and social infrastructure, including childcare facilities and rural school dorms. Women were the first to be retrenched from the formal sector under the pretext of humanely enabling them to engage in their childcare work by retiring earlier[52] (UNIFEM, 2001, p. 41) and looking after their young children until they reached three years of age. In 1994, based on a 1990 revision of the pension law, about 20,000 women aged 35-55 were pensioned off because of having four or more children (UNIFEM, 2001, p. 41). Divorce rates and violence against women and children climbed. Crime, aggression, and alcoholism were on the rise and beggars and street children began to emerge from the depths of deepening poverty.

2.3.3 Democratic progress and regression

While Western academic scholars and lay observers (Fish, 1998; Ginsburg, 1997, 1998; Severinghaus, 1999) continued to extoll the virtues of Mongolia's democracy, focused on the regular 'free and fair' elections and market reforms, ominous anti-democratic undercurrents were coming to a fruition (Tumursukh, 2009). In the second decade of postsocialism,

---

[52] In 1994, based on a 1990 revision of the pension law, about 20,000 women aged 35-55 were pensioned off because of having four or more children.

Mongolia's political developments were characterized more by stagnation and deterioration than by transformation towards a functioning humane and democratic society, with mounting electoral fraud, growing corruption in the government, a stunted multi-party system, a weak judiciary, politically controlled media, and inadequate protection of human rights (Tumursukh, 2009). During this decade, it appeared that the realization dawned on significant segments of the population that the 'temporary' conditions of stark poverty and inequality were here to stay.

Not surprisingly, the rapid economic growth from 2003 was accompanied by widening inequalities between the rich and the poor, between men and women, and between Ulaanbaatar and peripheries. In 1999 and 2002, summer draughts and winter blizzards (*dzud*) decimated livestock, impoverishing herders who were no longer organized in collectives, nor protected from such calamities by government schemes. Thousands of rural migrants moved to the capital city, largely settling in informal, poorly serviced *ger* districts, and thousands engaged in artisanal mining (Fritz, 2008). From 2002, the pace of economic growth increased, peaking in 2004 at 10.6% and continuing at an average of 8.7% until 2008 (The World Bank, 2009, February, p. 17). GDP per capita more than doubled between 2004 and 2007. Government tax revenues and budget expenditure rose, especially on public servants' salaries, pensions and social transfers, but the modest budget surplus quickly turned to a large deficit when the global economic downturn hit Mongolia (The World Bank, 2009, April, 2009, May). The rapid economic expansion was accompanied by soaring inflation (34.2% in August 2008), driven mainly by 25-40% price increases for key food staples such as flour and meat as well as for oil and coal. Costs of key services also sharply rose: by 74% for water, 76% for hospital services, 66% for higher education, 28% and 39% for electricity and heating, and 50% for bus fares (The World Bank, 2007, 2008, October).

The growth episode did not translate into a lower poverty rate, which rose to 42.1% by mid-2008 from 36.1% in 2002/2003 (National Statistical Office of Mongolia, 2009; National Statistical Office of Mongolia, World Bank, & United Nations Development Program, 2004). Spatial and social inequalities increased. In 2008, poverty in Ulaanbaatar was lowest at 21.9% while higher in *aimag* centers at 34.9% and highest in the countryside at 49.7%. Time and income gaps were also significant. Rural men and women earned 2.2 and 3.8 times less respectively compared to their urban counterparts despite working 2.5 hours longer per day.

The Gini coefficient increased from 0.33 in 2003 to 0.36 in 2008. On average, the income of the wealthiest decile grew nearly eight times the income of the poorest decile (National Statistical Office of Mongolia, 2007). The ADB Country Poverty Assessment report warned against a high risk of these inequalities becoming self-reinforcing as richer people progressively captured a larger share of national wealth (Asian Development Bank, 2009).

Persistent corruption coupled with the flow of mining profits intensified self-interested competition among the political elites between and within the two main political parties: the MPRP, which increasingly sought to distance itself from its state-socialist past (shedding 'revolutionary' from its name in 2010), and the Mongolian Democratic Party (MDP), a 2000 merger of a left-leaning MSDP and right-leaning MNDP and smaller opposition parties united primarily on an anti-MPRP ticket. The growing frustration of citizens over self-interested politics, the disappointing performance of both main political parties, persistent poverty and increasing inequities, culminated in the first ever post-election violence in July 2008 (Open Society Forum et al., 2008, July 2; Tumursukh, 2009). The event shocked society, bringing back memories of the 1930s repressions.

These trends only solidified in the third decade of postsocialism. The current party system only represents a small wealthy minority, leaving the vast majority of the Mongolian population without political representation. In an effort to boost their legitimacy, the MPRP and MDP have resorted to increasingly ethno-nationalist populist rhetoric. Moreover, the ethno-nationalist forces have been increasingly positioning themselves to fill in the gap in the political space, becoming more institutionalized and politically savvy (Bulag, 1998; Davaasuren, 2008; Tumursukh, 2001). This trend is set against a backdrop of overall decline in the socio-economic status of women, limited representation of women at political levels, rising violence against women, and proliferation of sexual objectification of women and middle-class housewife images in the media.

2.3.4 Civil society and women-led advocacy NGOs

The first independent citizen-initiated organizations were formed in the early 1990s by women who had been active in the dissident movements and were affiliated with the democratic opposition parties (Center for Citizens' Alliance, 2006; Tumursukh & Davaasuren,

2009). Initially, these organizations ran as large clubs where women came together to discuss pressing issues faced by the fast changing society and determine their priorities for collective action. They had close ties with the opposition political parties, with at least one organization initially formed as the party wing for women (the Women for Social Progress Movement that started as the Social-Democratic Women's Movement). The opposition parties, now legal and commanding some resources gained from the State (e.g., party buildings) initially provided space and other support to the women's groups.

Under the influence of western funding and NGOs such as The Asia Foundation (TAF) (US) and the KAS (Germany), these organizations soon transformed into Western-style office-based and staffed NGOs (Center for Citizens' Alliance, 2006; Tumursukh & Davaasuren, 2009). As the new multi-party system became institutionalized as a male-dominated sphere, NGOs provided a new and dynamic avenue for well-educated and politically active women to channel their energies towards promoting democratic reforms and social development in the country. This energy, supported by limited international funding, gave rise to a number of women-led advocacy NGOs, which grew to form the backbone of Mongolia's emergent civil society. Since the early 1990s, women NGO activists have led the way in policy analysis and advocacy, human rights and democracy education, participatory training, public forums and policy discussions, networking and coalition-building, community development and grassroots empowerment, the development of an egalitarian organizational culture and inclusive social spaces, the monitoring of human rights, legal aid, and many other projects and processes that are essential for the development and functioning of a democratic society (Tumursukh, 2013).

As Chapter 6 will discuss in more detail, the number of NGOs quickly from the mid-1990s, facilitated by the passage of the 1997 NGO law and an inflow of donor funding. In 2000, already 1,615 NGOs were registered (Consulting and Business Center of the Academy of Management, Gender Center for Sustainable Development, & Consulting Unit LLP, 2000). The number grew to at least 5,077 in 2005 (Democracy Education Center (DEMO), 2005). In 2017, the National Statistical Committee reported there were 12,851 registered NGOs (National Statistical Office of Mongolia, 2017). However, most of these NGOs exist on paper. Most active NGOs are concentrated in the capital city (Tumursukh, 2013). Numerically, the human rights-based women-led advocacy NGOs are now a small minority in the broader field of civil

society but they have played a key role in the overall development of civil society, staking out an independent, albeit fragile, space outside the State and political parties.

2.4 Summary

In this chapter, my goal has been to locate Mongolia in time and history as well as the present global economic order. Mongolia's nomadic-cum-military origins have always set it apart from its sedentary neighbours and rice-growing East Asian civilizations. There appears to have been greater social mobility and some degree of what we would today call 'democracy' in the military confederation of tribes. While we know very little of women, they too appear to have had a significant degree of freedom compared to Asian women from land-tied cultures. These features begin to change during the Manchu period, when Mongolians' mobility became restricted and access to the accumulation of wealth could no longer achieved by raiding the southern neighbour.

The Manchu period led to the disintegration of the traditional tribal system, loosening clan and family ties and relaxing sexual mores. Under the pressure from western colonial powers, the Manchu imperial oppression not only intensified but increasingly took a form of mercantile exploitation by Chinese trading firms. The socialist history taught that Mongolia skipped over the stage of capitalism, making a leap from feudalism directly into the 'more advanced stage of development,' namely socialism (Bulag, 1998; Steiner-Khamsi & Stolpe, 2006). Yet, a close look at the late Manchu period shows that Mongolia did have some experience of marketization and monetization under disastrously unequal power relations. Chinese traders backed by the imperial power of the Manchu, wrapped Mongolians in a tightening net of debt. The devastating effect on the common people was exacerbated by the corruption and exploitation of the feudal and religious nobility. It was only the People's Revolution aided by the Red Russians that saved Mongolia from dissolution as a nation.

Mongolia's geopolitical location has been one of the most decisive factors in determining its historical trajectory. Post-transition discourses on the socialist past have tended to either exaggerate the evils of authoritarianism or inflate the progress achieved during state-

socialism.[53] Mongolia did indeed achieve significant levels of development during the socialist period, with substantial aid from the Soviet Union and Comecon countries. It developed a modern administrative system, an extensive network of public services and social protection mechanisms, eliminated illiteracy and venereal diseases, trained and educated its population, organized its agriculture, developed light and heavy industries, and built modern cities. This development was not merely accompanied by but was largely achieved through submission to Moscow's control, several waves of repressions, suffocating paternalism, authoritarianism, and exploitation of the people. The state developed a dual approach to women. On one hand, it emphasized women's liberation from slavery under the feudal patriarchy and stressed women's equality in employment and education. On the other hand, it exploited women's reproductive capacity to increase the population size and maintain their families through unpaid work while extracting their labour for the formal economy. This triple burden was significantly eased for women in the cities and other settled areas by the provision of free social services.

Despite the promise of a humane, democratic and wealthy society, the political and economic liberalization after the fall of the Berlin Wall has resulted in a stratified society, with large sections of the society caught in deep poverty and an increasingly oligarchic and masculine control of the political system. While the state has lost its direct control over women's reproductive lives, ethno-nationalist and traditionalist discourses have promoted the same dehumanizing utilitarian approach to women as key to ensuring national survival. The neoliberal policies that shrunk public services and expanded the informal economy have undermined women's socio-economic status. Politically, few women have pursued a leadership career through political parties. The political energy of large numbers of educated women has been channelled into and through a new space: civil society. This thesis is about the story of how women have constructed this new space and themselves under conditions of neoliberal hegemony. To tell this story, I first sought to clarify what this thing called 'neoliberalism' is and this topic is the main focus of the next chapter.

---

[53] These discourses proliferated through mid-2000s, especially strongly during election campaign periods, until the MPRP and opposition parties began to form grand coalitions following the 2004 election, giving rise to the convergence the two main parties that was later named MANAN. *Manan* means 'fog' and also stands for MAN (MPP) + AN (DP).

Chapter 3 : Perspectives on neoliberalism(s)

Developing a theoretical, political and historical stance

> As a result, peoples of distant zones were drawn into the vortex of change the origins of which were obscure to them …
>
> - Karl Polanyi, *The Great Transformation: The Political and Economic Origins of Our Time*
>
> One of the most conspicuous deficiencies of general economic theory, from the point of view of the periphery, is its false sense of universality.
>
> - Raul Prebisch, *The Havana Manifesto*

3.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I start by sharing the intellectual journey I travelled to develop a theoretical *and* a political perspective on neoliberalism. Following a brief auto-ethnographic reflection, I begin with political economy perspectives, exploring the origins of modern capitalism with Karl Polanyi as my guide, then reviewing some of the Global North and the Global South perspectives on the ascendance of neoliberalism. Then, I look at the postsocialist experiences of neoliberal democratization. Next, I seek to explore the intellectual and conceptual developments and constituents of neoliberal thought (if the term can ever be used in a singular form) in order to develop a more nuanced analytical understanding of the definition of neoliberalism and its hegemonic power. As critical information and discussion on neoliberalism is very scarce in the Mongolian context, I have opted for more detail in this section. Given the scarcity of knowledge in Mongolia about the historical developments of the contemporary global order, capitalism and liberal democracy, giving a long-term historical perspective on neoliberalism was also deemed important.

3.2 The context of neoliberal globalization

It is telling that for me, as a Mongolian and an activist, it came as a surprise, to hear New Zealand activists speak critically of neoliberal policy reforms since 1990s. My first exposure to these discussions in New Zealand was at Kotare Trust's workshop in 2014, about five months after my arrival in New Zealand. I remember feeling quite amazed that the Kiwi activists drew their timeline similarly to Mongolians – the 1990s were pinpointed as the key period of

change, when neoliberal policies began to be implemented in earnest, creating, from what I heard, problems that were, in some ways, similar to ours – maintaining independence *vis-à-vis* the state, securing resources necessary for building and maintaining organizations and sustaining action, and promoting solidarity among activist organizations and movements in a competitive and divisive environment. It was with the same sense of wonderment that I first read analyses from the Canadian context about the *re-emergence* of the 'volunteer' in the 1990s, that accompanied the *structural adjustments* and concomitant *downloading* of many of the previously state-performed or state-funded care functions onto the 'third sector' and *volunteers* (Mosher, 2000; Neysmith, 2000; Prentice & Ferguson, 2000).

My (initial) surprise in encountering these criticisms is an indication of how persuasively 'democracy' 'came' to Mongolia, 'neoliberally' packaged. Downsizing the government and 'offloading' many of its functions was seen, aside from economic arguments, as a necessary democratizing step to reform the socialist-authoritarian-paternalist state and to free people from its suffocating infantilization.[54] The term most commonly used in expressing this view has been *belenchlekh setgelgee*, approximately meaning 'mentality of the spoon-fed,' i.e. expecting an easy life with all the necessities provided by the paternalist state, passively waiting to be taken care of, lacking initiative.[55] Democracy supporters embraced the idea that cutting 'excessive' state involvement, both care and control, would empower and liberate individuals through *responsibilization.* Voluntarism, and civil society as the hallmark of voluntary and independent citizen action, have, therefore, been celebrated signs of people shaking off their dependency on the state, assuming responsibilities for their own lives and taking initiative as democratic citizens. Underlying this discourse has been an understanding of freedom as an idealized notion of self-reliance. I too subscribed to this view in the late 1980s and the 1990s. Among the most systematic and vocal proponents of this position have been the self-proclaimed libertarians who consist of a network of businessmen, politicians, academics, actors, artists, young professionals and students. The Mongolian Libertarian Foundation (MLF)[56] has actively promoted its philosophy through various means, including

---

[54] Václav Havel's concept of "responsibilityism" was possibly very influential in spreading these views (Falk, 2018)

[55] Bulag (1998) also discusses this term in his Nationalism and Hybridity in Mongolia (pp. 50-51).

[56] I encountered the MLF (*Mongolyn Libertari San*) around 2008 through the networks I was developing with some of the Mongolian National University's Law School professors who had been supporting many of the young

the translation and publication of books,[57] academic and public lectures, social networking, and summer training for youth.

Through my surprise, I 'glimpsed' a possibly fruitful avenue for problematizing what Mongolians have come to accept as 'democratic' essentials and, therefore, constants (e.g., a limited (welfare) state, the responsibilization of individuals, and volunteering). After all, countries such as New Zealand and Canada were 'democratic' before the neoliberal changes. Secondly, my surprise was an indication of the entrenchment of the 'development' discourse in which the objects of structural reforms are invariably 'developing,' i.e. non-Western, countries and the West appears as supplying the expert knowledge, authorship of reforms and models of success to be emulated. As human rights and women's rights activists, I and my colleagues had been exposed to important 'Third World' activist critiques of neoliberal globalization and Western hegemony, even if not always systematically,[58] through our international and regional networks.[59] In these discussions, the West tended to figure, if mentioned, as a hegemonic force imposing harmful neoliberal policies onto the global South. In Mongolia, in addition to economic arguments, the legitimacy of structural adjustment programs was, as mentioned above, closely tied to the imperatives of 'democratic' reforms. Yet here, quite unexpectedly from my perspective as a Mongolian, Western 'advanced democracies' and 'highly developed countries' themselves appeared as *objects* of neoliberal

---

people MONFEMNET began to support through the "Hands Up for Your Rights!" campaign from 2008. I attended several informal networking events organized by the MLF. Most of the present at those events were men, including wealthy businessman Tsenguun (*Altan Taria* Co. Ltd.) who sponsors the foundation, Baabar and his friend Tsenddoo (publicists), Sosorbaram (actor), Bat-Uul (then MDP MP) and Temuujin (former law professor and MDP MP in 2008-2012). Baabar and Sosorbaram are well known for their prominent roles in the dissident movements. The MLF stressed the dissemination of libertarian ideas and sponsored the Libertarian Lecture Series and summer training workshops for youth organized by the law school professors and their youth partners. I participated in some of those as a guest lecturer or trainer. In retrospect, the MLF is very much like the Mongolian version of Mont Pelerin Society as described in the volume edited by Mirowski and Plehwe (2015b).

[57] Economics professor B. Batchuluun provided a helpful list of eighteen books translated and/or published by the MLF in his *Erkh chuluunii daisan: Libertari uzliin undsuud* (*Enemy of Freedom. Foundations of Libertarianism*) (Batchuluun, 2010, pp. 22-24).

[58] With an exception of the CHRD, which has been more systematically and critically informed about neoliberalism and macro-economic policies.

[59] Depending on the NGOs, these have included the Asia Pacific Forum on Women, Law and Development (APWLD), Forum-Asia, Asia Pacific Research Network, the IBON Foundation, the International Women's Rights Action Watch Asia Pacific (IWRAW-AP), the Association for Asia and South Pacific for Basic and Adult Education (ASPBAE), and the Association for Women's Rights in Development (AWID).

structural adjustment programs and were struggling, as a consequence, with some of the same issues we have been.

What I intend to emphasize through this auto-ethnographic reflection is the importance of destabilizing the seemingly timeless, coherent and universally valid model of neoliberal democracy that has influenced postsocialist Mongolia. A critical discussion of postsocialist transformations, including processes of democratization and civil society development, necessitates the unpacking of the context of 'neoliberal globalization.' To this end, in this chapter, I will seek to piece together a historicized, albeit necessarily abbreviated and generalized, account of 'neoliberalism' as gleaned from a selected set of analyses by diverse scholars to clarify what makes it 'neo,' why it has risen to hegemony, and what its globalization entails.

3.3 Political economy perspectives

3.3.1 The origins of our time - the birth of capitalism

In his 1944 book,[60] *The Great Transformation*, Karl Polanyi (2001) provided what Fred Block described as "the most powerful critique yet produced of market liberalism - the belief that both national societies and the global economy can and should be organized through self-regulating markets" in his introduction to the 2001 edition of the book (Polanyi, 2001, p. xvii). In this seminal work, drawing on history and ethnography, Polanyi demonstrated that all pre-existing economic orders, regardless of their great diversity, had been, *as a rule*, mere functions of the social worlds they were contained in. He argued that these economies were *embedded* in social relationships and driven by non-economic motives, with the general principles of *reciprocity*, *redistribution*, and *householding* underlying the production and distribution processes and the market was never more than an accessory to the economic life (Polanyi, 2001).

According to Polanyi (2001), the nineteenth century civilization ushered in by the advent of the industrial capitalism was an *unnatural exception* to this rule in that it adopted, as its

---

[60] Ironically, the neoliberal classic *The Road to Serfdom* by Hayek was also published the same year (Polanyi-Levitt, 2006).

central organizing principle, the utopian ideal of a self-regulating market driven by a singular motive of self-interested gain-seeking. Justified theoretically by economic liberalism (Adam Smith and his followers), this ideal required a fundamental rearrangement of the society to enable the market mechanism. Polanyi (2001) reasoned that, in principle, a *market economy*, i.e. an economy solely regulated by market prices, can only function in *a market society* where all elements of industry, including land, labor and money, are commodified so as to be freely bought and sold. However, since land and labor are "no other than the human beings themselves of which every society consists and the natural surroundings in which it exists" (Polanyi, 2001, p. 75), their transformation into *fictitious* commodities meant no less than the subjugation "of the substance of society itself to the laws of the market" (Polanyi, 2001, p. 75). Such a society is inherently unstable and self-destructive. Treating land, labor and money as if they were *real* commodities would fatally imperil human society and its natural environment. Apart from being morally impermissible, the *disembedded* market system is a practical impossibility as it cannot exist unless "the human and natural substance of society" (Polanyi, 2001, p. 3), including businesses, are provided with some measure of protection against its dangers.

Polanyi's (2001) central argument is that far from evolving naturally, the free market system was imposed, through deliberate and often violent state action, by the ascending bourgeois classes progressively empowered politically through the development of constitutionalism. Thus, in England, the 'free' labor market was the result of the eighteenth century enclosures that violently uprooted and impoverished the smallholders and farm workers, and the poor law reforms of the 1830s that forced the poor to sell their labor under the threat of starvation or the workhouse (Polanyi, 2001). The market rationality was essentially enforced through a process of internal colonization as it required the dissolution of any and all cultural norms and social institutions that might protect people and nature from a complete exposure to the market. This is why the Industrial Revolution caused a deeper damage to the social fabric than economic exploitation and material destitution, however grandiose their proportions. It plunged the masses of common people into the depths of human degradation (not just poverty but the loss of dignity and standards) by destroying their social and cultural existence (Polanyi, 2001). Polanyi (2001) argued that this social catastrophe was magnified by the ruthless speed of the reforms, propelled by a blind faith in the economic liberalism in

spontaneous progress. The social impact of this transition was less severe in continental Europe and North America thanks to the time-lag of some fifty years in the arrival of industrial market capitalism there and a different cultural, economic and political configuration of the social classes (Polanyi, 2001). Under the British hegemony, with free trade facilitated by the gold standard, the industrial market capitalism spread globally with an effectiveness comparable "only to the most violent outbursts of religious fervor in history" (Polanyi, 2001, p. 31). By the end of the nineteenth century, a global economy was born, which demanded that foreign exchange be kept stable to maintain the gold standard and the free trade at whatever domestic sacrifice (Polanyi, 2001).

Further, according to Polanyi (2001), this expansion of the market system was, inevitably and almost immediately, accompanied by an institutionalization of a plethora of measures designed to restrict the market, including factory laws, unionization, social legislation, public works and utilities, tariffs, import quotas, subsidies, capital controls, cartels and trusts. Faced with the high social and human costs of the economic liberalization, society thus responded with a deep-seated self-protective countermove which, contrary to the belief of liberal economists, was unplanned and spontaneous: while "(l)aissez-faire was planned; planning was not" (Polanyi, 2001, p. 147). Contrary to Marx, this countermovement was not limited to the industrial working class but came from different social strata and in many forms, including fascism and socialism. On this point, Polanyi (2001) defined socialism as "the tendency inherent in industrial civilization to transcend the self-regulating market by consciously subordinating it to a democratic society" (p. 242).

Polanyi (2001) argued that this *double movement*, i.e. the push towards marketization (the expansion of market capitalism) and the society's self-protective countermovement, has shaped the history of the nineteenth century, including the development of the modern liberal states with extensive administrative functions to not only enforce the market economy but also to make it more humanly bearable and socially acceptable. Polanyi (2001) saw the root causes of the two world wars in the dynamic of this double movement: the self-protective interventionism eventually jammed the gears of the market mechanism, straining global and national economies and causing social and political upheaval. The attempt to organize the global economy based on market rationality resulted in the depression of the 1890s, leading to the First World War and subsequent Bolshevik revolution in Russia. The

inter-war attempt to restore the global liberal economic order aggravated the crises, prompting states to abandon the gold standard and retreat into extreme forms of economic nationalism, weakened liberal democracies, brought fascist regimes to the fore, and precipitated the Second World War (Polanyi, 2001).

Both Polanyi and Keynes emphasized the disastrous consequences of the international gold standard, which was a mechanism that imposed deflationary measures on debtor countries to protect the assets of the British and American financiers, essentially prioritizing the economic interests of the propertied classes at the expense of the livelihoods of the laboring classes (Polanyi-Levitt, 2006, p. 5). As Keynes (2010) keenly observed, "(t)he gold standard, with its dependence on pure chance, its faith in 'automatic adjustments', and its general regardlessness of social detail, is an essential emblem and idol of those who sit in the top tier of the machine" (p. 224). The utopian project of economic liberalism exacted unbearably high costs. Writing during the Second World War, Polanyi envisioned new paths opening to subordinate the economy to democratic politics once the blind belief in the possibility and superiority of the self-regulating market was abandoned. These paths and emergent patterns would differ from country to country depending on their varied social contexts.[61]

3.3.2 'Embedded liberalism' aka the era of state-managed welfare capitalism

The compromise of 'embedded liberalism,' a term coined by John Ruggie building on Polanyi's analysis (Ruggie, 1982, p. 390), was reached in the aftermath of the Second World War: "(a) grand social bargain whereby society agreed to liberalize markets but also to share the social adjustment costs that open markets inevitably produce" (Ruggie, 2016a, p. 3). Unlike the liberalism of the gold standard and the pre-war economic nationalism, this new world order was predicated on domestic interventionism while maintaining the multilateralism (Ruggie, 1982, p. 390) that was so essential for capitalism (D'Souza, 2018) through the Bretton Woods agreements and backed by the USA's willingness to float its dollar beyond its borders. According to Ruggie (2016a), besides the international balance of powers, particularly the replacement of UK by US as a hegemon, this new world order reflected the interests of

---

[61] Hypothetically, to extend this analysis, post-socialist societies may have arrived at different economic systems without the imposition of the market economy under the Western hegemony.

different social strata and shared normative views about the legitimate role of the state in managing the economy. For Ruggie (1982), the compromise was enabled by the strong consensus outside of the US[62] about the need to reassert broader social control and government authority over market forces and devise a framework that would enable governments to prioritize domestic social security and economic stability over international monetary policy without, however, losing the benefits of international free trade.

The class accommodation at the center of the compromise of embedded liberalism was necessitated by the dramatic redistribution of political and economic power that had taken place as a result of industrial capitalism itself and of the pressures of modern warfare and nation-building (Hobsbawm, 1992; Tilly, 1990). The extension of suffrage, the socio-political mobilization of the working classes, and the emergence of socialist parties and even governments (Ruggie, 1982, p. 388) had changed the internal balance of power between social classes. The class compromise between labor and capital, a crucial feature of the post-war reconstruction project and seen as key to maintaining domestic stability (Harvey, 2007, pp. 9-12), was mandated by, as Foucault put it, "the war pacts," i.e. "social pacts of a kind that promised – to those who were asked to go to war and get themselves killed – a certain type of economic and social organization which assured security (of employment, with regard to illness and other kinds of risk, and at the level of retirement)" (Foucault, 2008, p. 216). However, the demands for social protection came from all social strata across the political spectrum (Ruggie, 1982, p. 388). Thus began the era of state-managed welfare capitalism for the western industrialized world.

As Polanyi predicted, the state forms that emerged differed, ranging from social or Christian democratic in Western Europe to liberal democratic in US and highly bureaucratic in Japan (Harvey, 2007). However, according to David Harvey (2007), they strongly shared[63] a view that "the state should focus on full employment, economic growth, and the welfare of its citizens, and that state power should be freely deployed, alongside of or, if necessary, intervening in or even substituting for market processes to achieve these ends" (p. 10).

---

[62] The liberal economic orthodoxy was most prominent in New York financial circles (Ruggie, 1982, p. 390).
[63] With the US being somewhat of an exception. However, even the US came up with the New Deal based on some of these views.

Consequently, states employed Keynesian fiscal and monetary policies to stabilize business cycles and ensure full employment, instituted and/or strengthened labor protection mechanisms (minimum wage, trade unions and collective bargaining mechanisms), increased public spending and constructed far-reaching (although less so in the US and more so in Scandinavian countries) welfare systems (education, healthcare, social housing, etc.) (Harvey, 2007). To varying degrees, states planned national economic development, and maintained public ownership and management of strategic sectors such as minerals, transportation and automobiles. Furthermore, many states continued to protect their domestic markets and industries via tariffs, non-tariff measures and exchange rates (Kelsey, 1995, p. 16; Ruggie, 2016b, p. 4).

In the 1950s and 1960s, state-managed capitalism generated unprecedented levels of economic growth and increase in the material standard of living in Western industrial countries, laying the basis for more equitable long-term development (Harvey, 2007; Polanyi-Levitt, 2006; Ruggie, 2016b). However, the 1970s crisis of capital accumulation, with attendant high unemployment rates, soaring inflation, and fiscal crises, weakened the legitimacy and popularity of 'embedded liberalism,' creating an opening for "the neoliberal counter-revolution"[64] (Polanyi-Levitt, 2006, p. 3). Yet, Ruggie (2016b) argued, it is precisely the institutional foundation established under 'embedded liberalism' that enabled the current wave of neoliberal globalization. Thus, 'embedded liberalism' cushioned the adverse domestic effects of the exposure to international markets by allowing Western capitalist societies, including common men and women, to gradually adapt to the market economy in a relatively secure and stable environment, and develop resources and institutional capacity to cope with the new challenges brought by neoliberal globalization. In Polanyian terms, it had made market economy bearable.

---

[64] The revolutionary language was used by neoliberals themselves. For example, Klein (2007) quotes Jose Pinera, a self-described Chicago Boy who served as Pinochet's minister of labour and mining, saying that the reform in Chile was "the real revolution… a radical, comprehensive, and sustained move toward free markets" (p. 78).

3.3.3 The 'neoliberal turn'

Echoing Polanyi, David Harvey (2007) maintained that 'neoliberalism' was, in theory, a *utopian*[65] (and predictably failed) project to disembed the economy and reorganize international capitalism so as to establish an ideal-typical free market that would afford equal opportunities to all and ensure individual and societal freedom and prosperity. However, in practice, neoliberalism has been, unabashedly and extraordinarily successfully, "a *political* project[66] to re-establish the conditions for capital accumulation and to restore the power of the economic elites," albeit not necessarily to the same elite groups (Harvey, 2007, p. 19). According to Harvey (2007) and other Western scholars (Foucault, 2008; Klein, 2007; Polanyi-Levitt, 2006), 'the neoliberal turn' was a reaction to the significant concessions made to labor and the restrictions placed on capital by the interventionist state under the compromise of embedded liberalism. While capital was complacent enough to partake of this compromise in the expanding economy of the 1950s and 1960s, it was no longer so once the crises set in, diminishing profits. At the same time, socialist and communist forces were gaining ground, especially in continental Europe, advocating for the deepening of state control over the economy as a way out of the 'stagflation' (Harvey, 2007). In the context of the Cold War, exaggerated fears about the very existence of the capitalist order served to intensify and legitimate elite mobilization for the second wave of global economic liberalization (Harvey, 2007). Underlying this dynamic was the intrinsic dependence of capitalism on continuous market expansion, relying on exploitative class relations internally and exploitative (neo-)colonial relations externally (D'Souza, 2018).

"The neoliberal counter-revolution" intensified in the 1970s (Polanyi-Levitt, 2006, p. 3), championing a set of policies aimed at establishing free markets nationally and globally through, *inter alia*, deregulation, privatization, free trade, and downsizing of the welfare state (Harvey, 2007). In the West, Chile became known as the first extensive laboratory of neoliberal programming (Fischer, 2015; Harvey, 2007; Klein, 2007). There, riding on the shock waves created by the 1973 military coup d'état and the 1975 economic recession and backed

---

[65] Interestingly, Foucault also mentioned that Hayek quite purposefully sought to create a liberal utopia (Foucault, 2008, pp. 218-219).

by Pinochet's ruthless dictatorship, radical free market reforms were introduced as a 'shock therapy' by 'Chicago boys'[67] installed in key government positions with encouragement and support from the US and Milton Friedman as a personal advisor to Pinochet (Klein, 2007). Klein (2007) argued that the Chilean formula of paving the way for free market reforms with military force and political terror spread to other Latin American countries under the pretext of saving democracies from the terror of communism. The vast majority of the some 100,000-150,000 victims of the torture machines in Chile, Argentina, Uruguay, and Brazil were non-violent activists, academics, writers, workers, farmers, artists and other professionals with leftist views: "(t)o be leftist in those days was to be hunted" (Klein, 2007, p. 94). The right-wing economic reforms depended on the suppression of leftists.[68]

In the west, the birthplace of neoliberalism, the US and the UK spearheaded far-reaching macro-economic reforms in the 1980s, with Reagan and Thatcher elected with a mandate to revitalize the economy by liberating capital, deregulating industry, curbing trade union power, cutting social spending, and promoting competitive incentivization and individual responsibilization (Foucault, 2008; Harvey, 2007). Other OECD countries followed, albeit unevenly. In 1984, New Zealand starkly demonstrated the underlying trend toward the neoliberal convergence of the left and the right when its newly elected Labor Government launched a structural adjustment program to increase competition, reduce rigidities and lower inflation (Kelsey, 1995, p. 5). Global financial markets began their ascendance, galvanized by the deregulation of capital controls in the US and the UK and technological and institutional innovations (Naim, 2000; Polanyi-Levitt, 2006). The Washington Consensus, an opportune, if inaccurate, name given to the 'ten-best' economic reform prescriptions summarized by the US economist John Williamson in 1989, bolstered the global credibility and acceptance of the neoliberal policy orientation despite significant disagreement and

---

[67] Including actual graduates from the Chicago School of Economics and those who subscribed to the free market ideas promoted by it (Klein, 2007, pp. 7, 78). Interestingly, several decades later, in Russia, Yeltsin's team of economists who considered themselves devotees of Friedman and Hayek also referred to themselves as 'Chicago boys' (Klein, 2007, p. 222).

[68] In post-socialist countries, extreme forms of suppression were unnecessary given 'the fall of communism' had thoroughly discredited leftist views. This is not to say there is no suppression. In post-socialist Mongolia, proclaiming oneself as or being seen as left-wing would result in being shunned, ridiculed, verbally attacked (often in the form of 'democratic' 'debates') and shamed as retrograde, an ignoramus, a weakling, or an autocrat.

confusion with regard to much of its content (Naim, 2000). Neither last, nor least, the collapse of the communist bloc in 1989-1990 dealt a critical blow to the already weakened leftist ranks and served to solidify the global hegemony of neoliberalism (Ilkhamov, 2001; Kregel, 2006; Naim, 2000), and, with it, western cultural preponderance under US unilateralism (D'Souza, 2018).

3.4 History and political economy from the 'Global South' perspective

With his focus on the Western industrialized countries, Ruggie (1982) optimistically concluded that the postwar regime cannot be characterized as essentially liberal with "a lot of cheating" going on but that it was a different kind of a regime in which, based on a shared set of social values, the multilateralism and social protectionism were conditioned by one another (p. 398). In a similar vein, Helleiner (2014) argued that the formation of the postwar multilateral financial architecture through the 1944 negotiations held at Bretton Woods, New Hampshire, was strongly influenced by the ethos of 'embedded liberalism,' particularly by the US New Dealers' broad concern with poverty and social justice, their antipathy towards New York financial elites and the 'past' imperialist practices of the US, and their sincere commitment to supporting national development in the less developed countries to ensure international peace and stability. Moreover, in Helleiner's (2014) view, Latin American, Asian and African countries were able to directly contribute to the negotiations through their representation among the forty four country delegates present. Thus, according to Helleiner (2014), despite the British and American dominance at Bretton Woods and the underlying structural inequality between the Western powers and the less developed countries, the IMF and the World Bank emerged with built-in pro-development features beneficial to the latter.

However, the history of capitalist globalization looks very different from a non-Western[69] point of view. To start with, as Polanyi (2001) noted the colonial peoples lacked "the political status necessary to shelter themselves from the social dislocations caused by European trade

---

[69] I am using terms such as the 'West,' 'Global North,' 'non-western,' and 'Global South' to denote the particular formations of political, cultural and economic power and imbalances in the world and not in strictly geographic terms. The term 'West' thus refers to wealthy capitalist states in North America (Canada and US), UK, and parts of continental Europe (Germany, France, Scandinavian countries, Italy, Spain, etc.) as well as Australia and New Zealand.

policies" under the gold standard, and were denied "(t)he protection that the white man could easily secure for himself through the sovereign status of his communities"(p. 192). Further, as D'Souza (2018) argued, the New World Order that emerged from the great wars was largely a response to the inherent dependence of capitalism on imperialist expansion. Constructed "when the majority of humanity struggled under colonial or semi-colonial domination" (Prashad, 2014, p. 24), this new international system formalized the institutional, legal and ideological framework required for the transnational monopoly finance capitalism that began to emerge during the world wars from the ruins of the national-competitive-industrial capitalism of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries (D'Souza, 2018).

At Bretton Woods, most Asian and African countries were not independently present and had no real say in the negotiations dominated by US and UK. Keynes, chief negotiator for UK, remarked about their role that they "clearly have nothing to contribute and will merely encumber the ground" (Prashad, 2007, p. 68). The IMF and the World Bank were headquartered in the US, their policies controlled by Western powers, with the rest of the world disenfranchised from their governance (Prashad, 2014). It is no surprise, that as early as in the late 1950s and 1960s, during the heyday of state-led capitalism in the Global North, the Bretton Woods institutions were promoting the free market approach in the less developed countries despite even stronger arguments being made for an even greater role of the state in planning, managing, protecting and developing peripheral economies (Chandrasekhar, 2015; Prebisch, 1950).

The 'embedded liberalism' framework maintained the structure of global inequality, which facilitated capital accumulation in the Western industrial centres *at the expense* of the agriculture-based peripheries in the Global South. As Raul Prebisch, a prominent Argentinian economist and founder of the development theory, articulated in his historic 1949 report (1950), contrary to the equalizing and universalist assumptions of neo-classical trade theory,[70] free trade exacerbated global inequalities due to a systemic bias in favour of the industrial countries where business cycles originated, gains of productivity were greater, and labor was

---

[70] Interestingly, Prebisch wrote his much cited statement about the "false sense of universality" being "(o)ne of the most conspicuous deficiencies of general economic theory, from the point of view of the periphery" in the footnote to his report, not in the main text (1950, p. 7).

more organized and able to protect their wages and livelihoods during recessions. The downward pressure on prices during cyclical recessions, therefore, was systematically pushed out onto the peripheries, perpetuating underdevelopment in the Global South while subsidizing more equitable economic development in the Global North (pp. 10-14). At the same time, the capitalist cores were able to maintain full employment by keeping peripheral markets open for industrial products (Patnaik, 1997). Consequently, Prebisch (1950) recommended, *inter alia*, a more activist role for the state in promoting industrialization and diversification of the economy in peripheries to equalize the terms of the global trade, prioritizing the lifting of the general living standards in poorer countries.

This systemic disadvantage was exacerbated by the economic and non-economic coercion through which the Western industrial states accessed cheap raw materials and new markets in the less developed countries, and by colonial exploitation (Baran, 1957; Chandrasekhar, 2015; Patnaik, 1997). As Das, Kar, and Nawn (2016) recapped, Patnaik argued that the very appearance of success and stability of capitalism derives from this "institutionalized global mechanism of unequal interdependence," which "enables the capitalist core to simultaneously uphold the interests of the organized labour force as well as organized capital" (pp. 6-7).[71] No wonder that, as Ruggie (2016a) mentioned only in passing, most developing countries did not have the privilege of enjoying the cushioning that the state-managed welfare capitalism had provided in the Global North when they were subjected to the intensification of neoliberal globalization from the 1970s on.

Without the economic independence necessary to render substance to political sovereignty, the decolonization that peaked in the 1960s did not result in the desired independence and global equality (Bagchi, 2008; Baran, 1957; Chatterjee, 1993; D'Souza, 2018; Escobar, 1995). As countries formally decolonized, they were incorporated into the international inter-state system modelled by and after Western nation-states (D'Souza, 2018, p. 64; Sinclaire, 2017). The ideological bias of the international system was evident as the development agenda propagated by UN agencies and especially the Bretton Woods institutions was distinctly right

---

[71] To logically extend this analysis, given the centrality of class accommodation to the expansion and consolidation of western liberal democracies, their very maturation was subsidized by the less developed and less democratic countries of the Global South.

of centre, designed to keep the developing countries' markets open while preventing their migration towards a socialist path (Chandrasekhar, 2015, p. 1409; Rosen, 1985). With powers derived from the Global North due to their role as "important conduits for and coordinators of the recycling of global surpluses" to the developing countries, the international organizations, particularly the Bretton Woods institutions, wielded significant power over countries of the Global South (Chandrasekhar, 2015, p. 1409). Escobar (1995) argued that the invention of 'development' not only maintained the structure of global hierarchy but in fact deepened Western cultural hegemony through its West-centric colonizing regime of truth, knowledge and representation. Escobar (1995)analysed how the homogenizing dichotomous constructions of the developed 'First World' and underdeveloped 'Third World' served as ideological tools to legitimate Western domination in the former colonies in the name of modernization and development. The 'Third World,' which initially denoted a political movement of the non-aligned nations that sought a third space between the capitalist west and the communist east, was invested with a different meaning, referring to an underdeveloped 'dark' region (Escobar, 1995).

As Prashad (2014) narrated, countries of Asia, Africa and Latin America, with allies from other regions (e.g., Yugoslavia, Scandinavian countries, New Zealand), strategized to articulate and promote an alternative vision. The Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) was formed in 1956; the UN Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD)[72] was created in 1964 and the UN Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO) in 1966; the Group of 77 (G77) negotiating bloc was also formed in 1964[73] to advance the 'Third World' agenda, capitalizing on their demographic advantage in the General Assembly and working their way into various specialized agencies of the UN. According to Prashad (2014), the USSR and the Eastern bloc stood in parallel to rather than in alliance with the NAM and the G77 due to being wary of the UN and its bodies.[74] In 1974, emboldened by OPEC's demonstration that peripheries can

---

[72] It was founded in 1964 as a permanent intergovernmental body on trade, investment and development, with headquarters in Geneva. Prebisch played a key role in its establishment and was the first to lead the new body (Dosman, December 2001; Prashad, 2014).

[73] Initially, as a Group of 75, without Cuba and the Ivory Coast and including New Zealand (Toye, 2014).

[74] Thus, Mongolia, as part of the communist bloc, had no deep engagement in the UN or the Third World alliances and their perspectives on the world order. Yugoslavia, on the other hand, was actively involved in the founding of the NAM.

wield power through concerted action, the 'Third World' alliance proposed a program for a more democratic and egalitarian restructuring of the global economy. Thus, from the 1970s on, despite the fragility of its unity, the 'Third World' movement, with its well-articulated and substantiated proposal for a New International Economic Order (NIEO), growing in confidence and political power in various strategically occupied spaces within the UN system, was increasingly seen as a threat (Bair, 2015; Prashad, 2014).

Prashad (2014) recounted that, to counter the growing power of the 'Third World' movement, the Group of 7 (G7) was formed in 1973 upon the initiative of the US, comprising the US, the UK, West Germany, France, Canada, Japan and Italy. Two years later, this group launched a coordinated campaign, targeting the 'Third World' as well as the welfare states in Western countries, and the Communist bloc (Prashad, 2014). The campaign also involved staffing and institutional changes in international organizations, especially the IMF, World Bank and key UN organizations (Prashad, 2014). Divisive policies and categories such as the Less Developed Countries (LDCs) further weakened the fragile unity of the 'Third World.' The NIEO was neglected and the international debt crisis was leveraged to pressure 'developing' countries, through loan/aid conditionalities, to adopt neoliberal reforms (D'Souza, 2018; Klein, 2007; Naim, 2000; Toye, 2014). Ironically, the debtor/aid recipient countries had largely subsidized the accumulation of the global surpluses in the West, which in turn allowed the international organizations to provide the very same loans and aid.

In the early 1980s, the North-South dialogue on restructuring the international economic order ended with the arrival of conservative leaders in the rich capitalist countries (Thatcher in UK, Reagan in US, Kohl in Germany, and Namason in Japan) (Toye, 2014). Developing countries entered the Uruguay Round of the General Agreement on Trade and Tariffs (GATT) negotiations (1987–94) bound to trade liberalization through the structural adjustment programs and without organized leadership (Toye, 2014). The negotiations culminated in the creation of the World Trade Organization (WTO) in 1995 and the reform of the intellectual property regime. This regime essentially prevented technology transfer by making reverse engineering of technology illegal and enabled Northern corporations to take advantage of cheaper labour in the Global South while retaining the bulk of the sales profit as rent levied on their intellectual property, thus creating 'jobless growth' in the Global North (Prashad, 2014).

As discussed by D'Souza (2018), in the face of decolonization and in the context of the Cold War, the US developed 'democracy promotion' programs as an extension of its foreign policy, establishing a number of formally non-governmental but state-funded organizations such as the National Endowment for Democracy (NED) and The Asia Foundation (TAF) in the 1950s. From the 1970s on, she argued, these US-initiated and later internationalized 'democracy promotion' programs (implemented through a network of governmental, non-governmental and quasi-governmental bodies) propagated institutional reforms that in effect eroded national sovereignty in non-Western countries, 'softening' the ground for transnational capital (D'Souza, 2018). NIEO-inspired UN efforts to develop a code of conduct for transnational corporations were halted with the dissolution of the short-lived (1975-1992) UN Center on Transnational Corporations (UNCTC), which was set up to function as the secretariat of the Commission on Transnational Corporations (CTC) (Bair, 2015). In 1999, the UN Secretary General Kofi Annan announced the Global Compact in which multinationals prominently figured as development partners, shifting the focus from ethics to directing the "enlightened self-interest of companies" towards development (Bair, 2015, p. 347). The neoliberal counter-revolution within development was accomplished, strengthening the global infrastructure for neoliberal capitalism or, to use D'Souza's (2018) term, the transnational finance monopoly capitalism. It was the defeat of the NIEO that allowed the Washington consensus to emerge as dominant, paving the way for the global ascendance of the West-centric neoliberalism (Bair, 2015; Prashad, 2007).

3.5 The postsocialist era: neoliberalization-cum-democratization

When the Berlin Wall fell in 1989, Francis Fukuyama, then working for the US State Department, declared, as quoted by D'Souza (2018) that the world might be witnessing "the end point of mankind's [sic.] ideological evolution and the universalization of Western liberal democracy as the final form of human government"(p. 24). The Second World countries that had existed for decades in their own bubble, largely insulated from the colonial, neo-colonial and anti-colonial dynamics, had to rapidly integrate into the hierarchically organized Anglo-Eurocentric global order. They did so at a time when neoliberal counter-revolution was in ascendance. The 'Western *idea*' that had triumphed, as loftily pronounced by Fukuyama, was the neoliberal one, which predicated political freedoms and democratic institutions on

economic freedoms and market institutions, reversing the classical liberal tenets concerned with expanding political freedoms to secure economic freedoms (D'Souza, 2018).

At the on-set of postsocialism, democracy and a free market economy had become synonymous, the latter cast as the very basis of the former. To paraphrase a famous Soviet poem, the prevailing thought became "when we say democracy, we mean free market; when we say free market, we mean democracy."[75] The direct identification of democratization with marketization effectively stifled any form of opposition: any action to question the direction or the pace of reforms in an attempt to protect the society from the rapid enforcement of market rules was condemned, both inside and outside the country, as anti-democratic, "revisionist, or worse, communist" (Kregel, 2006, p. 111). Indeed, communism and socialism, used interchangeably, came to mean authoritarianism and totalitarianism, also used interchangeably.[76] In this context, the meaning of the word 'socialism' differs significantly from what leftists understand by this word in other parts of the world. It is very far from the Polanyian definition of socialism as "the tendency inherent in industrial civilization to transcend the self-regulating market by consciously subordinating it to a democratic society" (Polanyi, 2001, p. 242).

Overriding the arguments for a more gradual transition (Kregel, 2006; Naim, 2000), sweeping free market reforms were imposed as a "shock therapy" onto societies systematically structured to function "without profit and monetary accumulation as primary goals" (Kregel, 2006, p. 113). Kregel (2006) argued that both the decision to introduce the 'market' and the decision to do so through a 'shock' were not economic imperatives but political decisions,[77] made at the convergence of interests of western expansionist capital and powerful domestic groups. Thus, on one hand, the rapid economic liberalization was aggressively promoted by the Bretton Woods institutions, Western advisors and governments, especially the US. The neoliberal crusade was fuelled by Western subjects' sense of moral and intellectual

---

[75] The original is a 1924-1925 poem by Vladimir Mayakovskii dedicated to Lenin, which states that the Communist Party and Lenin are the same. The most famous lines are: "The party and Lenin are twin-brothers; Who is dearer to mother-history? When we say Lenin, we mean party; When we say party, we mean Lenin" [my translation]. It is one of many poems we had to learn by heart at the Soviet secondary school.

[76] To use the same analogy, the dominant thought became "when we say socialism (communism), we mean dictatorship; when we say dictatorship, we mean socialism (communism)."

[77] Kregel was referring to Eastern Europe more broadly here.

superiority (all too familiar from the colonial period), a missionary zeal to spread free market-based democracy, and a typically modernist[78] belief that "what has only been built up through 300 years of conscious effort and direct government intervention in the capitalist economies" could be engineered to swiftly form in postsocialist countries (Kregel, 2006, p. 110). Polanyi's (2001) comparison of economic liberalism with religion and his observation that the market system spread "with a claim to universality unparalleled since the age when Christianity started out on its career" (p. 136) would be an even more accurate description of this stage of neoliberal globalization.

On the domestic front, the rhetoric of democratic and free market reforms and the method of 'shock therapy' were opportunistically or idealistically embraced by the emerging economic and political elites of the postsocialist countries (Harvey, 2007; Klein, 2007; Kregel, 2006; Naim, 2000). The newly elected governments were quick to adopt, albeit with varying degrees of internal conflict, policies inspired by the Washington Consensus in the apparent absence of viable alternatives (Naim, 2000), given the 'defeat' of communism in the East, of Keynesianism in the West, and of the 'Third World' project/the NIEO. Quite significantly, many who stood at the apex of the power structure strategically utilized the historical moment to unequally redistribute power and wealth to secure their own positions. Kregel's observation of this aspect of postsocialist transformations in the Russian case is true of many other postsocialist contexts:

> It is now the case that those government bureaucrats who formerly defended the Soviet state are the same as are at present defending Russian democracy by imposing free market reform, insisting on rapid privatization, and promoting the break up and sale of state enterprises. They are also the same persons who have seen their relative position in society solidified through the privatization of state assets. … Their position of power and dominance now rests on firmer foundation of the natural law of property and the IMF, rather than the leading role of the Party in the workers' revolution and the support of the military. (Kregel, 2006, pp. 113-114)

In the absence of democratic institutions, hit by the turmoil of systemic collapse and concomitant ideological confusion, and exposed to an avalanche of Western 'knowledge,' the

---

[78] Modernist in the sense applied by James Scott (1998).

common people in most postsocialist societies[79] did not have the political, psychological or ideological capacity to counter this systemic wave. Klein emphasized that neoliberals depend on times of crisis, which they use to thrust their policies onto a population still reeling from the shock of natural disasters or social and economic crises and hence are unable to put up effective resistance (Klein, 2007). The opportunistic use of crises appears all the more important in the light of Polanyi's (2001) argument about society's natural tendency to erect protective barriers against the ravages of the market: crises weaken society's ability to mobilize for a self-protective counter-move.[80] At the same time, the role of the government as a protector of and provider for the people was being continuously rolled back to allow the market to 'self-regulate' and people to be 'free' while its role in forcefully implementing market reforms and protecting private property was continuously mobilized.[81] As Kregel (2006) wrote "(n)ot only did the policies recommended by the international institutions depend on the operation of markets and market laws which did not exist, the ensuing stabilisation policies precluded the state from playing an active role in the process because this contradicted recommended budgetary policies" (p. 110). Once again, to use Polanyian language (2001), the crucial role of government in economic life, not the least in modifying the rate of change if not its direction to protect the people, was obscured by economic determinism and the belief in spontaneous progress.

The people of the former Second World thus became subjected to another *high-modernist* project, this time of a capitalist variety, within a matter of fifty-to-eighty years after the first, communist one. As James Scott (1998) explained, high-modernism, *or* "industrial-strength social engineering," is another product of the European Enlightenment and Industrial Revolution (p. 91). It stems from the idea that, using science and technology, entire social orders can be rationally and fundamentally engineered to realize certain utopian visions to

---

[79] There were important differences between and within socialist, hence post-socialist societies. Socialisms in East Germany, Hungary, Yugoslavia or Poland were very different experiences from the socialisms of the Central Asian Republics, Russia, Ukraine, Bulgaria or Mongolia. The lives of the party elites were very different from the experiences of ordinary workers, herders or farmers. The experiences of urban residents were very different from the experiences of those in remote rural locations.

[80] This is not to say there has been no resistance or self-protective move, only to say it has not been effective.

[81] The trend towards the transmogrification of the state into a police-state was clear in 2002 and 2008 in Mongolia when different levels and agencies of the state, including the police and the army, were mobilized to suppress peaceful demonstrations.

improve the human condition. High-modernism is a largely a twentieth-century phenomenon as its utopian projects unfolded, on a colossal scale, through the power of modern nation-states (Scott, 1998). As Polanyi, Scott (1998)critiqued the deeply authoritarian foundations of high-modernism, which establish scientific authority as the only legitimate form of knowledge and dismiss people's resistance as "retrograde ignorance" that needs to be swept away (p. 94). Much of the resultant "massive, state-enforced social engineering" driven by "progressive, often revolutionary elites" has had disastrous consequences, especially for the weakest and marginalized populations (Scott, 1998, p. 89). Scott (1998) emphasized that the results were catastrophic where, on one hand, the ruling elites had no compunction in using excessive state power to push high-modernist reforms with no regard to democracy and civil liberties, and, on the other hand, the people had no capacity to effectively resist. He also noted that, for different reasons, revolutionary and colonial regimes were particularly enabling of high-modernism. In a certain sense, in postsocialist countries, domestic neoliberal counter-revolutionaries and Western neo-colonial neoliberals came together to force 'progressive' market reforms onto people unable to effectively resist, all in the name of democracy and development.

The imposition of a market economy resembles a process of colonization: the universalizing Western liberal model of a free market-based democracy was imposed on societies organized completely differently by the joint forces of external and internal powerful groups. Postsocialist societies were bound to experience significant deterioration in the material conditions of living due to the pre-existing systemic problems, resultant economic stagnation, and the collapse of the socialist economic and political cooperation mechanisms. The overall living standards were lower than those enjoyed by the middle classes in western capitalist countries. There were also significant regional disparities between and within countries. Thus, living standards were much higher in East Germany, Poland, Hungary, Yugoslavia and Czechoslovakia compared to large parts of the Soviet Union, Romania, Bulgaria and Mongolia. Due to the prioritization of industrialization and concomitant diversion of resources to urban centers, rural areas in most countries were less developed[82] (Bulag, 1998; Ilkhamov, 2001).

---

[82] Largely due to the prioritization of industrialization and concomitant diversion of resources to urban industrial centers.

However, the neoliberal 'counter-revolution,' with many parallels to the communist revolution (Humphrey, 1996; Ilkhamov, 2001; Kregel, 2006), was more deeply destructive in that it entailed a rapid disintegration[83] of the cultural environments and basic social institutions of state-socialism, including state enterprises.

Under state-socialism, the workplace was much more than a source of employment and income. It was a source of identity, social status, residence and job permits, professional training, political education, personal development, community support, friendships, housing, plots of land, vacation or reward trips (*putyevki*), coupons to purchase rare goods, and various welfare entitlements and services. The political and associational life also centered at the workplace as the dense network of the communist party, trade unions, other mass organizations (i.e. women's and youth's) and various clubs were largely organized at and through workplaces. All or nearly all work (depending on the country) was provided by state or collective enterprises. Losing a job was to find oneself outside this security system, to become a 'nobody.' The restructuring, downsizing and shutting down of state enterprises, therefore, produced an army of the 'dispossessed,' as they were described by Humphrey (1996). Depending on the country context, the 'dispossessed' have included the unemployed, pensioners, people with disabilities, the homeless, international and rural migrants, informal laborers and others (Humphrey, 1996). They were 'dispossessed' in a dual sense: "deprived of property, work and entitlements" and "themselves no longer possessed" (Humphrey, 1996, p. 70). However, the rapid impoverishment severely affected the employed and well-educated strata as well, in sharp contrast to the 'Third World' where poverty had been traditionally associated with unemployment and illiteracy, destabilizing long-established notions about causes of poverty (Atal, 1999). In fact, in some countries, poverty was higher among the intellectual classes, including doctors, teachers, academics and others working in sectors financed from the state budget. The army of the 'employed poor' emerged as their

---

[83] I use this word here with hesitation as while many institutions did indeed collapse as state enterprises were simply shut down or mass organizations such as the young pioneers' association folded, there was also a process of reconstitution of various 'inherited' organizations as in the case of state enterprises that were restructured to fit into a new competitive market or the women's and youth organizations that reformulated their mission and identity. However, this process of reconstitution was, in many cases, also a process of getting leaner and meaner, excluding large numbers of people. For those excluded, or 'dispossessed' in Humphrey's (1996) terms, disintegration is perhaps still a valid verb.

purchasing power dropped below subsistence levels due to high inflation, working hours and/or salaries were cut, and as salaries were not paid for extended periods (several months) due to insolvency problems (Atal, 1999; Ilkhamov, 2001).

Incomes fell dramatically against the background of reduced social provisions, liberalization of prices, and introduction of user fees. Writing about the 'new poor' in Uzbekistan, Ilkhamov aptly characterized the pain of this sudden socio-economic sinking of the masses of people by paraphrasing the famous line from *L'Internationale*: "they who had been all, have become naught"[84] (Ilkhamov, 2001, p. 34).[85] The pain was all the more intense as new inequalities emerged or old ones deepened and a new class of the *nouveau riche* arose just as suddenly and largely through illegal, even openly criminal, means (Humphrey, 2002; Ilkhamov, 2001). In Polanyian (2001) words, the rate of social dislocation was too great as the rate of change was too fast and did not allow the communities to adapt, causing them to succumb. The heightened sense of insecurity, scarcity and competition for survival, power and wealth intensified various forms of discrimination or created new kinds of exclusions,[86] exacerbating social and political instabilities. Within just a few years, high rates of crime, violence, alcoholism, unemployment, homelessness, poverty, inequity and a sense of hopelessness and lawlessness[87] became a major part of everyday life in many postsocialist countries. The extent of social dislocation, impoverishment, and cultural degradation was massive even when real incomes rose. Neoliberal crusaders misjudged, or judged as unimportant, the nature and enormity of this uprooting experience.

Nearly thirty years since the 'transition,' the postsocialist experience has diverged significantly, largely mirroring the distribution of power and wealth in the international system. The countries historically and geographically closer to the West are now integrated into the European Union, economically faring vastly better than those to the east, although

---

[84] The original phrase is "*Nous ne sommes rien, soyons tout*" in French, "*Kto byl nichem, tot stanet vsem*" in Russian (1902 version attributed to A. Kots), and "We have been naught, we shall be all" in English.

[85] I slightly revised Ilkhamov's (2001)original paraphrasing, which was "the ones who used to be everything have become nothing."

[86] Caroline Humphrey (1996) discusses some of these processes in her analysis of the production of the 'dispossessed.'

[87] Russians refer to the 1990s as *likhiye devyanostyie*, approximately meaning 'the wild 1990s,' to describe the state of *bezzakoniye*, literally 'lawlessness.' In Mongolian, the words used to describe this context are *oroo busgai tsag*, approximately meaning 'chaotic and insecure times.'

still in junior positions within the EU. In many contexts, there has been a regression to (neo-)feudalism where local political economies are run as 'suzerainties' and individual survival and life chances are heavily dependent on a patron/employer or a patronage network (Humphrey, 2002). In all cases, as economies stabilized, the 'transitional' inequalities solidified and 'temporary' poverty became entrenched.

3.6 The neoliberal legacy

By now the pervasive inegalitarian effects of neoliberalism are well documented. As Thomas Piketty (2014) showed, income inequality has increased in rich countries (Western capitalist states and Japan) since the 1970s and most radically in the US where the concentration of income has even exceeded early twentieth century levels[88] (p. 15). Furthermore, given the process whereby wealth is currently accumulated and distributed, the trend toward divergence, i.e. increasing inequality, is not only likely to persist but lead to extremely high levels of inequality (Piketty, 2014). According to Prashad (2014), the rates of social inequality are at a record high for the modern era, where the world's top one percent own 40% and the top 10% own 85% of global assets; with alarmingly high unemployment in 'developing' countries (especially in rural areas), exacerbated by the collapse of social safety nets, weakening of the social fabric, and exorbitantly high food and fuel prices. In the Global South, D'Souza (2018) noted, the fragile alliances that fought for national liberation from colonial powers have been weakened, deepening old inequalities and conflicts and creating new ones. Along with the emergence of poverty and extreme inequality, postsocialist countries too have faced increased violence and instability.

In all parts of the world, alongside heightened global rhetoric on democracy and democratization, there has been a rise of religious and cultural fundamentalisms, right-wing populisms and ethno-nationalisms, which go hand in hand with an attack on women's dignity, freedom and bodies. As Stiglitz summarized in his foreword to the 2001 edition of *The Great Transformation*, in many 'developing' and postsocialist countries, democracy and market

---

[88] The share of the top ten percent in US national income fell from 45-50 percent in the 1910s-1920s to less than 35 percent in the 1950s and then rose back to 45-50 percent in the 2000s-2010s from less than 35 per cent in the 1970s (Piketty, p. 24). See also: piketty.pse.ens.fr/capital21c.

economy have meant, in practice, oligarchic control of politics and widespread corruption combined with high levels of capital flight, perpetuating a vicious cycle of under-development (Polanyi, 2001). As Prashad (2014) observed, given obvious contradictions between the disparity and deprivation and the ideas of justice and fairness, many states have been building up their capacity for policing the disgruntled masses by investing in their security apparatuses. Despite the promise of global peace at end of the Cold War, inter- and intra-national conflicts have only intensified. According to Piketty (2014), in a certain sense, the world is back where it started at the beginning of the early nineteenth century. In the light of the Polanyian (2001) analysis, illiberal, anti-democratic phenomena can be understood as part of the double movement set in motion by this second, neoliberal wave of globalization. In other words, they are not external to the process of neoliberalization/neoliberal democratization, but are, to a large measure, produced by it.

The Dalai Lama once remarked that, contrary to common assertions, violence and aggression are not natural to human nature, which is precisely why they make the news, whereas regular acts of kindness go unnoticed precisely because kindness is natural. By a similar logic, we could posit that inequality and injustice are unnatural and that is precisely why they need to be enforced and ideologically legitimated. If neoliberal capitalism is so obviously unjust, benefiting few and failing the majority of the world's population, resistance to it would be natural. Yet, neoliberalism remains dominant and continues to infiltrate our lives through various policy, legal and institutional permutations, e.g. the introduction of public-private partnerships into traditionally public and vital sectors such as education and health. While widely divergent phenomena such as religious and cultural fundamentalisms, movements for social justice and environmental protection, and even mafia and corruption networks can all be understood as the society's attempt to protect itself from various aspects of West-centric neoliberalization, democratic resistance to neoliberalism per se remains weak and disconnected in most parts of the world. Arguably, the anti-neoliberal resistance is weakest in postsocialist countries where the 'de-equalizing,' so to speak, and destabilizing effects of neoliberal marketization have been most starkly demonstrated within a few decades and where scientific Marxism and Leninism had been systematically taught only three decades ago.

Political economy perspectives on neoliberalism are important and necessary but insufficient to explain the hegemonic hold of neoliberalism on masses of people around the globe. A more nuanced approach to understanding neoliberalism is necessary and is also increasingly possible now that the dust has settled somewhat and, as Mirowski (2015) noted, sufficient distance has been gained after some five decades of experience. The next section will move beyond political economy to outline some of key features of neoliberalism, accounting for its multiple origins, organizational diversity and ideological complexity.

3.7 Neoliberalism as a movement, ideology and political rationality

The origins of neoliberalism date back to the 1920s when the debates between socialist economists, including Polanyi, and liberal economists, including Ludwig von Mises and Friedrich von Hayek, were already on-going in Europe (Polanyi-Levitt, 2006). German neoliberalism continued to develop under the Nazi state, congealing intellectually and institutionally in the 1940s as 'ordoliberals' based at the Freiburg School (Foucault, 2008). The first and foundational text of American neoliberalism was an article on *laissez faire* by Henry Simons (1934), the father of the Chicago School of Economics (Foucault, 2008). In Paris, from 1935 on, broader discussions were held among economists, philosophers and sociologists *via* the Colloque Walter Lippmann (Plehwe, 2015). A long-standing neoliberal classic, Hayek's *The Road to Serfdom,* was published in 1944 (Polanyi-Levitt, 2006). The Mont Pelerin Society founded in 1947 with an exclusive membership, including von Mises, Hayek, and Milton Friedman from the Chicago School, played a leading role in the mobilization of neoliberal intellectuals and the development of neoliberalism into a comprehensive, trans- and inter-disciplinary, transnational (but predominantly Western) and trans-academic thought collective, whose programming is irreducible to economics (Mirowski & Plehwe, 2015a, 2015b; Plehwe, 2015).

Despite dominant representations by friends and foes alike, neoliberalism did not start as, nor has it existed as a monolithic and stable phenomenon (Foucault, 2008; Mirowski & Plehwe, 2015b). Rather, the degree of coherence and power it has achieved today is a result of conscientious work which has required significant strategizing, planning, coordination, time and effort (Mirowski, 2015). Its unity has derived from the neoliberals' shared aspiration to distinguish themselves from social welfare liberalism and socialism perceived as

authoritarian, and *laissez-faire* classical liberalism perceived as unable to provide necessary solutions (Mirowski, 2015; Plehwe, 2015). Hegemonic neoliberalism is best seen as "an intricately structured long-term philosophical and political project," a transnational movement (Mirowski, 2015, p. 426), and a multi-layered, "complex and efficient knowledge machinery" with a sophisticated division of intellectual labor (Plehwe, 2015, pp. 4-7) and intentionally non-transparent linkages (Mirowski, 2015). It has been elitist in its organization and impact but populist in its rhetoric, sustained by corporate funding and often converging with corporate interests even if not directly controlled by them (Mirowski, 2015; Plehwe, 2015). Significantly, the neoliberal movement has mobilized largely through informal networks and 'civil society' outside formal state institutions or through quasi-governmental arrangements.

Due to its plurality in terms of political practice and philosophy (Plehwe, 2015), diversity of actors, and its continuous deliberation on and reconfiguration of its key tenets and concepts (Mirowski, 2015), hegemonic neoliberalism not only remains poorly understood but in fact "draws some of its prodigious strength from that obscurity" (Plehwe, 2015, p. 3). Nevertheless, it is possible to distinguish several doctrinal positions that are central to neoliberalism, at least in its current configuration. That some of these positions are internally and mutually contradictory only contributes to the productive obscurity of neoliberalism and likely facilitates their escape from accountability. These doctrines include, but are not limited to, the following:

- *Anti-statism and 'inflationism of state-phobia:'[89]* Neoliberals view the state as inherently authoritarian and antithetical to freedom. Foucault (2008) proposed there are three ways in which state-phobia is inflated. Firstly, the state is assumed to have an intrinsically expansive autonomous power *vis-à-vis* civil society (its object-target), detached from underlying power shifts and socio-economic stratifications. Secondly, and consequently, states are assumed to have 'a sort of genetic continuity,' which then enables circuitous arguments that equate fascism to a welfare state or administrative mechanisms for maintaining social security to concentration camps. Thirdly, and consequently as well,

---

[89] 'Inflationalism of state-phobia' is a term used by Foucault (2008, pp. 75-77, pp. 187-192).

this posited critique of the state leads to an elision of reality by removing the need for analysing actuality: any example of state wrong-doing can be explained-denounced by invoking 'fantastic' images of a totalitarian state.[90] According to Foucault (2008), this feature of neoliberalism is historically rooted and specifically localized in the 1930s-1940s experiences under fascist regimes. This mistrust of the state is, however, broadly shared by leftists and is a strong point of convergence with socialist dissidents and postsocialist democrats.

- *Economic theory of democracy:* Neoliberals completely reverse the original liberal project concerned with freeing the economy from the state (the *laissez faire* approach) (Foucault, 2008). Foucault (2008) argued that, having established that the state is intrinsically defective, neoliberals opt for the adoption of the free market as the optimum and the only legitimate organizing and regulating principle for the state and all of society, thereby going well beyond the economic sphere. They posit that the mechanism of price formation engendered by free market competition is the most powerful and reliable (objective) information processor and the most rational regulator of choices, far surpassing the state's ability to do the same (Foucault, 2008; Mirowski, 2015). With neoliberals, not only is the legitimacy of the state predicated on ensuring economic freedom but the state itself and society on the whole are posited to achieve the highest degree of freedom and material wellbeing if they function on a market logic basis or at least approximate it (Foucault, 2008; Mirowski, 2015). The neoliberal 'democratic' project is to model the overall exercise of political power on market economy principles (Foucault, 2008) and reorient the populace towards competitive individualism, entrepreneurship and self-reliance.

- *Constructivist orientation:* Unlike liberals, neoliberals do not see competition as naturally given but as a formal phenomenon with its own internal logic and structure, which yields its beneficial effects only under specific circumstances that allow those to unfold fully and freely (Foucault, 2008; Mirowski, 2015). As it would be naïve to expect such conditions to naturally arise, neoliberals believe they must be deliberately constructed,

---

[90] In other words, it enables a slippery slope argument, a "general disqualification by the worst" (Foucault, 2008, p. 188).

which in turn necessitates an active role of the state, which Foucault (2008) termed as "active governmentality" (pp. 120-121). This is a radical departure from the *laissez faire* approach embraced by the classical liberals who rejected (in principle though not necessarily in practice) any state interference in the market. Despite their popular rhetoric about markets being ontologically natural, neoliberals adhere to a constructivist orientation (Mirowski, 2015), which is broadly shared by many progressive thinkers and fields of study, including the social sciences.

- *Invasive interventionism*: If liberals were concerned about drawing boundaries between domains where the state may legitimately intervene and those where it cannot, for neoliberals the question is no longer *whether* the state can intervene but *how,* i.e. it is a question of governmental style or 'governmentality' (Foucault, 2008)*.* According to Foucault (2008), a defining feature of neoliberal governmentality is that it prescribes the state to loosen its regulation of the market while deepening its regulation of the society. Thus, the state should not directly intervene in the market mechanism and its actions should be *regulatory* at the level of economic processes. By contrast, the state *must* take more intrusive *(re)organizing* actions on the more fundamental and general conditions of the existence of the market to enable the market to function as a general economic-political regulator (Foucault, 2008). In Polanyian (2001) terms, this is the subordination of the substance of the society and its natural environment to market logic.

A society permeated by market rationality would, as Polanyi and Foucault remarked, in theory, be self-regulating, removing the need for state intervention, provided that all actors adhere, freely and fully, to the rules of the market game. Neoliberal governmentality centres on producing this adherence through the plethora of processes and techniques that govern the conduct of people: state and non-state institutions, laws and social norms, discourses and identities, and personal care and self-regulation (Ferguson & Gupta, 2002). Despite the popular propagation of a limited state, therefore, neoliberal governmentality is, in principle, comprehensive and deeply invasive. In a certain sense, it is also a form of economic colonization in so far as it seeks to apply the market grid onto the whole of society, including the heretofore non-economic spheres of life.

- *Governing from a distance:* This new invasiveness "was not so much a process in which a central state extended its tentacles throughout society, but the invention of various 'rules for rule' that sought to transform the state into a centre that could programme, shape, guide, channel, direct, control events and persons distant from it" (Miller & Rose, 2008, p. 202). Neoliberal governmentality seeks to govern not by command and control but by *conditioning* people's choices (Collier & Ong, 2005a), governing with less state (negative, disciplining power), as it were, and more government (productive, conditioning power) (Foucault, 2008). Its invasiveness is not readily observable and, therefore, not easily resistible.

This governmentality, as theorized by Foucault (Burchell, Gordon, & Miller, 1991; Foucault, 1991a), is a historically specific liberal political rationality that began to emerge in Europe in the eighteenth century with the discovery of the population and its welfare as the basis of political legitimacy of the state and the object of government. In its Western manifestations, it has developed through diverse critiques from both the left and the right levelled against the welfare regimes of the post-war era, which ranged from economic and financial considerations to concerns about human rights, gender equality and morality (Miller & Rose, 2008).

- *Transnational and network governmentality:* An important aspect of 'governing from a distance' is the outsourcing of state functions to non-state actors and quasi-governmental arrangements, involving international organizations, transnational networks, non-governmental or quasi-governmental organizations, and corporate actors (D'Souza, 2018; Ferguson & Gupta, 2002; Kipnis, 2008). The rise of neoliberalism has thus been associated with a proliferation of NGOs and intensified discourses and programs on 'civil society' (Bernal & Grewal, 2014; Choudry & Kapoor, 2013; Comaroff & Comaroff, 1999; D'Souza, 2018; Neysmith, 2000).

Moving to the global level, Ferguson and Gupta argued that the "proliferation of voluntary organizations supported by complex networks of international and transnational funding and personnel" are as much a part of 'the transnational governmentality' as are IMF's structural adjustment programs and "the new strategies of discipline and regulation, exemplified by the WTO" (Ferguson & Gupta, 2002, p. 990).

Transnational governmentality encompasses "not only new strategies of discipline and regulation, exemplified by the WTO and the structural adjustment programs implemented by the IMF, but also transnational alliances forged by activists and grassroots organizations and the proliferation of voluntary organizations supported by complex networks of international and transnational funding and personnel" (Ferguson & Gupta, 2002, p. 990). This insight is crucial in contexts where non-state transnational actors routinely infringe on national sovereignty.

- *Individual as an entrepreneur of the self*: The neoliberal *homo economicus* is constituted as an active, autonomous and self-interested economic subject who "is morally responsible for navigating the social realm using rational choice and cost-benefit calculations grounded on market-based principles to the exclusion of all other ethical values and social interests" (Hamann, 2009, p. 37). As Foucault (2008) explained, the concept of human capital is central to the re/production of this historically specific form of subjectivity. Neoliberals dissolve the Marxist worker who sells his/her labour power to wages/market prices. Labour is no longer a commodity but an ability, a skill, a 'machine' that comprises capital (Foucault, 2008). This 'capital' is all that can be a source of future income, including physical and psychological capacities. The wage is now an income, a return on the capital. An individual is an entrepreneur of his/her self, a manager and producer of his/her 'human capital,' one's own capital and source of income (Foucault, 2008).

Foucault (2008) observed that this economic analysis can then be extended to virtually all aspects of human life by looking at how 'human capital' is formed, accumulated, allocated, etc. Education, health, social security and other public goods and services can now be seen as matters of individual responsibility and personal investment in one's own or one's children's human capital (Foucault, 2008). This individualization and responsibilization work through specific 'regimes of the self' (Rose, 1996), which emphasize, inter alia, empowerment and self-discipline (Burchell, 1991; Miller & Rose, 2008).

- *Privatization of risks and social policy*: In welfare capitalism, social policy is designed to counter the destructive inequality-generating effects of the market through equalization

(of access to consumer goods) via the socialization of risks and costs (social insurance, public health and education, etc.) and income redistribution (taxation and welfare transfers) (Burchell et al., 1991; Foucault, 2008). For neoliberals, such equalization measures are illegitimate as shielding people from the effects of the market would distort the rules of the economic game.[91] A neoliberal society is one of resilient, responsible and self-sufficient individuals who can take care of their needs without patronizing (and economically inefficient) state welfare so long as they are enabled to gain sufficient private reserves by economic growth (Foucault, 2008; Rose, 1996). In the neoliberal logic, Foucault (2008) elaborated, the society does not 'owe' public services such as health and education to each of its members but will provide limited welfare – through individualized schemes (e.g. school vouchers) - to those unable to provide for themselves, thus reintroducing the category of the 'poor' that all social policies sought to abolish since the end of the nineteenth century. This is no longer about 'social welfare' but about ensuring a bare minimum required for survival to prevent some people from falling out of the 'economic game' (Foucault, 2008).

- *Benign view of monopolies and corporate power:* Classical liberals largely saw monopolies as undesirable by-products of the market, which may necessitate anti-monopoly state action (Foucault, 2008). Neoliberals absolve the market by attributing the existence or emergence of monopolies to external intervention, especially by the state, and render monopolies benign in two manoeuvers (Foucault, 2008; Horn & Mirowski, 2015). First, they posit that even if monopolies arise, they are not stable and the market will eventually self-correct. Second, even if they are stable, monopolies will behave as if there is free competition. By contrast, an attempt of labour to pool its economic power through unionization is seen as a major threat to the rules of free competition (Horn & Mirowski, 2015).

- *Freedom of capital:* Neoliberals posit the freedom of capital to move across national borders as a natural right, a *sine qua non* of a free society but the same does not apply to labour (Mirowski, 2015). Ferrara (2017) argued that the financialization of capital and the

---

[91] This is so because, as Foucault explains, the mechanism of competition works through differentiation, i.e. inequality (Foucault, 2008, p. 143).

disembedding of financial markets as a defining characteristic of neoliberal political economy and transnational governmentality. In view of Piketty's (2014) analysis, the implications of this financialization are particularly dire for poorer countries that are highly dependent on foreign investment. As Piketty (2014) showed, the current workings of capital markets constitute the most powerful drivers of divergence (increasing inequality) and, contrary to assertions of equalizing 'trickle-down' effects of economic growth, "the more perfect the capital market (in the economist's sense), the more likely" the increase in inequality (2014).

- *Inequality-positive:* Neoliberals see inequality as not only natural but beneficial in that it promotes competition and encourages productivity (Mirowski, 2015). Inequality is inscribed in the logic of the market since the liberal shift from positing, as the essence of the market, the free exchange that established equivalence to the competition that thrives on inequality (Foucault, 2008). Thus, consistent with its conception of the *neo homo economicus*, inequality is an individual failure or misfortune, not a structural or systemic phenomenon (Foucault, 2008). Neoliberal concern with inequality is not moral or ethical but instrumental: it is an issue only if it poses a threat to market efficiency, i.e. by causing political instability or lowering competitiveness and productivity (Foucault, 2008; Mirowski, 2015; Naim, 2000).

- *Primacy of courts and the rule of law:* In both liberal and neoliberal capitalism, the role of the state is crucial in enforcing a legal order that protects private property and ensures the freedom of capital (Harvey, 2007). In neoliberalism, the pervasive competition and multiplication of the enterprise form in the society increase the demand for arbitration, elevating the importance of the rule of law and the judicial function of the state (Foucault, 2008). While the rule of law is deemed essential to a democratic society, Ferrara (2017) argued that this trend is not necessarily conducive to strengthening democracies due to the proliferation of pseudo-economic and quasi-political entities "that escape full democratic accountability" and the influence of the market on law-making (p. 173).

To be sure, the political economic history of neoliberal globalization is far more complex and nuanced than constructed at the beginning of this chapter. Neither is neoliberalism limited to the doctrinal positions listed above, nor are these doctrines stable or internally coherent, nor

are they uniformly shared by neoliberals or all unique to neoliberalism (Foucault, 2008; Mirowski & Plehwe, 2015b). A growing number of scholars (Collier & Ong, 2005b; Hardin, 2014; Kipnis, 2008; A. Smith & Rochovska, 2007) have cautioned against imagining 'neoliberal governmentality' everywhere and assuming processes of neoliberalization and globalization to be overdetermined, homogenous and unidirectional. I will discuss some of these approaches in the next chapter on methodological perspectives.

3.8 Reflections

When Mongolia liberalized following the collapse of the Soviet Union and the socialist bloc of countries, it was inserted, at a bewildering pace, into a global context dominated by the West in an increasingly unipolar world order with the US emerging as *the* hegemon in the aftermath of the bi-polar Cold War context. Having been largely closed to the outside world beyond the socialist bloc of countries until the fall of the Berlin wall, Mongolians could not have known that they entered this world order at a particular point in the history of the West when neoliberal policies had taken centre stage. While in parts of the world where neoliberalization did not coincide with a political regime change, especially in the said Western 'democratic' contexts, the neoliberal policies may have been seen and identified as distinct from 'democracy' and 'liberalism,' such was not the case in postsocialist countries. In Mongolia, at the point of the rupture (perceived as well as actual) between the 'old' socialist and the new 'democratic' regimes, the post-1990 neoliberal policies were seen as quintessentially and, therefore, ahistorically 'democratic.' In other words, the changes advised by Western 'experts' and espoused by Mongolian 'democrats' and 'progressives' were not seen as 'neoliberal.' They were, by and large, seen – especially by the democratically minded (however vaguely and variously they understood 'democracy') - as simply 'democratic' and, in the same breath, 'modern.'

I shared some of my initial learning from this literature review with one of my friends and fellow activists (personal communication, January 24, 2018). I 'told' her (*via* Facebook messenger) that what we had thought of *the* democracy was actually a very recent phenomenon in its neoliberal form, even for many of the Western countries, and that many of the social welfare programs put in place in the West after the Second World War were quite similar to what we had under state-socialism. My friend 'listened' with interest and then

'gasped': "*Yaanaa*![92] We came out suddenly from under the overturned pot (*togoo*)[93] and immediately believed the first thing we saw!"[94]

She meant we directly accepted the neoliberally framed democracy and the juxtaposition of socialism/socialist states and democracy/Western states as complete opposites. My friend added: "Sometimes countries such as Norway and Sweden look like the communism we had dreamed of." Finding similarities between the 'democratic' West and socialist 'dictatorships' is 'surprising' too. One of the reasons we bought into the neoliberal democratization was that socialism and democracy were cast as incompatible opposites through the deployment of oppositional dichotomies such as collectivism/individualism, dictatorship/democracy, state provision/individual responsibilities, etc. The feeling that arises from these reflections is similar to the feeling of "participating in a grand deception" that Carolyn Humphrey mentioned in relation to the Soviet state's propaganda (Humphrey, 2002, p. 53).

In his foreword to Polanyi's seminal book, Stiglitz remarked, with a certainty reminiscent of Fukuyama's, that "the myth of the self-regulating economy is, today, virtually dead" (Polanyi, 2001, p. x), and that:

> Today, however, the battle lines are drawn at a far different place than when Polanyi was writing. As I observed earlier, only diehards would argue for the self-regulating economy, at the one extreme, or for a government run economy, at the other. Everyone is aware of the power of markets, all pay obeisance to its limitations. (Polanyi, 2001, p. x)

Sadly, the reality in which Stiglitz can make this generalizing statement with such optimistic confidence is not the reality I have inhabited as a Mongolian human rights/women's rights

---

[92] This is a common exclamation that is similar to the English "Oh my god!" The literal meaning of the word, however, is "What to do now?!" It expresses, depending on the situation, fear, regret, worry and shock or a combination thereof.

[93] *Togoo* is the wide-brimmed shallow pot Mongolians have used for cooking over the fire stove. The *togoo* is black on the outside, covered with soot. Here, my friend is referring to the well-established post-socialist metaphor of our life under state-socialism as having lived under the overturned black pot, ignorant of and excluded from the 'world.' In this phrase, the exclusion of the socialist world from *the* 'world' reveals the depth of our post-socialist belief that the whole socialist experiment was 'unnatural' and 'detached' from the 'natural' evolution of *the* 'world.' This imagined world is essentially Western, with the West viewed as the pinnacle of humane, democratic, and affluent development.

[94] In Mongolian: *"Yaanaa! Genet khumursun togoonoosoo garaad kharsan zuildee shuud itgechikhdeg baina shuu dee!"*

activist. Just as the formulation and successful advocacy of neoliberal policies rode on the privileged and powerful position of western subjects in this globalized process, the informed and self-assured critique of neoliberalism by western and non-western subjects alike in fact does the same. What is well researched, well theorized and rather obvious to the naked eye of the neoliberalism's critics is obscured, disconnected and confusing for the majority of the people, including activists, in a country like Mongolia that has existed in the hinterlands of shifting empires.

Chapter 4 : Methodological considerations

Envisioning the research journey

> Every increment of consciousness, every step forward is a travesía, a crossing. I am again an alien in new territory. And again, and again... "Knowing" is painful because after "it" happens I can't stay in the same place and be comfortable. I am no longer the same person I was before.
>
> - Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera*

4.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I will start out by looking at more ethnographic approaches to theorizing and researching neoliberalism and postsocialism. Then, I will explore methodological considerations raised by postcolonial and other feminist scholars in conducting research and, specifically, in producing knowledge about the 'Third World' and 'Third World' women. I will then discuss my approach to this study as a form of feminist activist research and finish by laying out my research design.

4.2 Interrogating neoliberal globalizations and democratizations

Structural and ideological approaches to neoliberalism have been broadly criticized for assuming a monolithic, overdetermined and unidirectional view of neoliberal hegemony without sufficient empirical proof (Collier & Ong, 2005b; Hardin, 2014; Kipnis, 2008; Ong, 2006; A. Smith & Rochovska, 2007). Such an encompassing, homogenizing view risks colonizing the diversities, differences, divergences and resistances that actually exist on the ground (Buyandelger, 2008). Indeed, they may be said to be reproducing the very structures of power inequality they seek to criticize by painting an image of the Global North as active and all-powerful and the Global South as passive, malleable and subjugated (Kipnis, 2008).

Thus, Kipnis (2008) cautioned against imagining neoliberal governmentality everywhere. Through an ethnographic examination of audit cultures in China and comparative analysis, Kipnis showed how generalized invocations of neoliberal governmentality risk reducing cross-cultural similarities "to a derivative set of ideas that diffused from the West," mis-recognizing locally arisen governmentalities as well as patterns of social relations common to modern industrialized societies (p. 286). When it does occur, diffusion should not be automatically

attributed to the hegemony of the West as it may have been due to the choices of local actors who saw specific ideas or methods as 'useful' in their local contexts. Thus, the scientism that underlies modern audit cultures is not neoliberal or socialist and its various forms diffuse from place to place and are independently invented and reinvented based on the social need in modern societies to legitimate one's decisions as unbiased.

Scholars, particularly those coming from ethnographic perspectives (Collier & Ong, 2005a; A. Smith & Rochovska, 2007), have emphasized the impossibility of understanding big hegemonic projects such as neoliberalism outside the context of their domestication and articulation in and into everyday life in specific local contexts. Collier and Ong (2005a) proposed to approach 'globalization' in terms of 'global forms' and 'global assemblages.' Global forms are "abstractable, mobile, and dynamic, moving across and reconstituting 'society,' 'culture,' and 'economy'" (Collier & Ong, 2005a, p. 4). As they are "articulated in specific situations – or territorialized in *assemblages* – they define new material, collective, and discursive relationships" (Collier & Ong, 2005a, p. 4).

Collier and Ong (2005a) proposed that, similar to 'cultural' or 'social' phenomena, as categorized in the anthropological tradition, global phenomena depend, for their intelligibility and acceptance, on a common set of meanings, relations and structures. What makes them global is their "distinctive capacity for decontextualization and recontextualization, abstractability and movement, across diverse social and cultural situations and spheres of life" (Collier & Ong, 2005a, p. 11). In the space of assemblage, these global forms interact with a diversity of other forms, giving rise to the context-specific actual global, which is not static but constantly emergent, shifting and in formation (Collier & Ong, 2005a, p. 12). An assemblage is not a mere structural effect of global forces but a result of multiple phenomena. As a concept, 'global assemblage' denotes the ambiguities, tensions, instabilities and contingencies inherent in the complex interactions between the 'global' and multiple other determinants (Collier & Ong, 2005a).

As Ong (2006) proposed, approaching 'neoliberal governmentality' as a 'global form' would shift the analysis towards context-specific inquiries into processes of "contingent, discontinuous application of some neoliberal ideas and not others in particular contexts with particular effects" (Hardin, 2014, p. 211). The processes and consequences of neoliberalism,

even when directly imposed by powerful actors, cannot be assumed in advance but have to be critically and empirically investigated:

> A context-specific inquiry allows us to capture how opposing interpretations and claims can and do interrupt, slow down, deflect, and negotiate neoliberal logics and initiatives. The temporality of transmission, translation, and negotiation in this fluctuating space is fraught with political complication, contingency, and ambiguity. (Ong, 2006, p. 17)

Smith and Rochovska (2007) proposed that the experience of neo-liberal globalization needs to be approached "not as a model of power imposed on communities, although there are clear examples of this, but as a negotiated outcome of the struggles engaged in by 'ordinary' people in their everyday lives" (p. 1176). In their example of the urban postsocialist Slovakia, neoliberal reforms were facilitated by the middle and older generations' 'postponement of the future' (patiently coping with hardships for the sake of future improvements), informal employment and social networks, and domestic food production. They argued that the expansion of the capitalist free market was articulated through and made possible and bearable by such 'constitutive outsides,' encountering a range of pre-existing social practices and relations.[95] In addition, the effects of domesticating neoliberalism have often been diametrically opposed to the purported neoliberal goals, ranging from the creation of the informal economy (A. Smith & Rochovska, 2007), the production of urban and rural poverty through active forgetting by the state and society (Fernandes, 2010), the promotion of non-individuated subjectivities, and the strengthening of ethnic or racial tensions (Kipnis, 2008).

This emphasis on the micro-politics and micro-foundations of macro-processes has been echoed by scholars of postsocialism critical of the transitology scholarship (Burawoy & Verdery, 1999; Buyandelger, 2008; Kubik & Linch, 2013). In the (US-led) 'mainstream' comparative politics, until a decade or so ago, transitology had been the dominant approach to understanding the so-called Third Wave of Democratization (Kubik, 2013). The term was coined by Samuel Huntington (1991) to describe the late twentieth century political

---

[95] Thus, the household food production in their dachas enables urban households to "partially reproduce their labour power without requiring payment of a living wage from employers," thereby contributing to the low-wage workers for neoliberal economies, both formal and informal (A. Smith & Rochovska, p. 1175). Thus, the informal economy is an important 'constitutive outside' of the neoliberal economy.

transitions in countries of Latin America, parts of Asia, Southern Europe and of the former Second World. As summarized by Kubik (2013), key characteristics of the transitology approach included: reliance on modernization theory; positivist assumptions; the compart-mentalization of complex interrelated phenomena and the reduction of post-communist transformations to an oversimplified dual model of democratization and marketization; the failure to take into account history and structural conditions; overemphasis on agency (the role of the elite) and institutional design; and an exclusive focus on formal institutions. The transitology literature has played no small role in reifying Western experiences of liberal democracy and market economy as the telos of post-authoritarian regimes.

Despite the prescription of a one-size-fits-all solution for 'managing transitions,' the postsocialist realities have been characterized by great diversity as well as divergence from the posited model. A growing body of scholarship, primarily of the ethnographic variety, has explored the complexities of both socialist and postsocialist experiences, disrupting the dominant narrative and demonstrating how localized politics, various aspects of culture, pre-socialist influences and other highly context-specific factors interact to create unexpected outcomes (Buyandelger, 2008; Kubik, 2013; Kubik & Linch, 2013). As Smith and Rochovska (2007) noted, neoliberalism is more than the project of the powerful institutions of the global economy and national elites as it is constituted through everyday practices of 'ordinary' people who are continuously making sense of and 'making do' within neo-liberal worlds (p. 1164).

Reviewing this strand of scholarship, Kubik (2013) noted the emergence of an approach that could be called 'contextual holism.' As outlined by Kubik (2013), 'contextual holism' is ontologically committed to constructivism. It is based on an assumption that "the signifying process through which people build models of the world, particularly of the social and political world" has political and material effects and, therefore, privileges interpretative methodologies (p. 55). This approach calls for analyses that are more deeply historicized and aware of the co-existence of multiple regimes of memory, go beyond simplistic dichotomies of agency/structure, and pay attention to the historical and contemporary significance of informality, those "(f)ormal-informal institutional hybrids [which] resemble neither the clear-cut blueprints of institutional reformers nor the concealed informal networks sometimes blamed for all the ills of postcommunism" (Kubik, 2013, p. 61).

77

Manduhai Buyandelger (2008) referred to these more contextualized and theoretically nuanced studies as post-post-transition theories, noting their focus on and valuing of "the exploration of the experiences of the peoples who accommodate, resist, interpret and shape their lives in relation to, and despite, the failed transitions brought upon them" (p. 237). In the same vein, Burawoy and Verdery (1999) called for attention to the vernacular knowledges, subcultures, situated agencies and everyday practices that inform the macro-level changes.

4.3 Bringing in postcolonial and feminist perspectives

Chari and Verdery have called for a greater dialogue between postcolonial and postsocialist studies in the post-Cold War era (Chari & Verdery, 2009). As they summarized the situation, postcolonial studies emerged in the 1980s as a body of work, some two decades after formal decolonization, "as a critical reflection both on colonialism's ongoing presence in the projects of post-independence national elites and in notions of nationalism, sovereignty, accumulation, democracy, and the possibility of knowledge itself" (p. 11). Similarly:

> Over time, 'postsocialism' too came to signify a critical standpoint, in several senses: critical of the socialist past and of possible social futures; critical of the present as neoliberal verities about transition, markets, and democracy were being imposed upon former socialist spaces, and critical of the possibilities for knowledge as shaped by Cold War institutions (Chari & Verdery, 2009, p. 11).

Taking into account both postcolonial and postsocialist perspectives is particularly pertinent for Mongolia given its geographic location in Asia, 'Asian race,' under-developed economy, and dependent status both within the Soviet bloc and the post-Cold War global order. Furthermore, Mongolia has been recast as belonging to the 'Third World,' and to be managed by the 'Asia-Pacific' programs of international organizations. This in turn necessitates taking into account postcolonial feminists' critique of the stereotyped representations of 'Third World' women in certain strands of western feminist scholarship (Minh-Ha, 1991; Mohanty, 1991, 2003b; Spivak, 1988).

In her influential essay 'Under Western Eyes,' Mohanty (1991) critiqued a particular kind of western feminist scholarship, which assumes that all women, by virtue of their common

oppression, are a homogenous, an "always already constituted" group (p. 56). She explained that such analysis relies on a universalist definition of patriarchy and a binary concept of power whereby men have power and women are power-less. When coupled with ethnocentric assumptions, such scholarship produces a monolithic category of a 'Third World woman' as a perpetual victim of (her) patriarchy, discursively colonizing "the material and historical heterogeneities of the lives of women in the third world" (Mohanty, 1991, p. 53). These accounts deprive 'Third World' women of their history, politics, and agency and mask the oppressive effects of the structural inequality between the Global North and the Global South on the lives of women in the latter. Mohanty's (1991) argument is that by casting 'Third World' patriarchies as the sole source of women's oppression, this strand of feminist scholarship has been complicit in the legitimation of western domination in the (former) colonies. They have also materially complicated the possibilities of combating patriarchal oppressions for 'Third World' women by associating the cause of women's liberation with the expansion of western domination (Mohanty, 1991).

Trinh T. Minh-ha (1991) highlighted another aspect of the colonial relationship in the production of knowledge about the 'Third World': an intrusive search for the authentic 'Third World' subject. She explained how in this search for the authentic 'other,' 'native' researchers are relied upon to supply the 'authentic' truth about their 'native' culture to fill in the gaps in the 'Master's' knowledge. While the western scientist is able to 'absorb' the 'different truth' supplied by the 'insider' and produce an objective, general account, the 'insider' researcher remains mired in his/her subjectivity (Minh-Ha, 1991). At the same time, the 'insider' is legitimated as an authentic source of knowledge about his/her environment so long as he/she remains 'pure' as an 'insider' (Minh-Ha, 1991). Rejecting the construction of 'outsider' and 'insider' as binary opposites, Minh-ha wrote about insider/outsider researcher:

> Whether she turns the inside out or the outside in, she is, like the two sides of a coin, the same impure, both-in-one insider/outsider. For there can hardly be such a thing as an essential inside that can be homogeneously represented by all insiders; an authentic insider in there, an absolute reality out there, or an incorrupted representative who cannot be questioned by another incorrupted representative. (Minh-Ha, 1991, p. 75)

Thus, Minh-Ha (1991) highlighted how notions of authenticity and truth in cultural representations essentialize 'native' culture and marginalize ambiguous spaces and hybrid subjectivities as inauthentic. These notions are inseparably linked to the homogenization and objectification of the 'Third World woman.'

Postcolonial and other feminists (Anzaldúa, 1999; Fernandes, 1997; Mohanty, 2003b) emphasized that categories of analysis and practice such as class, gender and caste are not pre-given or stable but are dynamically reproduced and negotiated through everyday practices in interaction with larger intersecting structures of power such as patriarchies, capitalisms and racisms. Thus, they have politicized and 'dissolved' the static, self-evident categories that positivist social science relies on, making its claim to the objectively verifiable truth impossible. Queer Chicana feminist writer Gloria Anzaldúa (1999) pointed to the violence inherent in the dichotomies maintained by modern Western culture, which, in seeking to be 'objective,' distanced itself from the people and things it studied and made them into 'objects.' She theorized how the Cartesian split between mind and body at the basis of modern science has been an intrinsic part of the white/Western patriarchal oppression in privileging the rational mind imagined as male and white/Western while branding forms of knowing such as dreams, imagination and emotions as 'primitive' and relegating them to the lower realm of the body imagined as female and 'savage,' i.e. non-white/non-Western (Anzaldúa, 1999). Anzaldúa pointed to possibilities of recognizing, theorizing and legitimating other forms of knowing such as *la facultad*:

> *La facultad* is the capacity to see in surface phenomena the meaning of deeper realities, to see the deep structure below the surface. It is an instant "sensing," a quick perception arrived at without conscious reasoning. It is an acute awareness mediated by the part of the psyche that does not speak, that communicates in images and symbols which are the faces of feelings, that is, behind which feelings reside/hide. The one possessing this sensitivity is excruciatingly alive to the world. (Anzaldúa, 1999, p. 60)

Anzaldúa argued for new kinds of epistemologies, which do not subjugate through binary oppositions and do "not separate between mind and body, theory, art, everyday knowledge, popular culture, and spirituality" (Elenes, 2011, p. 51). Thus, feminists have argued that science has no direct access to truth, nor is the knowledge it produces the only legitimate

form of knowledge. Further, as Minh-ha (1991) theorized, neither the outsider, nor the insider have a privileged access to authenticity, objectivity or truth. Thus, feminists have proposed to leave behind the empiricist search for the 'authentic' or the 'truthful' and focus on the power dynamics and effects of the research process, the production of knowledge, and representation strategies, while integrating the international and historical contexts into the analysis, structural inequalities between and within country contexts, and the location of the researcher (Fernandes, 1999; Mohanty, 2003b).

Once objectivity can no longer be claimed, the social location of the knower becomes important. Mohanty (2003a) argued that if we start from a dominant position, "our visions of justice are more likely to be exclusionary because privilege nurtures blindness to those without the same privileges" (p. 510). However, if we begin "from the lives and interests of marginalized communities of women," we can "read up the ladder of privilege," making "the workings of power visible" (p. 511). In her research located at an Indian jute mill, Fernandes (1997) also demonstrated how "the particular social location of the working-class women" enabled the women to develop "a distinctive critical consciousness through their interpretations of everyday struggles" (p. 154). Similarly, Anzaldúa argued in relation to *la facultad* that:

> Those who are pushed out of the tribe for being different are likely to become more sensitized (when not brutalized into insensitivity). Those who do not feel psychologically or physically safe in the world are more apt to develop this sense. Those who are pounced on most have it the strongest – the females, the homosexuals of all races, the darkskinned, the outcast, the persecuted, the marginalized, the foreign.
>
> When we're up against the wall, when we have all sorts of oppressions coming at us, we are forced to develop this faculty… Pain makes us acutely anxious to avoid more of it, so we hone that radar. It's a kind of survival tactic that people, caught between the worlds, unknowingly cultivate … (Anzaldúa, 1999, pp. 60-61)

In addition to the politics of location, in this type of research the identity of the researcher becomes important as it impacts on the outcome of the research. A researcher needs to self-reflexively analyse her own location *vis-à-vis* those she is studying, making visible her own ideology, values, social status, cultural identity, power and privileges (Anzaldúa, 1999; Behar,

1993; Buyandelger, 2013; Fernandes, 1997; Spivak, 1988). Thus, the researcher's identity, her particular location at the intersections of the systems of power, her self-reflexivity and honesty become important for evaluating the validity and reliability of her research. I will return to these issues of identity and location later in this chapter.

4.4 Exploring activist research methodologies

As Lois Presser (2005) pointed out, "(i)nsofar as women's perspectives and experiences are subordinated in scientific inquiries and the larger culture," feminist researchers are sensitive to their place in the hierarchies of knowledge (p. 2068). I have embarked on this research journey as a postsocialist Mongolian, now classified as part of the 'Third World,' feminist, activist researcher. I am acutely aware, therefore, that the knowledge I produce is subject to triple devaluation as 'pertaining to women only,' as 'specific to Mongolia,' and as 'insufficiently academic.' I made a deliberate choice to conduct this research as a committed activist in order to 'speak for ourselves' as Mongolian women human rights/women's rights activists, to reflect on my/our activist experiences of over twenty years, to critically interrogate our work in relation to the overarching dynamics of neoliberal globalization, and to visibilise our activist labour.

To achieve this goal, I set out in search of activist and participatory research methods, particularly participatory action research (PAR) and political activist ethnography (PAE) (Bradford, 2014; Kapoor & Jordan, 2009; Ornelas, 1997; D. E. Smith, 2006; S. E. Smith, 1997; S. E. Smith, Willms, & Johnson, 1997). As Jordan and Kapoor (2009) explained, the PAR "emerged from a critique of western social science methodologies, viewing these in many instances as cultural imperialism" with an expressly political orientation, recognizing "that the social is constituted by asymmetrical power relations between and within communities" and in all spheres of social life from family to politics (p. 138). The same can be said about PAE (Jordan & Kapoor, 2016). These approaches were influenced by various strands of critical theory, including feminism and Marxism/neo-Marxism. Based on the explication of PAE and PAR by these scholars, the two approaches share a number of common features, which appealed to me, including the following:

- Are critical of positivism and lie within the constructivist epistemology, holding that the social world is produced through the social practices of people and there are no objective or neutral ways of knowing.

- Engage in a critical inquiry of the dominant configurations of power, including dominant concepts and ideologies such as patriarchy, capitalism and neoliberalism.

- Integrate theory and practice: aim to directly inform action by producing practical knowledge and strategies for action.

- Seek to empower people/activists to act on their own behalf to improve the conditions of their lives.

- Emphasize writing as part of the process and emphasize the need to write in plain, accessible language and disseminate results broadly.

- Do not turn the movement into an object of research.

- Can be done by activists themselves.

There are some differences between these approaches. PAR is thoroughly participatory and produces collective forms of knowledge. It starts from the lived realities of the people and proceeds through an open-ended cycle of reflection-action-analysis (Ornelas, 1997; S. E. Smith et al., 1997). According to Susan Smith (1997), PAR is based on a broader understanding of research as "a process of discovering and recreating personal and social realities" and "is about individuals and groups researching their personal beings, socio-cultural settings, and experiences," reflecting "on their values, shared realities, political resistances, and collective meanings, needs, and goals" (pp. 7-8). Thus, the PAR is open to looking inside, including at how power plays out among the people, but its main thrust is about looking from the inside out to the external structures of power and *vis-à-vis* the privileged classes and groups (Jordan & Kapoor, 2016; S. E. Smith et al., 1997). As Jordan and Kapoor (2016) stressed, PAR is conducted outside academia, expressly challenging the authority vested in a researcher-academic and conventional research methodologies:

> PAR aims to shift responsibility for the research process onto individuals and groups who are directly affected by these inequalities. Insofar as professional researchers have a role within PAR, it is to set their expertise alongside the lay knowledge, skills and experiences of people who are the focus of their investigations. In this way the research process is conceptualized

as an encounter, where equal partners meet, enter into dialogue and share different kinds of knowledge and expertise on how to address issues affecting a group or community. (p. 138)

PAE, on the other hand, may be done by an individual researcher, may or may not include action and can be time-bounded. For analytical entry points, it looks for particular confrontations between the movement and ruling regimes of power and is focused on the external relations of power (Jordan & Kapoor, 2016; D. E. Smith, 2006; G. W. Smith, 2006). PAE does not look inside the movement/activist world. George Smith (2006) was highly critical of studies that focus locally on the movements themselves and was adamant that PAE *never* turns movements into objects of research. Hussey (2012) also stressed that PAE is "explicitly set up to analyse social relations and social organization, not individuals and any "inner meanings" they may articulate about themselves" (p. 20). For PAE, movements are the location from which to explore the ruling relations and this location is conceptualized as being outside the ruling relations. This can be gleaned from George Smith's (2006) discussion about the epistemological shift articulated by Dorothy Smith from objective epistemology, which legitimizes "a form of knowing used to rule the society" (p. 51), to a reflexive epistemology, which sees all knowledge as socially organized:

> It is precisely this epistemological shift that allows D. Smith's method of sociology to embrace the standpoint of those who stand outside a ruling régime; whether this be the historical position of women in patriarchal society, the position of gay men and lesbians in heterosexual society, the location of people of colour in a racist society or the standpoint of working people in class society — to name but a few of those individuals who often stand outside a ruling regime. (G. W. Smith, 2006, p. 51)

Unmodified, neither PAR nor PAE suited my purpose. While the thoroughly participatory aspects of the PAR appealed to me, time and location were major obstacles: I had relocated to New Zealand with my family, my scholarship was for a maximum of four years, and I was formally enrolled in a time-bound PhD program. Having two small children, I could not afford to spend more than two months in Mongolia. Having limited finances, I could not travel back repeatedly. Also, given my research was set within an institutionalized PhD program, the responsibility for the research was on me as an individual researcher. These features meant I could not engage in a PAR as described above.

On the other hand, my research stemmed from over twenty years of our collective experience as activists and some ten years of intensive self-reflexive discussions about our activism and the institutional and structural conditions of our activism. My research questions were about the problems and challenges we had collectively identified and reflected on over several years. In addition, I had constant access to and frequently engaged in aspects of our activist world through Facebook, which has been consciously used and developed as an important activist space since circa 2008.[96] Furthermore, I had continued to function as an advisor to the MONFEMNET National Network through the organization's Facebook group, email exchanges, Skype calls and other means and had maintained regular contact with many of my activist colleagues. Nevertheless, my inability to be physically present in Mongolia for a prolonged period of time remained a key obstacle to adopting PAR.

PAE presented an interesting possibility in that it would guide me to produce activist research from inside the activist world, critically interrogating the larger power structures we are embedded in while retaining individual responsibility for the final product. It could also be done within a specific time frame. However, while looking from the inside out, I also

---

[96] Until 2008, most of the NGO leaders in our small community of pro-democracy human rights/women's rights NGOs had stayed away from social media. However, in 2008, after the July 1st events, MONFEMNET intensified its work with youth. Many of the youth were engaged on Facebook and Twitter and some on Instagram. The youth insisted that activist NGOs such as MONFEMNET and the older feminists and other activists should raise our voices and engage in discussions in these new spaces. I was still reluctant, primarily out of privacy concerns. However, when the youth created a Facebook profile for the "Hands up for Your Rights!" campaign MONFEMNET was supporting, I felt it was my duty to support the youth in the virtual spaces. After I joined, I encouraged other experienced activists to also join. Our young staff created a profile for MONFEMNET too on Facebook and other NGOs were also creating Facebook pages. Then we began to form various groups, ranging from closed to open, to consult on specific issues, engage in analytical discussions, share information, coordinate activities, organize events, and launch urgent action campaigns. Individually, some of us have used our own profiles to share our values, principles, worldviews and analyses. Our 'friends' range from 2,000 to 5,000 (this being the limit of friends one can have on Facebook), including people we had never met and who often have very different ideas from us. An important aspect of Facebook engagement is being in touch with people outside Ulaanbaatar, including people who live outside of the *aimag* (province) centers. For MONFEMNET, Facebook has been an important medium for maintaining communication with its local partners and alumni of the various training programs such as on Transforming Masculinities, SASA! Mobilizing communities to prevent violence against women, Safe Schools (to prevent gender-based violence at secondary schools), and leadership training for women local representatives. MONFEMNET has consciously approached networking with these groups with a view to promoting solidarity- and movement-building for social change. Older activists have been less active on Twitter, which is a more aggressive, masculine, urban, middle-class space in Mongolia. It is strategically important for getting directly in touch with male politicians and observing dominant trends. It is less valuable for popular awareness raising. However, younger activists are more active on Twitter and they have often filled in the gap when a need arose.

wanted to look, self-critically and self-reflexively, inside our own world, at our own conceptualizations, feelings, roles, relations, and politics in relation to the macro-level processes. Secondly, I did/do not view the activist world as outside the ruling regimes in light of the Foucauldian analyses of power and the theorizations about neoliberalism as a political rationale I discussed in Chapter 3. Thirdly, I still wanted to incorporate participatory elements into my research design so that I could tell our collective stories.

With these considerations, I opted for a form of feminist activist political ethnography as a methodology that is rooted in and stems from the concrete experiences and daily realities of women activists; allows for a combination of collective and individual reflections; enables us to re-look, re-discover and re-construct our histories and realities while deepening our critical understanding of the larger structures of power, particularly in relation to neoliberal democratization; and, thereby, enhances our capacity to see our roles, goals, and strategies more clearly.

As the general contours of the thesis began to emerge based on the fieldwork data, it became increasingly clear to me that I needed to use my own activist memories and experiences as a resource beyond what I had shared with my colleagues during the research workshops. This realization led me to seek additional methodological approaches that would supplement the form of feminist activist ethnography I outlined above by allowing me to incorporate my memories and experiences to a greater degree but without centring me as an individual. This search led me to an encounter with auto-ethnography and discussions of using the ethnographic self as a resource.

4.5 Auto-ethnography: using self as a resource

As Adams, Jones, and Ellis (2014) articulated, auto-ethnography emerged from the crisis of representation in social science research engendered by the critique of positivist science and the realization, in the 1970s and 1980s, that there is no such thing as a detached, neutral and objective researcher who produces true accounts of realities. As mentioned earlier, this crisis called into question many of the verities and established practices of mainstream social sciences such as universal truths and static claims about social reality; exclusion and suppression of emotion, story-telling and local knowledges; and hierarchical, objectifying

and exploitative ethnographic practices and representations. In response, some ethnographers experimented with and embraced, *inter alia*, storytelling as a way of knowing, careful attention to power relations and ethics in research, and explicit inclusion of personal experience and emotion (Adams et al., 2014). As Adams et al. (2014) stressed, admitting emotions into social research is important for confronting the erasure of the researcher's and participant's bodies in ethnographies and renders research more honest as well as closer to lived realities and embodied experiences. The authors proposed auto-ethnography as an effective alternative to mainstream social science methodologies and defined it as research that:

- Uses a researcher's personal experience to describe and critique cultural beliefs, practices, and experiences;
- Acknowledges and values a researcher's relationships with others;
- Uses deep and careful self-reflection (reflexivity) to name and interrogate the intersections between self and society, the particular and the general, the personal and the political;
- Shows "people in the process of figuring out what to do, how to live, and the meaning of their struggles;"
- Balances intellectual and methodological rigor, emotion, and creativity;
- Strives for social justice and to make life better (Adams et al., 2014, pp. 1-2)

Autoethnography thus suited my purpose well with one important caveat: it is a methodology that generally foregrounds the personal experience of the researcher. As Collins and Gallinat (2010) characterized it, in auto-ethnography, the ethnographer's self is the only informant. This did not suit my goal of telling our shared and collective stories as women activists, using my memories and experiences to supplement and enrich those stories.

Drawing from the same crisis of representation in social sciences, Collins and Gallinat (2010) made a case for a new kind of ethnography, "where the voice of the anthropologist, drawing on remembered experience, is one among others" (p. 17). Like auto-ethnography, this ethnography is not only self-reflexive but explicitly draws on the ethnographer's self as a resource. The authors argued that as all human interaction depends on the self with its experiences and memories so does ethnography, as a practice of studying "human interaction through observation and participation," depend on the ethnographer's self (p. 14).

Ethnographers' experiences can be highly relevant for their studies and drawing on similar or shared experiences can stimulate and enrich ethnography, particularly in the case of 'insider' researchers (p. 10). Therefore, ethnographers should take into account that they may be "their own, intimate informants" but approach this 'in-built' informant self-critically (p. 17). Not including personal experiences as data would not only be a lost opportunity but also insufficiently transparent and honest, hence morally and ethically problematic (Collins & Gallinat, 2010, p. 17).

Whether the researcher's personal experiences figure as the only source or one of many sources of data, there are several methodological and ethical considerations that apply to both approaches, and in fact to all ethnographies:

- *Theorizing memory*. Experiences of the self and others are woven with and through memory. Memory is inherently selective and forgetting is part of memory. Both remembering and forgetting are often subject to the dominant power dynamics, regimes of truth and cognitive paradigms as well as the personal capacity for remembering (Buyandelger, 2013; Collins & Gallinat, 2010; Kaplonski, 2004; Kubik, 2013; Michielsens, 2003). As Frigga Haug (2008) put it, "(m)emory itself should be conceived of as contested; it contains hope and giving up; above all, memory is constantly written anew and always runs the risk of reflecting dominant perspectives" (p. 538).

- *Seeing ethnographically.* The ethnographic gaze has been duly criticized for its historical complicity with the colonial and patriarchal structures of power. Commitment to a self-reflexive understanding of how one's way of seeing people and phenomena is "saturated with power, politics and history" and unavoidably partial and selective (Mayden, 2010, p. 97) is key to avoiding, or at the very least minimizing, one's complicity in the reproduction of the dominant power relations. As a researcher, one has an obligation to look at oneself, the ethnographic field, and one's own and others' experiences, memories and accounts critically, with self-awareness (Behar, 1993; Collins & Gallinat, 2010).

- *Ethics in research.* In all research, it is imperative that a researcher respects research participants as human beings, seeks to minimize power inequality, seeks their consent throughout the research process, and take steps to protect their privacy and identity, where relevant. These concerns figure prominently with the introduction of the self into our ethnography as writing about the self invariably involves writing about others (Adams et al., 2014). Therefore, as Collins and Gallinat (2010) put it, our friends and family and, potentially, many others become informants the moment we insert our self into our research. They must be afforded the same care and respect as the other participants. This concern is also of particular importance to 'insider' researchers who may know more and be allowed to see and hear more than 'outsiders' and thus run a higher risk of revealing more than participants would have chosen to. Ethics concern all stages of the research, including writing and the choice of representational strategy to avoid reproducing dominant power relations (Fernandes, 1999). Care must be taken to avoid causing harm to research participants, especially those most vulnerable, to minimize the burden of research on and maximize its benefits for the participants.

Supported by these two approaches to using the ethnographic self as a resource, I have included auto-ethnographic accounts in this thesis to further highlight the realities of women activists' lives. Also, inspired by Anzaldúa (1999), Behar (1993)and the auto-ethnographic approach to writing, I conceptualized this thesis as a series of inter-connected stories.

4.6 Research design and process

4.6.1 Locating ourselves in 'civil society'

As discussed above, the location and positioning of the researcher impacts on the outcome of the research. As this research project is about telling my/our collective/shared stories as women activists, I will start by locating us as activists/activist NGOs in the broader field of the Mongolian civil society. This, in turn, necessitates a clarification of the terms 'civil society' and 'NGO.' As I mentioned in Chapter 3 and discuss more in detail in the Mongolian context in Chapter 6, the term 'civil society' as well as the seemingly more straightforward term 'NGO' are extremely problematic on many levels, including at conceptual, ideological-political and practical levels. In addition to Antonio Gramsci's incisive critique of civil society

as central to the hegemonic programming of the dominant classes in a capitalist liberal democracy (Gramsci, 1972), a growing number of scholars have critiqued the resurgence of civil society and proliferation of NGOs as part and parcel of western imperialism and/or neoliberal governmentality (Choudry & Kapoor, 2010, 2013; Comaroff & Comaroff, 1999; D'Souza, 2018; Ferguson & Gupta, 2002; Neysmith, 2000). I will return to these criticisms later in the thesis. Here, my purpose is to locate our activist community within the messy field of 'civil society.'

Western political theory and mainstream political science have largely viewed civil society as central to democracy and democratization (Gellner, 1994; Putnam, 1994; Tocqueville, 2000). However, there has been no comparable consensus on the definition of civil society although the key conceptual boundaries have been those distinguishing 'civil society' from the state characterized by a monopoly of the legitimate use of coercion in a society, the market characterized by its for-profit nature, political society characterized by its goal of attaining state power, and family characterized by its private concerns (Aronoff & Kubik, 2012; CIVICUS, 2011; Kubik, 2013).

Aronoff and Kubik (2012) identified three basic approaches to defining civil society: one normative and two analytical. The first evolved in the specifically Western historical context and refers to the "*ideal* self-organization of society outside the state's control" (pp. 200-201). In the liberal option of this conception, civil society is all that is not the state, including the market, family and political parties/political society. In the social-democratic option, civil society is separate from the economic/market domain. The second approach is more analytical, primarily based on the Habermasian notion of a public space, which is "*institutionally protected from the state's arbitrary encroa*chment," mediates between society and state and within which citizens freely associate, self-organize as bearers of public opinion and negotiate their public life (Aronoff & Kubik, 2012, p. 201). In this conception, civil society is delineated from the private family/kinship sphere, market and the state. The third approach looks at civil society "*as a set of organized groups/associations*, whose members deliberate or act collectively to accomplish common goals" (p. 201). This conception narrows the boundaries of civil society to formal or informal voluntary groups, ranging from local chess clubs to lobby groups to trade unions, including NGOs and usually excluding political parties.

All three approaches are heavily biased in positing ideal-typical western and liberal democratic parameters such as the rule of law, public accountability and transparency, independence from the state, transparency, formality and civility (pp. 200-202). Therefore, for the purposes of mapping Mongolia's 'civil society' in order to clarify our location within it, I will use the third conception of civil society as a formal, not substantive or normative, model. Based on this model, the Mongolian NGO sector is a large but one of many sub-sectors of the broader civil society. As Chapter 6 discusses more in detail, the NGO sector is extremely diverse and its boundaries *vis-à-vis* the state, political society, family and market are murky. This research focuses on a numerically small sub-set of independent, non-partisan women-led advocacy NGOs committed to participatory democracy, human rights, gender equality, social justice and sustainable development, located formally within the NGO sector (see Figure 1).

This long list of characterization evolved over time as we increasingly articulated our positions as feminist or feminist-oriented, human-rights based NGOs concerned with structural inequality and social justice and, hence, with a focus on solidarity- and movement-building. The boundaries of this community are blurred as the criteria are not absolute, open to interpretation, and hard to strictly apply. For example, being human-rights based is at times an ethical commitment and an aspiration rather than an actual practice, depending on the organization's financial and other capacities. Similarly, while NGOs are committed, in principle, to movement-building, their ability to effectively and consistently promote this process invariably depends on the organizational capacity, especially staff time and finances. In total, these NGOs may number less than twenty, including NGOs that have not managed to become institutionalized and are primarily run and represented by one or two people.[97] Their boundaries often overlap with various other sub-sets of the field such as women's NGOs that do not systematically question patriarchy,

---

[97] In the Mongolian context, whether an NGO manages to become institutionalized, i.e. as a minimum become set up with an office and staff, depends primarily on its leaders' ability to raise funds from international sources. Therefore, the institutionalization of an NGO predominantly depends on the leaders' English or other foreign language skills. This (primarily) English language requirement is a key de-equalizing factor. Therefore, dismissing un-institutionalized NGOs as merely individuals parading as NGOs would in fact corroborate inequalities based not only on linguistic abilities but also geographic location (few rural activists have access to English), and class (bilingual and multilingual Mongolians are primarily from urban intelligentsia).

other pro-democracy and human rights NGOs that do not seek to challenge neoliberalism, and environmental and other social justice-oriented movements and local groups that often embrace patriarchal, even misogynist, ethno-nationalism.
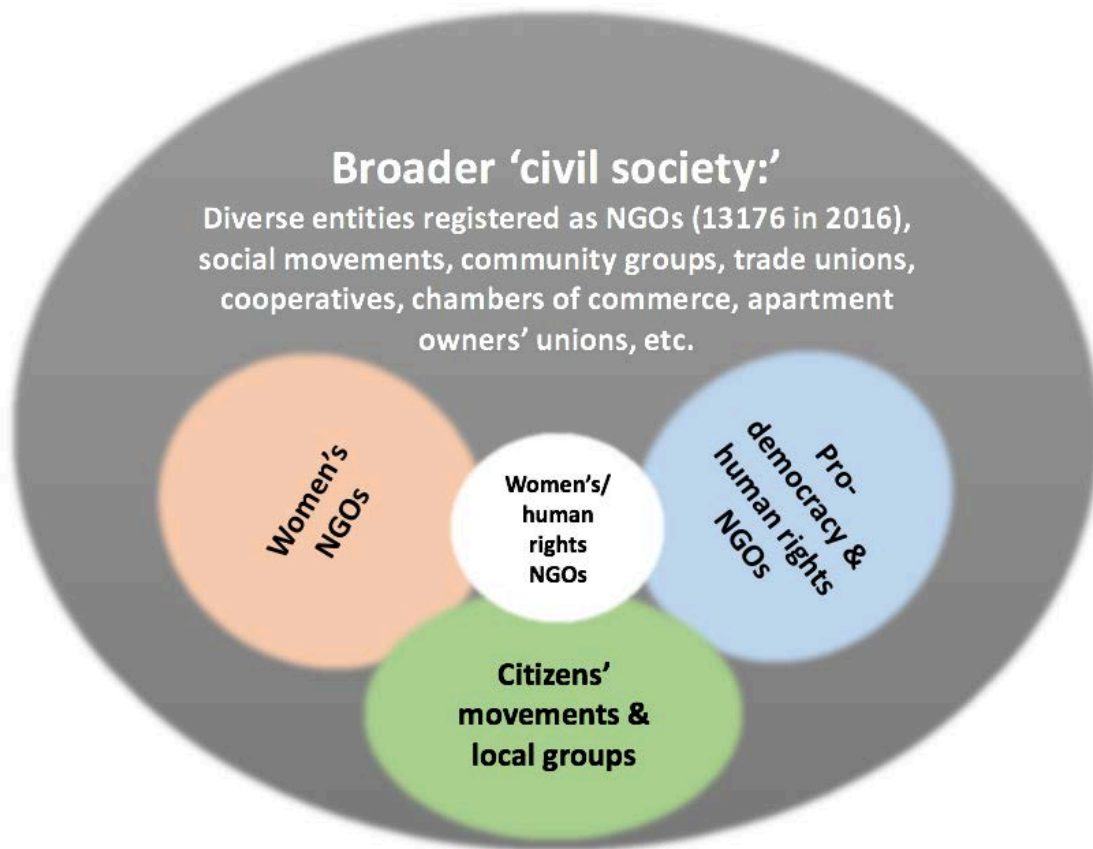
Figure 1. Locating women-led advocacy NGOs for democracy, human/women's rights and social justice

At the core of this community are NGOs such as MONFEMNET National Network (MONFEMNET), the Center for Human Rights and Development (CHRD), the National Center against Violence (NCAV), the Center for Citizens' Alliance (CCA), the Human Rights Center for Aiding Citizens (HRCAC), and the Law and Human Rights Center (LHRC). These NGOs and their leaders have played a central role in the human rights/women's rights NGO community and in the broader civil society field. We have also worked closely together, including through MONFEMNET as the latter five NGOs have been active and supportive members of MONFEMNET, sharing a commitment to movement-building based on a growing understanding of the structural nature of inequality, poverty and violence. This is a group I invited to the collective analysis workshops.

4.6.2 Introducing workshop participants

To ground my research in the lived experiences of women activists, I designed my research so as to centre it on a series of collective analysis sessions with a select group of women activists. Based on my consultation with some of the potential participants, I developed the following criteria for selection:

- actively involved in the Mongolian civil society for over ten years,
- self-identify as promoting gender equality, human rights, democracy and social justice (emphases can vary),
- regarded by other activists as key actors/leaders in civil society,
- have formed and led NGOs,
- agreed to participate in the research project and able to devote the time.

Having formed and led NGOs was an important criterion as, in an unfavourable funding environment, the experiences and perspectives of activists who have had to 'carry organizations on their backs' and those that have not differ significantly. In consultation, we opted to have a small group in order to have more in-depth discussions. This led to an emphasis on mutual trust and comfort with each other based on shared values, ethical principles and a sense of common political goals. Thus, we formed a tightly knit group of six women, including myself, who have worked and struggled together for many years, especially intensively from the 2000s. This group included J. Zanaa, Director of the CCA; G. Urantsooj, Chair of the CHRD; D. Tsend-Ayush, Director of the LHRC; S. Dondov, Director of the HRCAC; D. Enkhjargal, who was at the time simultaneously the Director of the NCAV and the National Coordinator of MONFEMNET; and T. Undariya, myself, former National Coordinator and current Advisor of MONFEMNET.

For the purposes of ensuring transparency and self-reflexivity in this research, here is an overview of who we are in terms of our social positions and identities as of 2015:

- *Age:* Our physical ages ranged from the early forties (Undariya) to the early sixties (Zanaa) while our 'civil society' ages ranged from eighteen (Enkhjargal and Dondov) to twenty-five (Zanaa).

- *Geographic background:* All of us were Ulaanbaatar residents. Three of us were born in the capital city (Urantsooj, Tsend-Ayush and Undariya) but one of us had moved several years earlier to a remote district of Ulaanbaatar. Three of us had grown up outside of Ulaanbaatar: in Tuv *aimag* centre (Zanaa), in a *soum* in Khentii *aimag* (Enkhjargal), and in Bayankhongor *aimag* centre (Dondov). Dondov *egch* had also worked in her home *aimag* for five years after graduating from university in Ulaanbaatar and moved to the capital in the mid-1990s. Most of us had close relatives in rural areas.

- *Ethnic background*: Presumably all of us identified as *Khalkha* – we did not explicitly discuss our ethnic backgrounds. However, when discussing oppressions during state-socialism, one of us shared she was half-*Buryad* and half-*Khalkha* but identified as *Khalkha* because her parents registered the older two of their four children as *Khalkha* and the younger two as *Buryad*.

- *Language skills:* Two of us were Russian-educated[98] Mongolians (Urantsooj and Undariya) with a native command of the Russian language and one of us (Zanaa) taught Russian at a tertiary level. We were also the three of the six who were fluent in English. Two of us (Urantsooj and Undariya) had academic-level English skills. The other three of us had a language barrier although Enkhjargal could comprehend an intermediate text with the help of a dictionary. She is a rarity in the Mongolian NGO community in that she has managed to successfully run a large[99] NGO without English skills.

- *Educational background:* All of us had higher education. One of us (Urantsooj) had attended a university in a Comecon country and obtained a PhD degree during state-socialism. The other five attended universities in Mongolia. Two of us (Urantsooj and

---

[98] This is significant as those who attended Soviet or special (Russian-language) schools during state-socialism were primarily from the urban intelligentsia (*sekheetnii davkharga*), socially placed higher and (self-)seen as more cultured (*soyoltoi*) and educated (*bolovsroltoi*). A good command of Russian further facilitated upward mobility. Russian-educated Mongolians had greater access to the outside world, tertiary education abroad, information and English language training. The difference between Russian-educated (*oros surguuliin*) and Mongolian-educated (*mongol surguuliin*) Mongolians was not only of social status but also cultural. This cultural divide and social inequality lingers, although the patterns differ.

[99] The NCAV is large by Mongolian standards where funding and support for independent NGOs is very limited. The staff size ranged from 15 to 25. Most independent NGOs that operate regularly probably have 3-5 employees.

Undariya) had attended Western universities after the 'transition' (in Hong Kong, Hungary and the US).

- *Professional backgrounds*: Three of us were lawyers and defence attorneys: Enkhjargal, Dondov and Tsend-Ayush. The other three were a microbiologist (Urantsooj), a Russian language teacher (Zanaa), and a professional translator and a political scientist (Undariya).

- *Family backgrounds*: All of us had the experience of marriage and children, two had experienced widowhood and three single motherhood, and four of us had been primary bread-winners for our families at different times. Four of us (Zanaa, Urantsooj, Tsend-Ayush and Dondov) were grandmothers and two of us (Enkhjargal and Undariya) had young children. Both Enkhjargal and I had experienced the difficulty of running an NGO while pregnant and with a young child: neither of us was able to take a pregnancy leave and our maternity leaves were cut short too.

What this overview shows is that while all of us consider ourselves (more or less) middle class urban Mongolians, our actual backgrounds, geographic experiences and identities, and socio-economic situations are quite diverse. We are privileged as Khalkha, highly educated, professional, urban, heterosexual women. On the other hand, a few of us have known vulnerabilities and financial insecurities as widows, single mothers and low-earning activists. Nearly all of us have also had serious health issues, which we associate with the high burn-out rate among activists, especially those in charge of organizations and those who are front-liners, providing direct services to victims of violence and human trafficking, or leading mobilization during times of struggle, e.g. during environmental litigation *vis-à-vis* mining companies or in face of mass violations of human rights by the State as in 2008.

4.6.3 Fieldwork and data

My fieldwork was conducted in November-December, 2015, in Ulaanbaatar. We held five collective analysis workshops stretched over this period. Four of these were full days and one was half a day. The timing, location and topics were determined collectively under the general scope of the interrogation I presented at the first workshop. The first workshop was held in a small meeting room of a hotel, three were held at the MONFEMNET office and one at the

CHRD office. In February 2017, when I returned to Mongolia for a short visit, I held follow-up meetings with all the participants to report on the progress of my research and some of the analytical themes that were emerging.

During my fieldwork in 2015 and the visit in 2017, I held fifteen interviews with other activists, former activists, employees of international and bilateral development organizations, researchers and politicians. The interviews were open-ended and were analytical conversations rather than interviews. In 2018, I held two additional interviews/conversations via Skype.

During my fieldwork, I attended various NGO events, including training workshops, discussions, and meetings with the government, and held numerous informal discussions with activists, public servants, politicians and employees of international and bilateral development organizations.

Throughout the research process and especially intensively during the writing stage, I have maintained conversation with several of the workshop and interview participants as well as other activists *via* e-mail and Facebook Messenger. I included Facebook in my 'field' as much activist and public interaction takes place on social media, including strategic consultations, public discussions, advocacy, and urgent actions. I often used Facebook to test some of my 'hunches' and gather different perspectives and, occasionally, important information.

I also used various secondary sources and heavily relied on my personal and MONFEMNET electronic archives as sources of data. These included our urgent alerts, photos, forum programs, strategic meeting minutes, appeals and petitions, letters to politicians, project reports, articles for newspapers and video materials. Finally, I have used my own activist experiences and memories as data through auto-ethnographic accounts and reflection.

4.6.4 Inductive analysis

I approached this research inductively. My fieldwork was rather open-ended. I began purposefully with a broad and vague idea of the general direction of my research. While I sought to develop theoretical and political perspectives on neoliberalism, I held them 'lightly' so as not to impose ready-made theoretical concepts and explanations onto our

practice and realities. I sought to let my data, especially the women's perspectives, guide my analysis and focus. I did not seek to tell a general story that would be 'true' about civil society, NGOs, women activists and democracy in Mongolia. Instead, I sought to make visible our specific perspectives at specific times in our history.

The process of transcribing the workshop discussions and the interviews triggered numerous reflections, which I began to record as they emerged. I arranged some of the data thematically and teased out some of the 'stories' they 'held.' The transcripts, especially the workshop transcripts, guided additional literature review. Through this back-and-forth process between the transcripts, my own reflections and literature review, the thesis began to take shape. Only a fraction of the 'stories' made it into this thesis; many remain untold.

4.6.5 The researcher, power and ethics

I sought to maintain awareness of the complexities of my dual role as a researcher and a fellow activist throughout this research process. My primary concern was with the workshops as they entailed more intense engagement. However, the same issues applied to some of the interviews as many of my interviewees were my colleagues and friends as well.

On one hand, due to my educational background as a western-trained political scientist, I had historically, since the early 2000s, played a role of an educator for some of my colleagues. As a Coordinator of MONFEMNET, I had led many of our advocacy actions, the analytical teams for public forums, and training programs. Some of my colleagues had long seen me as an 'expert' and even *bagsh* (teacher) and had come to trust my judgment. This had important power implications, amplified by my status as a researcher based at a western university.

On the other hand, sharing power was facilitated by the egalitarian culture we had consciously cultivated in our micro-spheres (*bichil orchindoo*) as well as our well-established tradition of engaging in collective analysis. Thus, in the workshops, with a practiced ease, we took turns facilitating the workshops, brainstormed together on the research questions and possible directions, digressed into silly or serious matters, openly shared our thoughts and experiences and identified some of our challenges in a reasoned, focused manner. As a researcher, I still led the process, making sure we covered all the topics we had identified. As one of the

participants was from a remote district, I had budgeted a transportation allowance for her from my research grant in order to equalise the conditions of participation for everyone.

I was less worried about my cultural and social difference as a Russian-educated Mongolian as it had long ceased to be an issue in my interactions with most of my research participants.[100] The closeness and friendships, however, posed an ethical concern. Most of the time, my colleagues forgot I was engaged in the process as a researcher. Whether in the workshops or interviews, they spoke freely as they always did in my presence. Some of the talk was deeply internal and sensitive. The same concern applied to my own memories and experiences. Consequently, throughout the research process and especially during the writing of the thesis, I have been acutely and nervously aware of the need to carefully choose what to reveal as well as how to reveal/represent. In some cases, what I could not directly explain due to potential risks to people (not only activists) or organizations (not only NGOs) but I felt it was still important to express, I chose to present using very general language.

Although nearly all workshop and interview participants consented to full disclosure, I considered keeping all or most of their identities anonymous. However, as I proceeded to write in that manner, it became clear that it would cause another ethical problem - that of corroborating the active erasure and invisibilization of women activists and their labour. I checked back with some of the workshop participants and they assured me that I could go ahead and name them openly. A number of times I still went back to my colleagues to obtain their explicit consent on specific points. I also sent some sections of my writing to workshop and interview participants (if they had access to English) for their feedback.

Finally, after I returned to Mongolia, having submitted my draft thesis for examination, I held a half a day workshop with my five colleagues who were the research workshop participants

---

[100] This was, however, still an issue for me until the mid-2000s. I had no difficulty working together with Mongolian-educated activists but I did have difficulty relating to them socially. I did not know what to talk about with them and had anxieties about my command of Mongolian. As we deepened our understanding of the importance of process, informal and social relations and human-to-human connections in community- and movement-building, I consciously sought to overcome this cultural divide. Over the years, I trained myself to overcome my social anxiety and learned to speak the kind of colloquial Mongolian I was expressly forbidden to use as a child (the 'street talk' as my mother used to call it). I also dressed and carried my body more casually and, most of all, cultivated my sense of humour and relied on it to evoke the same humorous responses from others.

and MONFEMNET staff who have consistently supported my research process. At this workshop, held on October 24, 2018, I reported back to the group about my research process, key analytical points and main findings. I also took the opportunity to verify, one last time, if they still wished to grant me full consent regarding the use of their names and the information they had shared during my research process. My colleagues unanimously and readily confirmed their consent. They also validated my findings. We all agreed that we need further discussions among us to reflect on the outcomes of this research and to strategize for future action. We reaffirmed our plans to share the learnings from this research with our fellow activists and other interested parties through various formats, including smaller workshops and larger public discussions.

Chapter 5 : The emergence of women's NGOs

And the establishment of the NGO form

> A beginning is the time for taking the most delicate care that the balances are correct.
>
> - Frank Herbert, *Dune*
>
> Had a nightmare last night
> A long hand tormented me
> It choked my words
> And covered my eyes
> Luckily, the bell rang
> Struggling, I woke up.
> > The sound of the bell, wake us up, wake us up
> > The sound of the bell, wake us up
>
> - Khonkh band, "Khonkhny duu" ["The Sound of the Bell"]

5.1 Introduction

The balances were not correct when the MPRP stepped on the path to political and economic reforms in the 1980s. Although far better off compared to pre-revolutionary Mongolia, the economy was stagnant, then hit hard by the disintegration of the Comecon and, most damningly of all, the Soviet Union withdrew its massive support, leaving Mongolia's social sectors in the lurch. In 1987-1992, Soviet professionals and some 100,000 soldiers exited Mongolia, leaving the country not only short of skilled labour in many sectors but also unprotected from the more populous and economically more powerful China (Bulag, 1998, p. 17; Rossabi, 2005, pp. 9-10; Zoljargal, 2012). Without major reforms or without the infusion of aid from other sources, or both, Mongolia's prospects were grim.

While life was getting harder in material terms, excitement and hope were in the air. *Perestroika* had stirred people's imaginations of a life that could be freer, more genuine, and more prosperous. In 1984, the aging president Yu. Tsedenbal and his domineering Russian wife Filatova were removed from state power (and the country) and a former university professor J. Batmunkh was installed to lead the country through the *uurchlun baiguulalt* (*perestroika*) (Bulag, 1998, pp. 16-17). The MPRP not only relaxed its censorship and control but also encouraged people and specifically the media to speak up about the defects of the

system and wrongdoings of bureaucrats (Rossabi, 2005, p. 8; Zoljargal, 2012).[101] First Soviet, and then Mongolian media, including national television and starting from youth programs, had begun to touch upon critical issues[102] (Zoljargal, 2012). In the spring of 1989, the Mongolian State Radio began to air Khonkh band's political songs critical of the status quo (Bars, 2014, May 26). Snippets of information about the world outside the socialist bloc began to trickle in. Mongolia joined the Group of 77 in the United Nations in 1989 (Bulag, p. 17) but the focus was really on the west, especially the US. In a complete reversal of the previous condemnation of the US as capitalist, imperialist and racist as portrayed in Herluf Bidsrup's cartoons,[103] advanced capitalist states were now beginning to be seen as pinnacles of civilization, the epitome of humane society, and a model of democracy.[104]

Choinom's poems, censored for honouring Chinggis Khaan, criticizing socialist bureaucracy and mentioning sex and alcohol, were being hand-copied and circulated, even among secondary school students. Movies were produced glorifying the Queen Mandukhai the Wise and even Chinggis Khaan. *Mongol bichig*, the largely forgotten traditional script, was introduced into the school curriculum in 1987 and televised lessons began to be aired on television. Mongolians were increasingly talking about the domination of the *Oros akh* (Russian big brother), the relegation of Mongolia to a raw material base and the privileged status of Soviet expats. The 'brotherly' relations were further strained by the Northern brother's demand that Mongolia repay the debt of ten billion transferable roubles incurred primarily between 1970 and 1990 (Ts. Batbayar, 1998).[105] Some of the bolder ones even used the words 'imperialism' and 'colonization' and argued that the aid given by the Soviet Union

---

[101] G. Zoljargal (2012), a well-known documentary producer, specifically mentioned the important role Mr. Tudev, then the General Editor of the MPRP's newspaper *Unen* (*Truth*), played in encouraging the media and artistic community to speak the truth about the Mongolian reality. Mr. Tudev also served as a member of the MPRP's Central Committee and was elected as a deputy of the *Ardyn Ikh Khural* (the MPR parliament) and a member of its presidium. In 1997, Mr. Tudev competed in the first presidential election.

[102] Ms. Kh. Naranjargal, Founder and Chair of Globe International NGO, also talked about the movement for *uurchlun baiguulalt* at the national television station as well as pro-reform broadcasting in the late 1980s and the early 1990s (personal communication, December 22, 2015).

[103] A Danish communist artist. His art was published in the Soviet Union in a large format, very thick album and many Mongolian families owned a copy. Many in my generation grew up watching the world through this book. I still vividly remember images of oppressed black people and the Ku Klux Klan, fat capitalists with a fat cigar in their mouths, and Uncle Sam (I did not know then who that skinny tall man in a tall hat was).

[104] Thelen (2011) and Kregel (2006) touch upon this point in various ways in postsocialist contexts.

[105] Ts. Batbayar (1998)noted that the parties disagreed on the USD amount of the loan. Bulag (1998) estimated it at GBP 10 billion.

probably equalled the value of minerals and meat they accessed at much lower prices (Rossabi, 2005).

Political discussions were proliferating throughout the country, critiquing the *khuuchinsag* (outdated, retrograde) political and economic system, the authoritarian bureaucratic culture, and the oppression of individuality. In 1989, some of my fellow ninth-grade students (16-17 years old) decided not to join the Mongolian Revolutionary Youth League (MRYL) as a political statement in support of the emerging mass movement for democracy. This was a bold move as, during state-socialism, university doors were as good as closed to those who were not MRYL members. Most students therefore opted for a more cautious course of action as things could go either way politically and joined the league, albeit with some degree of shame and guilt at betraying ideals of freedom. Thus the late 1980s and early 1990s were filled with hopeful exhilaration and a sense of awakening but also of fear and uncertainty. The first generation of women activists was born from these stirrings.

This chapter aims to tell the story of how women's NGOs for democracy, human rights, gender equality and social justice began to emerge and became established in the first decade of postsocialism. This is a story we have not had the luxury of time to tell in any systematic manner. In the meantime, others have written *about* us, often highlighting our leadership in civil society (Fish, 1998; Sabloff, 2003). Some have written us completely *out* of Mongolia's civil society (J. Amarsanaa & Baasansuren, 2013). Others have started to write us *into* the western-dominated neoliberalization project (Bumochir, 2018). In view of these voice-overs and gloss-overs, I aim to bring women activists' own voices to the forefront, drawing on the stories shared during my research workshops and interviews. As an activist myself, I will also share auto-ethnographic accounts. In order not to lose the nuances of Mongolian culture, language and the nature of the activists' relationships with each other, I have opted to use the Mongolian word *egch* (older sister/auntie) following the women's names instead of the English Ms. or Mrs., which would impose a measure of formality and distance. To contextualize the stories, I first provide an overview of pro-democracy mass mobilization and opposition party formation in the early 1990s.

5.2 Pro-democracy movements and opposition parties

In the late 1980s, young urban intellectuals were holding clandestine political meetings and forming various groups all over central Ulaanbaatar and in the aimags. In November of 1988, the *Shine uye bulgem* (New Generation group) was formed secretly by a philosophy and social sciences lecturer S. Zorig, journalist S. Amarsanaa, physicist E. Bat-Uul, journalist and singer-song-writer S. Tsogtsaikhan from Khonkh band and others (Bars, 2014, May 26; Rossabi, 2005; Ulemj, 2012, December 5). On the night of January 2, 1989, the group pasted around the city center its first political leaflet[106] (History and Archeology Department of the Mongolian Academy of Sciences, n.d.-a; Ulemj, 2012, December 5), which included a demand to popularize the UDHR. On February 9, 1989, the *Unen* newspaper printed the UDHR with an important modification: "the freedom of peaceful assembly and association" was changed to "the freedom of peace assembly and association"[107] (S. Amarsanaa, 2015, February 26; Ulemj, 2012, December 5). S. Amarsanaa recalled in 2012:

> This was before we distributed the first leaflet. In 1988, I happened to buy a new magazine named *Courier* from the Central Post Office. In it, I came across the 'Universal Human Rights Declaration' and read it for the first time. This magazine was issued … by UNESCO … Since Mongolia had become a member of the UN, the Russian-language edition was freely sold… At the time, I was shocked as I read … articles such as "… Everyone has the right to freely move and choose [his/her] place of residence within the borders of their country… Everyone has a right to struggle to establish such a social and international order in which the rights and freedoms set forth in this Declaration can be fully realized."[108] Of course [I was shocked] because we had no right to freely move inside the country, to say nothing about freely choosing where we wish to live. To leave the city, one had to obtain a permit… It was not easy to get it. … At the time, I worked for the *Khudulmur* (*Labour*) newspaper. I proposed to translate the declaration into our mother tongue and publicise but my editor refused, saying

---

[106] S. Amarsanaa wrote that the leaflet was typed at the Khureltogoot Star Observatory where Bat-Uul worked as a researcher. The group members deemed the observatory was somewhat outside the purview of the Ministry of Internal Security (Ulemj, 2012, December 5).

[107] This is Article 20.1 of the UDHR: "Everyone has the right to freedom of peaceful assembly and association" (United Nations, 1948).

[108] In the UDHR text, these are articles 13.1 ("Everyone has the right to freedom of movement and residence within the borders of each State") and 28 ("Everyone is entitled to a social and international order in which the rights and freedoms set forth in this Declaration can be fully realized") (United Nations, 1948).

'No such directions came from above.' Still, finding out what rights we have is an important accomplishment. Also, because it was a UN publication, it was not confiscated as 'capitalist print.' I had my copy of *USA Today*, which I had obtained with great effort and was using to learn English, confiscated by the Ministry of Internal Security. (Ulemj, 2012, December 5)

The Young Economists' Club emerged in 1988-1989,[109] involving young professionals from the State Planning Committee, the Statistical Bureau, the Bureau of Prices and Standards, MongolBank, various foreign trade cooperation organizations, the Ministry of Foreign Trade and economics lecturers from the Mongolian National University (MNU), the Polytechnic Institute and the Party Institute (Assa.mn, 2014, December 7; Bars, 2014, May 26). In August, 1989, the political group *Orchlon* [Universe] was founded by a motley crew, which included heads of departments, engineers and researchers from the Bread and Confectionary Factory, the Foreign Professionals Service Office, the Roads and Construction Utilization and Maintenance Office, the Construction Research Institute, and the Bus Depot, and one student (Assa.mn, 2014, November 26). In September, 1989, lecturers D. Lamjav and D. Ulaankhuu formed a group at the Mathematics Department of the Mongolian National University (MNU) and began to regularly produce a 'wall newspaper'[110] titled *The Hide Park*, containing not only criticisms of the party and state leaders but also analytical articles questioning the social structure of state-socialism (Bars, 2014, May 26). Meanwhile, the Mongolian Student Union (MSU) and the MRYL were going through intensive organizational and ideological changes, gearing up to play a crucial mass mobilization role in the democratic movement (Otgonjargal, 2014, December 4). Lamas actively supported the democratic movement as well.

On November 27-28, 1989, at the Second National Convention of Young Artists, young architects, artists, actors, writers, journalists, film-makers and musicians directly expressed their criticisms and ideas to the participating members of the Central Committee (S. Amarsanaa, 2015, February 26; Bars, 2014, May 26; Dasha, 2016, May 21). On December 3 the first mass demonstration was held in Erdenet city and included, among others, city

---

[109] Interestingly, these dates vary by sources. Da. Ganbold reminisced about it emerging in 1987-1988 (Assa.mn, 2014, December 7) whereas Bars (2014, May 26) stated it was established in 1989.
[110] *Khanany sonin* – a large format information sheet that was affixed on walls. This format was broadly used during state-socialism, most likely as the most cost-efficient option for informing large numbers of people.

officials (Otgonjargal, 2014, December 4; Vikipedia [Wikipedia]).[111] Protestors met again on December 6 to issue demands, including one to nationalize the Soviet-Mongolian jointly owned Erdenet copper-molybdenum plant (Vikipedia [Wikipedia]). On December 7, lecturers and students of the *Khovd aimag's* Pedagogical University held a mass rally at the Ard Ayush Square, reportedly attended by over 300 people[112] (S. Amarsanaa, 2015, February 26; Otgonjargal, 2014, December 4).

On December 9, 1989, the various political groups joined together, founding the Mongolian Democratic Union, a political mass organization with a mission to bring about a democratic revolution through peaceful means. S. Zorig, S. Amarsanaa, E. Bat-Uul, journalist Ts. Elbegdorj, actor D. Sosorbaram, lama D. Baasan and nine others were elected to the MDU's Coordinating Council (S. Amarsanaa, 2015, February 26). At its first public demonstration held on December 10, International Human Rights Day, outside the Cultural Palace of Youth and Children, drawing about two hundred people, the MDU announced its establishment. They issued demands to, *inter alia*, establish a multi-party system, respect human rights, and hold the next Ardyn Ikh Khural elections in the first half of 1990 (S. Amarsanaa, 2015, February 26). The *Khonkh* band's song "The Sound of the Bell" became the hymn of the democratic movement from this day. The next demonstration, held on December 17 to demand a response from the MPRP, drew two thousand people. That evening S. Zorig was elected as the MDU's General Coordinator and his role was crucial in keeping the protests peaceful.

Inspired by the MDU, the National Progress Movement was formed at the State Statistical Office in December 1989 and began to support the MDU (Assa.mn). The Social Democratic Movement (SDM) was formed on December 28, 1989. The third MDU demonstration held on January 4, 1990 drew over 10,000 people, prompting the MPRP's Ulaanbaatar city leadership to meet with the protesters. The meetings were broadcast live nationally on radio and television (S. Amarsanaa, 2015, February 26). With support from the MDU, the Mongolian

---

[111] Rossabi (1979) mentioned that in the early December demonstrations, an Erdenet mill employee expressed his discontent with the Russians getting paid twice as much as Mongolians for the same work and demanded pay equity between Soviet and Mongolian employees. This may have happened during the first demonstration.
[112] In his chronology, S. Amarsanaa (2015, February 26) omitted the Erdenet demonstrations and mentioned that the Khovd demonstrators ended their demand for speeding up the *uurchlun baiguulalt* and radically reforming the Central Committee with words expressing trust in the ability of the MPRP to make these changes.

Journalists' Union was reformed as the Mongolian Free Democratic Journalists' Union (MFDJU) (Rossabi, 2005, p. 15). The fourth demonstration was held on the Sukhbaatar Square, right outside the Government building, drawing over 20,000 people, and the fifth drew 30,000 on February 17. On February 18, 1990, at the MDU's first Congress, the first independent magazine *Shine toli* (New mirror) was distributed. The Mongolian Democratic Party (MDP), the New Progress Union (NPU), founded by the merger of the New Progress Movement and the Economists' Club, and the Social Democratic Movement (SDM) announced their establishment (S. Amarsanaa, 2015, February 26; Assa.mn, 2014, December 7). The Mongolian Social Democratic Party (MSDP) announced its establishment on March 2 (S. Amarsanaa, 2015, February 26).

Following a mass demonstration organized by the MDU, SDU, NPU and the MSU that drew about 100,000 people, the first hunger strike was started by ten members of the MDU's National Coordinating Council, demanding the Politburo of the MPRP Central Committee step down and speed up democratic reforms (S. Amarsanaa, 2015, February 26; Vikipedia [Wikipedia]). More people joined the strike, reaching 33, including one woman, Sh. Nina. Nina recalled in a 2015 interview with *Ugluunii Sonin* (Morning Newspaper) ("Ankhny ulsturiin ulsgulun [The first political hunger strike]," 2015, March 9):

> Fortunately, my *khani*[113] (husband) was a man with democratic views. N. Altangerel – he was one of democracy's first. So I had no oppression or pressure from family though my mom and dad were fearful. But I made a bet with my *khani* and I won, so I went to join the hunger strike. My husband's health was weak, so I went myself. At the time, I was a doctor at the Hospital No. 3. But I did not abandon my patients to go on hunger strike. I was a statistician doctor. So I could catch up with the statistical information later.
>
> … I watched the hunger strike on the Noyon Uul issue and it appears specific interest [for private gain] may be present.[114] There was none of that among us. My husband and I strived

---

[113] *Khani* is an important and cherished concept among Mongolians. It refers not only to a spouse or romantic partner but a companion. Mongolians commonly say "*khani bolokh*" (to keep someone company), "*khaniguideed baina*" (left alone, without someone to share a task, a journey, time or enjoyment). While *khani* often means a husband or wife, a spouse or partner is not always *khani*.

[114] Noyon uul in Tuv *aimag* became a controversial issue due to it being rich with gold as well as an important historical site. A struggle over licensing rights involved rhetoric about preservation of the site due to its historical value.

for democracy whole-heartedly, purely by our views and aspirations. We did not look for profit
or [self-interested] gain. At the time, such degradation (*busarmag zuil*) was not yet spread.
People know. We were young and daring, so we participated in something very risky.

In support of the hunger strike, demonstrations were held all around the country and
university students boycotted lectures. The hunger strike ended at 10 pm on March 9, 1990,
with J. Batmunkh announcing to the nation that the Politburo would step down and a multi-
party system would be legalized. These steps were formalized at the MPRP Central
Committee's Eighth Congress on March 12-14 and the MPR Ardyn Ikh Khural's Eighth
Congress on March 21-23. The 1960 MPR Constitution was amended, removing statements
that established the MPRP as the supreme leader and director (*udirdan chigluulegch*) of the
state and society (*tur niigmiin*), and adding a cautiously worded article legalizing the right of
people to form or join political parties and mass organizations (S. Amarsanaa, 2015, February
26; History and Archeology Department of the Mongolian Academy of Sciences, n.d.-a).

However, the situation was volatile. Another national wave of mass demonstrations, student
boycotts and a hunger strike in Khuvsgul took place in late April, prompting the Politburo to
station soldiers to guard Government House. The opposition continued to formally appeal to
the MIS and the Ministry of Defence to refrain from using weapons and force against their
own people. Premier J. Batmunkh continued to uphold the principle of non-violence (S.
Amarsanaa, 2015, February 26; History and Archeology Department of the Mongolian
Academy of Sciences, n.d.-a). Yet violence could have erupted and escalated at any moment.
S. Zorig is well remembered by a black and white photo of this period in which he is being
carried through the Sukhbaatar Square packed with protestors, hoisted on the shoulders of
his comrades with a loudspeaker in his hand, appealing to the crowd to stay calm and to avoid
violence.

More opposition parties formed, including the Mongolian National Progress Party (MNPP)
founded by the NPU, the Mongolian Free Labour Party, the Mongolian Green Party (MGP),
and, remarkably, the Mongolian Religious Democratic Party (MRDP). Underlying the
proliferation of opposition parties were ideological cleavages. According to Rossabi (2005),
the MDU members Kh. Khulan, one of the few female leaders in the dissident movement, and
S. Oyun, S. Zorig's sister, were deeply concerned about the social costs that would ensure

from rapid marketization proposed by some of the dissidents.[115] As Da. Ganbold, a member of the Economists' club, the first Chair of the MNPP and an ardent Friedmanite who was one of the masterminds of the Mongolian 'shock therapy' reforms (Rossabi, 2005; Tomlinson, 1998, December 7), reminisced (Assa.mn, 2014, December 7):

> We [the Economists' club] translated various articles and important international documents into Mongolian and publicised in newspapers when possible. … (W)e heard that an organization named MDU was emerging in Ulaanbaatar and some *aimags*. … We saw the first demonstration and … we understood we needed to work together with them and met with some members of the MDU. When we were presenting the first objectives of the Economists' Club, their folks said something like 'we will build a genuine socialism, the MPRP distorted the ideas, we will implement them in their true meaning.' We will not go far with such a goal. We must denounce socialism completely. The main thing was to use the word 'capitalism' or not. Let's use the word 'market' and 'free competition economy,' which don't have a political overtone and are softer on the ears of common (*jiriin*) people. But the content, in the end, would be market, in other words, the society we are living in now – we had disagreements over this …

> … The establishment of the Mongolian National Progress Party was formally announced on March 11, 1990. The NPU and the MNPP issued a document entitled 'The reason for struggle,' in which new ideas about economy were presented. … That document contained this statement: 'Abandoning the public property ideology that is dominant in our country is one reason for our struggle. The public property ideology creates the bureaucratic red tape that holds a society's development back. Therefore, we aim to fundamentally change the economy.'

The Supreme Court undertook the registration of political parties and the first multi-party elections of the Ardyn Ikh Khural were held on July 22-29, returning the majority of the seats to the MPRP.[116] The newly formed Ardyn Ikh Khural elected a MPRP-majority State Baga

---

[115] This does not mean, they were necessarily opposed to the free market. In 2008, a reporter, praising Khulan's role in retaining and reforming the social security system in Mongolia, recalled that she informed and persuaded the older MPs and the media, using examples from Chile (Gal, 2008, September 12). S. Oyun has been generally supportive of neoliberal policies.

[116] According to S. Amarsanaa (2015, February 26), MPRP received 61.74% of the votes.

Khural[117] (the upper chamber) (S. Amarsanaa, 2015, February 26). However, the MPRP leadership opted for a power-sharing arrangement with the young opposition and proposed that the latter take charge of the economic and social reforms. The interim government consisted of the first MPR President P. Ochirbat (MPRP), the first and only Vice-President R. Gonchigdorj (MSDP),[118] the Prime Minister D. Byambasuren (MPRP), the First Vice-Prime-Minister Da. Ganbold (MNPP) and Vice-Prime Minister D. Dorligjav (MDP). In 1992, the MDP, MNPP and the Mongolian United Party merged, founding the right-leaning Mongolian National Democratic Party (MNDP). In the 1990s the MNDP and MSDP formed the backbone of the so-called 'democratic forces.'

The spirit of this idealistic period of struggle for a dream of a free, genuine and humane society was aptly conveyed by S. Tsogtsaikhan's response to a question about why he joined the MDU ("Khonkhny duu bidniig seree," 2016, December 21):

> People (*ard tumen*) talked a lot about our lives not improving (*uudlukhgui*). But we spoke loudly at home, softly in the streets and squares, and whispered at work. In other words, a Mongolian person has lived through sixty years unable to speak the truth. Then the MDU emerged, piercing through that cloud of fear. … Let's value our freedom. The MDU, which pierced the black cloud of fear and shone the light of truth, desired to live like a human being (*khun*),[119] a human being who is free, with sober intellect, able to speak the truth and able to live the truth (*uneneer amidarch chaddag*). That is the reason I became a member of the MDU.

What is clear from various accounts about this short period from 1988 to 1990 is that the desire for a democratic society was broadly shared by people inside and outside the MPRP, the state bodies, Ulaanbaatar, and urban intelligentsia. The MPRP leadership played a crucial role in this peaceful transition. The driving force of the democratic movement was, however, primarily made up of urban youth. The leaders of the movement were predominantly well educated young professionals, many of whom were the children of the party-state elites. The

---

[117] According to S. Amarsanaa (2015, February 26), MPRP had 31, MDP 13, and MNPP and MSDP three seats each in the Baga Khural.

[118] The position of the Vice-President was eliminated through the 1992 Constitution.

[119] In the text, the MDU is the desiring subject. S. Tsogtsaikhan must have meant the members of the MDU.

dissidents met, debated and mobilized despite knowing there were informers among them. Arrests and interrogations happened but no one was imprisoned.

Finally, these written accounts, by virtue of their focus on national-level leadership, have had a compound effect of invisibilizing the role of women in the pro-democracy movement. Rossabi's book (2005) *Modern Mongolia: From Khans to Commissars to Capitalists* is an exception in that he discusses the role of Kh. Khulan, S. Oyun and L. Nomin. However, two of these women came from *nomenklatura* families and one was S. Zorig's sister; all three of them were educated in the Soviet Union or Eastern Europe and commanded multiple languages, including English. Khulan and Oyun became prominent politicians[120] and Nomin was a well-known journalist. Thousands of women who did not come from elite families, who were not visible at leadership levels but carried out the 'background' jobs have remained in the shadow of a few dozen people, predominantly male, regarded as 'democracy's heroes.'

5.3 Cherchez les femmes? Women in/and the pro-democracy movement

On November 17, 2015, our first research workshop started with sharing stories of how each of us entered the civil society space (*irgenii niigmiin oron zai*). Two of the women, J. Zanaa and D. Tsend-Ayush, started their stories in 1989. What they shared offered a precious glimpse into the lives and struggles of women who have been over-shadowed by the elitist accounts of the 'democratic revolution' during the tumultuous years of 1989 and 1990.

Zanaa *egch* had been working as a Russian language teacher at the Institute of Russian Language Teachers, located right on the western side of the Government House. Reflecting on what motivated her to enter the civil society field, she said:

> Democratic changes were taking place in the Eastern European countries. The two Germanies united, the wall crumbled, beautiful things (*goyo yum*) were happening! It was exhilarating! Then the USSR fell apart, so it looked like communism had collapsed.

---

[120] Kh. Khulan was an MP in 1996-2000 and chaired the Standing Committee on Social Policy and Health. Since then, she has moved out of party politics but has served as a non-staff policy advisor to the Minister of Education and headed various donor-funded projects. S. Oyun ran for her late brother's seat in 1998 and became an MP. She founded the Civil Courage Party *(Zorig* means courage in Mongolian) and was re-elected to subsequent parliaments in 2000-2012. She also served as a cabinet minister in various coalition governments.

Tsendee *egch* was a public prosecutor. Here is her recollection of November 28, 1989:

> In 1989, my *khani* (partner) attended the Second Convention of Young Artists. He was an artist (*uran buteelch*). He had attended the first day and this was the second day. I worked at a district prosecutor's office at the time. We were not allowed to go home that day. I was pregnant, with a huge belly like a *togoo* [a wok-shaped large pot]. It was just two days to go until my maternity leave [a month and a half before her due date].[121] My belly was aching and I begged to go but I was not allowed to. We were not told why at first.
>
> Finally, at around 8 p.m., we were told that some unruly (*dursgui*) people had gathered at the Artists' Convention and the authorities were waiting to see if they would disperse on their own or they would have to be arrested. In that case, prosecutors had to be ready to sign the arrest warrants. So district prosecutors were not allowed to go home. … I was terrified at the thought that I might have to sign a warrant to arrest my own *khani*.
>
> For me, it was a terrifying time. Very scary. This experience made me think what kind of a society we were living in. The impetus for me to join civil society started there. So I was sitting there, terrified. Finally, at half past nine, we were told that the convention has dispersed and we were allowed to go home. When I came home, my partner was already there. I told him what happened at work and he was furious [with the authorities] …

Zanaa *egch* shared the following about her MDU days:

> I count December of 1989 as the beginning of my civil society participation. The Mongolian Democratic Union held mass demonstrations almost every week. I participated in those but I was not in leadership. Just went there as a simple citizen (*jiriin irgen*). Women were actually very active participants of these demonstrations, marches and sit-ins. However, in those days, until March 1990, all leaders were men. There were no women. More women participated at leadership levels after March 7, 1990. Still, only two women were elected to the governing body of the MDU, all the others were men. I was one of the two and I was put in charge of Ulaanbaatar.

---

[121] During state socialism, women were entitled, by decree, to 45 days of fully paid leave before and 45 days of fully paid leave after childbirth. In addition, they were entitled to one year of unpaid leave, which many women could not afford to take. Nurseries and grandparents stepped in, where and when available, to care for the young while mothers were working.

Until the March 7-9 hunger strike, we had been struggling, holding demonstrations and we had hit against a wall (*mukhardal*). We were thinking "What can we do now? The Politburo is not showing signs of stepping down ..." Suddenly, a few people initiated a hunger strike and carried it out. Women played a key role during that time. What I mean by 'key' is again service [everyone breaks out laughing]. Yes, always service. We were the background guarantee (*ar talyn batalgaa*). We carried the water, monitored the strikers' health status, and if the police and military threatened to come down, we formed a protective human chain around the hunger strikers by tightly linking our arms.

We stood with banners and slogans. We also went to local areas to spread information among the people. We raised our voices, quarrelled (*khereldekh*) if necessary, meaning we raised our voices, fought for our ideas (*temtseldej*) [laughing around the table at the choice of the word *khereldekh* and the meaning in which it was used].[122] We had even become pariahs in our own families [with a soft, self-mocking laugh].

Women's participation in demonstrations appears to have substantially increased along with the overall escalation of mass participation. As the economy was in ruins, many people were idle. So, many joined the street actions or simply went to observe. As Zanaa *egch* said, eliciting much laugher, "in those days, that is how we spent our time."

While Tsendee *egch* was not herself a member of a dissident group, her partner was. Through her *khani*, she, too, was drawn into the struggle:

There were meetings held in our apartment. Men would talk about who would do what and they would say 'send your wife' with a message. My baby was born in January. I delivered secret messages when I was pregnant and just one or two months after childbirth. That is how I got to know the Dagva lama [who supported the dissidents]. On March 7, I delivered a message to Dagva lama. Remember the lamas with red throws (*orkhimj*)[123] who came to

---

[122] The choice of the word *khereldekh* is not accidental or self-deprecating. Literal translation of the word into English would be 'bickering,' 'quarrelling,' or 'having a row.' However, in the Mongolian political context, this word that has a strong connotation of private conflicts over insignificant matters has been used commonly in reference to conflicts of opinions and open debates about public issues. On the other hand, the word connotes the *manner* in which women and men may have expressed their opinions in the 1990s (some still now). Debates would get heated and quickly deteriorate to personal insults – this is common even now once one goes outside the human rights NGO sphere.

[123] *Orkhimj* is a part of a lama's attire, depending on the sect. Some lamas wear yellow robes with red throws over the robes.

support the hunger strike? That had a big psychological effect on people. So I was their *kholboochin* [secret messenger, a communication agent] [laughing]. Being a *kholboochin* was again the background work (*ar tal*), the server (*uilchlegch*), but it was an important function.

Since clandestine meetings were often held in the 'kitchens,' it is safe to assume the womenfolk of the dissident leaders carried out more background 'service' work. A case in point is Rossabi's (2005) quote of S. Oyun's description of her role as being "in the background … taking care of all the housework … in the apartment … and cooking for Zorig's friends" while listening in to their discussions with her brother (p. 3). It is also safe to assume that secretaries and assistants of the various research institutions and government agencies where the dissident leaders worked, carried out much 'background work' such as typewriting numerous information pamphlets and 'carrying tea' during the clandestine meetings.

Zanaa *egch* observed that women became more politically and socially active from the time of the hunger strike, especially with the establishment of the opposition political parties, but did not break through to national level leadership:

> Many of the party councils in the *aimags* were chaired by women. But again, of course, when it came to the parliamentary elections, the level where big political decisions were made, it was <u>only men.</u> There were no women elected to the first parliament from the Democratic Party. No woman ran and no woman was elected. There were no women in the Baga Khural either from the democratic opposition. However, quite a few women were elected as deputies to the capital city's *khural [*legislature] … I was elected to the city *khural* [from the MDP] and was a presidium member.

She continued that women's wings began to form within the opposition parties in 1990-1992 but they were "very <u>politicized</u> and <u>partisan</u>" and "knew <u>nothing</u> about women's rights *mights* (<u>*erkh merkh*</u>)."[124] The last statement triggered another round of laughing.

The workshop participants reflected that concurrently with the political processes, the burden of survival was falling onto women's shoulders. Zanaa *egch* put it as follows:

---

[124] This is a specific feature of the Mongolian language. The meaning of the word is broadened and made less specific by repeating it. In repeating, the first sound of the second part is modified, usually to "m." In this case the meaning of 'rights' is modified to 'such things as rights and things related to rights' by stating it as '*erkh merkh*.'

The shops were empty and women carried their families and the society on their backs. Many women went on *ganzaga* [informal 'suitcase' trading].[125] Men did go on *ganzaga* in the beginning but many drank the money [they made], hired sex workers and so on. There were many tales of women going [to China] to drag their men back home. Of course, there is no research on this.

The 1992 State Great Khural [the new unicameral parliament] elections under the new Constitution galvanized society, including women. Along with many other women, Zanaa *egch* campaigned for the opposition and served as a party-appointed observer:[126]

Women participated very actively in the 1992 elections. Women were really the main force of the election campaigns. There <u>were</u> men but men were always the ones giving orders, not the ones who actually did things with their own hands or went there with their own two feet. Few men went knocking on people's doors.

… I served as an observer. In those days, the laws *maws* were weak. I was an observer but I did not just observe, I was taking part in the vote-counting [participants burst out laughing].[127] Observer, right? But [the committee members] called out to me "Huuye (Hey!), Zanaa *guai*, come, come, count!" [more belly laughing] …

A discussion ensued about the highly polarized context of the 1992 elections, with the young opposition feeling deeply disadvantaged *vis-à-vis* a much more powerful and experienced opponent. At every step, partisan sentiments could and often did interfere, from both sides. The system and the institutions could not be trusted, trust was low and suspicion was high, at least from the opposition's point of view. With weak oversight mechanisms, those who counted the votes had opportunities to change the outcome of an election. Parties instructed their members and supporters to do everything possible to ensure their candidates won. In

---

[125] Mostly between China and Mongolia but also between China, Mongolia and Russia.
[126] At the time, the law did not allow for non-partisan observers. All observers were appointed by parties and represented their parties' electoral interests.
[127] In all of my research discussions, interviews and workshops, laughing has been an important signifier. It has had many meanings and marked many nuances. At times, laughing was used to soften a strong statement, to leave room for doubt, additions, alternatives, or corrections. Many times, as in this case, it signified a distance we have travelled through the years. From today's point of view, an observer acting as a vote-counter is a clear violation of the law and the principles of accountability and fairness. It is funny to remember that these boundaries were not well established, were frequently crossed, and became downright blurred in the early days of Mongolia's democratization.

the women's words, "the principles had not set in and the times were *zambaraagui* (disorderly, unprincipled)." As a participant observed, "Mongolia was not ready to make a democracy."

Politically active women during this period were deeply passionate about their parties, which often led to domestic conflicts and sometimes even to divorces. A participant observed that perhaps it is in the nature of revolutions to so influence people, to turn them into fanatics and followers. In Zanaa *egch*'s experience, until 1992, women were loyal to their parties and the parties were led by men:

> So the 1992 elections took place and not a single woman was elected from our party, nor did we care much about it [participants burst out laughing]. It was assumed that men should naturally rise up. So we had put our people up [got them elected], our job was done [more intense laughing] and now our people are doing the job [making laws and democratic reforms] [with a self-mocking smile]. … So we walked around, very satisfied people [more laughing around the table].

Participants discussed how, at the time, women did not think of their representation and did not seek to get elected into the national parliament. It seems that the majority of the party women shared an implicit notion with their male counterparts that women can compete at local levels but that the national level was the men's job.

In the 1992 elections, based on the plurality electoral system, the opposition parties received about 40% of the votes but only gained six out of seventy six seats (Fritz, 2008, p. 777). Nevertheless, the opposition was now more secure owing to the constitutional guarantees, the experience of power-sharing in the previous two years, the growing institutionalization of the multi-party system and the increasing recognition by and support from international organizations.

Moreover, in the wave of the privatization of public assets, the key organizations of the democratic movement gained crucial assets: office buildings. Thus, the MNDP obtained an old but centrally located two-storey building, the MSDP obtained a two-storey structure squeezed between the Opera House and the Central Cultural Palace but overlooking Sukhbaatar Square, and the MDU came to own an old large two-storey building at a fifteen

to twenty minutes' walk from Government House. The MPRP became an owner of its new four-storey party building and a number of the inheritor mass organizations, with the exception of the Mongolian Women's Federation (MWF), became owners of sizeable real estate.

5.4 The emergence of independent women's organizations

As the NGO development in Mongolia was heavily influenced by international funding organizations, I will first give an overview of the international organizations that supported civil society development during this time. Then I will tell the composite stories of how the Liberal Women's Brain Pool (LEOS) and the Women for Social Progress Movement (WSP) emerged. These two NGOs are considered the first independent women's organizations in Mongolia. Although both of them emerged from opposition parties, their development trajectories and missions differed significantly. These narratives are primarily constructed from the stories shared during interviews and workshops by Ms. O. Enkhtuya (Enkhtuya *egch*), a founder and the first Chair of LEOS, and J. Chantsaldulam (Chantsal), a former WSP staff member, J. Zanaa (Zanaa *egch),* the first Vice-Chairs and then a Chair of LEOS, and myself, volunteer and advisor for the WSP from 1992 to 1997. The stories are supplemented by auto-ethnographic accounts.

5.4.1 International support for NGOs and civil society

Two key organizations that supported democratization in Mongolia in the early to mid-1990s were two private foundations: the Konrad Adenauer Stiftung (KAS) and The Asia Foundation (TAF). According to the rather detailed information about the history of KAS on the foundation's webpage, KAS traces its roots back to the Society for Christian Democratic Education Work, which was established in 1955 in Bonn by a group of German Christian Democratic politicians with a goal to undertake "systematic civic-education programme inspired by Christian Democratic values" and promote young politicians (Konrad Adenauer Stiftung, n.d.). The foundation expanded its international programming from 1978 and began setting up offices abroad from the 1980s (Konrad Adenauer Stiftung, n.d.). KAS developed a focus on policy research, the training of politicians, and independent media.

TAF's webpage is cryptic about its origins, stating that it was established in 1954 as "a private, non-governmental organization devoted to promoting democracy, rule of law, and market-based development in post-war Asia" by "a group of forward-thinking citizens who shared a strong interest in Asia, distinguished personal achievements, and dedicated public service" (The Asia Foundation, n.d.). However, U. Alexis Johnson[128] (Johnson, 1969, June 7) in his 1969 confidential memorandum to Henry Kissinger, released in 2009 by the US Central Intelligence Office (CIA) under the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA), emphasized that TAF was established "entirely by and at the initiative of the U. S. Government, with all support coming from the Government" and that "(t)he many prominent Trustees … were recruited and agreed to serve only as a public service" (p. 2). Another secret document (Central Intelligence Agency, 2000, August) reporting headquarters traces on TAF[129] cited a 1983 report on TAF prepared by the Library of Congress for the US Senate Committee of Foreign Relations:

> The Asia Foundation was originally a creation of the executive branch intended to promote U.S. foreign policy interests in the region. Nevertheless, it has always been, and remains a private foundation, albeit with considerable financial support from the U.S. Government. Because of this dual character, it is called a 'quasi-nongovernmental organization.' The source of the General Grant which is the core of its budget was shifted in 1981 … to the Department of State (Library of Congress. Foreign Affairs and National Defense Division. United States. Congress. Senate. Committee on Foreign Relations, 1983, p. 1).

According to this report, TAF was created in 1951 as the Committee for Free Asia, "sanctioned by the National Security Council and …supported with covert indirect CIA funding" in order to "… help find ways to maintain and expand private U.S. contact and communication with the people of Asia following the establishment of communist regimes in China and North Korea" (p. 1), taking full advantage of its private status:

> The emphasis was on a private instrumentality that would be privately governed and would have the freedom and flexibility to do things the government would like to see done but which

---

[128] At the time, Johnson was the Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs ("Ural Alexis Johnson (1908-1997)," n.d.). The memorandum did not contain any official titles for Johnson or Kissinger. At the time, Kissinger appears to have been the head of the National Security Council (The editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica, n.d.)
[129] This document was released by the CIA under the FOIA in March, 2004.

it chose not to do or could not do directly as well. This continues to be the basic rationale for The Asia Foundation (p. 1).

In 1954 the Committee was renamed as TAF and incorporated as a non-profit tax-exempt organization, which was funded "from its inception through trusts and other foundations which in turn were funded by the CIA" (p. 1). When this connection to the CIA was publicly revealed in 1967, "the State Department was asked by the White House in 1968 to find an overt means of funding The Asia Foundation" (p. 2). In 1975, in response to a TAF trustee's request to the US Government to decide if it wanted TAF programs to continue, a government-appointed panel determined that TAF "is an effective instrument for the furthering of United States interests in Asia' and that TAF 'could best serve the purposes for which it had been established by remaining a private body" (p. 3).

In 1990 both KAS and TAF sent representatives to Mongolia on a reconnaissance trip. TAF's programming started in 1992 with providing extensive technical support to the drafters of the new Constitution (Astrada, 2010; The Asia Foundation, n.d.). In 1993 both foundations set up their resident representative offices in Ulaanbaatar and implemented programs to support Mongolia's democratization (Konrad Adenauer Stiftung, n.d.; Rossabi, 2005; Tomlinson, 1998, December 7). TAF Resident Representative Sheldon (Shel) Severinghaus and KAS Representative Werner Prohl developed both professional relations and personal friendships with people active in the pro-democracy space and had informal, cooperative relations with their grantees.[130] They were both known and are warmly remembered as people who listened carefully, asked incisive questions and challenged their grantee-partners to think critically. Also, unlike most highly placed expats, both Werner and Shel lived in modest apartments among Mongolians, rather than in gated deluxe compounds.

KAS's programming under Werner Prohl was more straightforward: to strengthen Mongolia's democracy by strengthening the democratic opposition (Rossabi, 2005) to render the playing

---

[130] They are seen as people who contributed greatly to Mongolia's democracy. In 2009, President Ts. Elbegdorj awarded Mr. Severinghaus and Mr. Prohl with 'Golden Polar Star' awards for their contribution to Mongolia's democracy (Public Relations and Information Division of the Office of the President, 2009, December 10). Shel is remembered fondly, with great respect, by the pro-democracy and human rights NGO activists whom he supported in the 1990s. Arguably, no other representatives of KAS, TAF or any other international organization have gained as much respect as Shel and Werner.

field somewhat more even. KAS supported NGOs mainly in so far as they potentially strengthened the support infrastructure for the opposition. Thus, KAS supported the establishment and programs of the Political Education Academy (PEA), which was founded by opposition leaders. The PEA's mission was to spread democracy education, with a particular emphasis in the 1990s on rural areas where support for the opposition was weaker. KAS also supported the establishment of the Sant-Maral Foundation (SMF), whose role was deemed important in conducting unbiased surveys that would inform the opposition's strategies (D. Lamjav, personal communication, December 10, 2015). By residing in the MDU building and installing the PEA and the SMF there as well, KAS subsidized the MDU by paying them office rent. The MDU's role continued to be crucial in supporting the opposition parties, especially during election campaigns when mass mobilization was required.

TAF's programs were initially broad and flexible. Shel continuously adapted TAF's programming to the fast-changing political situation and the growing number of international organizations with various program areas. Initially, TAF supported the strengthening of an independent judiciary, the parliament, media and, very briefly, market economy reforms. The latter were quickly dropped in view of the extensive programming in this area by the ADB, USAID, German Technical Cooperation (GTZ), International Finance Corporation (IFC) and other organizations. As NGOs[131] began to emerge, a program objective to support the development of watchdog and public education NGOs was formulated. Soon after I joined TAF as a junior officer in 1995, supporting NGOs/civil society became the foundation's main focus in Mongolia.

In the 1990s, TAF Mongolia was primarily funded by the State Department (general grant) and by USAID (program funding). Formally, TAF was required to work in a non-partisan manner. This requirement did not easily align with the goal of promoting democracy in view of the MPRP's domination and especially given that, in effect, the extensive aid from other sources to the government was also support for the MPRP, as the MPRP and the public service largely overlapped. Shel had to manoeuvre creatively and diplomatically to maintain a claim to non-

---

[131] The use of this term in the early and even mid-1990s is problematic as not all of these new organizations saw themselves as NGOs or were familiar with this term.

partisanship while TAF programming primarily benefited the opposition (Rossabi, 2005),[132] both directly and indirectly through the support of NGOs (Coston & Butz, 1999).[133] However, unlike KAS, TAF Mongolia valued pro-democracy NGOs in their own right as an important and essential component of a functioning democracy. Until 1996, TAF was the only foreign funder with a permanent office in Mongolia, which had a dedicated program to strengthen civil society within a democratization paradigm. In 1996, the Soros-funded Mongolian Foundation for Open Society (MFOS) set up its office in Ulaanbaatar, with a budget much larger than TAF's.

Both TAF and KAS were funding, not operating foundations, and their representatives sought to maximize the impact of their funding for Mongolia. Shel went to great lengths to minimize TAF Mongolia's own administrative costs. For example, the office consisted of three small rooms in a dilapidated 1907 log cabin,[134] the furniture was second-hand, equipment was old, the staff was gradually increased from two to four, A4 paper was always recycled and Shel often paid from his own pocket for informal networking events. Staff salaries were on a lower scale compared to other international organizations and even the social insurance contributions mandated by Mongolian law were not being paid for the local staff until late 1995.[135]

The International Republican Institute (IRI), affiliated with the US Republican Party, began its programming in 1992 at the urging of James Baker, then Secretary of State, who had visited Mongolia the year before and saw Mongolia as of symbolic value as the first Asian country "to embrace democracy and free markets" while not "all that important" for the US in the big picture (Tomlinson, 1998, December 7). In its 1996 Annual Report, the IRI (1996) wrote that the victory of the Democratic Union Coalition (DUC) of opposition parties in the 1996

---

[132] Rossabi (2005) observed TAF and KAS support to opposition parties, stressing the issue of ethics given that the funding for KAS and TAF came from German and American tax-payers.
[133] Coston and Butz (1999) give an example of a voter education project by WSP contributing to the victory of a MDU member in the 1996 elections. A former WSP staff member also mentioned this case, adding that WSP's non-partisan voter education campaign did contribute to the opposition victory in 1996 (personal communication, June 25, 2018).
[134] Interestingly, Nikolai Konstantinovich Rerikh (Nicholas, Roerich), Russian artist and philosopher, used to live in that building.
[135] Shel was even reluctant to spend money on blinds for the windows and windows were all around in my little corner, making it difficult to work on my computer. I resorted to using some of the maps sent in with the books by the Books for Asia program to cover some of the windows.

parliamentary elections was the culmination of its four-year effort. This effort included providing "party organization and communications training to eight democratic parties and movements;"[136] urging the MSDP, MNDP and other opposition parties to unite against the MPRP; and assisting the coalition to draft a platform based on the Republican leader Newt Gingrich's conservative reform agenda "Contract With America"[137] (International Republican Institute, 1996, p. 10). The "Contract with Mongolia" included "policies to promote economic and democratic growth such as private ownership of land, freedom of the press, and open markets" and this "blueprint for change ... became the most widely distributed document in Mongolian history" (International Republican Institute, 1996, p. 10). The report proudly quoted Ts. Elbegdorj, a prominent MNDP member: "The victory is as much IRI's as ours" (p. 9). Besides IRI, KAS also played a crucial role in convincing the disparate opposition parties to unite in a coalition (D. Lamjav, personal communication, December 10, 2015; Rossabi, 2005).

Furthermore, USAID began its operations in Mongolia in 1991 (USAID, n.d.) as did the Peace Corps (Peace Corps, n.d.). The UN presence began to expand as well in the early 1990s, with the UNDP, UNICEF, WHO and UNFPA beginning to implement and/or expand their projects (United Nations in Mongolia, n.d.). UN support for NGOs in the early to mid-1990s was limited. In the area of free press, DANIDA, the Danish bilateral development agency, provided DKK 24 million in 1994-2000, enabling the establishment of the Press Institute of Mongolia (PIM) and the Free Press Foundation (printing house) with sizeable physical assets (Globe International NGO, 2006, February 15; Press Institute of Mongolia, n.d.). In addition, a range of philanthropic and religious organizations began to filter in, including the Mormon Church, Save the Children Japan, and the Adventist Development and Relief Agency (Rossabi, 2005, pp. 40-42).

---

[136] Tomlinson (1998, December 7) noted that, initially, the IRI offered its training to both the MPRP and the opposition but the MPRP soon dropped out.

[137] Gingrich led the Republican Party to victory in 1994 with this "Contract with America," which included 10 policies, including 'welfare reform, tougher crime laws, a balanced budget and other conservative policies' (*Newt Gingrich*, n.d.).

5.4.2 LEOS and the WSP: Of women, by women but not only for women

The Liberal Women's Brain Pool (LEOS) and the Women for Social Progress Movement (WSP) are considered the first independent women's organizations. Until their establishment, the Mongolian Women's Council was the national body that organized and mobilized women under the party-state's direction. In the early 1990s, the Council reinvented itself as the Mongolian Women's Federation (MWF), formally detaching itself from the MPRP. However, the historical ties remained strong as the majority of the MWF members were MPRP members and the MWF's local councils were closely tied to MPRP-controlled local governments. Women's organizations within opposition parties were active but, of course, not formally independent.

Furthermore, Mongolia of the early 1990s was still under the effect of the gender-blinding party propaganda according to which patriarchy had been abolished along with the feudal order.[138] There were no 'gender' issues and the word 'gender' itself was alien and confusing. According to the party line, there were no inequality issues in general as Mongolia had achieved socialism. The term 'human rights' was unheard of until the dissident movement began to demand respect for human rights. The word *erkh*, which is now used to mean 'rights,' as in *khunii erkh* (human rights), commonly appeared in legal documents in combination with the word *uureg* (obligation/duty) as in a subheading *erkh uureg* under which the contracting parties' rights and obligations were listed together.[139] Often, the *erkh uureg* of the more powerful party (state, employer or mass organization) would consist of mostly rights and powers whereas the *erkh uureg* of the less powerful party (citizen, worker or member) would mostly consist of duties and obligations. Characteristically, my secondary school teachers frequently scolded us for failing to fulfill our *erkh uureg.* This use of *erkh uureg* is still common.

---

[138] We understood this connection to socialist propaganda more clearly only in 2009 when Enkhjargal and I conducted a study commissioned by MONES about the women's movement (Tumursukh & Davaasuren, 2009).
[139] This must have been a translation of the Russian *prava i obyazalelistva* (rights and responsibilities). In the Russian language, there is a word 'and' between 'rights' and 'responsibilities,' which separates their meanings. In Mongolian, due to the nature of word formation through compounding nouns, the *erkh* and *uureg* merge to create a common meaning, leaning heavily towards *uureg.*

In such a context, 'women's rights' (*emegteichuudiin erkh*) was a doubly incomprehensible term. Hence the earlier observation by Zanaa *egch* that party women had no knowledge of women's rights would not be an exaggeration. Yet, from 1992, women began to mobilize actively as women within their political parties. Within a matter of a few months, at least two such groups began to detach themselves from their respective parties and more formally independent women's organizations began to form, especially actively from 1995. These groups were often interpreted by westerners and international organizations as 'women's NGOs' in the sense of being 'of women, by women and for women' and US-style interest groups or issue-specific, professionally-oriented office-based organizations (Coston & Butz, 1999; Sabloff, 2003). My personal experience in women's NGOs in the early 1990s always contradicted this blanket characterization. In the following sub-sections, I explore this contradiction by tracing the initial stages of the formation of the WSP and LEOS.

5.4.2.1 The birth of the WSP

Now that the main opposition parties had office buildings, women in those parties had a physical space to gather and set up an office. The Social Democratic Women's Movement (SDWM) was thus given a room on the first floor in the MSDP building. The space was originally intended as a cloak room and was tiny and could barely fit two desks. This is where, in the fall of 1992, I first met Battungalag *egch* and Burmaa *egch* who staffed the office.[140] At the time, I was a second-year English language student at the Institute of Foreign Languages (former Institute of Russian Language Teachers). The women at the movement, including the party staff (secretaries and assistants), always made me feel welcome. Among women and men who frequented the party headquarters, there was a strong sense of a shared commitment to democracy and social progress. In my mind, all the mostly unpaid translation and writing I did for the movement, the party and the individuals there ultimately contributed to Mongolia's democracy.

I was a newcomer in this space when women began to discuss the idea of a non-partisan independent organization. Burmaa *egch* and Battungalag *egch* had met with Shel Severinghaus and reported back to the members that partisan organizations were not eligible

---

[140] Both women came from engineering and science backgrounds as did many of the MSDP members.

for TAF funding and that there is a new type of an organization, an 'En-Jee-Oh,' that was independent of both the state and the party. At the same time, more and more women, friends and colleagues of the members, were beginning to express keen interest in the organization but were reluctant to join the MSDP. I myself bristled when people assumed I was an MSDP member and made a point of setting the record straight. Discussions continued informally and formally at members' meetings (*gishuudiin uulzalt*), which drew 20 to 40 and possibly more women and were held upstairs when the party meeting rooms were available.

There were three main arguments against becoming an independent organization: the SDWM's mission is to support and strengthen the party; becoming non-partisan may water down the democratic commitment of the movement; and an independent organization might not survive without party support. The argument for reform was two-fold: becoming non-partisan would enable the organization to mobilize more women, going beyond the MSDP membership, and attract funding from international organizations such as TAF. At the final large meeting at which non-partisan women like myself were also present, the women openly debated these points and, unable to agree, split into two organizations: the SDWM and the WSP. Despite this disagreement over the organization's identity, both groups shared a common assumption that women possessed much potential to contribute to the country's democratic social progress and that this potential needed to be effectively mobilized. Both organizations were of and by women but not *for* women.

Though formally independent, the WSP continued to occupy the cloak room and use the party premises and equipment. This was a busy time of building foreign relations for nearly all types of organizations in Mongolia: government, political parties, the emerging private sector and emerging NGOs. The search was not only for financial support but also for much needed information about democracy and its attributes and, of course, the market economy. As English language skills were in dire need and in short supply, I was increasingly drawn into the movement's work to help with translation, writing letters and, new for all of us, project proposals, as well as being mobilized to assist the party. So I happened to interpret at meetings between a European feminist representing the Socialist International (SI) and the MSDP's prominent members R. Gonchigdorj and B. Batbayar who is best known as Baabar. The first impressed the guest by stating he considered himself a feminist. The second impressed her further by stating that abortion and contraceptives should be liberalized as

people should not be bred like livestock (*mal*).[141] The SI representative left in awe of how progressive the male democratic leaders were.

In 1995, TAF project funding enabled the WSP to rent a large room in the State Statistical Office.[142] The move was necessary as the project was to be non-partisan and TAF recognized the need to include administrative costs in the projects. The WSP hired a small project staff and acquired basic furniture and equipment, including a computer, a printer and a small copier, which made it better equipped than many government agencies. While doing their work on the project, the staff and members were also learning to use the computer and other equipment and picking up some English. Also, a new organizational culture was being developed. Former WSP staff member Chantsal described her first visit to the WSP office in 1995 as follows:

> That year, my *darga* [boss] Dr. Tumen [an anthropological archeologist] asked me to go and help with the preparations of an international women's conference on science and technology [the WSP was organizing]. … I got the directions[143] and went. When the door opened, I saw a spacious, well-lit room, a newly painted desk, a copier and a computer -things I had never seen, nor used before, and several women who were incredibly friendly. I was hit by a cultural shock because at my work, I sat in a tiny dark room with an old furniture and I spoke to my *darga* only occasionally, so most of the time I sat quietly working. … And here, people were laughing and talking while also working.

At times, we worked through the nights, especially in preparation for workshops or conferences when information packages needed to be prepared. Besides substantial conceptual work and writing, this involved much manual labor. Each little task often required learning new skills and creatively using available tools and resources that were not adequate to the task. Women strove to appear professional so as to be taken seriously, which required

---

[141] In 1989, abortion and contraceptives were decriminalized as part of societal reforms.

[142] At the time, government agencies, faced with a severe budget deficit, rented offices to the growing number of private companies, NGOs and international organizations. Funnily enough, in 1995 Mr. D. Lamjav, Chair of Tsekh, a constitutional watchdog NGO, sat in an office inside Government House. This goes to show how informally things were operating during this time.

[143] Those who are familiar with Ulaanbaatar will know that 'giving' and 'obtaining' directions is not a simple matter as street names and building numbers are not used. Directions are given by landmarks and cardinal directions and instructions about when to turn left or right.

significant investments of time and labor. By now, the women were paid small honoraria but, driven by their ideals, they worked for far more hours. As Chantsal said, "we never thought about money, it was not important." Impressively, from the onset, the WSP paid social insurance contributions for the staff[144] – many emerging organizations did not at the time or even later.[145]

The WSP ran the first non-partisan civic/voter education project in Mongolia. The women had identified voter information and empowerment as an important need but did not know how to go about it and felt ignorant about democracy and its specifics. In 1995, TAF organized a study tour to the US for representatives of six NGOs, including me in a triple capacity of a TAF staff member, a WSP member and an escort-interpreter.[146] The tour included a visit to the American non-partisan voter information organization VoteSmart. In December, 1995, seven months before the 1996 elections, TAF brought a staff member of the VoteSmart to work with the WSP for a week (Coston & Butz, 1999). A public workshop was organized during this time to raise awareness about non-partisan voter education, with the VoteSmart staff member as a key resource person. Having received "training and templates" from the US "voter education specialist" (Coston & Butz, 1999, p. 130), the WSP designed its project to include the following: publicizing a comparison of the MPs' voting records, conducting a survey among candidates about their policy goals, producing newsletters, and holding workshops in the city and five *aimags.* Developing recommendations for amending relevant laws was not an initial goal but was carried out intuitively by the women.

---

[144] Chantsal herself was in charge of the financial accounts, including social insurance deductions and payments to the social insurance fund.
[145] TAF only began paying these for the local staff after my older colleague insisted that TAF must comply with the Mongolian social insurance law.
[146] This was one of the most strenuous interpretation jobs I have ever done in my life. For two weeks, I translated for my five colleagues from breakfast until late night, through the weekends and lunches and dinners. On the day of the departure, TAF held a briefing meeting with tour participants at the San Francisco airport. I had a nervous break-down from exhaustion and broke into tears. Only then was the meeting called to a stop. TAF Mongolia in the 1990s strove to maximize the impact of every dollar spent. As a staff member, I was paid my usual salary (about USD 200 a month). All tour participants were given small per diems (as I remember, about USD 20 a day). TAF saved extra expenses by not hiring an external translator and built its own staff and an NGO capacity, killing three birds with one stone. The practice of piggybacking translation/interpretation duties without pay onto one of the participants attending an event abroad is not a rare phenomenon among international organizations and it is women who are generally tasked with such heavy obligations. There have also been cases when the 'translators' simply refused to do that job once abroad, leaving the non-English speaking participants in the lurch.

Each project element led to new insights and experiences. For example, the women learnt that parliamentary transcripts and voting records were classified as 'state secrets' but they pressured the parliamentary secretariat, arguing the citizens' right to know and the state's obligation to be *il tod* (transparent, open), and gained access to the archives, with some leveraging from TAF.[147] The newsletter title *Turiin ezen songogch tanaa* was radical in addressing the voter as *ezen* (master/owner) of the state. Some WSP members were concerned the title was too bold and would alienate people. A number of people pointed out 'our mistake' in the title. Chantsal related one such story:

> It was my very first trip to *khuduu* (countryside)[148] and I was a young and ignorant girl. It was terrible, people madly rushed to get onto the little green plane. I had no idea where my feet were or how the luggage was carried into plane, where it was. … So I was there in Khuvsgul, distributing the newsletters. One old man said to me: "My daughter, do check the title. There is a mistake. It is the people sitting in the Government who are the *ezen* of the state, not the citizens." So I told him: "No, grandfather, <u>we</u> are the ones who elected those people, <u>we</u> sent them as our representatives to work on our behalf. So <u>we</u> are the *ezen* of the state." The old man looked surprised, then thoughtfully said "Hmmm… Yes, indeed, we did elect them, we did send them as our representatives." … Then he rolled the newsletter into a tube and inserted it into his *mongol gutal* [traditional knee-high boot][149] and said he would read it carefully when he got back to his cattle.

The newsletter content was a mixture of information adapted from US democracy/civic/voter education materials and local information such as voting records, survey results, and election platforms, all presented in a tabled format for ease of comparison but without the WSP's commentary so as to maintain neutrality (Coston & Butz, 1999, p. 121). The newsletters were in very high demand. They were distributed nationally, at political conventions and food markets, on the streets and on the buses (Coston & Butz, 1999, p. 120). People's hunger for

---

[147] The secretariat too had been a TAF grantee.

[148] For Ulaanbaatar dwellers, *khuduu* frequently means *aimags*, including *aimag* centers, which are legally towns, and remote rural areas. In this case, Chantsal flew to the Khuvsgul *aimag* center. For *aimag* center dwellers, *khuduu* means soums (administrative sub-divisions of aimags) and remote rural areas.

[149] *Mongol gutal* has two layers, an outer leather layer, and an inner layer like a quilted thick sock. Items are carried between the layers.

information, especially in rural areas, was extraordinary to the extent that the risk of getting trampled on as people rushed in to grab a copy was very real on a number of occasions.[150]

The translation and adaptation was a difficult task. I remember discussing the best way to convey what 'money-tracking' meant. Competitive elections were new as was campaign financing – an area the opposition parties were being trained in by the IRI. We were beginning to see the unequal and non-transparent financing of election campaigns as an issue but primarily in terms of the ruling party's advantage in mobilizing public resources (venues, vehicles, employees, finances). To date, the issue of campaign financing and associated corruption is still largely delinked from the underlying neoliberal capitalism and the adoption of the specifically American-style adversarial politics as a model of democracy. This specifically US influence has been occluded by the repetitive and interchangeable use of the word 'international' by both Mongolians and foreigners. A clear example is the otherwise sound description of the WSP materials by Jennifer Coston, a US-based academic, and Jennifer Butz (1999)who was TAF Mongolia Assistant Representative in 1995-1996:

> WSP learned to juxtapose *international* examples of good governance with the patterns occurring in Mongolia. … For example, WSP introduced the concept of the citizens as owners of the government by citing examples of this perspective in other nations, such as the United States. These international examples were positioned side-by-side with corresponding passages from the 1992 Mongolia Constitution [italics in original] (p. 119).

> WSP … used specific, contextual information … while still benefiting from *international* information where appropriate. For example, WSP juxtaposed *international* examples of good governance with patterns occurring in Mongolia to both explain the phenomenon and empower the citizenry regarding the gaps in practice [italics in original] (p. 130).

---

[150] Both Chantsal and I experienced this. In Chantsal's case, it was a food market in Khuvsgul. She and Batbayar, another young colleague, began distributing at two ends of the market. People rushed in immediately, surrounding Chantsal and trying to grab the copies out of her hands. She held the newsletters tightly to her chest and crouched down to protect them. She tried to reason with the people and eventually began running away from the crowd. The crowd ran after her. On the other side of the food market, she saw Batbayar running as well and another large crowd running after him. They barely managed to distribute some of the newsletters, some batches were torn in the mad rush. In my case, the location was a national convention organized by the MDU or one of the parties and the majority of the participants in that large theatre hall were from rural areas. As soon as I started distributing the newsletters, people rushed in and began grabbing. I had to stand on a chair to be above people to distribute more evenly. It was a forest of arms reaching out for the newsletters.

The WSP's voter education project was considered a resounding success. The WSP got feedback from both sides of the political divide that the project influenced the election outcome, facilitating the democratic coalition's victory. Late Mr. Chimid, widely respected as the 'Father of the Democratic Constitution,' reportedly chided the WSP Chair in his characteristically humorous manner that the WSP's voter education project caused his electoral loss in Khuvsgul (J. Chantsaldulam). Until 1996, the WSP had explored various areas of possible work such as income generation and women in science. After this project, it single-mindedly went on to specialize in the area of voter education and electoral reforms and established the non-partisan Voter Education Center (VEC) in 1997. That year, the WSP organized the first televised presidential candidates' debate with an audience selected from around the country through a popular contest on voter rights, election law and presidential powers.

In the middle of this growing professionalization, the WSP had transformed its organizational structure. It had shed its large membership, adopting a western-type lean organizational model with a small board and a small staff. From the mid-1990s on, the WSP was no longer an aspiring movement but a NGO. The VEC too was set up in the new format. While mass information and public education remained as key goals, mass mobilization was no longer a mission. The WSP was and is a women-led pro-democracy NGO, as are a number of other NGOs that emerged in the 1990s such as the Center for Citizenship Education (CCE) and the Democracy Education Center (DEMO). While at times it continues to conduct women-specific projects, it is not a women's organization per se. Conceptually, the WSP has largely functioned within an American-style liberal democratic framework, focusing on electoral democracy, government transparency and accountability.

5.4.2.2 The birth of LEOS

LEOS too was motivated by a desire to mobilize women's potential towards the development of a humane and democratic society (O. Enkhtuya, personal communication, December 22, 2015). However, there was also a focus on empowering women as women *vis-à-vis* men who enjoyed greater privileges in their party and in the broader society. While this sentiment may not have been consistently shared throughout the organization's extensive membership (nearly 10,000 circa 1999 according to Enkhtuya *egch*), the commitment to women's equality

was well articulated at the leadership level. An exploration into the origins of the focus on women's mobilization elicited an important and interesting story from Enkhtuya *egch*:

> It started in 1992, when we were still the MNPP, which was known as the party with the most number of women. Yet, when it came to elect the party leadership, very few women got elected. So basically, [in retrospect] we fought for power. We talked among ourselves: "We need to establish a women's organization, why should we always be men's followers?!" Within the MNPP, women had a very strong voice but soon after the women's organization was established, the four[151] parties merged. Then we announced that LEOS was an independent civil society[152] organization.

> So to the question 'why women?' The history is that we conflicted with the men, I guess we competed for power against them. We did not seek to become a party chair or such but we were women who loudly insisted that we were not second sort people. So initially these women came together to form the organization.

> When the parties merged, women did not participate in that process at all. I even withdrew my name when it was proposed to the party leadership because, just before the merger, we had already clearly defined our position, that we were going to be non-partisan.

This story suggests that LEOS was, in part, a response to the increasingly masculine institutionalization of the opposition political parties. The MDU women, including Zanaa *egch* became actively involved, co-founding LEOS and encouraging other MDU women to join the new organization. This was the real beginning of women's activism for women's and human rights (J. Zanaa). Another impetus for insisting on an independent status came from the attempt of the MWC to subsume new women's organizations under the umbrella of the MWF in the process of its reconstitution (O. Enkhtuya). Both LEOS and WSP refused to join the MWF and were adamant that the MWF had no monopoly right to represent all Mongolian women.

Enkhtuya *egch* recalled that the initial aspiration was to create a think tank-like organization that was based on human rights and worked at a more conceptual level but also one that served as an engine to build a new women's movement throughout the country via

---

[151] The number was most likely three: the MNPP, MDP and the Mongolian United Party.
[152] In 1992, they may not have used this term.

information dissemination and training. So the women came up with the name *Liberal Emegteichuudiin (women's) Oyuny San (LEOS)*:

> We did not think of calling ourselves a think tank then because, at the time, we had no idea what think tanks were. So we translated [*oyuny san*] incorrectly as 'the brain pool.' What we had in mind was actually a think tank. But the name had become a brand and it really caught people's attention, so we decided to leave it as it was. (O. Enkthuya)

Deeply aware they were attempting to create a new kind of an organization, the women endeavoured to research how such organizations are structured in the west. Enkhtuya *egch* had studied in East Germany and attended formal English Language courses during state-socialism, so she read about German women's organizations and Zonta International. She also tried to read English-language materials about NGOs and civil society and, laughing, described these struggles: "At the time, I had no English. I sat there with a dictionary. What did I understand? Of course, nothing! It was just like translating 'think tank' as 'brain pool.'" This obvious exaggeration of her lack of knowledge and understanding is symptomatic of the fundamental crisis of knowledge Mongolia plunged into as a society in the ideological paradigm shift. Everything we had known and believed was now discredited, leaving us feeling completely ignorant (*yu ch medekhgui*) and painfully insecure about our knowledges, beliefs and truths.[153]

The first important contact with the State was over registration. Without registration, the emerging independent organizations could not open bank accounts or obtain an organizational stamp, which was required for all formal communication with state bodies and financial operations.[154] LEOS was the first to seek state registration and the story below,

---

[153] This was probably exacerbated by the Mongolians' cultural tendency to downplay their knowledge. This, I believe, is a combined effect of Soviet/Russian maximalism (if you do not know everything, you know nothing) and Mongolian traditional Buddhist stress on modesty and humility. Different approaches to claiming knowledge were often pointed out in the 1990s, comparing Americans (e.g., Peace Corps volunteers) and Mongolians. Mongolians tended to say they knew nothing when they knew quite a lot whereas Americans tended to say they knew something when they knew only a little. This was particularly visible in terms of language skills.

[154] One could write a whole book on the importance of the stamp in Mongolia. The Manchu emperor claimed to have obtained Chinggis Khaan's stamp, thereby asserting power over the Mongols as a successor to Chinggis' legacy. The stamp became an issue for TAF as well, which had functioned in various Asian countries since its establishment in 1945 without a stamp. TAF correspondence was formalized by the use of a letterhead and the Representative's signature. Shel could not understand why that was not sufficient. My senior colleague B. Oyunbileg was extremely frustrated as she was the main communicator with the government and insisted that

related by Enkhtuya *egch,* sheds light not only on the hurdles faced by the civil society pioneers but also on the ambiguities of this time of fast-paced changes:

> LEOS was the first NGO to seek registration with the State and it was a huge production (*buun yum bolson*). We argued our Constitutional right [to free association]; it did not work. The staff member put in charge of the registration struggled for two weeks and did not succeed. She was frustrated. Finally, she told me: "Enkhtuya, you go yourself to the Ministry [of Law (Justice) and Home Affairs] and explain. I can't, the Ministry keeps insisting that we become a political party if we want to be registered and that we won't be registered if we are not a political party" [we burst out laughing]. So I went. While I was sitting there, debating with the woman in charge of registration, one lawyer I knew happened to come by. When he left, he passed by the Vice-Minister's office and told him that a woman from his party is sitting there, arguing [laughing]. The Vice-Minister came down and basically ordered the woman: "Register them!" So we got registered practically through *aryn khaalga* (personal connection).

The irony was three-fold. LEOS was consciously committed to democracy as an antithesis of the state-socialist system, which had proliferated the arbitrary power of *dargas* (bureaucratic bosses) and the use of *aryn khaalga*. *Aryn khaalga* literally means 'back door,' referring to a form of bureaucratic corruption that was wide-spread at all levels and in all spheres from government agencies to shops and kindergartens. Obtaining or accomplishing something through *aryn khaalga* has a connotation of an unfair advantage. Yet here, LEOS owed its registration precisely to this culture: an authoritarian extra-legal decision of a highly placed *darga* and *aryn khaalga*. In addition, the *aryn khaalga* access to this powerful support was through a party connection while LEOS was asserting itself as a non-partisan organization. Enkhtuya *egch* added that she felt it was important to talk personally to the woman in charge of registration to increase her understanding of the emerging civil society and thus to lessen the need to rely on a *darga*'s order in the future.

TAF acquire a stamp. Shel had to communicate with the headquarters, which then had to design and order a stamp especially for the Mongolia office. I carried that stamp back home after my post-NGO study tour orientation at the headquarters in 1995. Oyunbileg *egch* was practically ecstatic when the stamp was finally in her hands. Since then she repeatedly said how much easier communication with the government became. It is not unusual for feuds within political parties and NGOs to involve someone running away with the stamp. As I am finalizing this thesis, the traditional wrestlers are fighting over the ownership of the Wrestling Palace that was built with public money and private donations. Once again, much of their quarrelling has been about the legitimacy of stamps.

From the end of 1992, LEOS launched into an intensive national mass mobilization campaign. LEOS members divided into teams and travelled to the *aimags* with an ambitious goal to set up a branch in each of them. Zanaa *egch* had been sacked from her work earlier for her participation in the dissident movement but under the guise of the restructuring. She now had the time as well as the desire and commitment to participate in this dynamic process:

> So we now focused on women's rights and human rights. The word 'gender' aroused much curiosity (*sonin sodon*). Enkhtuya [O. Enkhtuya] was the first to talk about it at LEOS… It was thought-provoking, very interesting. Although I had not properly understood [the gender and human rights], I travelled to many *aimags* and taught "it's like this and like that" [intense laughing around the table]. … Once, I was to go to Khovd. My husband was unhappy: "Why go so far to do some unpaid work?!" I went anyway. At first, I listened to the other trainer, then I myself began to teach. I had a lot to say. No idea what I said then. … [laughing around the table]. Being a teacher, I was able to somehow organize the information and teach it. …

> I educated myself through the stuff I was teaching. I would come back home and tell my husband about human rights and gender equality. I began suggesting we make changes in our lives and avoid conflicts over such issues [to do with each other's rights and freedoms]. My husband rejoiced: "Oh, you have changed so much, you have become wonderful [laughing around the table], do continue traveling for your workshops! It's really valuable!" [struggling to speak through her laughter]. The history of the women's movement started like this in my family [everyone laughing]. Since then, of course, the auntie (*ajaa*) became a really emancipated woman [more laughing], having gotten the approval [of the husband] [with laughter in her voice]."

In entering this new, yet unnamed, fast-evolving space, women were reinventing their own identities and renegotiating their family relations. According to Enkhtuya *egch*, LEOS mobilized thousands of women and many of them were from outside the opposition space and some were MPRP members. She continued:

> Many women brought in their husbands. Members used to say that in places where the wives of the *aimag* governor and the chair of the *khural* [local legislature] become LEOS members, there is more support for LEOS. These wives of powerful men must have influenced their husbands' understanding of civil society. So the authorities did not rush in to crush the new

movement. We were able to mobilize many people without harsh confrontation – that was a big value.

This work was not without obstacles, including a rather dramatic one that D. Enkhjargal had heard happened during leadership training for local women representatives in Khentii *aimag*. A participant recalled a workshop in the early 1990s conducted by Zanaa *egch* and her colleagues in Khentii *aimag*'s Galshirt *soum*. To sabotage the workshop, the MPRP people turned off the diesel motor and the lights went out. The women lit candles and continued the training. There were also cases when LEOS members of the MPRP faced intimidation from their party (O. Enkhtuya).

In 1994, TAF sent Enkhtuya *egch* to an Asia-Pacific women's conference in Manila. That was her first encounter with the international women's movement. By this time, Enkhtuya *egch,* could read and write in English, albeit with substantial effort and much use of a dictionary, but her English-speaking abilities were very basic. So her experience in Manila was rocky due to a language barrier:

> I was sent there with another participant who was supposed to translate for me. But, when we got there, she refused to translate. … It was my turn to introduce myself. My English was bad, I mean practically non-existent. … So I could not speak. The women from the other countries saw us and understood what was happening [laughter in her voice]. They said: "You are fine, you can do it, speak, speak!" So I went: [with a thick accent] "My name is." The women kept encouraging me. … [laughing].

> That's a women's organization for you! Highly sensitive. I could not explain to them what was happening! … Some bumpkin came with no knowledge of language but they surrounded me with support. That left a deep impression on me. These women, all so different, together they gave me such powerful energy! I found myself in a humiliating situation but I left there overjoyed even though I accomplished absolutely nothing there [laughing] because I understood <u>what</u> I must do! … I understood that this is our work: to support people who are unable … empowerment [said in English]. So after that conference, I began to study about the international women's movement. Before then, I did not know anything about women's movements.

LEOS continued to expand its membership and became increasingly decentralized, with strong branches in the *aimags* and various thematic clubs. These were the main vehicles for creating informal information networks among women, hence for movement-building (O. Enkhtuya). To provide content and leadership for this expanding movement, the LEOS chair sought to mobilize well-educated professional women who were "shining in their fields" (O. Enkhtuya). The economists' club was one of the most active and was led by U. Narantsetseg who completed a Master's program in the US with USAID support (O. Enkhtuya). Upon her return, she taught LEOS members about economic reforms. LEOS members had a pact that everyone who went abroad or read an important book, and learned something new would give a seminar to others. Enkhtuya *egch* continued:

> Because our discussions were interesting, many people came to the clubs. At one point, lots of accountants used to come. When the meeting was at the School of Economics, teachers and students would come and join. Same at the University of Humanities [then Institute of Foreign Languages]. So branches emerged, small branches. We continuously expanded in this manner. Perhaps it was the need of that time to understand the changes that were happening. … There was a social need, which is why so many people came and supported.

While TAF support was critical in strengthening LEOS's program on women in politics, its women in politics programming may have been a response to the need expressed by LEOS to train women leaders (O. Enkhtuya). According to TAF webpage (The Asia Foundation, n.d.), its Women in Politics program was founded in 1993 and TAF began to support an Asia-Pacific regional network on women in politics, APWIP, in 1994. According to Coston and Butz (1999), Enkhtuya *egch* was a founding member of APWIP.[155]

In September of 1995, LEOS organized a national conference on women in politics, with three other APWIP founders[156] as resource people (Coston & Butz, 1999, p. 122). This event led to

---

[155] Interestingly, the information on APWIP is contradictory. An internet search produced a webpage of CAPWIP, an Asia-Pacific Center for Women in Politics, established in 1992, with no reference to TAF support except for the participation of women in some of CAPWIP's events and no mention of Mongolian women's participation in the 1990s. I seem to recall that CAPWIP was established circa 1995-1996 based on APWIP. Enkhtuya *egch* clearly remembers she and U. Narantsetseg were very active in the network in 1994-1995.

[156] Coston and Butz do not mention the names. Most likely the women were Socorro Reyes from the Center for Legislative Development (Philippines), Suteera Thomson from the Gender and Development Research Institute (Thailand), and Bong-Scuk Sohn from the Center for Korean Women and Politics (South Korea).

the establishment of a non-partisan women's coalition to increase women's representation in the 1996 elections (Coston & Butz, 1999, p. 122), with LEOS as the coordinator. Coalition members lobbied political parties to field more women candidates and mobilized women to run for office. With support from KAS and TAF, LEOS ran a nationwide voter education campaign, based on an APWIP-produced manual, to educate women about the principles of democratic politics and the importance of women's political representation (Coston & Butz, 1999, p. 122). LEOS's extensive national network was key in this endeavour.

A number of LEOS leaders were persuaded to run, including O. Enkhtuya and U. Narantsetseg. Zanaa *egch* refused to run in order 'to hold down the fort' and continue building the women's movement, which was still weak in her view. During this time, she "went around Narantsetseg's district, giving workshops on women's rights and gender equality," without being 'very partisan,' not trying to persuade people to support U. Narantsetseg, but talking "more generally about women's political participation" (J. Zanaa). This was, of course, a marked change from the 1992 elections. While complete non-partisanship was difficult, if not impossible, LEOS members made a genuine effort to promote all women from all parties and refrain from partisan advocacy while working in their non-partisan NGO capacity. Their efforts paid off: the number of women MPs increased from three out of seventy six to seven. Six of the seven women were from the opposition, including R. Narangerel and D. Otgonbayar from the SDWM, O. Enkhtuya and U. Narantsetseg from LEOS, and B. Delgermaa and Kh. Khulan who had also been involved with LEOS (O. Enkhtuya, personal communication, June 7, 2018).

It is my observation that the presence of many strong women enabled LEOS to create a thematic division of labour within the board, which in turn made for a more dispersed power structure within the organization. In addition to power-sharing, the women's strong commitment to democracy contributed to a high degree of internal transparency and accountability during this period. LEOS of the 1990s was organized more as a social movement than an NGO, with registered members, a broader information network throughout the country, with the local branches often more active than the center (O. Enkhtuya). By 2000, however, LEOS stopped registering members (O. Enkthuya), moving towards the NGO model, which by then had become a dominant form. Conceptually, LEOS came to function within a market-based liberal democratic model, largely because the US democracy promotion through TAF, IRI and USAID was 'the only game in town.' While a few of the leaders openly

identified as feminists, the majority of the members did not but the organizational focus on gender equality and women's rights was consistent.

5.5 The establishment of the NGO form

As the stories of the WSP and LEOS show, independent non-partisan organizations were completely new for Mongolia. The dissident movements generated or were transformed into opposition political parties. These movements had operated effectively without formal registration. The Supreme Court was registering political parties. The inherited mass organizations had been reinventing themselves but did not face the need to register with the state to formalize their new status. They were already established and recognized as such. It was not so in the case of the new organizations. They had no 'name' as a type of an organization and no law existed to incorporate them into the national legal system. While some members described themselves as *sain duryn* (voluntary) and *olon niitiin* (mass public) organizations, these were designations for the state-socialist mass organizations that compelled 'voluntary' membership and work such as the infamous *subbotniks*.

From the 1960s on, the state had nearly completely socialized all spheres of society and subordinated them to the party-state. Existence, individual or organizational, unsanctioned by the state and outside the purview of the state was unimaginable for the majority of the population. A man once said to me resolutely: "There is nothing non-state! Everything is under the purview of the state!" For him, the idea of a non-state organization was ludicrous. Also, 'non-state' was becoming equated with 'anti-state,' likely due to the critical stance of the emerging organizations towards the (MPRP-permeated) state and their close alignment with the opposition. The terms 'NGO,' 'civil society' and 'civil society organization' were new and carried in English, inaccessible to most Mongolians. Most research participants who entered the civil society field in the early to mid-1990s stated that they learned these terms and concepts from international organizations, especially from TAF, and through their travels to various regional or international civil society events from the mid-1990s.

1995 was a watershed year for the emerging NGO sector in Mongolia. The NGO law was adopted in 1997 but even Lamjav *guai* who personally drafted the NGO law as well as several

other participants pinned 1995 as the year the law was adopted. I believe this is because the NGO form was established in 1995 as a result of several inter-related processes:

- TAF engaged American non-profit attorneys as consultants to conduct workshops for Mongolian groups, both emerging and inherited, on what NGOs/non-profit organizations (NPOs) are, how they are structured and governed, how they raise funds and implement projects, and how project proposals are written. Mongolians learned about boards for the first time. All mass organizations had been membership-based, with the governing council elected (often nominally) by the members. Here was a new structure, not rooted in membership. Mongolians were generalists, with a broad goal of a vaguely understood democratic development. They were advised to narrow their focus, work on specific issues in order to more effectively use their resources, and find a niche area. Thus, the new organizations were to specialize and think competitively.

- In October, 1995, TAF organized a study tour to California and Oregon for the representatives of the WSP, LEOS, the Women Lawyers' Association (WLA), Tsekh Constitutional Watchdog NGO and two organizations from the MPRP field – the Mongolian Artistic Workers' Union and the Mongolian Consumer Interests' Protection Association. The two-week study tour comprised visits to a variety of national and community-based non-profits, including, *inter alia*, the Global Fund for Women (GFW), VoteSmart, a women's shelter house, a consumer rights group, the United Way, League of Women Voters, American Civil Liberties Union, and environmental groups. Most groups emphasized volunteer work and private fundraising as key to their operations.

- TAF began supporting the drafting of the NGO law. There had been one or two drafts already prepared. One entitled as a draft law on *olon niitiin baigullaga* (mass public organization) was presented to TAF by the Mongolian Youth Federation. Not willing to support an inheritor organization, TAF engaged the Founder and Chair of Tsekh, Mr. D. Lamjav, to work with an American non-profit lawyer to prepare a new draft. The draft law focused on protecting NGOs from state obstructionism and intervention; prescribing an organizational structure for public-service NGOs that would, in theory, ensure internal transparency and accountability by separating the volunteer (unpaid) board and hired (paid) staff; and specifying possible funding sources and non-profit principles. The draft

also included tax deductions for donations to public-service NGOs. Workshops and discussions were organized to disseminate the draft.

- Following the NGO study tour to the US, TAF engaged an American non-profit attorney to work with the WSP, LEOS and the WLA to develop joint project proposals. This resulted in the establishment of two new NGOs structured according to the proposed NGO model: the Women's Information and Research Center (WIRC) and the Center against Violence (CAV). All three founding organizations were represented in the WIRC and CAV boards. The first staff were also recruited from the three founders. The new organizations were initially supported by the UN and AusAID. WIRC was intended to support the emerging women's movement with research and information. The CAV was inspired by the shelter house visited in the US.

- With TAF input, the Ministry of Law and Home Affairs, i.e. the Mongolian Ministry of Justice (MOJ), agreed to begin registering NGOs with an expectation this would be formalized by the passage of the NGO law in the near future.

The law was passed in 1997 by the parliament in which the DUC held fifty out of seventy-six seats. Ms. R. Narangerel, MSDP MP championed the law in the parliament. She was a Chair of the SDWM and had founded the Center for Citizenship Education (CCE) before becoming an MP. In passing the law, however, the democrats "cheated (*khuursan*)" as Lamjav *guai* put it (personal communication, December 15, 2015). They left out the provision on tax deductions for donations to public-benefit NGOs, stating that they will include it in the package of laws on taxation that was coming up for discussion later. A prominent member of the coalition personally assured the TAF staff not to worry. The provision was, however, omitted when the tax laws were passed. The NGO law was passed without any serious provisions about funding. The law likely played a key role in nationalizing and normalizing the lean organizational model.

5.6 Reflections

The 1990s were formative years for Mongolia's democracy. It emerged from a broad-based, diverse and inclusive indigenous movement for democracy. By democracy, most imagined a society in which all Mongolians can live in truth, dignity, freedom and equality. The dissidents

were not ideologically homogenous. While some wished to build 'genuine socialism,' others aimed to establish capitalism. Mongolia's historical experience of centuries and decades of subordination to a colonial power, its deeply troubled economy and vulnerable geopolitical situation rendered the country more permeable to the imposition of neoliberal democracy. The dream of democratic socialism was quickly washed away by the deluge of democracy and free market education from the US and other western countries.

In this context, women began to form a completely new kind of an organization and work in heretofore forbidden areas. LEOS and the WSP emerged as aspiring movements with a strong focus on mass mobilization and a general purpose to promote Mongolia's humane and democratic development. Their membership-based organizational structures were evolving organically based on what they had known under state-socialism, what they were learning from outside and, most importantly, inspired by their missions. Their commitment to democracy and their strong membership made for an egalitarian organizational culture and a functional degree of internal transparency and accountability. Their commitment to democracy, their need for support and their desire for new information, knowledge and skills converged with the interests of western organizations seeking to promote Mongolia's democratic reforms based on their specific understandings of liberal democracy.

Through information, advice, training and financial support, the emerging organizations were guided to internalize a neoliberal democratic paradigm and transform into office-based, issue-specific professionalized NGOs. In most cases, the proposed democratic governance structure of an unpaid board overseeing paid staff created new conflicts among members. As most NGOs were pioneers in their fields, they had a hard time recruiting supportive and capable board members from outside the organization. Without an effective board, power concentrated in the executive and the only guarantee of non-corruption became the ethics of the individual staff, especially of the executive director. Further down the road, this institutional weakness stemming from the design flaw would be used to delegitimate struggling NGOs and blame NGO leaders.

LEOS was remarkable in that it managed to sustain its mass mobilization focus and grow into a national movement with strong bases in the *aimags*. No other independent NGO has come close to this level of national mobilization and institutionalization. However, after 1999, LEOS

was not able to sustain the same dynamism. Several external factors are likely to have contributed to this change. Firstly, mass mobilization was in part sustained by the high level of unemployment and idleness of the early to mid-1990s. As the economy began to stabilize and then grow, people no longer had as much time on their hands. Secondly, information sources were proliferating and the hunger for new information was not so dire. Thirdly, in the emergent donor funding scheme of awarding small grants for specific short-term projects on a competitive basis, a large membership-bound organization was disadvantaged. This funding infrastructure forces an organization to trim down and/or run multiple projects. In the latter case, due to uneven funding from different sources, the risk of creating new inequalities and conflicts among staff and members is high.

In addition, the whole sector was established with an overpowering idea of the NGOs being voluntary and dependent on private fundraising or competitive small grants. Voluntary came to primarily mean free labour rather than free choice. This unpaid and under-paid sector became gendered feminine.

Given these new constraints and challenges posed by the legacy of state-socialist authoritarianism, women's achievements are astounding. Their idealistic commitment to democracy was a formidable engine that enabled them to find ways to work together, to make connections, to negotiate the old and new, to create a completely new space in society and recreate themselves in the process. They engaged head-on with powerful state bodies, with courage, creativity and a truckload of sense of humour. They went where no citizen had gone before, opening new paths, "breaking the ice and softening the ground" (Ts. Oyungerel, personal communication, December 17, 2015; O. Enkhtuya).

Chapter 6 : The expansion of the NGO sector

Mapping shifting grounds and concepts

> "It's an old, old trick of autocratic rule," Idaho said. "Alia knows it well. Good subjects must feel guilty. The guilt begins as a feeling of failure. The good autocrat provides many opportunities for failure to the populace."
>
> - Frank Herbert, *Children of Dune*

6.1 Introduction

In this chapter my aim is to sketch out the changing political context and the civil society field in which we were embedded, with a focus on the period from 1996 to 2008. This period was not only dynamic but also set the tone for the country's development into the third postsocialist decade. As I will discuss in this chapter, this was a time when the tectonic changes that began after 1990 began to solidify in the sphere of economy and politics with profound effects on social and cultural dynamics. Mongolia's whole society had been restructured under a free market ideology, driving the dream of democracy and human rights further away while the discourse of development, democracy, human rights and gender equality was taking root more deeply. I will start laying out the changes in the political context, then briefly review the economic situation. I will then focus on mapping out the changes in the fast-expanding NGO sector and discuss some of the conceptual nuances of the terms 'NGO sector' and 'civil society' that were in currency at the time.

6.2 A new political configuration

6.2.1 A whole new game: From collaboration to competition

Kh. Naranjargal, the founder and chair of the Globe International NGO, which promotes media freedom and the right to information, said: "The early 1990s were a 'golden period' for promoting the ideas of democracy" (personal communication, December 22, 2015). Indeed, despite visible confrontations, it appears to have been a period of collaboration and compromise, with the dominant MPRP and the emergent opposition committed to a peaceful transition (Tumursukh, 2009, p. 140). Even having won overwhelmingly in the 1992 election, the MPRP invited the opposition to form a coalition government. Suspecting an attempt at

co-option, the latter declined the offer. The social boundaries across partisan affiliations were porous and many in the opposition were former MPRP members (Rossabi, 2005). So it was not outlandish for the MSDP and MNDP to nominate Mr. P. Ochirbat, an MPRP member and the incumbent President, as their presidential candidate in 1993.[157] Mr. P. Ochirbat became the first popularly elected President of Mongolia[158] and his balancing role was important during the MPRP-dominant parliament in 1992-1996. The opposition chafed under MPRP dominance and the two camps increasingly assumed a more adversarial stance gearing toward the 1996 elections. By now, both had received democracy education from the west, predominantly the US, which included a reductionist definition of a political party as an entity with a sole purpose of gaining state power[159] and a marketing approach to election campaigning (International Republican Institute, 1996).

The MPRP *dargas* who had privileged access to information and cash had benefited disproportionately in the first wave of the privatization of public assets (Rossabi, 2009, p. 238). The sizeable aid flows to the government served to strengthen the MPRP given most public servants were MPRP members. The MPRP had a clear material advantage in the 1996 elections due to its control of public resources (Tumursukh, 2009, p. 140). With more free market reforms in the pipeline, the stakes were higher than in 1992. It is highly likely that the destructive and under-researched phenomenon of *namchirkhal* – fanatical partisan politicization – began to congeal in this period, sharpening the ideological and social cleavage between the pro-MPRP and the anti-MPRP/democratic opposition spheres. *Namchirkhal* continues to pose major obstacles to consistent and sober work towards shared goals of national development.

---

[157] It was also because by law, the candidate needed to be above 45 and there was no one among the democratic leaders who could satisfy the age criteria.

[158] In 1991, he had been appointed as the President.

[159] This definition came up in 2003 in response to our efforts to define the role of political parties more substantively in terms of organizations that develop and propose competing development programs based on the amalgamation of their members' preferences. A recognized civil society expert resolutely dismissed this approach, stating that a Harvard (not just any) professor taught several years back that a party's sole purpose is to gain state power. The German approach to political parties was more substantive but did not take hold among the parties. Also, KAS only worked with the opposition, not the MPRP. The IRI training for political parties on election campaigning appears to have been more influential. It was formalistic and focused on marketing strategies.

6.2.2 Democrats rise and fall, the free market persists

The MPRP came to be seen as the main obstacle to democratization and progress, conveniently blamed for the continued economic crisis. Unflatteringly labelled as the *Khu nam* (abbreviation of *khuvisgalt* (revolutionary) party) [160] or simply 'communists,'[161] it became the embodiment of socialism and authoritarianism – the two terms being used synonymously. Conversely, being a democrat came to primarily mean being anti-MPRP, which enabled the right-leaning MNDP and the left-leaning MSDP to form the anti-MPRP coalition along with two other small parties in 1996. The resounding victory of the DUC was a euphoric moment for democracy proponents, their foreign supporters and the emergent independent NGOs (Rossabi, 2005).[162]

The DUC's ascent to power was circumscribed by a strong MPRP opposition in parliament, in the predominantly MPRP-aligned public service, at the largely MPRP-controlled local levels and the victory of the MPRP candidate N. Bagabandi in the 1997 presidential election. Nevertheless, the DUC did create a greater openness in the political system, making state bodies more accessible to NGOs and citizens (O. Enkhtuya) and, probably, to foreign organizations as well. The law on NGOs and a very general and limited law on free media[163] were passed in 1997. However, the DUC's overall performance was poor. With little concern for the plight of the struggling population, the DUC re-emphasized the 'shock therapy' approach, exacerbating the socio-economic crisis (Nixson & Walters, 1999; Rossabi, 2005). In addition, its members became embroiled in banking scandals and a casino tender bribery case (Severinghaus, 1999, p. 132).[164] In its four-year term, the coalition installed four governments (Fritz, 2008, p. 781). In 1998, S. Zorig, a voice against corruption and unbridled marketization,

---

[160] The way a word sounds is very important for spoken Mongolian. This abbreviation – *khu* – sounds harsh in the way the full word *khuvisgalt* does not. It might be a safe bet to suppose that no MPRP member or supporter has ever used the short term '*Khu nam*' in reference to the MPRP. The Mongolian abbreviation MAKhN is also quite unfortunate, allowing derisive plays on words such as *makh* (meat) being forced down the throats of people. The connotation is of a heavy, unhealthy diet lacking the necessary variety of vitamins and minerals.
[161] In post-socialist Mongolia, this label has strong overtones of authoritarianism and (state) violence.
[162] On the election night, when the results began to trickle in, TAF and WSP staff visited parties at newly elected DUC MPs' campaign headquarters. One of these parties was at the KAS office, which was in the same building as the MDU. The general mood was euphoric!
[163] The law did not go far enough, however, as the state control of the media was to the DUC's advantage once it was in power (Severinghaus, 1999).
[164] Three MPs were convicted of accepting bribes from a Macao-based casino.

then an MP and Minister of Infrastructure, was killed the night before his likely appointment as the next Prime Minister.[165] Kh. Khulan, then Chair of the parliamentary Standing Committee on Social Policy, aptly noted that Zorig's death signified the end of the romantic period of Mongolia's democracy (Tumursukh, 2009, p. 141).

The pace of the structural adjustment reforms had been slowed down by the MPRP and the IMF had suspended its Enhanced Structural Adjustment Facility (ESAF) in March, 1996 (Nixson & Walters, 1999). The DUC, on the other hand, was encouraged and rewarded by IFIs and bilateral organizations for pursuing radical market reforms, including the introduction of regressive forms of revenue generation such as VATs and user fees, abolition of import tariffs and the adoption of transnational capital-friendly laws on foreign direct investment and minerals[166] (Fritz, 2008; Nixson & Walters, 1999; Rossabi, 2009). The IMF resumed its support after the elections, extending it for another three years (Nixson & Walters, 1999). In 1996, without a thorough analysis of the Mongolian context, the DUC embarked on a radical neoliberal restructuring of public administration based on the yet unproven New Zealand model (Nixson & Walters, 1999). "With strong support (if not insistence) of international donors and others," the DUC advocated for the privatization of key income-generating national enterprises (Severinghaus, 1999, pp. 134-135) and was said to have deliberately exaggerated the inefficiency of public enterprises to sell them at woefully low prices. The economy was a shambles and the public sector continued to run deficits while beginning to service the external debt from 1997. The extent of social and economic dislocation was severe despite some amelioration provided by philanthropic agencies (Rossabi, 2009).

6.2.3 Communism is dead! Long live the MPRP!

When the 2000 elections resulted in a sweeping victory for the MPRP (seventy-two out of seventy-six seats), the democrats blamed the people for 'voting with their bellies' and for

---

[165] To date his murder remains unsolved.

[166] I provided simultaneous translation during one of the public discussions between parliamentarians and donors on the foreign investment law. The DUC was primarily concerned with attracting foreign direct investment and focused on luring them with various privileges, including tax benefits, which were denied to domestic investors. I remember this point clearly because my father was frustrated with the government preference for foreign investors when domestic investors and companies needed much more support.

lacking democratic education and commitment.[167] On the other hand, the MPRP that came to power was a transmogrified one, with younger leaders such as N. Enkhbayar and S. Bayar who had by now studied in the US and UK (Rossabi, 2009). Like the democrats and unlike the older MPRP members, they were western-oriented and embraced neoliberal policies (Rossabi, 2009). In 2000, when the MSDP and the MNDP merged into the Mongolian Democratic Party (MDP) along with several small parties, the MPRP seized the heretofore unavailable label of 'social democrats'. From 2000, the MPRP engaged actively with the Socialist-International (SI), hosting their Asia-Pacific regional meeting in Mongolia in 2005 (Socialist International, n.d.). Despite the new label, the MPRP was neither communist nor social democratic in its policy orientation. It continued the neoliberal reforms and the international support continued too, with the share of loans rising in the aid packages (Rossabi, 2009).

Moreover, the new MPRP was anything but democratic. Having won the local elections in 2000 and with the re-election of President N. Bagabandi in 2001, the MPRP had a monopoly on political power and sought to secure it, *inter alia*, by crudely suppressing opposition MPs, recriminalizing the media, manipulating the NGO sector, and hardening the criminal code (Tumursukh, 2009). It began to systematically tie employment, career advancement and other economic opportunities to party membership, reinforcing partisan polarization (*namchirkhal*) (Tumursukh, 2009). In 2000, the MPRP even sent a secret instruction to its local committees to suppress the MDP, MDU and LEOS. In some localities MPRP members of LEOS were given an ultimatum to choose between their public service jobs and LEOS, leading to a mass exodus of MPRP women from LEOS (O. Enkhtuya).

The MPRP also adopted the constitutional reforms it had blocked in 1999 (Severinghaus, 1999), enabling MPs to serve as cabinet ministers, which concentrated power in the executive and the top leadership of the ruling party and weakened parliamentary oversight (Chimid et al., 2016; D. Lamjav). In 2001, a new law about parliamentary membership was quietly adopted. This law, aside from enhancing socio-economic privileges for MPs, specifically stated that an MP may concurrently hold "an elected position in an NGO" (Paragraph 36.1.3)

---

[167] I heard this many times from the mouths of opposition leaders.

("Mongol Ulsyn Ikh Khurlyn tukhai khuuli (shinechilsen nairuulga) [Law on the State Great Khural of Mongolia (revised law)]," 2006) (D. Lamjav; personal communication, December 10, 2015).

Politics was fast becoming a zero-sum game, with the stakes rising higher with the now-entrenched corruption exacerbated by the expansion of mining (Baabar, 2007, November 25; Fritz, 2008). N. Enkhbayar, elected as the President of Mongolia in 2005, became known as the 'Godfather of Mongolian Corruption.' From this time on, losing elections would entail much more than losing political power.

6.2.4 MANAN and the 'Third Force'[168]

The 2004 election confirmed the trend towards the ideological convergence of the main political parties and backsliding on previous democratic gains. US observers noted substantial irregularities and violations of the law that marred the election (Fritz, 2008). This time the MDP formed the Motherland-Democracy Coalition (MDC), joining with the Motherland Party founded by a rich mining businessman and the Civil Courage Party (CCP) founded by S. Oyun. To finance the increasingly expensive campaigns (MNT 1 billion in 2004 based on the parties' and candidates' reports to the General Election Commission (Enkhtsetseg, 2015, December 11)[169]), the MDP fielded candidates largely based on their financial contributions (Tumursukh, 2009). The MPRP ran an aggressive campaign, mobilizing public resources. Election outcomes were disputed in several districts. The full parliament was eventually formed, with the MPRP slightly ahead (forty members) of the MDC (thirty-two members), one Republican Party MP and three independents. The MPRP and the MDC agreed to form a grand coalition and take two-year turns in leading the government, starting with the MDC. However, a year and a half later, the MPRP orchestrated the fall of the coalition government headed by Ts. Elbegdorj (MDP) who was pushing anti-corruption measures (Center for Citizens' Alliance, 2006,

---

[168] In Mongolian: *guravdakh khuchin*.

[169] The figure is most likely under-reported as, according to Enkhtsetseg, OSF Program Manager and Coordinator of the OSF-supported Civil Society Network for Fair Elections, the figures are based on the reports submitted to the General Election Commission by political parties and candidates. The GEC has no capacity to verify these reports and, as of 2012, there had been no known case of state audit of any of these reports. In 2008, one party apparently reported that it had no stationery, fuel and meeting expenditures during a campaign period (Enkhtsetseg, 2015, December 11).

February 4). The next cabinet was headed by M. Enkhbold, ex-mayor of Ulaanbaatar who was believed to have greatly profited from corrupt deals on municipal land and assets. Before the elections, S. Bayar was installed as the Prime Minister.

The formation of the grand coalition was seen as the end of the MDP's career as a counterweight to the dominant MPRP and a consolidation of the trans-party oligarchy, which was later named MANAN (MPP+DP).[170] Various movements and civil society groups began to fill in the space of the opposition. The Movement for Radical Renewal (MRR), the Citizens' Movement for a Healthy (Ethical) Society (CMHS), the Mongolian Free Seniors' (Elderly) Association[171] and the Mongolian Student Union held mass demonstrations, demanding transparency, accountability and an end to corruption and poverty (Bulag, 2009, January/February; Landman, Larizza, & McEvoy, 2005; Tumursukh, 2009). In rural areas, in response to the devastation brought on by mining, the Onggi River and My Mongolian Land movements and other environmental and herders' groups were actively mobilizing (Snow, 2011, March 11). Various ethno-nationalist groups such as Dayar Mongol were also stepping up their organizing (Bulag, 2009, January/February; Combellick-Bidney, 2012; Myadar, 2011). In 2006, the combined pressure of some of these movements, top scientists and national experts in mining and natural resources, and several human rights and pro-democracy NGOs stalled the revision of the minerals law and forced M. Enkhbold's government to form joint government-civil society committees to revise sustainability agreements with mining companies (Ya. Byambajav, 2007). Concurrently, the Citizens' Council (*Irgenii Zuvlul*) was holding well attended policy discussions in a 'civil manner', off the streets, led by successful businessmen turned public opinion leaders such as D. Enkhbat ('Forum' Enkhbat)[172] and D. Jargalsaikhan ('DeFacto' Jagaa).[173]

---

[170] In 2010, the MPRP renamed itself as the Mongolian People's Party (MPP) or MAN in Mongolian. The MDP is commonly abbreviated in the Mongolian as AN (DP). MANAN is thus the combination of the abbreviated names of the MPP and DP but also a word *manan*, which means 'fog.'

[171] This group was formed in 2005 in opposition to the Mongolian Seniors' Association, a staunchly pro-MPRP NGO. The MFSA was led by Mrs. D. Baasan, an MDU old-timer.

[172] D. Enkhbat became nationally renowned as a charismatic host of a policy talk show "Forum," which was produced by the Open Society Forum (OSF) (formerly MFOS) and broadcast on MNTV in 2004-2006 (Enkhbat, 2008, June 10; Open Society Forum, 2006).

[173] D. Jargalsaikhan's website (JDF, n.d.) describes him as "an independent economist and media representative of Mongolia," "Mongolian political and economic observer, columnist, and host of TV's Defacto Debate, Defacto Review, and Defacto Interview, weekly television interviews on VTV in Mongolia, featuring distinguished Mongolian, English and Russian-speaking guests from across the globe."

As the two main parties' popularity ratings sank, according to the Sant Maral Foundation's polls (Tulga, 2008, April 10), the movements continued to gain popular support, converging as the 'Third Force.' The Citizens' Coalition was formed, made up of the Citizens' Movement Party (CMP), formed on the basis of the CMHS; the Mongolian Green Party (a merger between the Green Party and the Citizens' Council); other small parties; and independent candidates such as B. Lkhagvajav, a businessman who raised tax and VAT issues and engaged with the Constitutional Court. The MPRP and the MDP colluded to revise the election law to give more advantages to the incumbents and to revoke the 30% women's quota and voting rights of Mongolians abroad. Campaigning costs increased nearly eight times (MNT 7.9 billion) and the main parties formally demanded campaign contributions from prospective candidates in the amount of MNT 20 million per person (Enkhtsetseg, 2015, December 11).[174]

The election was held on June 29, 2008. The legitimacy of nearly all of its aspects was highly contested: the validity of the law itself, the impartiality and competence of the General Election Commission (GEC), equality and fairness in campaigning, the objectivity of mainstream media, the ethics of contestants, legal compliance during vote counting, and the veracity of the election results (Civil Society Monitoring for Fair Elections Network, n.d.; Open Society Forum, Globe International, & IRIM Mongolia, 2008; Sukhgerel, 2008). A popular protest ensued when the reports of preliminary results showed that the MPRP had more than half of the seats. On July 1, 2008, the protest was violently suppressed and a four-day state of emergency was declared, shutting down all non-state media (Open Society Forum et al., 2008). Five people were killed[175] and over 800 were arrested over several days. Many of them were subjected to police brutality and some 200 people were subsequently severely sentenced by the courts (Human Rights under State of Emergency Monitoring and Protection Coalition, 2008). Opposition candidates and human rights activists were interrogated by the police. Three opposition candidates were arrested for 'inciting violence' (Sukhgerel, 2008). Three movement activists were detained for two weeks for attempting to demand

---

[174] In 2012, the campaigning costs reportedly reached MNT 36.8 billion and the candidates' campaign contributions to their parties rose to MNT 50 million (Enkhtsetseg, 2015, December 11).
[175] Four were shot dead on that night but more than five may have been killed. Some detainees reported to our Human Rights under State of Emergency Monitoring and Protection Coalition activists that a child was beaten to death and taken out of the detention center through a back door (Human Rights under State of Emergency Monitoring and Protection Coalition, 2008).

accountability for the human rights violations: D. Baasan from the Free Pensioners' Association for 'disturbing public order' during the MOJ's Open Day, and Mr. G. Arslan and Ms. A. Saruul for demonstrating on Sukhbaatar Square 'without a permit' by sitting silently with tapes over their mouths. Subsequently, at least four leaders of the Coalition of Citizens' Movements defected to the two main parties they had adamantly criticized. Ms. M. Ichinnorov and Mr. B. Lkhagvajav joined the MPP and Mr. J. Batzandan and Mr. O. Magnai joined the MDP. The hope for the 'Third Force' was crushed. Election-related irregularities were well documented by the OSF-supported Civil Society Network for Fair Elections[176] and the media (Civil Society Monitoring for Fair Elections Network, n.d.; Sukhgerel, 2008). However, international election observers, including TAF and the IRI, cheerfully concluded Mongolia had held yet another free and fair election (Beck, 2008, June 30; Dierkes, 2015, June 8; International Republican Institute, 2008; Snow, 2011, March 11).

Even after two weeks, the GEC was only able to present a list of 66 new MPs (Civil Society Monitoring for Fair Elections Network, 2008, July 14). Parliament was formed with an incomplete membership, with the MPRP claiming 45 seats and the MDP 27. The seats were only finally filled in October 2009, adding, amongst others, the 'Forum' Enkhbat and Kh. Temuujin (MDP), former MNU Law School lecturer and Chair of the Open Academy NGO, who represented hope for renewal in the MDP and politics. Once again a coalition government was formed, with S. Bayar (MPRP) as the Prime Minister, N. Altankhuyag (MDP) as the First Vice-Prime Minister, and S. Bayartsogt (MDP) as a Finance Minister. In 2009 this government signed a highly controversial mining agreement with the Rio Tinto subsidiary Ivanhoe Mines to mine the Oyu Tolgoi strategic deposits. After the deed was done, S. Bayar resigned, claiming health problems, and headed to the US. S. Bayartsogt stayed on, was re-elected in 2012 and appointed as the Vice-Speaker of the parliament. In 2013 he was forced to resign when it was publicly revealed he had failed to report his offshore account. In a country with at least one third of the people living in poverty, S. Bayartsogt cavalierly explained he simply forgot because USD 1 million is not a big sum. After losing in the 2016 election, he too headed abroad.

---

[176] The WSP and the Globe International are members of the coalition.

6.3 The NGO field

From 2000 the MPRP campaigned to reframe Mongolia's most pressing challenge as that of development and poverty reduction, *not* of democracy. Some observed that support for democracy promotion declined after 1996 (Fritz, 2008). From 2000 more funding was made available for NGOs but predominantly under the rubric of development and poverty reduction. The number of pro-democracy and human rights/women's rights NGOs remained comparatively low, progressively dwarfed in percentage terms as the civil society field expanded and increasingly diversified. This reality has been occluded by repeated cursory statements about the strength and vibrancy of Mongolian civil society in various western accounts of Mongolia's democratization and governance.

The divergence between foreign and Mongolian assessments of the strength of civil society openly surfaced in parallel studies produced by Mongolian NGOs and western experts in the mid-2000s as a follow-up to the International Forum on Civil Society and Democracy (ICSFD) hosted by Mongolian NGOs in 2003 in parallel to the International Conference of New and Restored Democracies (ICNRD) hosted by the Mongolian government. The civil society process, led by the Centre for Citizens' Alliance (formerly the CEDAW Watch Network Center led by J. Zanaa), went on to produce a national, comprehensive and participatory assessment of the State of Civil Society, using the Civil Society Index (CSI) methodology developed by CIVICUS to allow for cross-country comparisons (Center for Citizens' Alliance, 2006).[177] The government process resolved to develop Democratic Governance Indicators (DGIs) and enlisted the Human Rights Centre of Essex University to help develop the methodology. The two teams periodically met to discuss methodology and findings. At one of these meetings, the western experts questioned the reliability and objectivity of the participatory self-assessment methodology. In their desk study on the State of Democracy in Mongolia, the western experts described their methodology as (Landman et al., 2005):

> … a well-established methodology for carrying out democracy assessment that has now been applied around the world across numerous single country studies and two comparative studies on the state of democracy in Asia and Africa. The International Institute for Democracy

---

[177] I worked as the Senior Researcher for this study.

and Electoral Assistance (IDEA) has developed this methodology in partnership with the UK Democratic Audit and the Human Rights Centre at the University of Essex. … For this desk study, the methodology has been combined with extant quantitative democratic governance indicators to provide as robust a picture as possible on the state of democracy in Mongolia using publicly available information. (p. 2)

The CSI study concluded that Mongolia's civil society was "somewhat small and weakly structured" (Center for Citizens' Alliance, 2006, p. 39) in stark contrast to the DGI desk study's statement that "Mongolia has a vibrant and lively civil society with strong and large non-governmental organizations, particularly among journalists and women" (Landman et al., p. 4). This divergence surprised the lead expert on the DGIs at a joint public discussion at the conclusion of the two studies in 2006.

What this case highlights is the need for a broader look at the civil society field in order to put in perspective the 'vibrancy and strength' of pro-democracy and human rights/women's rights NGOs. There have been few attempts to gather broader data on the NGO sector/civil society aside from the CSI process. In 2000 the UNDP commissioned the Consulting and Business Center of the Academy of Management, the Gender Center for Sustainable Development (formerly WIRC), and the Consulting Unit LLP to undertake a study on projects and programs implemented by NGOs in 'social sectors' (Consulting and Business Center of the Academy of Management et al., 2000). In 2005, the MFOS commissioned the Democracy Education Center (DEMO) to conduct an NGO survey (Democracy Education Center (DEMO), 2005). In 2007, the MFOS supported a policy study on NGO participation in policy- and decision-making processes (Ya. Byambajav, 2007). These studies give a good overview of the fast changing field of civil society from the mid-1990s to the late 2000s.

6.3.1 The NGO field in 1996-2000[178]

According to the 2000 study, 1615 NGOs were registered with the MOLHA, with the largest numbers in the fields of sports (216), arts and culture (172), international friendship and cooperation (138) and business and economics (124) while the numbers were much lower in

---

[178] All data in this section come from the above-mentioned 2000 study (Consulting and Business Center of the Academy of Management et al., 2000).

the fields of women's and family issues (66), defence of citizens' interests (55), environmental protection (38), and human rights (24) (see Figure 2). The categorization of NGOs in this report is problematic. For example, most NGOs can be said to be defending some kind of citizens' interests or the interests of some groups of citizens, and the women's rights NGOs were a minority among the NGOs working on women's and family issues. Regardless, the figures do clearly indicate that the human rights/women's rights and pro-democracy advocacy NGOs were a small minority of the organizations registered as NGOs.
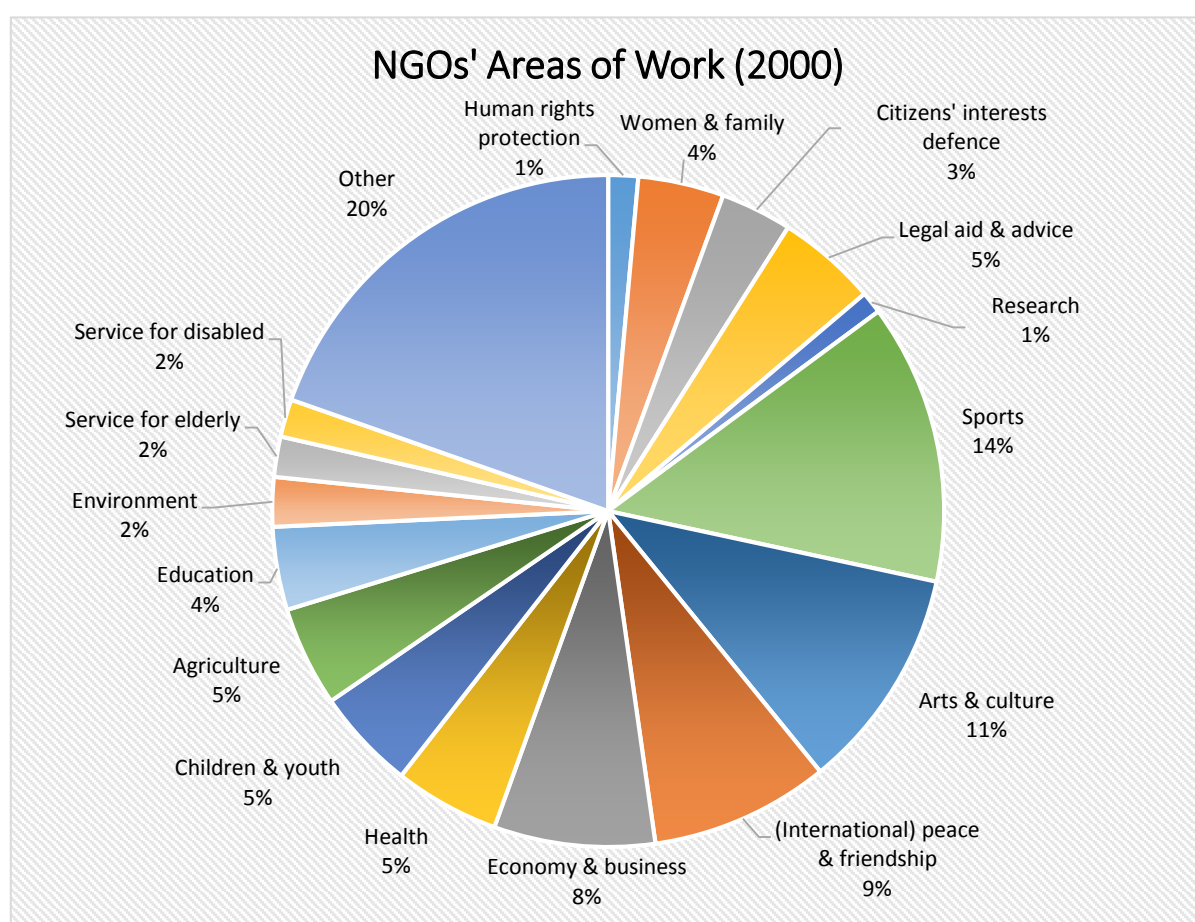
Figure 2. NGOs' Areas of Work (2000)

The study observed that the mushrooming of NGOs within three years of the adoption of the NGO law in 1997 was spurred by the National Poverty Reduction Program (ADB) and projects such as the Free Press (DANIDA), Distance Education (DANIDA) and Reproductive Health (UNFPA). It mentioned the important enabling role played by the UNDP, UNFPA, DANIDA, JICA, MFOS and AusAID. The study included eight 'donors' with regular operation in Mongolia: ADRA, TAF, Canada Fund, Peace Wind (Japan), Save the Children UK, MFOS, UNICEF and World Vision. In addition, it mentioned TACIS as a funder of NGO projects in 1996-1999.

Missing are the National Endowment for Democracy (NED), which supported LEOS and some other NGOs, and the Global Fund for Women (GWF), which was crucial for women's rights organizations.

Of the 170 projects and programs implemented in 1996-2000 by the eight donor organizations, the majority (112) were in education, community development and health sectors while twenty five were on "human rights, politics, citizens and social issues" (p. 11). However, it was unclear which of these were implemented with or by NGOs and the budgets must have varied vastly. Of the 80 NGOs, selected on the basis of regular operations and public recognition for their work on "social issues" (p. 4), thirteen implemented donor-funded projects in 1996-1998, seventeen in 1999 and twenty in 2000. The total number of projects and programs was 302, their total cost estimated at MNT 4,426.7 million (approximately USD 4.1 million),[179] predominantly (MNT 4,128.0 million) from international organizations. In 2000, the NGOs that implemented large projects included the Press Institute of Mongolia (PIM), the Consortium of Universities and Institutes, the Consortium of Management and Economics Training and Science Organizations, the Mongolian Development Center and LEOS (mainly due to the UNDP-funded micro-lending project).

As the study was motivated by the neoliberal goal of devolving state functions to NGOs, it assessed "NGO capacity to implement projects and programs" as measured by staff size, annual expenditure, capital assets, and the number of members/supporters and branches (pp. 19-22). Annual expenditure ranged widely from MNT 1 million (USD 928) to MNT 315 million (USD 292,270), with half of the fifty-five NGOs that provided financial data in 1999 working with less than MNT 5 million a year (USD 4,639) and only six reporting budgets of over MNT 50 million (USD 46,392) a year. Not surprisingly, these six included inheritor organizations such as the Mongolian National Chamber of Commerce and Trade (MNCCT), the Mongolian National Olympics Committee (MNOC) and the Mongolian Red Cross Association (MRCA). Of the sixty-eight organizations who made data available, six had more than thirty staff members while thirty three had up to five. In 2000, seven organizations, including the above-mentioned three, Zorig Foundation (founded and chaired by MP S. Oyun)

---

[179] All USD amounts are given at an exchange rate of USD 1 to MNT 1,077.77 based on the Ulaanbaatar city's Statistical Office data for 2000 (Ulaanbaatar City Statistical Office, n.d.).

and PIM, reported having capital assets worth over MNT 60 million (USD 55,670) while the majority reported having capital assets of up to five million (USD 4,639). Only about 10% of all the registered NGOs owned their offices. Government cooperation with NGOs was assessed as minimal.

Out of the eighty NGOs covered, nineteen had branches in all *aimags*. This highly informative list included the MRCA, Mongolian Seniors' Association, The Mongolian Federation of Consumer Interests' Protection Associations (MFCIPA), Mongolian Defence Attorneys (Lawyers') Association, Mongolian Federation of Trade and Service Cooperatives, Mongolian Federation of Agricultural Cooperatives, National (Traditional) Wrestling Association, Mongolian Art Workers' Association, Local Government Association, Mongolian Employers-Owners' Association, Mongolian Hunters' Association, Mongolian Scouts Association (which partially filled in the gap left by the former Young Pioneers' Union), Social Democratic Students' Association, and six women's NGOs. Many of these were inheritor organizations and most were closely aligned with the MPRP. This list shows the extreme diversity of the emerging 'NGO sector' and 'civil society,' terms generally used interchangeably during this period. This time was also characterised by the material and institutional advantages retained by inheritor NGOs, and by the murky boundaries between the state and civil society, with the Local Governments' Association being a rather extreme example.

6.3.2 NGOs in 2005-2007[180]

The 2005 NGO survey reported that the number of registered NGOs had reached 5077 by September 1, 2005. Based on the financial and tax reports of 1042 NGOs, 20% of the NGOs were deemed as active. DEMO examined registration forms and annual reports of 3720 NGOs, 40% of which were registered after 2002 and 77% of which were Ulaanbaatar-based. Interestingly, 231 clubs, forty five academies, thirty nine movements and nine political party wings were registered as NGOs. The largest numbers of NGOs were in the areas of agriculture, economy and business (500), sports, tourism and leisure (441), and social issues (410) (See Figure 3). There were 245 youth and children's NGOs and 243 environmental NGOs. The number of NGOs in the education and health sectors increased to 183 and 154 respectively

---

[180] All data in this section come from the 2005 study (Democracy Education Center (DEMO), 2005)

and 196 NGOs reported a focus on local development. By comparison, there were ninety-seven human rights and democracy NGOs. In addition, there were forty-four NGOs with a focus on law and 104 NGOs focused on women and family, which probably included a small number of women's rights NGOs. There were only eleven research organizations (17 in 2000).[181]
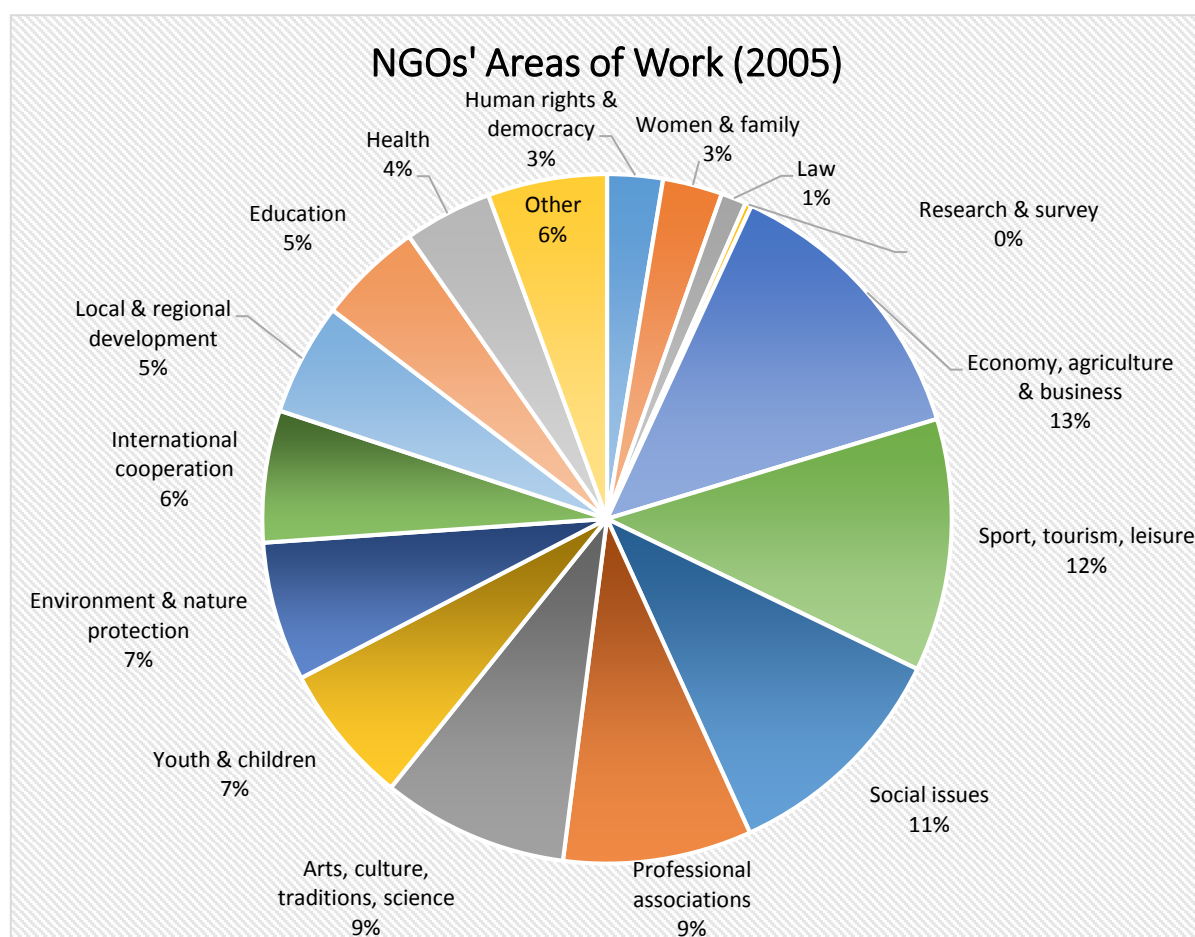
Figure 3. NGOs' Areas of Work (Democracy Education Center (DEMO), 2005, p. 10)

Based on financial reports, almost 60% of the NGOs' income came from foreign donors and only about 12% from their own sources, including training fees and rental of property. The survey reported that in the period 2001-2005, seventeen NGOs received a total of MNT 1,566 million (USD 1.3 million)[182] in government grants and subsidies. Not surprisingly, given the

---

[181] However direct comparisons are difficult as the 2000 and 2005 studies did not use the same classification of organizations.
[182] All USD amounts are given at an exchange rate of USD 1 to MNT 1,205.1 based on the Ulaanbaatar city's Statistical Office data for 2005 (Ulaanbaatar City Statistical Office, n.d.).

MPRP was in power from 2000 to 2004, the list included inheritor and MPRP-aligned organizations (elderly, family education, disabilities) and even the MPRP's party wings for youth, women and the elderly. The amounts ranged from just about MNT 1 million (USD 830) to over MNT 40 million (USD 33,192) for the period. Funding for the NCAV's shelter house, mandated by the 1996 National Program on the Advancement of Women until 2000, totalled MNT 7.4 million (USD 6,141) for 2001, 2003 and 2005 (no funding in 2002 and 2004). This was less than the funds received by the MPRP's youth and women's wings.

The top recipient was the MFCIPA. At the bottom of the list was the National Council on Gender Equality (NCGE), which is a government body. Its inclusion among NGOs once again highlights the confusion about and porosity of state-civil society boundaries that has permeated this field. It is also revealing that more than a fifth (22%) of the NGOs had boards primarily made up of government officials and 3% had boards mainly consisting of MPs. That 81% of the NGOs had five or fewer staff members and one-third had a staff of two clearly indicated the overall institutional fragility of the emergent sector. Given this picture, the 2000 study's optimism about this sector's ability to take over the state's functions in providing social security and welfare services appears unfounded.

6.3.3 Power dynamics in the field[183]

The 2007 study by Ya. Byambajav shed more light on the dynamics of this field in terms of NGO-government encounters. The study was based on secondary analysis, interviews with national and local governments and discussions with NGOs in Ulaanbaatar, Dundgovi and Khentii *aimags*, and discussions with NGO actors from Arkhangai, Bulgan and Uvurkhangai *aimags*. Byambajav found that although the policy and legal framework has increasingly included provisions for ensuring NGO participation in policy- and decision-making processes, this had not been institutionalized. Government processes for selecting NGOs for awarding contracts, grants or subsidies or to involve in policy dialogues were closed, non-transparent and *ad hoc*. As the majority of the local NGO employees were also public servants, they were often unable to speak freely for fear of repression whilst politicians and government officials

---

[183] All data in this section come from the 2007 study (Ya. Byambajav, 2007) unless otherwise indicated.

set up NGOs directly or through their family members and used their power and influence to hijack international projects and funding.

The involvement of NGOs in drafting committees was assessed as *pro forma*. There were only two formal avenues for participation in the legislative process: firstly, to be included in a drafting working group as an expert (an option open to few NGOs) and, secondly, to attend a public discussion organized by the parliamentary standing committee - if organized and if invited. The most common form of engagement, therefore, was informal. Access to policy- and decision-makers was primarily gained through business, social and mutual interest-based connections. In the context of poor transparency and accountability mechanisms, this situation risked creating unfair advantages for specific groups while the doors remained closed for the majority of NGOs, which lacked the prerequisite personal connections. In fact, a growing trend was noted of privileged access to decision-makers on the part of the leaders of larger NGOs as well as trade unions, business associations, and donors.

Echoing the CSI report's (Center for Citizens' Alliance, 2006) findings, Byambajav reported that partisan polarization (*namchirkhal*) and the tendency of government officials to view independent NGOs, especially those working for human rights, democracy and media freedom, as the opposition at times led to undue pressures and intimidation and attempts by the power-holders to sabotage strong civil society movements and initiatives through, *inter alia*, staging counter-demonstrations (p. 24). This observation echoes a 2006 statement by Mr. Chimid:

> There is a more serious distortion whereby parties redirect citizens' initiatives towards themselves, take their leadership into their hands and politicize them, turning them into a '*khalaasny* (pocket) organization.' … Once MPs, ministers and other state officials begin to head NGOs, politicization ensues, they lose their civil society quality, become party auxiliaries, extensions of the government. This is the meaning of '*khalaasny*.' A virulent disease has become chronic among state leaders whereby they strive to head a large union. … Every party now has a youth, women's and seniors' organization. Moreover, the use of such loathsome and toxic political manoeuvres as 'counter demonstrations,' 'counter hunger strikes' and 'defensive unions' risks sowing divisions and clashes among people. Getting rid of such dangerous trends as fast as possible and developing the civil society cleanly is the foundation

for rendering the political system healthy [ethical]. (Baasansuren & Bold-Erdene, 2013, pp. 54-55)

D. Baasansuren and D. Bold-Erdene quoted Mr. Chimid's above words in 2012 in the context of the MPP (former MPRP) establishing the Leftist Forces' Movement NGO and the MDP responding by founding the Democratic Forces' Movement NGO. At the launch of the latter, Mr. Z. Enkhbold, MDP MP, told a television reporter that the advantage of their NGO is that most of their board members are MPs and that, therefore, everything that is discussed by the NGO has a high chance of becoming law.

6.4 Defining civil society

6.4.1 NGOs as sub-contractors of the state

The 2000 study on projects and programs implemented by NGOs in social sectors (Consulting and Business Center of the Academy of Management et al., 2000) was very sympathetic to NGOs, noting that their establishment indicates achievements of democracy and civil society development. Critiquing the lack of cooperation with NGOs on the part of the government, the authors gave a set of recommendations. First and foremost, the authors boldly recommended that the government "decisively" outsource those functions that do not pertain to its core governance powers (*zasaglalyn buren erkh*) to the growing number of NGOs capable of implementing the government's social policy (p. 30). They stressed the need to ensure transparency of tenders and to introduce competition at all stages of project and program implementation. The authors specifically recommended that the government contract social security and social welfare services to NGOs in order to dismantle the government monopoly in the social services sector and encourage NGOs to compete for service contracts by enhancing the quality of their services while reducing costs. Further, for the implementation of large projects and programs, it was advised that the resources and capacity of NGOs should be consolidated, and that the capacity of the leading/coordinating NGO should be the main criterion for selection. Other recommendations pertained to supporting NGO development, including NGO data in the national statistics, and paying attention to foreclosing opportunities for NGOs to engage in activities outside their bylaw when amending the NGO law.

The 2007 study on NGO participation in policy- and decision-making processes (Ya. Byambajav, 2007) shed light on the dominant 'progressive' approach to NGOs supported by the OSF (formerly MFOS). It was based on a common assumption that citizen participation in policy- and decision-making processes is important for ensuring citizens' political right to participate in decisions that impact on their lives and for improving the quality and accountability of government policies. NGOs were seen as important because, for citizens, organizing into groups based on their *sonirkhol* (interest/hobby) and *erkh ashig* (common interests, concerns) is an effective way of conveying their positions and interests to the state. Without an explicit power analysis, the author emphasized the importance of ensuring the participation of NGOs that represent the interests of poor and marginalized social groups.

Citing examples of the practices of Eastern European postsocialist countries as 'international' experience, Byambajav (2007) advocated for the establishment of a government unit in charge of NGO relations and a replication of this model in line ministries. Echoing the 2000 study (Consulting and Business Center of the Academy of Management et al., 2000), Byambajav (2007) stated:

> Today, the state is confronted with many issues. Not only has the contemporary 'welfare' state become bulky (*dankhaisan*) due to having assumed many functions that should be performed by the private sectors or civil society organizations but also the state cannot single-handedly resolve many issues such as poverty, unemployment, environment and health. Therefore, it is imperative that the state make resolute steps to shift some of its functions onto the private sector and civil society and provide tax benefits and other forms of support. (p. 16)

Policy studies such as these are carefully vetted by the OSF. This study benefitted from the advice of a Columbia University professor, was reviewed by a well-respected national civil society expert and by the OSF program manager and was made available on the OSF website. Hence it is not far-fetched to suppose that the views expressed here are broader than the individual researcher's. In the 2007 report, there was a subtle but important shift to speaking of NGOs and civil society along with the private sector based on an underlying assumption that the state had artificially and forcefully taken over functions that naturally belong to and are better performed by non-state for-profit or non-profit actors.

6.4.2 Civil society as all *that is not the state*

Underlying this shift is the liberal notion of civil society as everything that is not the state, including the economy and the market. This broad conception of civil society is promoted by Mongolian libertarians and is also now embraced by Mongolian academics (J. Amarsanaa & Baasansuren, 2013; Chuluunjav, 2012). In 2013, the Institute of Philosophy, Sociology and Law of the Academy of Sciences published an edited volume on the development of Mongolia's civil society. A number of authors in this publication based their articles on western sources, accepting American and European histories and philosophy as the basis of their thinking about civil society developments in Mongolia (J. Amarsanaa, 2013; Chuluunbaatar, 2013; Chuluunbaatar & Gan-Ulzii, 2013; Jambal, 2013; Narmandakh, 2013). Academician J. Amarsanaa, having provided a rather comprehensive literature review of the conceptualization of civil society by Mongolian academics and civil society organizations (CSI study), dedicated the rest of his article to summarizing Nigel Ashford's *Principles of the Free Society*, which was translated into Mongolian and published by the Mongolian Libertarian Foundation (J. Amarsanaa, 2013). Amarsanaa *guai*'s summary included the following:

> The enemy of civil society is not individual freedom but the state. It is the state that cuts the connections between people, concentrates in its hands all power and resources and demands that we devote all our time, money and compassion to it. Thus the state weakens the linkages between people by demanding much from the people, marauding the people's material and emotional resources, which they otherwise would have devoted to each other. (J. Amarsanaa, 2013, p. 15)

In his book on civil society and a democratic person, Professor G. Chuluunjav shared the largely negative view of the state but also noted the inter-dependence of civil society and the state, stressing that the state is necessary to guarantee natural freedoms (Chuluunjav, 2012). However, a common trait in these writings is the treatment of 'people' and 'society' as a homogenous category juxtaposed to the state as an external imposition. A number of authors embraced a highly idealistic, romantic view of 'civil society' as a community of free and equal people (J. Amarsanaa, 2013; Chuluunjav, 2012).

6.4.3 Developing our understanding of civil society

The term 'civil society' began to be used more frequently from the late 1990s. People had not yet fully grasped the new phenomenon of 'NGOs' and the two terms were often used interchangeably, creating much confusion. We needed a theoretical, conceptual clarification of these terms but, as far as we knew, there were no domestic sources to turn to. The request we received from the Ministry of Foreign Relations in 2002 to organize the ICSFD gave us an opportunity to shed some light on this confusion with the assistance of foreign academics and activists. The ICSF Secretariat led by Zanaa *egch* and myself organized a three-day conceptual workshop in March, 2003, with Dr. Cas Mudde, a political scientist from the Antwerp University (Belgium) as a resource person. The workshop was the first time NGO activists got together with researchers and academics to engage in a conceptual discussion on civil society. Cas gave three interactive lectures, which focused on different models of democracy, diverse processes of democratization and different approaches to conceptualizing civil society (Workshop minutes). He refrained from prescriptions and cautioned the participants:

> Finally, some words on the Western experiences. I know that over the past decade, a lot of Westerners came to post-communist countries to preach democracy. They have provided you an image of an ideal world that exists somewhere. And it doesn't. It doesn't exist in the US, it doesn't exist in the Netherlands. I think it is very important in democratizing countries to understand this. I have been in countries where political scientists, colleagues of mine, criticized their governments, and they criticized certain policies or behaviours as undemocratic because they were not in accordance with the ideal type from the theory. Yet exactly the same behaviour or policies were completely acceptable to many academics from Western Europe and they said: "Yeah, that is just part of the compromise."… And when you look at western democracies, then you can also see situations, which have nothing to do not only with the liberal theory but even with the practice of liberal democracy.

> … The only point I want to make is: "Don't expect democracy as the ideal world." Also, don't just think "we are going to do what these established democracies do because they are perfect. … What is … very important to learn from other countries, not just what went well but what went wrong as well. And in that respect, again, don't look only at established democracies but look at other developing democracies. (Workshop minutes)

The workshop did not provide one best or correct definition of civil society. For postsocialist Mongolians, this ambiguity was frustrating. One middle-aged participant directly said: "This is very confusing. Just give me one good definition! And I will just go by it!" As I wrote in a report to TAF:

> Although the Workshop participants clearly appreciated the opportunity to talk about civil society at a theoretical level, it was evident that they were not entirely satisfied and even felt slightly at a loss as to how exactly they should define civil society and how they should go about it. (ICSF Secretariat, 2003)

With TAF support, we followed up with a national two-day Civil Society Review roundtable discussion (RTD) in August, which made an important breakthrough. Out of the one hundred invitees, seventy-seven attended the RTD, representing diverse NGOs, from Ulaanbaatar and the *aimags*, research institutions, political parties, cultural organizations, and the private sector. Among the participants were Mr. P. Ochirbat, the First President of Mongolia, Chimid *guai*, the 'Father of Mongolia's Democratic Constitution,' and Lamjav *guai*, the 'Father of the NGO Law,' all three of whom had actively participated in the drafting of the 1992 constitution.

Thanks to the diversity of the participants and the presence of the old-timers, the discussion was deeply contextualized and textured (Workshop minutes). Thus, Lamjav *guai* suggested that the history of Mongolian civil society might go back to the Manchu period to Ard Ayush's movement. Ms. J. Erdenechimeg, the MWF President, stated that Mongolians had always had the mentality and intellectual energy to be free, contesting the totalizing description of mass organizations during state-socialism as having been the 'hands and feet' of those in power. Mr. D. Ganbat, Director the Political Education Academy (PEA), argued that civil society can only exist in a democracy and, therefore, the history of Mongolian civil society started with the democratic revolution. Ochirbat *guai* observed that the NGOs had grown larger in number but weaker in power compared to the early 1990s. Urnaa *egch* added that contemporary NGOs were unable to mobilize masses and had weak support in rural areas. Chimid *guai* observed, based on his study in ten *aimags* and thirty *soums*, that rural civil society amounted to a few women's organizations that did not have much support. The participants "stressed the importance of understanding civil society in a broader, more systemic sense and paying

careful attention to the nature of power relations between the state and citizens, their organizations and activities" (Center for Citizens' Alliance, 2006, p. 30).

Participants discussed in depth the meaning of the Mongolian term *irgenii niigem*. This term is commonly used to denote the English term 'civil society.' However, the Mongolian language does not have exact equivalents for the English 'civic' and 'civil.' *Irgenii niigem* literally means 'a citizen's society' or 'a society of citizens' and carries no direct connotation of 'civil' as 'polite' or of 'civic virtue.' In its literal sense, *irgenii niigem* is the democratic society itself, i.e. a society of self-governing citizens and it is in this sense that the term was used in the 1992 Constitution, as clarified by Chimid *guai*, Lamjav *guai* and Ochirbat *guai* during the RTD. Ochirbat *guai* stated, for instance, that the drafters of the Constitution may have been tautological when listing "humane," "democratic," and "*irgenii*" in the preamble (Workshop minutes). Based on these clarifications, the RTD participants produced a three-tier definition of civil society, anchored in the conception of the 'humane and democratic society of citizens'[184] stated in the Constitution:

> First, in the broadest (constitutional) sense, 'civil society' is to be understood as a society that is based on democratic principles, wherein 1) citizens are able to make their State institutions serve them according to the will of the people, 2) citizens are able to check the State's arbitrary power and protect their own and other fellow citizens' human rights and freedoms, 3) citizens deeply understand and value human rights and freedoms and other democratic principles and 4) citizens have equal access to political power and are provided with equal opportunities to benefit from economic and socio-cultural development.

> Second, 'civil society' is to be understood as citizens' activities that are independent of the State, which contribute to developing horizontal networking schemes and help check the State's abuse of its monopoly of coercive force and create an environment in which citizens can solve their issues with each other without the intervention of the State. This definition would encompass all civic action independent of the State, whether or not it is conducted by a formally institutionalized NGO.

---

[184] The official translation of the Constitution erases this nuance by stating "humane, civil and democratic society" ("Constitution of Mongolia," n.d.)

Third, 'civil society' is to be understood as formal institutions, which may include NGOs, religious groups, media organizations and political parties, depending on the nature of their actions and agenda. These organizations are to be *de facto* independent of the State and are to be, in principle, supporting democratic values and principles. The development of these formal institutions bears strategic importance for promoting the establishment of 'civil society' in its constitutional sense. Thus, along with focusing on, for instance, NGO sector development, activists and their supporters must constantly check if their programs are in fact resulting in the empowerment of citizens at all levels, particularly at the grassroots, vis-à-vis [sic.] their governing institutions and other components of the society. (Center for Citizens' Alliance, 2006, p. 30)

We were also strongly influenced by the CSI definition of civil society as "the arena outside of the family, the state and the market where people associate to advance common interests" (Center for Citizens' Alliance, 2006, p. 14). The definition is clarified as follows:

The definition stresses the political nature of civil society as the CSI exercise is interested in the power dynamics between the state and civil society as well as within the civil society arena between different social groups. At the core of the definition lies the ability and freedom of citizens to bond with each other and undertake collective action vis-à-vis [sic.] the state, market forces and other entities with a view to improving their living conditions and advancing common interests. (Center for Citizens' Alliance, 2006, p. 14)

With these conceptualizations of civil society, we sought to support citizens' initiatives, social movements and cross-sectoral and horizontal linkages within civil society to the extent that our limited financial, organizational and human resources allowed. The ICSF-2003 was organized with a broader definition of civil society in mind, bringing together different types of NGOs from around the country, academia and research institutions, and other CSOs such as trade unions and political parties. The CSI study itself was organized so as to ensure inclusiveness and representativeness of the diverse civil society field, paying conscious attention to the partisan/non-partisan balance. These principles ran throughout the participatory elements, including the National Advisory Group of some twenty people who collectively directed the research, six regional consultations that each brought together some twenty civil society representatives, and the National Consultation held on September 22-23, 2005, drawing nearly seventy civil society stakeholders "from all aimags, Ulaanbaatar and its

remote districts who represented different age groups, CSOs, political parties, regions, government agencies, local administration, media, etc." (Center for Citizens' Alliance, 2006, p. 117).

Significantly, the final report on the National Consultation, after listing the programmatic goals of the consultation linked to the civil society assessment, listed seven experiential goals:

1. Further strengthen and broaden civil society connections carefully initiated and cultivated during and after the regional stakeholder consultations.

2. Promote an atmosphere or mutual trust and equality, paying special attention to mitigating the urban-rural cultural gap and power inequalities as well as neutralizing partisan affiliations to contribute to the process of 'healing' the deep cleavage along party lines caused by the negative tactics and strategies of competition of the 2 main political parties (MPRP and MDP), abuse of public office and discrimination by political affiliation along party lines, and corruption of electoral politics.

3. Promote inter-*aimag* connections and networks, especially within regions…

5. Learn more, through both formal and informal discussions, about specific contexts in different *aimags* and districts, types of CSOs and civil society sectors.

6. Broaden the established understanding of civil society as limited to a group of NGOs to include many other types of CSOs such as apartment owners' unions (AOUs), savings and credit cooperatives (SCCs), political parties, trade unions, community groups, religious groups, etc. and learn more about their specifics.

7. Encourage representatives of SCCs, AOUs, political parties and religious organizations to view themselves as part of civil society and, accordingly, maintain certain standards of internal democracy, transparency and human rights in their internal and external operations (Center for Citizens' Alliance, 2006, p. 117).

Furthermore, we continuously articulated the meaning of civil society and our identities as civil society activists through the elaboration of our commitments and ethical principles. In 2012, these looked as follows:[185]

- *Independent of the state:* opposing or cooperating with the state from an independent position
- *Independent of narrow economic interests:* recognizing the power and self-interest of wealthy groups and corporations
- *Non-partisan:* but politicized
- *Free of violence:* but cognizant that local groups out-powered by mining companies and the state are increasingly turning to militant forms of struggle as a last resort
- *Transparent, open and accountable:* first of all to the people we seek to serve, then to donors and the state
- *Supporting and empowering groups with the least power:* not leading on their behalf but amplifying their voices
- *Based on democratic, horizontal and open relations:* in individual NGOs as well as coalitions and networks
- *Free from discrimination*: by gender, age, sexuality, etc.
- *Seek to achieve an ethical goal through ethical means:* holding process as, if not more, important than the outcome
- *Self-reflexive, changing society while changing oneself:* the two processes have to go together to achieve meaningful change

Thus, our discussions largely ran on a different circuit from the discourses that focused on contracting out state services and functions to NGOs. While we adopted a broader conception of civil society, we did not lump civil society with the family and the economy. We paid more attention to the distribution of power in society and were concerned with the authoritarian tendencies of the government. Through these conceptual discussions that we held from around 2000, we developed a conception of civil society as a field (*talbar*) in which NGOs are not the only actors but play a key role in strengthening the field, enabling more people to be

---

[185] We must have begun articulating these principles in the mid-2000s. We kept clarifying the statements and adding to them. This particular list is from the civil society keynote presentation at the National Civil Society Forum we organized with the government in 2012.

active, and building linkages between different sectors, levels, and communities. We became seen as leaders in civil society and we assumed that role without questioning our capacity to guide the increasingly diverse sector towards contributing to the democratic development of Mongolia. We did not question the very possibility of doing so. We simply saw it as an imperative.

6.5 Being engulfed in the expansion of the field

6.5.1 The discourse on NGO corruption

Until 2000, corruption was primarily seen as a problem within the government. After 2000, a growing donor-encouraged discourse emerged about the importance of ethical self-regulation and the financial transparency and accountability of NGOs. In the early 2000s, I observed a tri-partite consultation on NGOs organized by the ADB, involving state representatives, NGOs and the ADB. I recall recognizing very few people among some 40 participants: a colleague from a pro-democracy NGO; the late Mr. Ch. Odonchimed, an MPRP MP and, simultaneously, Chair of the MRCA; and an old friend of mine who was working for the Federation of Mongolian Agricultural Cooperatives. Participants talked about the need to improve NGO capacity, various challenges they were facing in their development, and the need for support from the State and international organizations. Someone raised the issue of corruption and clientelism within the government as well as among the staff of international organizations and international project staff. Many participants supported this criticism, giving examples of such 'eating' of project money, and began to emphasize that international organizations need to pay more attention to transparency and accountability in their project implementation. Mr. Odonchimed followed up by emphatically saying something like this:

> We ourselves (*bid nar uursduu*) need to admit that there is corruption among us (*bid naryn dund*). NGOs themselves need to be responsible and free of corruption. We cannot sit and criticize the government and international organizations when we ourselves are corrupt. To hold the government and international organizations accountable, we ourselves need to be responsible and ethical.

To my amazement, no one in the workshop hall objected to such a blanket statement. On the contrary, quite a few nodded their heads in eager agreement. I had a gut reaction to the use

of 'we' here. My initial assumption was that Mr. Odonchimed was invited as a lawmaker who was familiar with NGOs given his long career in the MRCA. However, he was now speaking as an NGO representative, calling upon his fellow NGO people (*turiin bus baiguullagynkhan*)[186] to refrain from 'eating' project money. Since the term 'NGO' was and is all-encompassing, this blanket of 'corruption' also covered the financially and organizationally extremely fragile community of the emergent independent NGOs. On the other hand, I had heard from a friend who used to work for the MRCA that the embezzlement of project money was a fairly common practice there. The MRCA was also notoriously partisan, mobilizing support for the MPRP in the elections, including their very own Mr. Odonchimed. His call was indeed relevant to the MRCA and similar NGOs that had opportunities to 'eat' project money.

Yet among independent NGOs, embezzlement has been extremely rare and mostly happened at the level of the staff in charge of accounting. The few cases I know of were promptly dealt with by the NGO leadership, which indicates a functional degree of internal accountability. Most 'corruption' that went on among the NGOs I was familiar with had to do with shifting line items within a tight project budget or between projects to 'patch up the front of the skirt with a piece from the back of the skirt' in order to pay for staff salaries, the employer's social insurance contributions, rent, utilities, toilet paper, urgent actions, meals during urgent mobilization or taxi fares to get safely back home in the middle of the night, and other costs that were never fully or even partially covered by project funds. Many of these unfunded costs have been routinely covered by activists from their own pockets and family budgets. Thus, financial irregularities among institutionally fragile NGOs have not only been common but necessary for their survival. Not only were such irregularities seen, at least potentially, as evidence of corruption but also made it difficult for the struggling NGOs to protest such accusations.

As we discussed during our research workshops, unlike NGOs established by or affiliated with foreign organizations, most independent NGOs have had no core funding and those that did only received a modest sum for a few months or a maximum of two years. Unlike some

---

[186] In Mongolian, the term is *turiin bus baiguullagynkhan,* which literally means 'those of NGOs' or 'NGO people.' This is important as 'NGO people' includes NGO leaders who may be board members or directors, members, staff, volunteers and partners.

inheritor and foreign-established NGOs, they had no assets that would generate their own income, for example by renting offices, conference halls, equipment and so on. Unlike partisan and inheritor NGOs, they had no access to free offices in party or government buildings. Even training income had not been a possibility as human rights and gender equality workshops were not in popular demand unlike training in foreign languages and computer, management and other skills. Unlike 'sidekick,' 'hobby,' 'pocket,' 'puppet' or 'PR' NGOs[187] run by people employed in the government, international organizations or the private sector, running independent NGOs has been a (more than) full-time job, necessitating a fund for paying salaries.

Consequently, independent NGOs have been completely dependent on project funding from international organizations, which have consistently refused to provide adequate funding for administrative costs. Various workshops on project proposal writing trained NGOs to keep their administrative costs low. In over twenty years of my activist life, I have not attended or heard of any training for NGOs to realistically assess the costs incurred by project implementation, and the toughest downward pressure has been on salaries. Many of the NGOs did not negotiate the support costs for fear that they would lose the project grant altogether. As a result, most independent NGOs consistently and severely under-reflected their administrative costs in applying for project grants and have had to perpetually struggle to make do through so-called 'creative accounting,' which was then used as evidence of their unethical and corrupt practices.

Western volunteers posted at NGOs (to support the NGOs) may have also contributed to this discourse. In the late 2000s, I was invited by the Volunteer Services Overseas office to give a briefing about NGOs in Mongolia to their new batch of volunteers. When I arrived, a Peace

---

[187] During the ICSF-2003, I presented this somewhat comic mapping of NGOs to convey the diversity of the NGO field in which we were functioning. The categories keep multiplying as new kinds of NGOs keep springing up, e.g. 'façade' NGOs that present themselves as national while promoting foreign interests (usually in the mining field), 'business' NGOs that essentially run for-profit activities and use the NGO form as a method of tax evasion, 'bubble' NGOs that don't conduct substantive work and can burst any moment, etc. 'Puppet' NGOs are relatively recent phenomena. We encountered them directly when organizing the AFE Coalition's first Civil Society National Forum on "Education: Money, Quality and Accountability" in 2010. We sought to screen the participants and had asked the interested NGOs to fill out a registration form that asked about their internal democracy and gender equality provisions. Among the applicants, there were five NGOs that were registered in the same address of a well established business whose owner had fought to assume control over the coalition. The same man was the chair of all five NGOs, and the directors of the NGOs were his employees.

Corps volunteer who had been working for one of the women's rights NGOs was continuing her briefing. She described the NGO as dedicated but lacking capacity, that the staff could not properly perform even the simplest things like working on a computer, writing project proposals or bookkeeping. She went on to say that Mongolian NGOs were corrupt, that they engaged in creative accounting and were disorganized. I knew the NGO well and intervened to say that the creative accounting was not necessarily corruption and that the women were not putting the money into their own pockets but trying to cope under conditions of severe underfunding. The Peace Corps volunteer quickly agreed but insisted that NGO finances needed to be brought up to the western standard of transparency and professionalism. After I gave my briefing, one of the incoming VSO volunteers thanked me "for the valuable information," expressing his understanding of my "bias" and "desire to protect the Mongolian NGOs." I felt any argument from me would only confirm their view that I was subjective, reinforcing the construction of the American volunteer as objective in her assessment of local NGOs. So I said nothing.

6.5.2 The idealized discourse on NGO ethics

As the field became more diverse, we ourselves got caught in the discourse on ensuring NGO ethics in our attempt to prevent the NGO sector from becoming engulfed by the wave of corruption and to protect our independence from the state should it use corruption in the NGO sector as an excuse to interfere. In early 2007, DEMO, with Canada Fund support, initiated the development of the NGO Code of Ethics ("NGO ethical principles," 2007) and formed a working group to draft the Code, involving representatives from all the key independent NGOs. In the introduction, we stated:

> 'Mongolian NGO Ethical Principles' aim at defining ethical norms for NGOs so as to ensure the independence, openness, transparency and social accountability of NGOs.
>
> Abiding by these principles shall create more favorable conditions for NGOs to enhance impact, sustainability and scope of their activities and to gain public trust and support.
>
> NGOs shall join these principles on a voluntary basis.

The code enumerated ten principles as follows: internal democracy, non-partisanship, financial transparency and accountability, equality, (avoiding or disclosing) conflict of interest,

health and environment, cooperation and coordination. The third principle was elaborated as follows: "NGOs shall truthfully conduct their financial accounts and reports and ensure an efficient use of funds. Financial reports shall be open to public."

Failing to adhere to this principle was thus 'unethical.' So long as the underlying material conditions and the funding environment of NGOs remained unconducive to transparent and effective operation, most home-grown independent NGOs would be unable to fulfil this principle. The stress on ethics was compelling and we took it as *medeejiin yum,* something no one can argue with, something that must be accepted at face value, unequivocally. In our idealism, which has a lot to do with our socialist legacy, we did not link the ability of NGOs to maintain such 'ethical' principles to our structural reality. For those of us who have sought to aspire to these principles, the effect of this discourse has been self-blame and shame in our inability to align our practice with the principles we espoused, which exerted a downward pressure on self-confidence. We have still not unpacked this discourse as we have not fully unpacked the neoliberal project that gave rise to the NGO sector.

Towards the late 2000s, Ms. G. Urantsooj (Urnaa *egch*), the Chair of the CHRD, began raising the issue of core funding as key to strengthening CSOs and civil society at large. It was the first time I had heard of such funding. Ms. N. Chinchuluun (Chinchee *egch*), the Founder and then Executive Director of the Mongolian Women's Fund (MONES), had been talking about 'institutional support,' and the key women's rights/human rights NGOs had been trying to apply for longer term (up to three years) and larger (USD 100,000-300,000) program funding, often jointly. Gradually, there was more discussion of the funding environment and the role the state and international development partners should play in ensuring adequate funding for NGOs. The CHRD began to explicitly link the stress on ethical self-governance of NGOs to the funding environment and the development effectiveness of international organizations, including the issue of a significant share of official development assistance (ODA) to Mongolia going to international, not national, NGOs.

Still, the discourse on NGO corruption and ethics remains primarily focused on an individual's or individual organization's responsibility and failure, detached from the underlying structural and institutional factors. Thus, the issue of blurred boundaries between the state and civil society rarely comes up while independent women's rights/human rights NGOs are most

visible to the public due to their advocacy activities and become the main face of the 'project money-eating NGO sector.' This disjuncture is quite striking, considering where the opportunities for corruption lie. Lamjav *guai* related watching a television news report about a project being handed over from one NGO to another. The project was under the purview of one of the line ministries, the chair of the NGO handing over the project was a cabinet minister and the chair of the NGO receiving the project was another cabinet minister (D. Lamjav, personal communication, 2015, December 10).

6.5.3 Construction of INGOs as ethical, transparent and non-corrupt

Arguably this discourse has served to discredit Mongolian NGOs, especially independent NGOs that depend, almost exclusively, on foreign funding. While there has been a growing trend of international NGOs (INGOs) competing for a larger share of funding for Mongolia and Mongolian civil society, there has been no comparable questioning of their ethics, transparency and accountability by the funders although some evidence exists of 'highly irregular' practices among INGOs. Perhaps the most spectacular was a case of a TAF representative in the early 2000s who had installed a fully furnished bedroom and a shower in the TAF office.[188] He reportedly employed his (Mongolian) partner's relatives, tried to force a Luce scholar (TAF managed the Luce Scholars program) to rent his partner's mother's apartment, and travelled abroad to a meeting on national security with his partner and his partner's sister.[189] Another TAF representative in the late 2000s employed his wife. He was also said to have presented TAF to donors as a much better channel for their money as Mongolian NGOs do not have the capacity and are unreliable, i.e. corrupt.

While such behaviour is possibly unusual, what may be business-as-usual is the lack of transparency in terms of how much funding INGOs receive and what percentage of that funding is absorbed by their organizations, including their headquarters, as overhead, what percentage goes to foreign staff and consultants, and what remains for Mongolia and

---

[188] In 2003, I happened to visit Layton Croft, the newly appointed TAF Representative whom I had known since his Peace Corps days. There was a king size mattress in the lobby, which Layton was having removed from the office. By then, TAF had moved to a more spacious office in the Cuban embassy building. It was the first time I visited the office. It was very well appointed with artwork hanging on the walls and nice furniture, very different from the shabby two-room office in the crumbling building I had worked in for two years.

[189] These stories were shared at the time by the said Luce scholar and former Mongolian staff members of TAF.

Mongolian NGOs. Given TAF and Mercy Corps had run large programs related to civil society, I looked for their annual financial reports. I discovered that TAF does not have a country website, nor produce a country-specific report. TAF headquarters issues a glossy annual report, with two paragraphs on the program run in each country and no country-specific financial information (The Asia Foundation, 2018a). TAF also publicizes its audited financial statements, which do not give country break-down but include an attachment entitled "Schedule of Expenditures of Nonfederal Bilateral and Multilateral Awards" (The Asia Foundation, 2018b). This document gives lump sums of expenditures in the given year from specific donors per country, without stating the total amount of awards or the breakdown of expenditure. For the 2007 and 2008 financial years (ended September 30), TAF expenditures for Mongolia were (Grant Thornton, n.d.):

Table 1. TAF expenditures for Mongolia for years ended September 30, 2008 and 2007

Grantor	Project/program	Amount (USD)
Asian Development Bank	Gvrnc & Cpcty Dvlpmnt Intv Mongolia [sic.]	139,018
Canada Fund	Cmbat Fraudlent & Pred Ad Mongolia [sic.]	3,771
	Toson Zaamar Mine Info Center Mongolia	14,533
Royal Netherlands Embassy	Securing our Future Mongolia	1,023,809
	MG Wtrshd Mntr Ntwrk FX Mongolia [sic.]	5,568

The over USD 1 million grant from the Netherlands was for environmental protection. The Onggi River Movement, led by Ts. Munkhbayar, accused TAF of undermining indigenous movements. Few say this out loud. An anonymous commenter in an article entitled "Booming Mongolia. Mine, All Mine" in *The Economist* countered what they deemed as an unfair portrayal of Ts. Munkhbayar and other Mongolian environmental activists, explaining that:

> TAF attempted to take total control over the Mongolian Nature Protection Coalition (which it helped start) and Mr. Munkhbayar, telling them to defer major decision making to TAF and to refrain from publicly protesting against mining... After UMMRL's admittedly misguided but perhaps not unjustified reaction [after some representatives of the United Movement of Mongolian Rivers and Lakes that Onggi River Movement co-founded shot at the equipment of a large mining company after being provoked by the paramilitaries hired by the mining company], one of the leaders at The Asia Foundation's Mongolia office [Resident

Representative Bill Infante] publicly called them terrorists. Really? (BMV897, 2012, January 22)[190]

For the 2017 financial year, TAF expenditures for Mongolia were (The Asia Foundation, 2018b):

Table 2. TAF expenditures for Mongolia for year ended September 30, 2017

Grantor	Project/program	Amount (USD)
United Nations Environment Programme	Chemicals and Waste Mongolia	6,603
Canadian DFATD-STEPS	Strengthening Democratic Participation and Transparency in the Public Service Sector in Mongolia	509,152
Global Affairs Canada	Deliberative Democracy for Citizens of Ulaanbaatar Mongolia	73,917
Korea International Cooperation Agency	Women's Business Center and Incubator (WBC) - Mongolia	589,321
Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation	Engaging Stakeholders for the Environmental Conservation - Phase II (ESEC II) Mongolia	(4,604)
	Mandate for Implementing Component 2 of GDP: Urban Governance Mongolia	467,188

Having found no country-specific financial information, I sent an inquiry to TAF and received no reply.

The Mercy Corps Mongolia has a country-specific website and publicizes country-specific annual reports (Mercy Corps Mongolia, n.d.). Until 2017, the annual reports included financial summaries. I wrote to their office, inquiring if they had 'more detailed financial information, on an annual basis, about the percentage of the annual budget/spending that goes to Mongolian indigenous NGOs and what percentage goes to international staff, consultants and non-Mongolian organizations,' explaining that it would help me assess how much funding was available for Mongolian NGOs 'as some of the funding provided is channelled by international NGOs' (E-mail, 2018, May 28). I received a prompt response for their Communications and Development Specialist, stating:

---

[190] Journalist Keith Harmon Snow gave a more detailed description of the conflict between the river movements and TAF (Snow, 2011, March 11, 2015, May 22).

> Unfortunately, we do not make that information available to the public.

> Regardless, Mercy Corps Mongolia is less focused on civil society development this year.

> Our program areas, as per our website, include disaster risk reduction and economic development in rural communities.

Indeed, according to the Mercy Corps headquarters' web site, this organization's mission is to "(a)lleviate suffering, poverty and oppression by helping people build secure, productive and just communities" (Mercy Corps, n.d.). I sent my inquiry because in 2003-2008, with USAID funding, Mercy Corps implemented a five-year project entitled "Training, Advocacy and Networking Project for Stronger NGO Sectors in Mongolia" (Urtnasan, n.d.). The program goal was to "build effective, collaborative and professional civil society organization sectors in rural areas of Mongolia" (Mercy Corps Mongolia, n.d.). The project was implemented in five *aimags* (Uvurkhangai, Dundgovi, Arkhangai, Bulgan and Khentii) where, according to its final report, it established informal CSO networks; increased the CSOs' "internal competencies" in strategic planning, organizational management and service delivery and their "external competencies" in "fund-raising, advocacy, working with the government and networking with other organizations" and improved CSO-government relations (Urtnasan, n.d., p. 3). However, currently, Mercy Corps appears focused on the agricultural sector and, specifically, on improving veterinary services (Mercy Corps Mongolia, n.d.).

Not only are these two INGOs non-transparent and unaccountable to the Mongolian public, but they also appear to work opportunistically in widely diverse areas. That NGOs are donor-funded is a common criticism, one that is especially levelled against national NGOs. As women's rights and human rights NGOs, we have constantly been accused of following the money and importing foreign issues rather than truly responding to the people's needs. Compared to home-grown independent NGOs, TAF and Mercy Corps appear much more flexible, even nearly universal, in terms of their areas of work. This flexibility is likely linked to the funding they are able to access. In theory, such organizations could apply for any grant in any area so long as the funds are sufficient to hire the necessary 'capacity' and 'skills' required by a specific project.

By comparison, the home-grown independent NGOs I have been close to, have tended to consistently focus on their mission. Not only have they had no ample opportunity to hire additional staff but they have also prioritized individuals' commitment to progressive social change over professional skills. Having had disappointing experiences with skilled staff, these NGOs have developed a dictum that it is better to hire a person who is committed (*setgeltei*) but lacks capacity (*chadvargui*) than someone who has capacity but lacks commitment. However, due to inadequate and inconsistent funding, they are often unable to retain their trained staff. The research workshop participants unanimously agreed that what saps their energies most is this constant training and retraining of constantly changing staff. The discourse on the need for capacity-building of Mongolian NGOs, especially their management skills, masks the underlying structural problems and puts the blame of 'lack of capacity' onto individual NGO leaders' poor management skills. The stress on building fundraising capacity similarly associates lack of resources with individual NGO leaders' poor fundraising skills.

6.5.4 Accusations of partisan politicization

Lastly, the stress on non-partisanship has been a major factor in undermining our self-confidence. While, as an idea, non-partisanship appears self-evident, it has never been simple in reality. In Mongolian, the terms 'partisanship' or 'partisan politicization' (*namchirkhakh*) and 'politicization' (*uls turjikh*) have been used interchangeably. Generalized and vague accusations of politicization with a strong connotation of partisanship functioned similarly to the blanket accusations of corruption and poor capacity. In one of our workshops, we discussed this issue, which led to a recollection of how I (U) and Enkhjargal (EJ), then Executive Director of NCAV, both of us non-partisan, were frequently scolded by an older, influential woman who was herself closely linked with and often openly supported the MPRP:

> U: The 2009 'Through Women's Eyes Forum' focused on national security. We only understood much later, after the forum, that it was a very opportune choice of a topic in a presidential election year [as the President is the Head of the National Security Council and Commander-in-Chief of the Army].
>
> EJ [laughing]: Yes!

U: After the forum, I got reprimanded[191] by Davaa *guai* [pseudonym] that I was *acting in a politicized manner,* which really puzzled me! Then…

EJ [laughing and interrupting]: Remember, how terribly intimidated[192] the two of us were by Davaa *guai*?

U: She kept scolding us for *acting in a politicized manner*, didn't she?

EJ [laughing]: Every time she ran into us, she would ask "Are you *carrying on in a politicized manner*?!"[193] Then we would feel as if we had done something wrong [laughing hard, others joining in the laughing].

Zanaa *egch*: Poor things! (*khuurkhii amitad*)

U: We could not understand!

EJ [still laughing]: Yeah! We could not understand that [accusation].

U [laughing]: I really could not understand why she kept at it. I was so surprised once, I even exclaimed "When?!" and went on to assure her that "I haven't even gone outside my home lately!"[194] [Everyone is laughing].

D [laughing]: "I did not do any politics whatsoever," right?!![195]

EJ: And we kept feeling as if we had done something wrong!

[Everyone is still laughing].

---

[191] The actual word we both used was *zagnakh*, which means 'to scold,' 'to reprimand.' *Zagnakh* can range from scolding and reprimanding to yelling at and verbally abusing someone. The latter is rather common in workplaces as well as families. In this case, the word was used to describe the older woman's 'authoritative criticisms' intended to compel a 'corrective change' in the behaviour and/or thoughts of the targeted individuals. Not everyone's criticism can be 'authoritative' as not everyone is perceived/self-perceived as having the authority (given by age, position or relationship) to pass judgments to compel the judged to align their behaviour and/or thoughts with their expectations/advice/demands. I associate such authoritative statements with the mechanisms of social control pervasively used during state-socialism to compel individuals to conform to the party-state's ideology.

[192] The Mongolian word she used is *aikh*, which can also be translated simply as 'be scared (of).' I used the word 'intimidated' in the translation above as it describes more accurately how we felt at the time.

[193] The expression sounds much funnier in retelling in Mongolian: "*Uls turjuud l yavj bn uu huu*?!"

[194] I actually frantically reviewed in my head if I had spoken at some public event or given an interview to media lately to lead her to think I had been engaged in partisan politicization.

[195] The Mongolian expression is 'do politics' (*uls tur khiikh*).

U [laughing]: So I kept thinking "What have I done? Have I served one party? What have I done?"

Inheritor CSOs had much stronger and denser ties to the MPRP and MPRP-dominated governments. Their leaders ran on the MPRP ticket in elections and used their organizations, openly or indirectly, to support MPRP candidates in elections. Yet it is the newly formed pro-democracy, human rights and women's rights NGOs that were most frequently accused of partisan-politicization. These asymmetrical, unbalanced accusations of partisan-politicization point to the grossly unequal power between the MPRP field and the pro-democracy field. On the other hand, in the polarized world of postsocialist Mongolia, non-partisan pro-democracy activists presented an anomaly. At the same time as we were struggling to 'understand' and 'define' - construct - our identity as non-partisan activists, those from both camps had to struggle to 'place' us. Those on the democratic side tended to assume we were 'on their side' while those on the MPRP side tended to assume we were 'on the other side.'[196] A participant in an *aimag* conference on women's leadership organized by MPRP women once told Enkhjargal that, in drawing up a list of women who could run for the parliament, women mentioned Enkhjargal and me as promising women leaders but 'regrettably of the other side' (*daanch nuguu talykh*).[197]

Pro-democracy, human rights and women's rights NGOs were more sensitive to accusations of partisan-politicization not because they acted in a partisan manner (on the contrary) but because: a) we had embraced the principle of non-partisanship as an ethical standard for a public-benefit NGO committed to social change (along with the ideas imported from the West of what NGOs are and civil society is or should be); b) we were in a context where both the meaning of this principle and its practical application were ambiguous and contentious; c) any proclamation of non-partisanship was widely perceived as a smokescreen intended to mislead foreign donors to obtain grants; and d) partisanship indeed frequently wore an NGO

---

[196] Quite literally, the Mongolian expressions are *manai tal* (our side) and *nuguu tal* (the other side).

[197] Enkhjargal told this story laughing. We laughed quite a lot when she was finished sharing it, repeating "*daanch nuguu talykh*" ("regrettably, of the other side"). Laughing was probably due to the incongruity between our self-defined political position (the non-partisan space) and the outsiders' (in this case, MPRP women's) perception of our political placement.

hat. While some activists may have easily brushed aside such accusations, Enkhjargal and I were deeply affected. As I wrote in my field journal about the effect of Davaa *guai*'s critique:

> Since she did not clarify why she judged me so, I walked away not only bewildered but also concerned that I may have inadvertently and unthinkingly acted in a way that could be legitimately interpreted as partisan-politicization. This was a serious matter as the issue of maintaining non-partisanship was not simply about me as an individual but about the credibility of civil society, as a sector, and, closer to home, about the ethics and legitimacy of the pro-democracy, human rights and NGO community. I and my colleagues carried a sense of broader responsibility to model ethical civil society behaviour, which in turn was linked to our broader goal of strengthening civil society as a *sine qua non* of a humane and democratic society. In practice, this compelled us to weigh our decisions carefully, to ensure that they were properly motivated and in line with our goals, values and principles, that they were optimal under current circumstances, and that their possible consequences were as fully considered as possible. This included ensuring that we were not acting for partisan reasons and taking precautions, to the extent possible, from appearing partisan. Davaa *guai*'s comment and similar accusations suggested a possibility I may have failed in this task by overlooking an important point that I should have taken into consideration (2017, November 13).

Thus, accusations of partisan-politicization served to weaken our self-confidence, exacerbating our self-doubt and a sense of lacking democratic knowledge and experience. These experiences prompted us to engage in a deep critical reflection on the meanings, uses and power effects of some key words. We began to see that the meaning of 'politicization' as coterminous with partisanship was constructed by the dominant MPRP and was deployed to discredit, suppress or circumscribe not only the opposition but also people's struggles. Similarly, our analysis was that the meanings of the words 'power' and 'politics' were constructed by men in power as negative, dirty and tough and were deployed to discourage women from entering formal politics and discredit their efforts to achieve political equality. We finally articulated our position clearly in 2010 when developing materials for the training on Strengthening Women's Political Leadership and Advocacy Capacity (MONFEMNET Draft

Manual, 2011).[198] The first substantive session of this workshop was a collective critical reflection on key concepts: power, politics and politicization. We redefined power as an ability to influence policies and decisions that affect our lives and politics as having to do with our very lives on a daily basis. Inspired by the definition of activism in the SASA toolkit for mobilizing communities to prevent VAW, developed by Raising Voices from Uganda, we distinguished between partisanship and politicization, defining the latter as follows:

> A realization that injustices that affect one's own, one's family's and friends' lives are linked to the unjust systems of distributing power in our society and a process of consciously struggling to change the unjust systems of power and wealth distribution. (MONFEMNET Draft Manual, 2011, p.22)

Thus non-partisanship had to be intentionally constructed and applied. This task was undertaken by new pro-democracy NGOs, especially in earnest by women's rights/human rights NGOs. 'Constructing' non-partisanship has been an important part of 'constructing' NGO identity, civil society and 'humane and democratic society,' and ourselves as activists.

6.6 Reflections

Neoliberal democratization in Mongolia has largely resulted in oligarchic control of political power. The democratic discourse has been co-opted by party leaders to lay their claim to power, rather than empower citizens at large. The increasingly high-stakes zero-sum game led the two main parties to collude to prevent new actors, including women and third parties, from coming into the political space. The proliferation of NGOs did not necessarily result in a stronger civil society or the empowerment of people. As the NGO studies demonstrate, the majority of the new NGOs emerged in putatively non-political areas of the economy and social sectors, fuelled by significant aid funding. At the same time, the boundaries between the state, family, political parties, private sector and civil society became increasingly blurred. The all-encompassing definition of civil society as all that is not the state in fact aided the blurring of the boundaries between the private sector, the state, local government, the family and so-

---

[198] The 'capacity' here was about critical thinking skills and a conceptual clarity about human rights, representative and substantive democracy, and a feminist analysis of patriarchal power systems as well as an understanding of and skills development for working based on a human rights-based approach, developing egalitarian and shared leadership, and conducting people-centered advocacy.

called civil society. In the same move, it obfuscated the ideological, functional and organizational differences between the so-called CSOs and NGOs, engulfing the numerically small human rights/women's rights and pro-democracy NGOs.

Generalizing discourses on NGO corruption, lack of ethics, low capacity and partisan politicization undermined the reputation of Mongolian NGOs, affecting particularly the organizationally and financially fragile and chronically under-resourced home-grown independent NGOs. These discourses also undermined the self-confidence of these NGOs and exacerbated the difficulties in accessing much-needed funds while reinforcing the image of INGOs as ethical, capable, transparent and objective/non-partisan. Thus, the expansion of the field created new challenges for us as independent NGOs. Maintaining our non-state and non-partisan status acquired a whole new level of significance as well as risks. Raising funds, on the other hand, arguably grew more challenging as funds available for national NGOs for supporting democratization shrank at the same time as they were made available to INGOs. Moreover, in seeking to 'strengthen' NGO sector/civil society, the INGOs and the international development organizations have largely sought to develop NGOs into narrowly focused, professional and competitive project implementation units envisioned as cost-effective alternatives to the state. In this framework, the main value of NGOs lies not in their independence from the state or their ability to counter oppressive hegemonies and build collective power among discriminated and marginalized groups but in their ability to provide services in a cost-effective manner within pre-defined parameters.

It is in this rather heavy context that we have sought to carry out our work, all the while reflecting on our role, identity, values, principles and strategies. We have struggled to guard our independence from the state, maintain non-partisanship, develop horizontal linkages and an egalitarian organizational culture, support diverse civil society actors, including movements and grassroots groups, and promote solidarity across civil society sectors and within our own NGO community.

Chapter 7 : The activist labour of women

Struggling in and from the interstices

> We have worked in areas that are not recognized by the society, don't have state assistance, don't have funding, and are never included in state priorities. So our history is one of trying to bring into the state system an issue for which no system, no support infrastructure and no legal provisions exist, to include even a small sentence in the law while at the same time struggling to change public attitudes, those discriminatory attitudes.
>
> - D. Enkhjargal, former Executive Director of the National Center against Violence and Coordinator General of MONFEMNET National Network

7.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I aim to focus on the evolution of our women's rights activism after 1996 until approximately 2008. As the narratives will show, we have hardly ever delineated activism for women's rights as separate from our activism for democracy, human rights and social justice. Far from evolving into distinct professionalized NGOs with a narrow focus on specific areas or approaching different areas of work as distinct, bounded projects, our activisms evolved into more interconnected endeavours while organizationally tethered to an NGO form and project funding. The NGOs worked in diverse areas while coming together frequently for various collaborative efforts, making it extremely difficult to choose a story line that would showcase our activist labour. In the end, I have resolved to focus on two main themes and to privilege depth over breadth.

The first theme is that of becoming-being activists. This is an ongoing process as, in some ways, we are constantly becoming activists while being activists, in the sense that we constantly reflect on our activist identities, goals, practices, processes and forms of knowledge. However, there is a story to be told of how it all began. And so, based on our sharing in the workshops, I will start this chapter with a story of how we encountered the ideas and concepts of human rights/women's rights. There was a lot of laughter in the workshops, which marked the distance we have travelled since those early days.

The second main theme is that of working together across partisan and non-partisan lines. I chose to focus on this aspect of our activism because of the deleterious effects of *namchirkhal*

(fanatical partisan polarization) on the Mongolian society as well as the newness of non-partisanship as a concept. Here, after tracing our broadly collaborative efforts, I focus more in-depth on what I have come to call the 'Quota Battle', which ensued after the parliament revoked the women's minimum 30% electoral quota just before the 2008 election.

7.2 Being-becoming women's rights/human rights activists

We all started out with a commitment to the general ideals of democracy and human rights. Our focus on women's rights, on the other hand, sharpened gradually, unevenly, and, initially, largely under the influence of the development discourse, which viewed Third World women as victims of their patriarchies.

Thus, in 1994, with TAF support, political scientist L. Erdenetuul (LEOS) and I (WSP) attended a workshop in Thailand entitled 'Putting Gender Issues onto the Policy Agenda', organized by the Asia-Pacific Network on Women in Politics (APWIP). Not only were Erdenetuul and I the only Asian women at the workshop wearing a monochrome formal attire and high heels, but also we both had difficulty relating to the discussions. We sat there, bewildered, as women talked about 'problems caused by patriarchy' such as feminization of poverty, denial of education to girls, gender pay gap, and violence against women as long-established, self-evident phenomena. We felt that the discussions were utterly irrelevant to our experiences,[199] possibly also because we saw poverty, unemployment, violence and other emergent socio-economic problems as inevitable but temporary consequences of a transition from an inefficient centrally planned economy, not as systemic problems. In addition, the unidimensional definition of patriarchy as a system that privileged men and oppressed women seemed very far-fetched. We ourselves were a curious novelty for the workshop participants from South and South East Asia, all former colonies of western powers with the exception of Thailand, and, in turn, they too were a novelty for us. I had a distinct feeling of not fitting in and this feeling persisted for several years as did the feeling of not quite understanding the meaning of 'women's rights', 'gender equality' or 'democracy' and 'human

---

[199] I had not experienced or witnessed violence in my family and knew no one around me who had. Many of us had, however, experienced sexual harassment on public transportation or on the streets but we saw them as individual problems that resulted from lack of proper education and acculturation. Plus, sexual harassment was not even seen as violence then.

rights' for that matter. Still, I worked diligently to promote them through volunteering for the WSP and working at TAF and, later, helping Zanaa *egch* to set up the CEDAW Watch Network.

Zanaa *egch* first encountered CEDAW in 1996 when the newly elected MP U. Narantsetseg took her along to attend a workshop in one of the South-East Asian countries:

> So we went. Got there. Sat for several days. I understood practically nothing! [Laughing erupts] I thought: "OK, there is something called CEDAW [others are laughing loudly], it was produced by the UN [laughing continues], it must be implemented [more laughing], Mongolia has ratified it [more laughing]. *Za*,[200] I will do this!" [Barely able to talk through laughing]. No idea what it is! No idea! [All laughing]. At any rate, I understood it was important for women, that Mongolian women and citizens don't even know we are party to this convention, so I thought I needed to inform them, that this equality must be realized. So I came back and within a week, I founded the CEDAW Watch Club, enrolled some twenty LEOS people as members, and that's how it began. After that, I found a copy of CEDAW in Mongolian – it had been translated. I read it article by article.

A year later, Zanaa *egch*, along with five other women from NGOs and the government, attended a workshop on monitoring the implementation of the 1995 Beijing Platform of Action (BPA) and strengthening the national machinery for the implementation of CEDAW, organized in Bangkok by the Gender and Development Programme of the Asia Pacific Development Center, "an autonomous regional inter-governmental organisation created to be an independent think-tank for the Asia-Pacific region on key development issues" (Balleza, 1998). Inspired by this workshop, Zanaa *egch* initiated the CEDAW Watch Network, inviting all key women's NGOs as co-founders. A few years later, the network was registered as an independent NGO, becoming the CEDAW Watch Network Center. Soon afterwards, Zanaa *egch* attended the Regional Training of Trainers on CEDAW, organized by the International Women's Rights Watch – Asia Pacific (IWRAW-AP), a Kuala Lumpur-based regional NGO. From then on, the Center's CEDAW activism was largely based on IWRAW-AP's training manual.

---

[200] Here, *za* means 'OK now!' or 'Well, now!' Depending on the context and the manner in which it is pronounced, *za* can mean 'OK' or 'Yes' as in agreement, support or compliance; 'Well…' or 'OK…' when wanting to end an conversation or transition to another subject; "Go on" when urging someone to continue; 'Oh really? Is that so?' in disbelief or with sarcasm [if said twice or once slowly]; 'Desist immediately!' or 'How dare you?!' if said briskly three times. These are only some of the main uses and meanings of *za*.

Zanaa *egch* also organized several training workshops in Mongolia with Shanthi Dairiam, founder of the IWRAW-AP and a former member of the CEDAW Committee, and other South and South-East Asian feminist activists as resource people.

In line with CEDAW, IWRAW-AP's training materials emphasized historical and structural dimensions of inequality and discrimination; elaborated on the concept of substantive equality in contradistinction to formal equality; and emphasized state obligations to ensure the *de facto* implementation of women's rights on the basis of equality with men (IWRAW-AP). At the time, while the cases included in the manual reflected the complexity and diversity of experiences of gender-based discrimination in different national, cultural and socio-economic contexts, the introductory session on gender discrimination and patriarchy was still based on a unidimensional definition of patriarchy, which assumed men had and women did not have power. Later, circa 2011, this session was updated to include an intersectional perspective on patriarchy and power, based on a training session developed by MONFEMNET for the "Hands Up for Your Rights!" youth campaign in 2008 ("Hands Up for Your Rights!" draft training manual, 2011).

Enkhjargal's work on women's rights started when she joined the NCAV in 1997 as a legal counsellor. She had become a defence attorney, motivated by a dream of defending people from injustice after watching a documentary about a man who was wrongfully accused of murder and saved from capital punishment by a committed and competent lawyer. This dream was certainly not gender-specific but the NCAV mission made sense to her because she had seen many women suffer from domestic violence in her home *soum* in Khentii *aimag*:

> My mother was a *soum* trade union *darga*. My father did not drink and there was no violence in our home. That's why many women came to my mother for help with writing applications for a divorce or child support. One woman stayed with us for many days to escape her husband who had threatened her with a gun.

Enkhjargal's personal commitment to women's rights deepened after a tragedy:

> In the late 1990s, a woman from Khuvsgul came [to the NCAV], seeking help. She was a Russian language teacher, with higher education. Her husband beat her up publicly when she was teaching at the *aimag* school. She could not face people after that and moved to a *soum*. He followed and beat her up in front of her students again. Then he took her to the *khuduu*. When

she was pregnant with her fourth child, he chased her on a horseback whipping her and she lost her baby. So she ran for her life to the city with her three children. We did all we could but lost her. We lost touch with her. In two-three months, we heard she had died. There was no protection system in the *khuduu*. By law, domestic violence was not a crime, nor an offence then. Her husband was only sentenced to five years for cruel treatment (torture) and was released after just three years.

After this case, Enkhjargal resolved that the NCAV should strive for the establishment of a comprehensive legal system, not just one law, to protect women and children from domestic violence throughout the country, and that she would strive for that goal, as an individual and a lawyer. After becoming the Executive Director in 2001, she began to redefine the organizational strategy, prioritizing advocacy for a comprehensive anti-violence legal and institutional system, holding that it is the duty of the state, not of an NGO, to ensure the safety and security of a person. Before this turn, the NCAV was more focused on service provision, striving to set up branches and shelter houses in the *aimags*. It had taken it upon itself to fill in the gap left by the state, facing, year after year, intimidation and threats of violence from their clients' partners. After 2001, the NCAV began a slow and arduous struggle to responsibilize the state. This shift was influenced by their learning from the Asia-Pacific Forum on Women, Law and Development (APWLD), a Chiangmai-based regional NGO, which the CEDAW Watch Network Center, the CHRD and the NCAV had joined as members. Enkhjargal was a member of the APWLD's Task Force on Violence against Women:

> Every year, the task force held a conceptual workshop on the first two days of its regional meeting and held in-depth discussions about the key concepts and the theoretical framework related to the meeting's main topic. They invited resource people, researchers and activists working in those areas. For me, this was very important. These meetings gave me a push to see things systemically. That is why, every year, I somehow found the money to attend the taskforce meeting with a good translator. Every year.

It is also through the influence of the APWLD that the NCAV became a feminist organization in the sense of seeing violence against women as stemming from a patriarchal system of unequal power. Before then, as Enkhjargal shared, they saw individual attitudes and traditional cultural attitudes as the cause of violence, without linking them to systems of power. Before joining the APWLD, the NCAV's learning was mostly from western sources,

including Australia. It was also at an APWLD meeting that Enkhjargal first heard, with bewilderment, the words 'globalization', 'fundamentalism' and 'neoliberalism'. Later, through MONFEMNET processes, she was able to understand these words more deeply, linking them to the Mongolian context as well as feminism.

Both Tsendee *egch* and Dondov *egch* became first involved in supporting women through the WLA. In the mid-1990s, Tsendee *egch* sat in a small office made available for defence attorneys at the traffic police, assisting people with traffic-related disputes. One day, her former law professor told her to attend a workshop in his stead. The workshop was organized by the WLA and was presumably on women's rights. Tsendee *egch* did not clearly remember the content but she did vividly recall how she felt: "as soon as I entered [the workshop hall], I felt as if my ears opened!" She attended the workshop without missing a day even though she felt she did not understand everything. Soon afterwards, she became one of the first four women lawyers recruited by the WLA to provide *pro bono* legal counsel to women and began spending one Thursday a month at the WLA office. In 1997, when Dondov *egch* joined her in the office at the traffic police, Tsendee *egch* regaled her with a glowing description of the WLA and got her involved in the legal aid as well. Dondov *egch* fondly recollected:

> So I also began to give free legal counsel to women. Every Thursday, without fail, I would be there on time and leave on time.

Tsendee *egch* and Dondov *egch* profoundly enjoyed spending time at the WLA. Dondov *egch* described:

> It was very interesting for me! They constantly talked about new things! I liked spending time with them even though I could not grasp everything …

In the mid-1990s, with TAF support and guidance from a US attorney who specialized in women's rights, the WLA produced a manual on women's rights and Mongolian legislation. I remember the WLA members seemed somewhat puzzled by the special emphasis on women that TAF kept encouraging. In fact, the WLA was originally founded in 1992 as a member-service NGO with the intention of promoting the professional development of female legal professionals, many of whom were MPRP members. However, the first Executive Director of

the WLA, N. Chinchuluun (Chinchee *egch*), a former inter-*soum* court judge,[201] enthusiastically embraced the idea of serving women at large and promoting women's rights, especially after returning from the 1995 US NGO study tour. Still, the meaning of 'women's rights' must have remained somewhat vague and the legal aid provided by the WLA must have primarily focused on explaining the existing law, not linked yet to human rights or feminism. Tsendee *egch* shared:

> But I did not think "women" at all! What I thought about was simply justice and I was angry with the bullying policemen. As I worked at a law-enforcement institution, what I wanted to change was this injustice, this legal system. That is why I entered the civil society.

In 1998, Tsendee *egch* went on the South-East Asian study tour organized by TAF to support the WLA and CAV in their legislative advocacy on the Family Law. The women visited Singapore, Malaysia, the Philippines and Thailand. It was Tsendee *egch*'s first time to go abroad. She said, laughing, that she still kept talking about the police, adding that she knew "nothing about women's rights."

The CHRD was established in 1998 by Chinchee *egch,* D. Amarsanaa and Urnaa *egch* who were both former WIRC staff, together with two university professors. In 2000, when the CHRD opened its office, Tsendee *egch* and Dondov *egch* joined as staff. This was a turning point for both of them. Dondov *egch* pinpointed a workshop on human rights monitoring organized by the CHRD in 2000 as the beginning of more systematic 'understanding' of human rights. Tsendee *egch* was deeply affected by the cases she took up as a defence attorney on behalf of the CHRD:

> In 2001, two girls who were trafficked to Malaysia contacted Zanaa and I became their defence attorney. That's when I heard about CEDAW. I read it but not from A to Z. I cited it in defending

---

[201] After graduating from university, Chinchee *egch* was mandated by the party-state to work in Dornod *aimag* due to the centrally planned management of human resources. She worked there for five years before moving back to Ulaanbaatar. Due to the low population density in rural areas, some courts serve several *soums*. These are called inter-*soum* courts.

my clients, which angered the judge. She[202] said she wasn't there to be lectured about CEDAW and told me to sit down. I questioned her on that, it was a big commotion ...

... In 2004, there was a case of a woman who was wrongfully announced to have AIDS and then she died [her husband beat her to death]. She came to our office, so beautifully dressed... It is through my work on human trafficking and this case that I came to women's rights ..."

Still, Tsendee *egch* felt she did not have complete knowledge of women's rights and reflected that it was only in 2010, when MONFEMNET invited her to join the team of trainers for the 'Strengthening Advocacy for Women's Political Representation' (funded by the US Women's Issues Fund) that she received more systematic knowledge. However, even after attending the training of trainers, she continued to doubt herself:

Sometimes I felt like I understood and sometimes I felt like I didn't. And when I wanted to quit, feeling I could not do the job, they [Enkhjargal and Undariya] would tell me that I <u>could</u> do it. So I went to Khishgee [former WSP and NHRC staff member, OSF Human Rights Program Manager] to verify my knowledge and discuss the things I had heard in the workshop [everyone laughing]. Khishgee listened to me for a while and then she said: "Tsendee *egch*, aren't you at an advanced level? These are not basics, these are more advanced things you are talking about." [Loud laughing erupts again]. I kept feeling that I lacked the necessary theoretical knowledge about human rights [and women's rights] and that, therefore, I could not teach others. But I actually understood the things I hadn't while doing the actual workshops [in the *aimags*].

Tsendee *egch* explicitly linked her sense of ignorance with state-socialism:

We are products of communism. What human rights?! Even in law school, they did not teach about human rights [the other two lawyers – Enkhjargal and Dondov – supported this remark]. I don't know anything! I just keep going because I have this desire, this dream in my heart. Otherwise, I am a very outdated, backwards person in terms of theory [laughing, self-deprecating].

---

[202] I had to go back to Tsendee *egch* to clarify the gender of the judge and her professor. Mongolian pronouns are not gender-specific. Therefore, translation into English can be tedious as the gender of the person in question is generally not specified in the original. Names too do not reliably indicate the gender of the person.

Urnaa *egch*'s introduction to women's rights and gender issues was through WIRC, working on the UNIFEM-supported research on women in transition (UNIFEM, 2001). This research gave her an opportunity to make some sense of the changes taking place in the country, with a focus on the economy. Urnaa *egch* was educated as a microbiologist in the Soviet Union and had diligently studied historical materialism, which has influenced her perspective as an activist. Under her leadership, the CHRD developed a strong focus on social justice and socio-economic rights, especially of the poor and marginalized. Their work has included: nurturing community savings groups as a vehicle for the socio-economic and political empowerment of the poor; critiquing neoliberal policies, including trade liberalization, and fostering an inclusive process to advocate for food sovereignty; supporting mining-affected local groups and pushing for legal reform to enhance environmental protection and local communities' right to participation in relation to mining; and initiating a civil society process to monitor the development effectiveness of the official development assistance (ODA). In the development of these programs, the CHRD has cooperated with various international and regional networks such as the Asian Forum for Human Rights and Development (Forum-Asia), the Asia Pacific Research Network (APRN), IBON Foundation, People's Caravan for Food Sovereignty, Earth Rights, the Pesticide Action Network Asia Pacific (PANAP), and the CSO Partnership for Development Effectiveness.

What emerged clearly from our sharing is that we accepted the idea and ideals of human rights, without any hesitation, as *a sine qua non* of the humane and democratic society we wished to develop in Mongolia even if we were dogged by a feeling of not fully grasping its meaning. Urnaa *egch* perceptively linked this acceptance with our need to find a new system of belief:

> The Asia Foundation [under Kim Hunter as the Representative] offered me a scholarship to study human rights at a Master's level in Hong Kong. I knew I had to understand this 'human rights' thing. I had heard about it before, of course. For me, human rights filled in the space that was left by the dissolution of previous beliefs. The main thing was lost - what to believe in, what to hold onto. And I was not religious. Then the faith was lost in the society that we had hoped for, in which people would all respect each other and live in fairness and justice. When I looked around, it was a terrible blood-dripping capitalism, the few things that had

existed before had been destroyed, taken apart. … So the question arose: what to believe in? … So I went [to school].

I too went to school feeling I needed to deeply understand this 'democracy' thing to be a more effective activist. I began to learn the basics of Western mainstream political science at the Central European University (CEU) in 1997. Through writing my MA thesis on comparing German and US regulations on election campaign advertising, I began to see the diversity among Western democracies and the deficiencies of the US model, especially their failure to reduce the role of money in elections. Still, in 1998, I went to Rutgers as an optimistic liberal democrat eager to learn from US democracy in action. In 2000, after my exposure to critical theory, postcolonial scholarship, Third World feminism and intersectionality theories, I emerged ideologically aligned with postcolonial, anti-racist and anti-imperialist feminism, and deeply depressed about the direction in which Mongolia was heading. I defined my feminism then as one based on an understanding of patriarchy as a system that uses gender to signify and distribute power, which interacts dynamically with other systems of power such as capitalism and racism, and takes historically and culturally specific forms. My theoretical insights called for a counter-hegemonic activism that was self-reflexive, holistic in terms of simultaneously taking into account the interlocking systems of power, humble and yet bold, strategic and effective. I had absolutely no idea how to engage in this kind of activism in practical terms. I also felt paralyzed with fear that I might once again unwittingly participate in the reproduction of the dominant power structures as I judged myself doing when working for the WSP and TAF.

Tsendee *egch* summed up much of our collective experience of postsocialist activism in these words:

> I learned while doing the work. There is nothing I have done that I had known how to do. I simply figured out how this works, how that works as I did the work … I am still learning …

We came from a system based on scientific Marxism-Leninism that inculcated a form of positivism, an absolutist conception of knowledge. Knowledge was imagined as objective and perfect. Thus, since knowledge was static and bounded, it was, at least in theory, possible for one to acquire all of this knowledge. One's learning, therefore, was measured by how much one had mastered of the objectively existing knowledge. The main methods of acquiring

knowledge were memorizing, copying and reading as many books as possible. Family book collections were more than prized possessions but demonstrations of having knowledge (*erdem medleg*). From a very young age, we were assessed for how much and how well we memorized. To prepare for exams, we memorized the one right answer for each of the exam questions. Not knowing the right answer marked one as ignorant and ignorance was shameful.[203] Since one cannot, in practice, master all of the knowledge out there, with few exceptions, one was always 'not good enough'. Thus, knowledge was a way to maintain a power hierarchy, to control people. This cultural attitude is still prevalent.

The crisis of belief engendered by the collapse of communism was also a crisis of knowledge and, therefore, of self-confidence that was derived from the acquisition of knowledge during state-socialism. The repeated and quite totalizing pronouncements of activists as 'not knowing anything' and persistent self-doubt in our knowledge and understanding need to be seen in this context of intellectual and ideological crisis. Because we felt ignorant, we sought to acquire knowledge from external sources. Because democracy and human rights were presented as completely new, that knowledge could not have existed inside the country. It had to be sought from abroad. As we domesticated imported concepts, we did not see ourselves as actively engaging in the construction of their meaning and creation of new knowledge. It took us years to see knowledge as a process. The CHRD was ahead of others, owing to the influence of the people- and process-centered approaches of their Asia-Pacific partners such as IBON Foundation.

7.3 Seeds of solidarity: Advocacy for laws and policies

7.3.1 The National Program on the Advancement of Women until 2000

In 1995, about thirty Mongolian women from various NGOs attended the Huairo Forum organized in parallel to the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing. A number of women from the government attended the latter. The immediate follow-up was the joint effort to draft the National Program on the Advancement of Women until 2000, based on the

---

[203] It would be interesting to analyse this in a historical context and in comparison to the Buddhist conception of knowledge. This shame associated with 'ignorance' may have to do with the way the cultural revolution was carried out in Mongolia.

BPA. In 1996, a conference was held in the State Palace, on the adoption of the program and the women were lobbying to include violence against women (VAW) as one of the critical areas of concern. The opposition was significant among male decision-makers, including the Ministry of Population Development and Labour (MPDL) official who chaired the conference. However, the solidarity among women across the political spectrum, including the staff of the line ministry,[204] was significant.

The conference was timed to coincide with UNIFEM's head Noeleen Heyzer's visit to Mongolia. Ms. D. Baljinnyam, a senior diplomat who actively supported women's NGOs, was a former UNESCAP colleague of Noeleen Heyzer and facilitated informal strategizing between women activists, women inside the state and Noeleen. Still, the MDPL official tried to manipulate the final voting on the issues to be prioritized in the national program. Zanaa *egch*, who was sitting in the back row, lost her patience. She stood up and in a clear, loud voice told the man: "*Byamba*, *chi* [the form of 'you' used with an equal or a younger person] stop trying to confuse the vote! Now, ask the question clearly [she supplied the exact formulation] and call for the vote again!" The chair complied.

The program was adopted, including eleven critical areas of concern: women and poverty, rural women, education, reproductive health, women and family, women in decision-making, violence against women, national machinery for women, women and mass media, and women and environment (Government of Mongolia, 1996). This may have been the first policy advocacy women undertook *as* women, regardless of partisan and organizational affiliations. It was facilitated by the thin boundary between democracy proponents inside and outside the state during that time, owing to the lingering legacy of the collective struggle for democracy and to the ethos of democratic egalitarianism. During later parliamentary terms, both the MPRP and the democrats increasingly turned to the symbols of state power to prop up their failing legitimacy and to distance themselves from the people.[205]

---

[204] In fact, Ms. J. Altantsetseg, then the Head of the Women and Family Section, who passionately supported the whole process of developing the National Program and the inclusion of violence against women as a priority issue later became the Chair of NCAV and served there until her retirement.

[205] In practical terms, this involved enforcing strict restrictions on entering the State Palace, including a discriminatory dress code; fencing off the State Palace from the public in response to the mass demonstrations of the mid-2000s, and even closing off the park on the northern side of the State Palace, which had been open to public access.

In 2002, the Gender Center for Sustainable Development (GCSD), former WIRC, led the revision of this program into the 'National Program on Ensuring Gender Equality', involving a number of local governors and other men (2002). The resultant document centred on the family, seeing it as "a guarantee for population growth, national development and security" and positing the weakening of the tradition as the cause of family conflicts, chronic alcoholism, the phenomenon of street children, and prostitution. Consequently, it called for measures to "ensure the reputation, morality and stability of the family" (Objective 1), enhance the role of the male head of the household (2.1.), conscientize and responsibilize parents and disseminate, in cooperation with NGOs, "the good practices of families, which raised healthy children and supplied respectable citizens to the society" (2.3.2). The policy embraced structural reforms, calling for measures to "create equal opportunities for men and women to participate in the reform and privatization of social sectors" (6.2.2). Thus, under the rubric of ensuring 'gender equality,' the program was aligned with the paternalistic and instrumentalist patriarchal tradition of the Mongolian state as well as the neoliberal reforms.

In 2007, under different leadership, the GCSD initiated another round of revision of the program. They had developed a draft, which was discussed a number of times by the National Council on Gender Equality (NCGE) and women's NGOs. The government was duly supplied with a copy and necessary information. However, the program was finally revised in 2017. By then the NCGE, which was supposed to be a strong national machinery for women's rights and gender equality, had been demoted and brought under the Minister of Social Security and Labour. Until that happened, it was chaired by the Prime Minister, at least on paper.

7.3.2 Together when needed: Anti-violence legislation

Due to the severe nature of the problem of VAW, compounded by its hidden status during state-socialism, the CAV's task was arguably one of the hardest among the new NGOs. As Enkhjargal shared in the research workshops and follow-up discussions, nearly ten years were spent on changing public attitudes just enough to be able to speak about the problem a little more openly. The NCAV was particularly harshly accused of "copying foreign women and importing nasty (*muu muukhai*) things to Mongolia," and one large newspaper article even

stated that 'witch forces' (*shulamyn khuch*)[206] are spreading in Mongolia" (D. Enkhjargal). To counter, with support from various funding sources, including SIDA, AusAID, Global Fund for Women, UNDP, UNFPA and TAF, the NCAV emphasised both quantitative and qualitative research, training of legal and other professionals and public awareness raising, all the while also developing their direct services to victims and analysing the policy, legal and institutional framework. They built bridges across sectors, with a particular focus on bringing legal professionals over to their side:

> We ran a campaign entitled 'One Hundred Legal Professionals'. Our strategy was to avoid blaming the legal professionals. Our message was "the problem does not lie in you but in the laws you are holding and the system you are beholden to (*barij baigaa khuuli, barigdaj baigaa togtoltsoo*[207])." That is how judges, prosecutors and defence attorneys began to be involved in our work. (D. Enkhjargal, personal communication, June 21, 2018)

Although the drafting of a dedicated law on combatting domestic violence started in 1996, the chances of successfully advocating for a new law were minimal at the time (D. Enkhjargal). Hence, the NCAV pursued incremental changes, starting with policies such as on family. Each short sentence took frustratingly enormous effort, driving women to tears. Enkhjargal shared, laughing, that once one of the colleagues literally broke down and cried, giving birth to an in-house joke that "a particular sentence included in a policy was acquired at the cost of so-and-so's tears (*nulimasny unetei zaalt*)" (personal communication, June 21, 2018).

In 1998, with consistent support from TAF, the NCAV and WLA focused on including VAW-related provisions in the Family Law (D. Enkhjargal).[208] The law contained no provisions related to private property and domestic violence. The WLA was primarily in charge of drafting proposed provisions. The NCAV was in charge of the advocacy campaign but also contributed a number of specific provisions, which stemmed from the experiences of the women they had served, which related not only to domestic violence but also the division of family property in divorce cases. Enkhjargal wrote letters to each MP and the Speaker of the Parliament, stating the provisions, each supported with a real life case. "That took courage,"

---

[206] *Shulam* is generally translated as a 'witch' but its connotation is closer to 'evil' or 'satanic'.
[207] This phrase sounds poetic in Mongolian due to alliteration. Mongolian poems rhyme through alliteration.
[208] The law regulates matters related to marriage, divorce, child custody, etc.

she said, laughing, alluding to the fact that directly engaging the state officials was a completely new practice then. The revised Family Law was adopted in 1999. Enkhjargal stressed the important role Ms. Ch. Otgonbayar [MSDP], the first female chair of the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Legal Affairs, played in this process and in the adoption of the provisions related to domestic violence and economic rights with the exact wording the CAV had provided. One of these provisions was about considering all property given to the couple for their family wellbeing as common property, which should be divided equally in a divorce case (D. Enkhjargal).

As Enkhjargal related, the NCAV continued pushing for incremental changes in various policies and laws while continuing their training, research, community mobilization and public awareness raising and other activities. By 2004, the WLA and NCAV had a well-developed draft Law on Combatting Domestic Violence and were ready to launch their advocacy campaign, which was once again led by the NCAV. The women used the parliamentary election campaign to lobby candidates and political parties and recorded their promises to support the law. However, come the fall of that year, the members of the parliamentary Standing Committee on Legal Affairs colluded to 'sink' the draft law. In response, women launched an intensive lobby to reinstate the draft law:

> We divided up the MPs and that morning, before the plenary session [at which the parliament was to decide the list of issues to be included in their agenda], nearly twenty of us went inside the State Palace to lobby MPs face to face. Then we were kicked out [laughing merrily]. But we still managed to meet quite a few of the MPs in that time frame [laughing]. That is how in the plenary the parliament agreed to discuss the draft law. (D. Enkhjargal, personal communication, June 21, 2018)

Enkhjargal continued that the women mobilized support from all parties. Dr. D. Munkhuu, one of three female MPs (all MPRP) in 1992-1996 and a widely respected public figure, was critical in influencing MPRP members, especially some of the staunch opponents. Mr. S. Lambaa (MDP), the Chair of the Standing Committee on Social Policy was a strong supporter in the parliament. This advocacy effort was supported consistently and flexibly by TAF, which was then led by Layton Croft, a former Peace Corps volunteer, who also spoke Mongolian.

The Law on Combatting Domestic Violence was passed in the fall of 2004 but on a condition that women withdraw proposed amendments for other laws, especially the one on the criminalization of domestic violence (D. Enkhjargal). The 2004 law defined and banned domestic violence and provided for responses to domestic violence reports by the police, social workers and the courts. It also provided for a faster divorce procedure for women suffering from spousal abuse.

The struggle continued with an added task of supporting and monitoring the implementation of the new law while preparing for the next stage of legal reforms (D. Enkhjargal). That did not happen until 2015 when the 2004 law was revised and new anti-violence provisions, including on the criminalization of severe forms of domestic violence, were passed as part of the package of laws within the framework of the criminal law reform process. To achieve this, Enkhjargal and her colleague, Ms. T. Arvintaria, worked as members of the drafting committees, spending countless hours in the meetings, in addition to their usual workload. Kh. Temuujin (MDP), then Minister of Law (Justice), who led the reform process, remarked with humour and admiration that the NCAV staff was not only highly professional but also remarkably consistent in jealously guarding every sentence, every word and even punctuation marks (Kh. Temuujin, personal communication, December 18, 2015).

Thanks to the collective effort of MPs such as Kh. Temuujin and Ts. Oyungerel with backgrounds in civil society and human rights activism, and the engagement of other NGOs, especially the Young Women for Change (now Women for Change), the new Criminal Code was highly progressive on several counts, including the decriminalization of libel, the criminalization of sexual harassment, and the codification of homophobic and transphobic hate crimes ("Eruugiin khuuli (shinechilsen nairuulga) [Criminal code (revised law)]," 2015; personal communication in 2015 with Ts. Oyungerel, Kh. Temuujin, D. Enkhjargal and members of the Women for Change; D. Enkhjargal, personal communication, 2015-2018). However, after the 2016 election, the MPP-majority parliament revoked this package of laws, prompting women's NGOs to launch a national campaign to have the laws reinstated. The parliament passed the laws selectively, with some modifications, e.g. the elimination of the sexual harassment provision ("Eruugiin khuuli (shinechilsen nairuulga) [Criminal code (revised law)]," 2015).

7.4 The 'Quota Battle:' Broadening alliances

2005 was a year full of promise for enhancing women's political equality. On April 21, the parliament adopted the MDG goals, which included the goal to increase women's representation in the national parliament to 30% by 2015 (State Great Khural, 2005, April 21). A few days later, supported by international organizations, four partisan women's NGOs affiliated with the four parliamentary parties – the Mongolian Social Democratic Women's Association (MSDWA) of the MPRP, the Democratic Women's Association (DWA) of the MDP, the Civil Courage and Women Association (CCWA) of the CCP and the Motherland, Family and Women Association (MFWA) of the Motherland Party - organized a large conference entitled "Women's Partnership in Politics and Governance." The four organizations united as a Forum under the same title to jointly lobby political leaders to increase women's political representation, including the adoption of electoral and party quotas for women (Tumursukh, 2008, January 11).

On the last day of the conference, April 27, 2005, the leaders of the four parties signed the *Ikh Tenger* Declaration with the Forum, pledging their support for the introduction of an electoral quota for women. On December 29, 2005, the revised election law was adopted, containing Article 28.2, which mandated political parties and coalitions to ensure that at least 30% of their candidates were women in elections at all levels (Parliamentary Secretariat, 2005, December 23). Parties, urged by their female members, also adopted internal quotas although the MDP proved most resistant, if not hostile, to these initiatives. However, subsequently, parties began to argue for a reduction of the electoral quota. In May, 2007, Forum member B. Delgermaa, the DWA Chair, said, in an interview:

> In 2005, the quota was included in the Election law as a result of our [Forum members'] meetings with the members of the Working Group on the Election Law appointed by *Ulsyn Ikh Khural* [parliament] and a significant amount of lobbying politicians. At the time, *Ulsyn Ikh Khural* adopted the quota without any discussions about lowering the quota to 15% or 20%. It is highly irresponsible of them to suddenly argue today that "They gave too much quota to women." (Bulganzaya, 2007, May 25)

On December 21, 2007, the MONFEMNET staff and volunteers organized the first Civil Society New Year Party as part of our civil society community- and solidarity-building strategy

(Tumursukh, 2008, January 11). We had never organized a big party like that and had seriously underestimated the amount of additional workload and financial coordination it would take, especially given we (naturally) did not have any funds for this event. The party was a smashing success and we were dead tired.

However, our prospect of much needed rest was dashed away when we received a sudden call from our partisan members[209] D. Altai, the MSDWA Chair, and Ch. Bazar, the CCWA Chair. They said we needed to urgently act because two male MPs from the two main parties, Z. Enkhbold (MDP) and R. Nyamsuren (MPRP), had jointly presented a draft law to the parliament, proposing a number of changes to amend the election law, proposing to, *inter alia*, revoke the women's quota (Altai et al., 2007b). We immediately jumped to action, with inputs from Munkhuu *guai* who was then MONFEMNET's advisor, five women MPs, partisan women's NGOs, MWF, MONES, the Mongolian Women's NGO Coalition, Mr. D. Lamjav, a constitutional law and civil society expert, and others. We started out by gathering information and getting the facts straight; holding strategy consultations; contacting media; reviewing national and international legislation; drafting protest letters and press releases; disseminating information nationally and internationally by e-mail; and applying for an urgent action grant. About three weeks into the campaign, we received USD 5,000 from the US-based Urgent Action Fund (UAF) run by the Tides Foundation (MONFEMNET National Network, 2007, May 7). We had to work very fast as the parliament was uncharacteristically but not surprisingly expeditious (Figure 4 contains a timeline that shows some of the key events).

On Friday, December 21, just three days after the two MPs had presented their draft law to the parliament, the Standing Committee on State Structure allowed the draft law to be presented for a decision on whether or not to admit it for discussion. This item was the first on the list. As recorded in the meeting minutes (Standing Committee on State Structure, 2007, December 21), MP Nyamsuren thus began his presentation:

> MP Z. Enkhbold and I developed this draft … and presented to the State Great Khural. Also sent proposals and things (*sanal yumaa*) to the Government. But the Government said they

---

[209] From its inception, the network had partisan NGOs as members. After the 2008 July 1st events, we revised our bylaw to ensure non-partisanship of members and developed a separate policy of cooperation with partisan women's NGOs.

will not give specific comments on the law. So <u>since the Standing Committee decided by the majority to discuss this law</u>, I will now briefly present the content of the draft.

December 17 or 18, 2007	A few days later	December 21, 2007
• Two MPs presented the draft law to the parliament	• Partisan women's Forum sent a letter to MPs	• The Standing Committee admitted the draft law for discussion • The Forum's letter was received but not introduced by the Committee

December 25, 2007	December 26, 2007	January 7
• The Standing Committee voted to revoke the quota • MONFEMNET held a press conference and sent its first appeal to MPs	• The parliament revoked the quota • MONFEMNET Coordinator spoke on National TV on evening news	• Women politicians and women's NGOs issued a joint request to the President

January 8, 2008	January 9, 2008	January 10, 2008
• Women politicians and women's NGOs met with the President • The President issued a veto	• The Standing Committee voted to reject the veto • MONFEMNET sent its second appeal to MPs • Partisan women lobbied MPs face to face	• The parliament accepted the veto

January 11, 2008	January 14, 2008	January 25
• The Forum held a press conference • The parliament took a re-vote and rejected the veto	• MONFEMNET held a press conference in partnership with civic movements and male allies and issued a request to the President to take the case to the Constitutional Court	• MONFEMNET held a video-conference with 9 aimags and 1 remote distict of UB

January 31	February 18
• J. Zanaa issued a complaint to the Constitutional Court	• J. Zanaa issued a second complaint to the Constitutional Court

Figure 4. Timeline of events related to the revocation of the women's electoral quota

Mr. Nyamsuren then enumerated a number of changes proposed to the election law,[210] stating the following in relation to women's quota:

---

[210] Including a proposal to nullify a progressive article on ensuring voting rights of Mongolians living abroad on the grounds that there are reports that Mongolians are scattered in the countries they live and many of them

Za 28.2. There is a provision about women making up no less than 30% of the candidates. We approached this provision with an idea to also nullify it. The reason being simply, directly that we are taking as our guidance the main Constitutional principle of non-discrimination on the basis of age, sex, religion, and opinion, that all are equal. In addition, it is possible to talk about the concept (*uzel barimtlal*) of gender equality. If we take the Constitution and talk about equality and gender equality, perhaps this law should state not 30% but 50%, maybe it should be 50%. When it is 30%, are we putting [women] down or are we putting [them] up? So this is like this, somewhat muddy, confusing. I think our colleagues will reflect on this and decide what to do.

At the conclusion of the presentation, Mr. E. Bat-Uul (MDP) was the first to react, questioning the need to touch it and "create a gender dispute," and straightforwardly proposed to exclude it from the draft law (Standing Committee on State Structure, 2007, December 21). Mr. D. Idevkhten (MPRP) proposed to rush the vote since it was only about admitting the draft law for discussion. The Committee Chair D. Dondog eagerly agreed and then stated:

There is one thing here we are supposed to present. It is addressed to D. Lundeejantsan *darga*, Women's partnerships in politics and governance, about including the provision in the law. Has every member received, yes? … It is written here to present it. The general idea is the same as the one just now.

MP S. Bayartsogt (MDP) cut this short by stating:

It has been distributed to the members. That's enough. Where does it say [about presenting such things] in the law on procedures? Then we have to present submissions from all the mass organizations. This is contrary to principles.

The chair called a vote to admit the draft law for discussion and all the ten members present (out of nineteen) voted in favour. The meeting started at 14:55 and this discussion closed at 15:15. The 'thing' that wasn't presented was the letter sent to each MP by the four partisan women's NGOs' Forum (Altai et al., 2007a). Had it been read out as instructed, presumably

---

area residing illegally and that, therefore, it would not be cost-effective to organize voting booths at embassies and consulates as not many people would show up. At the time, the general feeling was that Mongolians living abroad would vote against the two main parties.

by the Speaker of the Parliament D. Lundeejantsan, the members would have heard that the leaders of the women's organizations affiliated to the four parliamentary parties unanimously denounced the proposal to revoke the women's quota adopted just two years ago. They would have also heard the following text contained in that letter:

> We deeply regret that respectable men (*erkhmuud*) who were born from mothers, taken wives, and became fathers to daughters and children have made such a deplorable step and we demand that they revoke their proposals.
>
> This proposal intends to change a law … due to short-sighted politics, narrow personal interests, and ignorance and is inciting the just anger and resentment of Mongolian women and girls who have been ridiculed and demeaned for ages as "having long hair but short intellect."
>
> … We deliberately stress that this demand is not motivated, as imagined by some short-sighted and narrow-minded people, by a few women's narrow self-interest and a desire to gain positions and power. (Altai et al., 2007a)

The women stressed that the MPs would earn people's respect by retaining the provision that has the potential to bring historic change in ensuring gender equality in democratic Mongolia. Women boldly concluded with a warning:

> … Should you take any detrimental steps to change the law … we shall turn to a more decisive form of struggle to ensure the political rights of Mongolian women … (Altai et al., 2007a)

The draft law was then promptly discussed by the Standing Committee on December 25 and was to be voted on in the plenary the next day. Women resolved to send an appeal to the MPs from MONFEMNET. With all the key participants, we agonized over every argument, every sentence and their logical sequence. We strongly felt that we needed to produce a letter that was not only robust in its legal and philosophical rationality but also appealing to the human inside the politician. We talked about the need to try and get through to the core of their humanity while firmly making our points. In structuring the arguments, some thought we should start by citing the state's obligations under international human rights law, specifically CEDAW. Others held our politicians did not care about international conventions and might in fact reject our appeal outright as an attempt to impose a foreign will. In the end,

we opted to root our argument in the Constitution of Mongolia and frame women's electoral rights as a democratic imperative (MONFEMNET National Network, 2007, December 25):

> The Constitution of Mongolia states that the power of the state is in the hands of the people and that citizens must be guaranteed an exercise of their civic and political rights on the basis of equality and non-discrimination. Therefore, ensuring that women, who make up half of the population, have a *de facto* right to represent themselves … is an important goal for democratic Mongolia.

We also used the word 'patriarchy' and linked the discrimination against women to injustice and unequal distribution of resources:

> A gender-unjust system permeated by patriarchal ideology, which stifles women's voices, rights and freedoms, proliferates violations of human rights, violence and unequal distribution of resources, thereby hindering human and social development.

Rather than presenting international obligations as a given, we stated that it is in recognizing this injurious dynamic that the international community sought to reflect the goals and principles of ensuring gender equality. We then reminded them of the Mongolian state's obligations to its citizens under both international and national laws to ensure democratic representation and to eliminate gender inequality. After that, we explained the function of the quota:

> The significance of a temporary special measure or a quota system, designed to increase the political participation of women who have been historically denied equal share of power, lies in that it orients political parties to training women for participation in political decision-making and creates a legal framework for ensuring equality.

We urged the MPs to prioritize values of democracy and human rights and long-term development goals over short-term self-interests and show respect to women by retaining the quota. We concluded by warning that we would be carefully watching their votes.

The party women and women who worked inside the State Palace, including Bazar *egch* (CCWA/CCP) and M. Bolormaa, Chair of the Woman Leader Foundation, distributed the appeal to each MP before the plenary session on December 26. Bolormaa *egch* recalled:

We needed to deliver the letters so that the MPs would hold them in their hands and read them. So we did not put the appeals in envelopes and deliver to the mailroom. So the working group members decided that we should deliver the letters in the morning when the MPs arrive for the plenary session. We were not sure if we should put them on their desks or stand at the door and give them as they trickled into the hall. That morning we talked to the parliamentary secretariat staff [also women] and we put the appeals on the seats of the MPs. For us, at the time, this was a completely new way of doing things. I do think it was impactful that the MPs received the appeals at the same time and read them at the same time. The mass media messages we spread were also impactful. (personal communication, June 28, 2018)

I remember Bolormaa *egch* reporting to us, happily giggling, how she and the other women quietly slipped into the plenary hall and quickly put the flyers on the seats and that, glancing back before exiting the hall, she saw a few astonished faces of MPs who were picking the flyers up from their seats.

The parliament quickly moved to adopt the proposed draft law, without any substantive discussion or even mentioning the 'women's quota' (Tumursukh, 2008, January 11). They simply voted to delete Article 28.2 along with a few other similarly 'named' articles from the election law. On television, we saw a number of male MPs grinning as the few women MPs protested. When we obtained the voting records, we were astonished to see Ms. D. Arvin's name among those who supported the revocation of the quota. The MPRP women contacted her and found out she was not even present during the voting. We heard afterwards that a male MP deliberately pushed her voting button in her absence 'as a prank.'

That day, the women obtained a prime time slot on Mongolian National Television (MNTV) during evening news. We would have only about seven minutes to make our point. The women agreed that I should be the one to go given my non-partisan status, key role as a coordinator of the campaign and my academic background in political science. I went with trepidation. For many of us activists, public speaking was one of the biggest challenges. Tsendee *egch* said in a workshop, laughing, that whereas she did not fear the state, she was utterly terrified when giving her first public presentation in 2002. During state-socialism,

critical public speaking was highly censored. People did speak out but at their own risk[211] or from a position of privileged security (as children of the party elites, for example). As Enkhjargal pointed out, people still remember the 1930s and the 1960s repressions (personal communication, June 22, 2018). Moreover, most of our lives were organized into stable, tightly knit units from families to school and university classes (groups) to work collectives. Hence, the need and opportunities for developing social skills were limited.[212] In addition, my anxiety was amplified by my Russian school background and lack of confidence in my Mongolian language skills. However, as our activism demanded that we engage in public speaking, we kept rising up to the challenge and gradually learned. By 2007, I had become accustomed to appearing on television and speaking in front of large audiences. However, this time the stakes were particularly high and the potential audience was much larger. O. Enkhtuya *egch* commented later (possibly a few weeks after my appearance on MNTV) that my words "men don't want to share power, they are afraid to share power" were very effective and reached many people.

Though angry, we were not disappointed with this outcome. We knew our chances of turning the vote were minimal. We had discussed possible scenarios and our goals and had unanimously agreed that the main purpose of the national campaign was not so much to reinstate the quota but to

> send a strong message to decision-makers that politicians' actions against gender equality and women's rights will not go unnoticed, that they will face significant costs in terms of voter support and political legitimacy, and to raise awareness among voters on women's quota and women' political rights in view of the upcoming … elections. (MONFEMNET National Network, 2007, May 7)

---

[211] From the stories of both of my parents, I know that they spoke out, knowing the risks. My parents were not in any way connected to the party elites but they both were mature professionals during late socialism, which was a more open period. It is no accident, however, that many of the first pro-democracy dissidents came from elite families.

[212] Divorces were discouraged, mobility (especially urban-bound) was strictly regulated, most people spent eight to ten years in the same secondary school group and, if they went to college or university, four to five years in another stable class (group), and then decades in the same work collectives in the same localities. In many ways, these social groups were modern tribes. A good example is the *bairny khukhduud* (kids from the same apartment block) who became a very closely knit group that took care of each other but was fiercely competitive with kids from another *bair* (apartment block) or turf.

So, media was a big part of the campaign (MONFEMNET National Network, 2007, May 7). We published articles in English and Mongolian in multiple newspapers and magazines. We appeared on talk shows on MNTV and smaller, private channels and held press conferences. We were also mobilizing male allies from academia, NGOs and civic movements. Our visible diversity helped convey the message that the issue of the quota revocation was not just about women wanting power but about fairness and the quality of democracy.

Nevertheless, we continued our campaign. On January 7, 2008, we issued a joint request to the President of Mongolia N. Enkhbayar (Tumursukh, 2008, January 11). This letter was more technical and listed relevant provisions from the Constitution, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the UN Convention on Women's Political Rights, CEDAW, and, lastly, the MDGs (Munkhtuya et al., 2008, March 1). Stating that the amendments were not only a setback on previous gains but also adopted illegitimately, without broad deliberation and through collusion, we urged the President to veto the "unjust law" (Munkhtuya et al., 2008, March 1). On January 8, women MPs and representatives of the women's partisan and non-partisan NGOs met with the President in person. He informed us that he was already inclined to issue the veto but that, after meeting with us, he was convinced even more it was the right step.[213] The veto was issued the same day.

The next day, on January 9, the Standing Committee on State Structure was convened to vote whether or not to accept the presidential veto. Meeting minutes (Standing Committee on State Structure, 2008, January 9) state that the President's advisor presented the veto, listing all the women's organizations that advocated for it. Women MPs D. Arvin (MPRP), D. Tuya (MPRP) and B. Munkhtuya (MDP) all spoke extensively in support of accepting the veto, arguing that the quota would benefit the society at large and that there are many capable women who could fill the quota. Mr. M. Zorigt (CCP) supported their arguments and reminded that all four parliamentary political parties signed the *Ikh Tenger* Declaration. No discussion ensued. Once again, the chair rushed the vote and only three MPs voted to accept the veto. The session started at 11:50 and was over in twenty minutes (Standing Committee on State

---

[213] This was an opportunity for the President to improve his rating. His veto is weak as the parliament has an option to reject it. Whether or not the veto is accepted, the President would still look like the good guy.

Structure, 2008, January 9). There was a distinct sense that the three women felt overpowered by the men.

Now, things were heating up. Women embarked on a new round of one-on-one lobbying of the MPs guided by Munkhuu *guai*. One of the women MPs' office became our temporary camp. When women gathered to report on their meetings, we began to hear about pressures being put on MPs supportive of the veto. The most extreme case was that of an MPRP woman. The MP reportedly received a call from a male MP known for his aggressive character and he told her "to keep her mouth shut", and threatened to "rape her" if she didn't. It was understood he did not mean the threat in a literal sense. Regardless, the woman was quite shaken with the level of aggression flung at her. Even some of the male MPs mentioned that they were pressurized by their male colleagues. I remember us sitting in that small office, cramped, women of different ages, backgrounds, professions, organizations, and political orientations faced with this gloomy reality of Mongolian politics. Yet, when we did our math, it looked like the veto might get accepted by the parliament.

The parliament discussed the veto in a plenary on January 10. MONFEMNET issued its second appeal, simply calling on the MPs to pause and think before pushing the button and vote with their conscience, from deep within, not from a narrow self-interest or fear of someone more powerful and influential (MONFEMNET National Network, 2008, January 10). We were very proud of this text as we felt it was not cold and formal as most statements we tended to produce, but short, simple and yet to the point. We even made it colourful, not the usual black and white. This confidence was shortly shaken when one of the 'progressive' male MPs derisively pointed out a phrase that could be twisted to have a sexual meaning to the woman who was distributing the flyers. She was deeply upset and felt ashamed that we could have written something like that. I too was shaken and, as a coordinator of the campaign, felt guilty for letting something like that pass through, jeopardizing our collective reputation and struggle. Fortunately, one of the GCSD researchers dropped by to help with the campaign and I shared my worry with her, blaming myself for not foreseeing the problem. She instantly dismissed the criticism: "*Za*, how can we ever guess what their dirty minds can think up? Try as we might, we can never catch up with them! Better not even try!" As soon as she said it, I knew she was right. A realization that had been hovering at the edges of my mind suddenly

sunk in, with a clarity, that men controlled the political space through sexualized language and that rhetorical sexual violence was a weapon custom-fitted for use against women.

As I wrote on January 11, 2008, in an article for *Mongol Messenger* (English-language newspaper) (Tumursukh, 2008, January 11), this time, finally, the men were forced to engage in a discussion and articulate their arguments for revoking the quota:

> Some argued that the 30 per cent quota will limit women's representation when they could in fact win as much as 50 or even 100 per cent of the seats. Some argued that the 30 per cent quota is unconstitutional (the Constitutional Court had actually ruled that the quota does not violate the Constitution). And some argued that there are no capable women to fill the 30 per cent quota and that they would have been happy to oblige if women had requested 10 or 15 per cent. Yet others beseeched women to be patient and wise because their time will eventually come naturally, without a need to hasten the process with a quota. Interestingly, no one argued that politics is not for women.

As we watched on television, women MPs and the few supportive male MPs reiterated their arguments for retaining the quota. The Speaker called for the vote. To everyone's surprise, the parliament accepted the veto with 37.7%, over the required minimum one-third or 34%[214] (Tumursukh, 2008, January 11). One of the stunned opponents of the quota exclaimed: "the vote came out wrong!" The opposing MPs gravitated towards each other, with puzzled expressions on their faces. Mr. N. Batbayar (MDP), S. Bayartsogt (MDP) and others demanded that the votes be verified against the MPs physically present in the hall and "quickly discovered that buttons had been pushed for two absent MPs" from the New National Party (Tumursukh, 2008, January 11). The quota opponents accused the Speaker D. Lundeejantsan "of violating the regulations for parliamentary sessions and mismanaging the discussion and the voting" and demanded to vote again (Tumursukh, 2008, January 11). Then, S. Bayartsogt (MDP) and R. Gonchigdorj (MDP) argued "that the President's veto must not have been discussed at all as the vote to accept the veto violate(d) the law stating that no changes may be made to the election law within six months of the election date" (Tumursukh, 2008, January 11). Furthermore, R. Gonchigdorj "warned that there may be dire consequences such

---

[214] In other words, the quota opponents did not manage to mobilize 66% of the votes to reject the veto.

as postponing the elections and proceeded to accuse women MPs and women activists for having potentially de-stabilized the State of Mongolia (*Mongolyn tur*) in pursuit of their narrow interests" (Tumursukh, 2008, January 11). As I wrote in then:

> The opponents of the quota were so upset by the outcome of the voting that they left the hall without discussing the rest of the issues on the agenda for the day. The Speaker was forced to announce a break until 3 pm and then extend it until 5 pm. Both times, quorum was not achieved. Understandably: the MPs were busy discussing plausible arguments to reverse the vote. (Tumursukh, 2008, January 11)

On January 11, the four partisan women's NGOs organized a press conference in the State Palace, protesting quota opponents' "shameless" (*eree tseergui*) aggression (MONFEMNET National Network (Producer), 2008). That evening, around 7 pm, the parliament moved to disqualify the previous vote on the basis of procedural violation and took a re-vote. Only forty-nine out of seventy-six MPs were present, 88% voted to reject the veto and only six voted in favour, including only two women MPs D. Arvin and S. Oyun; J. Batkhuyag and M. Enkhsaikhan whose buttons were pressed the day before in their absence; and former Prime Minister R. Amarjargal (MDP) and M. Zorigt (CCP). As Lamjav *guai* who supported our campaign, commented on television, while the procedural violation was indeed "a wrong thing, a bad thing" (*buruu yum, muu yum*) but its effect would not have changed the outcome as the veto had sufficient support without the two votes (MONFEMNET National Network (Producer), 2008). However, he continued, in claiming to correct the mistake, the parliament took a much more harmful action, a thing that was "more wrong and more bad" (*iluu buruu, iluu muu zuil*) (MONFEMNET National Network (Producer), 2008). By taking a re-vote with an express purpose of forcefully changing the position of the twenty MPs who had supported the veto, they infringed upon the independence of MPs, hence the principle of the sovereignty of the Mongolian State. He added that measures such as a quota were not about giving privileges but about levelling the field for groups such as women who have been historically

discriminated against and excluded from power and that it was the "right thing, the good thing" (*zuv yum, sain yum*)"[215] (MONFEMNET National Network, 2008).

There was a marked shift in the attitude of the media towards greater support for our campaign. One of the television stations aired a compilation of footage of MPs pressing absent members' voting buttons in plenary sessions. Most MPs did not move from their seats and only pressed the buttons of their neighbours. Some MPs leisurely walked around pressing buttons for any number of absent MPs. Nearly all were grinning or smirking akin to children making mischief. The compilation was accompanied by a commentary that this was standard practice in the parliament but never before had it been raised as an issue (MONFEMNET National Network (Producer), 2008). Other channels aired the compilation too or compiled and aired their own. This was the first time women activists who had remained outside the state found out this was such a wide-spread and long-standing practice. MPs claimed they had to do this because often they did not have a quorum. Even one of the female MPs told me that this was not such a big issue (*baij l baidag zuil*), stating that MPs sometimes asked their neighbours to vote on their behalf if they could not attend the session in person. Women's rights/human rights activists, on the other hand, were terrified to think how many laws may have been passed in such a manner by just a handful of MPs. We saw this practice as a major violation of the principles of representation and accountability.

Our campaign still did not stop. As recorded in our urgent alerts (MONFEMNET National Network, 2007-2008), on January 14, "we held a consultation and a press conference with participation of civic movements and activists in addition to women's rights' activists." Among those who spoke at the press conference were Lamjav *guai*; Mr. B. Lkhagvajav from the National Soyombo Movement, founded by diverse civil society actors, including Zanaa *egch*, to promote national interests and anti-corruption measures at policy level; and Munkhuu *guai*. In her speech, as always crisp and powerful, Munkhuu *guai* spelled out that, by their actions, the male MPs clearly showed that "they are unable to extricate themselves from their backwards patriarchal mentality" (MONFEMNET National Network (Producer),

---

[215] Lamjav *guai* has a knack for explaining complex things in 'plain speak.' He is also broadly recognized as a knowledgeable man and can use such simple explanations. If we had used such wording, we would have probably been harshly criticized as 'ignorant' and 'unable to speak in a proper, respectable manner'.

2008). From the press conference, we requested the President to take the case to the Constitutional Court.

Public support was rising with media support. According to our daily alerts (MONFEMNET National Network, 2007-2008), we were regularly receiving letters of support from the *aimags* and from abroad. According to our narrative report to the UAF, for several weeks, the quota became "the most important topic of conversation even in hair salons" (MONFEMNET National Network, 2007, May 7). We were receiving feedback from many different channels. A director of a large, well-funded CSO that worked with policy-makers told us, with a degree of amazement and amusement in her voice: "the men got scared by you, they did not expect you to mount such resistance, they were astounded and some even said "how scary these women are" (*ene emegteichuud chin yamar aimar yum be, iim gej bodoogui*)."

In response, the quota opponents launched a counter-campaign through media, declaring that women are demanding privileges and that democracy is about equal rights. *Udriin sonin*, a daily newspaper formally dedicated to democracy and human rights, published three large articles, which, playing on traditional misogynist attitudes, argued that women cannot be trusted to govern the state and that giving a greater share of political power to women will in fact lead to the destruction of the Mongolian state (Tumursukh, 2008, January 28; MONFEMNET National Network, 2007-2008). The newspaper was closely associated with the MDP and B. Batbayar (Baabar),[216] considered to be the foremost publicist and opinion leader in Mongolia. The articles were authored by his close friend and the newspaper editor B. Tsenddoo, renowned as a satirical writer (Tsenddoo, 2008, January 28). Moreover, as we reported in our January 28 alert, a number of women were verbally attacked in public for their active involvement in the campaign and a woman journalist who aired two televised discussions with us received anonymous threats on her phone (MONFEMNET National Network, 2007-2008).

---

[216] Baabar may have written one of the articles to make us think he was behind these attacks as well. I am unable to find these articles on-line. He was also said to be managing public relations for Rio Tinto and Ivanhoe mines on the Oyu Tolgoi project. At the 2018 Economic forum, he openly took the stage to speak in support of the transnational companies on the mining projects.

We kept going. With the UAF support, we were able to hold two video-conferences with women from the *aimags* and remote districts of Ulaanbaatar (MONFEMNET National Network, 2008, May 7). An effort was made to ensure diversity and inclusiveness in the composition of the groups in each location, including Ulaanbaatar. In our alerts and newspaper articles, we reported that, without exception, local women were "highly articulate in presenting their analyses of the parliamentary actions and proposing next steps for women's collective action" (Tumursukh, 2008, January 28). They openly criticized "the desire of incumbent male parliamentarians to hold onto their political power at all costs and their failure to liberate themselves from traditional views that hold women inferior to men," adding that men at local levels are similarly unwilling to share power with women (Tumursukh, 2008, January 28). A woman from Dornod shared that only two out of thirty representatives in the *aimag* legislature and only one of the nine presidium members were women in her *aimag*, and that "all *dargas* (bosses) are men while practically 60% of *aimag* life is shouldered by women" (Tumursukh, 2008, January 28). Women asserted that, contrary to men's claims, there are plenty of capable women and that they "need to be promoted systematically to take greater part in decision-making at local and national levels" (Tumursukh, 2008, January 28). Most importantly, the *aimag* women clearly voiced that the time had come "when Mongolian women must work together, regardless of party lines and *aimag* borders, to solve the critical issues they face(d) without waiting for male politicians to save the day" (Tumursukh, 2008, January 28). After the first video-conference held on January 25 with nine *aimags* and one remote district, I wrote:

> The video-conference was an exciting event for the aimag and city women that not only provided them with an opportunity to see each other face to face and exchange warm smiles, but also reinforced their confidence in their values and goals, strengthened their sense of solidarity and charged them with additional energy (Tumursukh, 2008, January 28).

Our next step was to file a complaint with the Constitutional Court. Since, by law, only a citizen can do so, Zanaa *egch* volunteered. Her first complaint was filed on January 31 (Zanaa, 2008, January 31; MONFEMNET National Network, 2008, February 4). We had heard informally from one of the judges that the complaint would be taken up by the Court. However, the Court declined to consider the complaint on the grounds that the actions of the MPs did not

constitute a violation of the Constitution. We changed the wording of our complaint and resubmitted in mid-February. It was declined again.

Still, we went on, with a view to garnering voter support for women in the upcoming elections. On March 1, looking toward the International Women's Day, we launched a nation-wide signature campaign to "to raise awareness and demonstrate the women's quota was an issue that many citizens were concerned about, including men" (MONFEMNET National Network, 2007, May 7). According to our report to the UAF, between March 1 and March 9, we "collected almost 8,000 signatures from within and outside the country by e-mail and in person" (MONFEMNET National Network, 2007, May 7). Five hundred of these signatures were collected within two hours of standing on the Sukhbaatar Square on a cold windy day and more than half were signed by men of various ages.

MONFEMNET coordinated the campaign nationally, sending instructions and small financial support to *aimag* coordinators who had participated in the video-conferences. In the city, the volunteer support of our young people was crucial. In 2007 we had begun working informally with youth, both men and women, with hopes of nurturing the next generation of activists to power the movement for social change. Our broader work on civil society and the connections we had made with the so-called 'street' movements enabled us to draw male allies from other sectors of civil society. That the network, which became MONFEMNET, was first founded in 2000 by diverse NGOs and had retained mixed partisan and non-partisan membership in 2007-2008, enabled us to coordinate this campaign. In this particular case, the participation of partisan women, older and experienced women politicians from the MPRP field and women who worked inside the State Palace was key.

Legally, we had reached a dead end. So we shifted gears from the quota campaign to electoral advocacy. On March 8, MONFEMNET held the third "Through Women's Eyes" forum, dedicating it entirely to holding a semi-structured discussion on women's policy priorities (MONFEMNET National Network, March 7).

From March, women politicians became occupied with election campaigning. So our roads diverged as they pursued partisan goals and we continued our non-partisan policy advocacy.

214

7.5 Reflections

We have not come to terms with the deep crisis of confidence we suffered in the transition when the dominant regimes of knowledge collapsed with communism. The transition rendered us not only socio-economically vulnerable but also intellectually and ideologically permeable to new dominant regimes of knowledge. Without a historical knowledge of the sources and effects of that knowledge, we eagerly sought to learn about democracy, human rights and gender equality. We imagined them as objective and universal but we have come to engage with them constructively. Many of us, especially those without access to English language and resources, developed an exaggerated fear of being considered ignorant. This pernicious feeling of 'not knowing enough or well' still dogs us and still needs to be unpacked and processed.

As I sought to highlight in the previous chapter, *namchirkhal* or fanatical partisan polarization has been a major challenge for Mongolia. Arguably, this phenomenon increased with the ideological convergence of the two main political parties. As is often the case, when parties are not able to deliver in material terms, they tend to turn to rhetorical and cultural devices to maintain their spheres of influence and prop up their legitimacy. From 2000 on, especially during our CSI research, we sought consciously to bridge the partisan lines to counter *namchirkhal*. However, as the narratives show, women began to bridge partisan divides early on and have worked effectively together despite the overpowering misogynist myth that 'women do not support women.'

Looking back at the 'Quota Battle', I am amazed at how well coordinated our actions were and how we managed to keep up with the fast pace of the powerful politicians. It is striking how women were able to work across parties and organizational lines for public interest whereas men's cooperation was based on narrow self-interest. Despite having been in the midst of many of these collaborative processes, I myself had not duly appreciated our ability to work together for common good, putting aside the various disagreements we continued to have given our ideological and other differences.

The narratives show that, contrary to assumptions about the narrow issue-oriented focus of NGOs and despite repeated advice from western advisors to define their NGOs' missions

more narrowly, women have maintained a more holistic perspective on their role and the changes they sought to engender. Even in the case of the National Center against Violence (NCAV), which has consistently focused on the 'issue' of violence against women, their work kept expanding as the organization developed a more systemic thinking.

The 'Quota Battle' also clearly shows how fundamentally the political space had changed from the early 1990s. In 2008, MDP leaders R. Gonchigdorj and Baabar are clearly not the same men who expressed support for women's equality in the mid-1990s to the representative from the Socialist International. The actions of the main parties show none of them is democratic or of the people, despite their names. Men in power have increasingly used traditionalist and misogynist discourses to exclude women from the political space and state power. It has been increasingly difficult for women to influence policies or retain their achievements. From this perspective, civil society's promise of empowerment has been deceptive. Women have been corralled into this under-funded sector, manipulated and forced by circumstances to 'volunteer' their labour and expend their valuable energy, constantly knocking on the door of the state captured by powerful masculine groups.

The 2008 election triggered the first post-election violence in Mongolia, giving an excuse to the state to carry out another round of repressions, albeit much smaller in scope than during state-socialism. During the state of emergency, we promptly mobilized a Human Rights Monitoring and Protection Coalition to document the abuses inflicted by the state on peaceful protestors and innocent bystanders and provide legal aid to the most vulnerable among the arrested. On July 3, we mobilized over 150 people but the number kept shrinking fast until, two weeks later, only ten people were sitting around the table in our office, including only one man who represented an NGO of people with disabilities. While we cannot prove, there was reason to believe the phones of MONFEMNET and NCAV were tapped, our websites broke down, and agents were stationed outside our offices and they followed us to our press conferences. We had reason to be concerned for our personal safety. A partisan woman advised us then to join a party as a party defends their people in such cases. Our non-partisan status enabled us to work broadly for public interest but also made us vulnerable. The 2008 July 1st events led us to further broaden our vision, reaffirm our commitment to a holistic, interconnected approach and strengthen our focus on movement- and solidarity-building.

Chapter 8 : Rethinking activism

Drawing the strands together

> There are many degrees of sight and many degrees of blindness.
> … What senses do we lack that we cannot see another world around us?
>
> -   Frank Herbert, *Dune Messiah*

8.1 Introduction

As I mentioned in the introduction, this research stemmed from a deep sense of frustration with the overall state of civil society in Mongolia, grim prospects for the country's future development, and pure exhaustion accumulated over a quarter of a century of activism. It was also guided by the nagging feeling we had carried on for years with a crucial gap in our analysis, knowledge and practice in relation to political economy and neoliberal policies. However, with few exceptions, most of us had few opportunities to acquire any kind of systematic knowledge in this area given the saturation of neoliberal thinking among Mongolian intellectuals and the ideological suppression of leftist thinking as retrograde.

Therefore, this research has been an opportunity for me and, through me, for many of my colleagues to make sense of neoliberalism in its multiple dimensions and to rethink the history of Mongolia, civil society and our own activism, informed by these newly acquired insights. This research journey has opened new vantage points for me and generated many new questions. It prompted me to see familiar things in a whole new light, dispersing some of the fog I had felt obscuring my vision. In this chapter, I will start by discussing some of these new insights, then review the limitations of this research and highlight areas for further exploration.

8.2 Rethinking democracy and democratization

The dominant representation of democracy is that it originated in ancient Greece, was philosophized by the Romans, then theorized, boldly attempted and finally established by the Americans, the French, the English and other western countries. It is constructed as a western invention, with the US as the 'Leader of the Free World,' backed by the West-centric academic knowledge machinery, with philosophy and political science in the avant-garde. This

democratic image is presented as the logical fruition of the Western subject's unrelenting intellectual and political struggle from times immemorial to the present. This self-image was achieved, as postcolonial scholars such as Edward Said (1979) and Partha Chatterjee (1993) have analysed, by orientializing/'othering' non-western societies as ahistorical, homogenous and profoundly authoritarian. I remember a Rutgers political theory professor lecturing, in the late 1990s, that, as Hegel established, the only subject of history is western as only the West has moved from a condition of unfreedom to a condition of freedom, i.e. the modern liberal democracy, whereas the rest of the world has no history as it has cyclically shifted from one authoritarian regime to another. An attempt by an Indian student to contest his example of China was quickly squashed and China remained devoid of history in that lecture hall as the Western subject, the professor included, was reproduced as an embodiment of a noble progression of history to democracy.

However, if we start with Polanyi's (2001) argument that "the liberal state was itself a creation of the self-regulating market" and that once the bourgeois class wrested the state power from the Crown, it was reluctant to further expand democracy (p. 3), we may begin to see the full implications of the bourgeois democratic model that we have been taught to accept as *the* model of democracy. We may also wonder less at why we still suffer a democracy deficit, not only in 'democratizing' countries such as Mongolia but also in the so-called established democracies such as the US and other western countries. We may do well to recall insights from the empirical studies on the origins of the modern liberal states (Moore, 1993; Tilly, 1990).

Scholars of states and nationalisms linked the expansion of democracy to the evolution of modern warfare and the emergence of modern nation-states. Eric Hobsbawm (1992) proposed that the "dramatic redistribution of political and economic power in the western world" was, to a large degree, motivated by the need of emerging nation-states to shore up their secular legitimacy and the necessity brought by modern warfare reliant on mass conscription to concede more power and benefits to the common man and the common woman (80). Expanding social programs, especially education, and broadening democratic participation helped secure the national/ist allegiance of the populace as well as deepen the administrative control of the state.

Charles Tilly (1990) also emphasized the important role wars played in the making of European states. He argued that states were formed as wars pushed the rulers/wielders of coercion to compete for control over the means of coercion and of capital, eventually establishing a centralized control over a given territory. The administrative apparatus of the state developed with the need to extract resources (effective taxation) and to impose/provide security (arms and ammunition, soldiers, police, knowledge and control of the population), growing more expansive and intrusive. States democratized as the wielders of coercion had to bargain with the wielders of capital to extract resources to finance the increasingly costly wars. Democracy expanded as the states had to bargain with the civilian population for both financial and human resources (tax and soldiers) to wage wars. However, wars no longer make states as most wars are financed and legitimated by external forces, removing the critical need for the rulers to bargain with the ruled.

The main point I wish to make here is that the origins of western democracies are violent, whether through the violence of wars or the violence of economic liberalization. Democracy, in whatever variations, is a product of bourgeois ideology as well as violent power struggles both inside and between countries. Yet, democratization programs implemented in postsocialist countries with the ideological direction and financial support from western countries have been devoid of any serious analysis of power relations and structural conditions. The emphasis of these programs has been on value education, institutions, and civil society. The assumption has been that once people had the right knowledge and attitudes (i.e., properly indoctrinated into the values and principles of western, in the Mongolian case, primarily American-style liberal democracy), the right institutions were put in place (regardless of the cultural and structural underpinnings), and a vibrant civil society was birthed (regardless of what social strata they came from and how they were located in the societal matrix of power relations), democracy would materialize.

Judging by the history of western democracies, the expansion of equality is key to forcing the expansion of democracy. Secondly, as a rule, the expansion of equality takes a bloody struggle, in both the figurative and literal meanings of 'bloody.' To logically extend Patnaik's argument that the "institutionalized global mechanism of unequal interdependence" "enable(d) the capitalist core to simultaneously uphold the interests of the organized labour force as well as organized capital" (Das et al., 2016, pp. 6-7), given the centrality of class

accommodation to the expansion and consolidation of western liberal democracies, their very maturation was subsidized by the less developed and less democratic countries of the Global South. This is another reason why western democracies cannot be held as a model for emulation for the so-called democratizing countries. In effect, the global industrial centres exported their conflicts over the redistribution of resources to less developed countries, emerging as enlightened and rational democrats in contrast to backwards and authoritarian 'others' mired in violence.

To further extend this analysis, by plunging Mongolia into unprecedented levels of socio-economic inequalities, neoliberal policies have not only been undermining democracy-making but creating conditions that would necessitate democracy-forcing at much higher costs, including mass violence. It is not surprising that Japan and Korea developed into stronger democracies given their political reforms took place during the era of 'embedded liberalism.' It is also not surprising that the erosion of democracy is blatantly visible in the US where the post-war New Deal policies were much more limited compared to European social democracies and social markets and neoliberalization had gone much further. So long as the macro-level policies and powers that create, perpetuate and exacerbate structural inequalities remain unchallenged, it is highly unlikely that an array of committed civil society organizations can effectively further the goal of democratization from outside the state power.

8.3 Rethinking Mongolian history

8.3.1 Parallels and continuities

Kubik (2013) identified 'historicism' as one of the building blocks of the emerging philosophy of 'contextual holism' in studies of postcommunism. One of the historicizing strategies is to establish "sufficiently deep causal chains in explaining postcommunist transformations" (p. 51). In part following this advice and, in part, following my personal interest in Mongolian history, I traced the contours of the societal transformations from the Mongol Empire to the Manchu period, to state-socialism and then postsocialism in Chapter 2. The parallels between the late Manchu period and the postsocialist period are striking. Both periods were marked by rapid marketization and monetization under foreign influence, degradation of living

standards for the common people, mounting corruption, and rising debt. State-socialist propaganda about skipping the stage of capitalism may have prevented Mongolians from learning from our own history.

In a similar fashion, Mongolia's prospects for an independent course of development were as severely constrained in the first quarter of the twentieth century as they were in the early 1990s. In the 1920s, Mongolia's attempt to develop a society that 'was wealthy without exploiting anyone' was cut short by a dominant foreign power that imposed the communist course of modernization. In the 1990s, Mongolians' dream of creating a society in which "every person could live in truth" was eschewed by the western hegemonic discourse of neoliberal democratization. In both periods, large-scale social engineering projects were implemented rapidly in the name of progress, resulting in massive suffering of large sections of society: repressions during socialism and socio-economic dislocations during neoliberalism. Despite pronouncements of a resolute rupture from the socialist past, the administration of the 'shock therapy' in the age of democratization was made possible precisely by this authoritarian legacy. Both socialist and neoliberal projects have been elite-driven despite maintaining popular rhetoric in the name of the workers' rule or the people's rule.

A striking continuity is the subordination to foreign powers - the Manchu, the Soviets, and the West. The former colonies of western powers had gone through the de-colonization process and had developed anti-colonial resistance movements as well as a body of critical scholarship that became known as postcolonial. By contrast, Mongolia's relationship with the Manchu started as that of a vassal and a lord rather than a colony and an empire and the Soviet-Mongolian relationship was officially named a 'brotherly friendship.' This meant that Mongolia was ushered into the age of Western-dominated neoliberalization without having processed the full implications of its semi-colonial pasts. Soviet advisors who often had higher powers than Mongolian ministers were smoothly replaced by western advisors. In a sense, Mongolia replaced its Soviet 'big brother' with a Western one.

8.3.2 Naiveté about the global order

Caroline Humphrey touched upon a sense of being cut off from global history in the Russian context, where Soviet propaganda was more totalizing than in Eastern and Central Europe.

Discussing how Soviet propaganda aimed at projecting images of successful economic development and material plenty, she wrote that "there was another aspect to being involved in a gigantic deception," which "derived from the growing sense during the 1970s-1980s of being removed, by being entombed in the Soviet Union, from another more real but curtailed-off history, that is, from the history of the world" (Humphrey, 2002, p. 53).

Mongolia's experience is very similar. The socialist period became associated with an overturned pot (*khumursun togoo*), which separated Mongolians from the outside world and kept them in the dark. Everything outside the *togoo* became naively imagined as one continuous *gadaad* (outside/foreign land) with the wealthy western states at the higher end of the continuum and the poorer regions of the world at the bottom. The transitology theories reinforced this West-centric teleological understanding of the world and its history. Capitalism was imagined as the natural course of development and socialism was constructed as an artificial imposition.

The state-socialist reliance on more overt forms of power and control made its authoritarianism more visible. By contrast, the technologies of power and control in the age of neoliberalism have been harder to pinpoint. If in Latin American countries the imposition of neoliberal policies depended on a degree of violent suppression of leftist forces, in postsocialist Mongolia this suppression was achieved through discursive practices that conflated the West with freedom, democracy and development/wealth and socialism with oppression, dictatorship and backwardness. As Lamjav *guai* said in an interview, it is important that we recognize that the collapse of communism dealt a major blow to leftist ideologies (personal communication, December 10, 2015). Without such recognition, we continue to buy into the postsocialist myth of pluralism of opinion and allow neoliberalism go largely unchallenged.

8.4 Rethinking civil society and women's activism

8.4.1 Neoliberal democracy and civil society

Mongolians lack a historical understanding of the origins and evolution of western liberal democracies and the imperialist expansion of capitalism. The fall of the Berlin Wall coincided with and further aided the ascendance of neoliberal hegemony. As Mongolia opened up, its

democratic proponents' vague notions about a humane and democratic society were largely supplanted by a free-market based model of democracy. The free market became conflated with democracy and the welfare state with state paternalism and authoritarianism. The market competition came to be seen as a panacea for all ills.

While political scientists and pro-democracy practitioners have continued to emphasize the important role of civil society and NGOs as its main representatives in strengthening democracies, a growing number of scholars have demonstrated the ways in which the discourse on civil society, the proliferation of NGOs and the outsourcing of state services to non-state actors in fact are part and parcel of neoliberal governmentality, western hegemony and the attack on the welfare state (Choudry & Kapoor, 2013; Comaroff & Comaroff, 1999; D'Souza, 2018; Ferguson & Gupta, 2002; Neysmith, 2000).

The romanticized and idealized notion of civil society, delinked from the underlying structures of political economy and categorically juxtaposed to the (inherently autocratic) state, obscures these sinister aspects. On the other hand, criticisms of NGO-ization coming mostly from postcolonial contexts and structural analyses have tended to assume dichotomous juxtapositions such as social movements versus NGOs, national versus international, professionalized versus people-centred, etc. As Mohanty (Mohanty, 1991), Minh-Ha (Minh-Ha, 1991), Fernandes (Fernandes, 1997) and Anzaldúa (Anzaldúa, 1999) observed, dichotomies often result in the colonization of the diversity, dynamism and complexity of identities, subjectivities and processes on the ground. This is exactly what my reflection on the evolution of the women-led pro-democracy and women's rights/human rights NGOs in Mongolia has shown.

8.4.2 The NGO form: resistance and conformity

Feminist critics of NGOs have associated the NGO-ization and the professionalization of NGOs with the depoliticization and de-movementization of feminism. However, as Helms (2014) suggested, this may not be a unidirectional process and NGOs may in fact become movementized. Further, Bernal and Grewal (2014) discussed the need to distinguish the seemingly unitary form of NGOs from the actual organizational, ideological, contextual and other diversities that use and/or inhabit that form. A historicized exploration of women-led

NGOs in the Mongolian context has also shown that the NGO phenomenon is much more diverse and multi-dimensional than often assumed.

As I discussed in Chapter 5, the first women-led independent organizations initially emerged as aspiring movements for democratic development, loosely based on the socialist mass organizations' models and inspired by the dissident movements' ethos of democratic egalitarianism. However, they were quickly 'recognized' by western funders, particularly TAF, as aspiring issue-based advocacy and government-oversight NGOs. Through a plethora of measures, including training and consultancy, the western-style lean organizational model of an NGO was soon established and institutionalized through the adoption of the NGO Law in 1997. Although this law provided for two types of NGOs, one with and one without membership, it is the membership-free NGO model that consists of a small unpaid board and a small low-paid (if paid) staff that became the dominant form.

The WSP followed this model, shedding its membership and professionalizing in the area of voter education, government transparency and electoral reform. While maintaining public education and training components, the WSP became more state-oriented due to its focus on legislative advocacy. LEOS, on the other hand, did not conform to this model while identifying as an NGO. They prioritized movement-building and, through intensive training and informal networking, developed a nationwide network of *aimag* branches and thematic clubs. They not only retained but expanded their membership, reaching nearly ten thousand by 2000. Later, LEOS had to reorganize, shedding membership, most likely to survive in the neoliberal funding environment that is not conducive to membership-based NGOs.

The second-generation NGOs such as the CAV/NCAV and WIRC and most subsequent NGOs were established as lean NGOs. Here too, the paths diverged. WIRC, renamed as the GCSD, largely moved away from activism, and proceeded to work more as a professional research organization. The NCAV began working as a single-issue, professionalized service-delivery NGO. However, from the early 2000s, the NCAV began developing a more holistic, systemic vision and emphasized building alliances and movements and empowering survivors. They also began to incorporate people-centred advocacy strategies in their work on policy and legal reform.

The narratives also show that, contrary to assumptions about the narrow issue-oriented focus of NGOs and despite repeated advice from western advisors to define their NGOs' missions more narrowly, women have maintained a more holistic perspective on their role and the changes they sought to engender.

8.4.3 Solidarity, namchirkhal and non-partisanship

One of the most destructive effects of neoliberal democratization in Mongolia has been *namchirkhal* or fanatical partisan polarization. Yet it is an under-analysed phenomenon, perhaps because it is not ethnically or religiously marked and, hence, not easily recognizable as a social cleavage by existing theories. While politics was becoming more zero-sum and *namchirkhal* was deepening, women kept coming together across partisan divides. They formed their first multi-partisan-non-partisan coalition in 1995, coordinated by LEOS. In 1996, women worked together across organizational, party and state boundaries on the National Program on the Advancement of Women. In 1997, the National CEDAW Watch Network was formed in an effort to bring together independent and inheritor women's NGOs. Later, the Mongolian Women's NGO Coalition was formed to promote women's political participation. In 2000, the National Network of Mongolian Women's NGOs, which became MONFEMNET in 2007, was formed to unite women's voices *vis-à-vis* the state. These collective efforts, although often unstable and unsustainable, nevertheless demonstrate an effort on the part of women to find new ways of coming together and stake out an independent space as women.

The 'Quota Battle' clearly demonstrated the impressive ability of Mongolian women to work across parties and organizational lines for common/public interest in stark contrast to male politicians' behind-closed-doors dealings based on narrow self-interest. Through this joint struggle and intensive consultations and sharing, the women were also creating critical perspectives on the patriarchal culture and institutions, some of them sharpening their feminist analyses and commitments.

This coming together was facilitated by the emerging non-partisan space. Non-partisanship was a new concept, first imposed by western donors, but one that women have constructively engaged with, creating this new space that could effectively bridge between different actors.

During the 'Quota Battle,' the cooperation of non-partisan and partisan women *as women* was a key factor in the success of the campaign. Non-partisanship enabled women activists to work effectively during the July 1st events. However, it also became clear that non-partisanship leaves us unprotected while those associated with political parties can rely on the party protection, especially in the case of people and organizations affiliated with the two main parties.

8.4.4 Empowerment and containment

NGOs provided a new and dynamic avenue for well-educated and politically active women to channel their energies towards promoting democratic reforms and social development in the country. This energy, supported by limited international funding, gave rise to a number of women-led advocacy NGOs, which grew to form the backbone of Mongolia's emergent civil society. Since the early 1990s, women NGO activists have led the way in policy analysis and advocacy, human rights and democracy education, participatory training, public forums and policy discussions, networking and coalition-building, community development and grassroots empowerment, development of an egalitarian organizational culture and inclusive social spaces, monitoring of human rights, legal aid, and many other projects and processes that are deemed essential for the development and functioning of a democratic society.

Civil society and the NGO sector have undoubtedly served to empower women, enabling them to constructively engage in the changing society and develop independent spaces. However, in the neoliberal donor funding scheme of awarding small grants for specific short-term projects on a competitive basis, a large membership-bound organization was disadvantaged. This funding infrastructure forces an organization to trim down and/or run multiple projects. In the latter case, due to uneven funding from different sources, the risk is high of creating new inequalities and conflicts among staff and members. The market-based approach to civil society and NGOs has encouraged splintering and rivalry among the continuously proliferating NGOs, possibly creating a vicious cycle as proliferation would in turn exacerbate the rivalry for the scarce resources. In addition, the whole sector was established with the overpowering idea of the NGOs being voluntary and dependent on private fundraising or competitive small grants. Voluntary came to primarily mean free labour rather than free choice. This unpaid and under-paid sector became gendered feminine.

With the NGO sector providing an alternative, much less aggressive avenue, women had abandoned the political parties to men without a fight. The political society and the state became institutionalized as masculine spaces. The men in power have increasingly used traditionalist and misogynist discourses to exclude women from the political space and state power. It has been progressively more difficult for women-led advocacy NGOs to influence policies or retain their achievements. From this perspective, civil society's promise of empowerment has been deceptive. Women have been corralled into this under-funded sector, manipulated and forced by circumstances to "volunteer" or under-sell their labour and expend their valuable energy, constantly knocking on the door of the state captured by powerful men's networks.

8.4.5 The expansion of the NGO field

The support of international, especially US governmental and non-governmental organizations, facilitated the formation of the first NGOs and the adoption of the NGO law in 1997 to support Mongolia's democratization. However, it appears that it was the funding of international financial and development organizations that fostered NGO proliferation from 2000. This proliferation did not necessarily result in a stronger civil society or the empowerment of people. As NGOs became 'profitable' and international organizations encouraged NGO-Government cooperation on donor-funded development projects and the outsourcing of state services, the boundaries became blurred between the state and NGOs. Homogenizing definitions of civil society and the NGO sector have obfuscated the ideological, functional and organizational differences between the new breed of these pseudo-NGOs and the numerically small human rights/women's rights and pro-democracy NGOs. This is not to valorise the latter or to suggest that only the self-professed women's rights/human rights NGOs should be supported. I merely wish to point that this publicly visible small sub-set of the so-called NGO sector has borne the brunt of the accusations and suspicions that mainly had to do with the much larger but less visible sub-sectors that have been more tightly linked with the state and international and bilateral organizations. In such a situation, general terms such as 'civil society' and 'NGO' are not simply unhelpful but also have a pernicious political effect.

The expansion of the field under the influence of international development organizations meant a shift from a democratization paradigm to a development paradigm. This in turn shifted the emphasis from the advocacy and oversight roles of NGOs to the project implementation and management capacity of NGOs. The move towards the development paradigm de-emphasized the independence of NGOs from the state and increasingly emphasized NGO-government cooperation. The 'developmental' expansion of the NGO field then gave rise to generalized discourses that constructed Mongolian NGOs as corrupt and perpetually lacking (vaguely defined or even un-defined) capacity and ethics, undermining the legitimacy of the independent advocacy NGOs. Raising funds, on the other hand, arguably grew more challenging as Mongolia became classified as a lower middle income country. Funds available for national NGOs for supporting democratization shrank drastically at the same time as sizable funding was made consistently made available to INGOs. If this trend continues, 'Mongolian' civil society will indeed consist mainly of INGOs as is the case in many former western colonies in Asia and Africa.

8.4.6 Asia-Pacific and international connections

In his article on Mongolian civil society published in the *Routledge Handbook of Civil Society in Asia*, Cambridge-educated Mongolian male anthropologist D. Bumochir (2018) defined civil society as a "Western exported import machine" (p. 96). To develop this concept, he relied on James Ferguson's "discussion of international development projects in Africa" (p. 96). He claimed that his "detailed ethnography" among Mongolian environmental movements showed that they reject the concept of 'civil society' because "most of the "civil society" non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in Mongolia import foreign culture, rather than encouraging, promoting, preserving, and reinforcing the nation's traditional culture" (p. 96). This is an interesting charge. Damning, if true. Also surprising, coming from an anthropologist, in failing to critically question the patriarchal and Khalkha-centric constructions of the 'nation' and its 'traditional culture' and the blatantly misogynist overtones in the ethno-nationalism he wished women activists to embrace.

While we have indeed started out largely working within a liberal framework as imported from the West, primarily the US, our main influences, it turns out, have actually been Asia-Pacific and postcolonial and, when international, from expressly anti-neoliberal organizations

such as AWID. Approximately from 2000, our small community of NGOs has engaged in active rethinking of our visions, missions, concepts and strategies and we grew increasingly critical of western domination, the international development industry, neoliberal policies and liberal politics. Although the origins of women's independent NGOs came from opposition political parties, we moved away from that field. We also began to clarify our positions *vis-à-vis* neoliberal/bourgeois democrats, qualifying our references to democracy with adjectives such as 'substantive,' 'participatory' and 'popular.' We also began to add 'social justice' to our goals as democracy does not necessarily mean, in the neoliberal context, structural equality and socio-economic equity.

8.5 Erasure and invisibilization of women activists

I had not thought consciously about the invisibility of our activist labour until I interviewed a number of actors outside our small community of NGOs. The interviewees were all people who had known us and most had worked with us. I realized, with a significant degree of surprise, that even these close allies did not really 'see' our work, our day-to-day labour, the amount of effort and resources we invested to achieve various results. While all interviewees were largely supportive and appreciative of our work, it became increasingly clear to me that they only saw some of the obvious results of our work. However, even then they tended not to link those 'positive' results to our years-long labour.

A clear example was the intensified youth activism and emergence of new youth-led NGOs. This was brought up by an interviewee as an evidence of a bright future of Mongolian civil society, that it will not be weakened should the older NGOs disappear. The example was also brought up to draw a contrast between older NGOs (such as ours) and the new NGOs, explaining the success of the new ones by their ability to work innovatively, particularly using social media. A few other interviewees also praised the youth for being active, implicitly contrasting them to 'less active' older NGOs. The new NGOs mentioned by the interviewees emerged directly from the youth-focused dedicated work of MONFEMNET, supported by the other NGOs and established women leaders. Supporting and engaging youth, both men and women, was part of a conscious goal of feminist movement-building (not to be confused with building a feminist movement).

However, as I delved more into my research, I began to see that this invisibility was a result of the active erasure of women activists' work and presence. This erasure happens in multiple spheres and at multiple levels. One of them was identified by the workshop participants as the most frustrating challenge: years of women's hard work to educate law-makers and public servants about specific policy and legislative changes were erased routinely with every parliamentary election. The partisan polarization meant that every time state power was transferred to a different party, significant sections of the public service would be replaced. Women had to start all over again, including raising funds for the same work done a few years ago. In the thesis, this can be seen from the way the package of laws on criminal reform were successfully passed in 2015 only to be recalled the following year by the new party in power. Another example was given in the 'Quota Battle' narrative: men banded together to forcefully reject the Presidential veto after it had been lawfully accepted.

I discovered that academic accounts of civil society, NGOs and movements also actively erase our labour, contributions and presence. Consider the following passages from an article on local resistance to mining by Byambajav Dalaibuyan (2012):

> The local movements and some human rights NGOs in Ulaanbaatar provided resources to the Ariun Suvraga Movement. Some local movements shared with the local activists their experience and provided legal information. Human rights NGOs organized training sessions for the local activists and provided a lawyer.

> With the assistance from the lawyer, the Ariun Suvraga Movement filed a lawsuit against the "Mongol Gazar." Their claim was based on the resolutions of the Citizens' Representatives' Meeting of Tsenher district: on the special needs land the resolution issued in 2000 and on banning mining in Nariin Hamar Valley issued on May 30, 2005. … However, despite a hard-fought effort by the movement, it was defeated at all three levels of court. The inter-district, provincial, and supreme courts ruled in favor of the mining company confirming the legality of the mining licenses granted in Nariin Hamar Valley … (p. 25)

The unnamed 'human rights NGOs' included the CHRD and the Globe International, a woman-led NGO that focuses on media freedom. Most importantly, the unnamed lawyer of unspecified gender was Tsendee *egch*. From 2003, when the CHRD developed its strategic environmental litigation program, Tsendee *egch* worked with mining-affected groups to help

defend their lands and livelihoods. She supported the struggles of the Onggi River Movement mentioned by D. Bumochir and the Khuvsgul Dalain Ezed (Masters/Owners of Lake Khuvsgul) Movement. In 2005, she worked with the Ariun Suvarga (Sacred Mount) Movement mentioned above.

This was one of the most emotionally draining experiences for Tsendee *egch*. This work involved traveling 438 km one way (half a day in a car on a bumpy road), sleeping in people's *gers* or in her car for three to seven days per visit, to consult with the movement members. She prepared the documentation for the primary court, the movement members agreed they would arrive at the court when notified. About a month later, Tsendee *egch* travelled back to the area but none of the movement members showed up at the court. According to the law, at a primary level, she could not represent the case without the plaintiffs. The court issued a decision in favour of the mining company. She left the court, deeply upset, and drove thirty five to forty five km to Tsenkher *soum* to inquire why they did not show up. During the month that she waited for the court date, the local people had changed their minds. She recalled:

> A huge wave came up inside me. I felt so much pain and anger inside! I couldn't hold it back! I worked to death for them and they had given up! I couldn't hold my tears back! When I got out of the car, I stomped to the *ger* and kicked the door open and I yelled, crying: "Why did you give up?" They couldn't look me in the eyes. They avoided my eyes. I left there, crying. … Years later, I ran into some of the local people at a workshop and they joked "Oh isn't this a familiar face? Isn't this the woman who cried for our land?" [laughing sadly].

As the primary court had issued its decision, Tsendee *egch* could appeal to the next level as a defence attorney. When the appellate court issued a decision in favour of the mining company, she appealed to the Supreme Court. The Supreme Court too ruled in favour of the mining company.

It wasn't the only time Tsendee *egch* cried. The struggle was hard, especially for front-liners like her. She said in one of the workshops:

> I would come back from court meetings wailing. … I guess I was trying to be a human rights defender [laughing] even while not fully understanding everything. I only knew that the society should be different, that my children and grandchildren should live well and for that I have walked this path despite being constantly called all sorts of nasty names.

One of the hardest and yet also one of the most invisible types of activist labour has been providing legal aid, ranging from giving legal counsel to defending the clients through three levels of the court system. The women activists' pain, anguish and tears are unlikely to surface in academic accounts.

8.6 Refocusing the gaze

What Bumochir and other scholars who have focused on environmental movements fail to mention is that women's rights/human rights NGOs have supported environmental struggles. Furthermore, the 'Quota Battle' showed only one example of the degree of misogyny in the Mongolian society, reinforced by the traditionalist, nationalist and capitalist patriarchal discourses. Environmental groups often use images of sex workers with Chinese men as symbols of women's betrayal of their nation. They also explicitly join with ultra-nationalist groups who openly target sex workers in the name of defending national security and purity of the Mongolian blood. That women's NGOs are targeted for criticisms of importing western culture needs to be examined more closely, especially when male neoliberal thinkers have presumably had far more influence in importing western ideas and policies.

Perhaps, the most illustrious example is B. Batbayar (Baabar) who is reportedly most widely read and highly popular among young males. One of his fans, Dori Ider, has created a fan club blog entitled "Baabar said so" (Ider, n.d.), where he reposts Baabar's writings, giving the following reason for doing so:

> I am a simple young Mongolian man. … I like reading Baabar's essays. In a sense, I am his loyal fan. Of course, I do not agree with everything he says. However, I respect and love him as an intellectual, classical *sekheeten* (intellectual) and a great thinker who emerged as a leader of my parents' generation. Most importantly, he is "someone who has become recognized." No matter in what part of the universe I am traveling, I have frequently seen people around me ask each other "What's new with Baabar? Has Baabar written good essays lately? Whereabouts is he?" I resolved to create this blog to publish his essays and interviews so that his words could reach many more people. Let us learn from Baabar, debate and also critique him! [italics in original] (Ider, n.d.).

On his blog, Ider emphasized the following quote from Baabar's 2006 interview as the 'quote of the week':

I have always said to young people. That the first thing they need to do is to stand up on their own feet. Otherwise the world is full of problems. Mongolia is headed the wrong way, we have chosen the wrong leaders, will we become China's colony, and, further, the ozone layer of the atmosphere has a hole, or global warming is threatening us, lots of problems. But the first challenge for the young person is for you to get up on your feet. So long as you haven't gotten up to stand on your feet, you won't be able to solve any of those problems. Before anything else, think about how to create wealth, how to find your place in the society. There is no need to leave the task in front of you worrying about the ozone layer when you don't have a spare pair of socks. Darn your socks, then become financially independent from your parents, then grow enough strength to provide for them to repay their *ach* (support and care). So go systematically like this and then, when you have become as rich as Bill Gates, solve that ozone. Give money to the cause, send a rocket to the space, right? There is no need to quit your school, drink vodka in frustration, or write poetry in excitement because [of being upset that] the government is not doing right. Before then, your prime objective is to find your place in the society. (Ider, n.d.)

Given the influence of such figures and their oppressively elitist and sexist views, it appears necessary to refocus the gaze on the more influential drivers of neoliberalism in the Mongolian society. While it is important for us to continue looking inside to carefully and critically identify the ways in which we may have been complicit with the overarching hegemonic structures, it appears equally important to take a careful look at the 'rest' of the much broader civil society, the plethora of organizations that are more tightly intertwined with power centres such as the state, political parties, corporations and development agencies. This includes the need to closely examine the causes behind the proliferation of 'NGOs,' for example from 5,879 registered NGOs in 2011 to a whopping 12,851 in 2016 (National Statistical Office of Mongolia, 2017). A more detailed and sober look at the actual make-up of the so-called 'civil society' and the 'NGO sector' is needed. In the Mongolian context, while the critical gaze of scholars has been focused on women-led NGOs, powerful men who yield far more influence over the people and state policies appear to escape the same scrutiny.

8.7 Limitations of the research

This research did not cover the developments in the country and in the 'civil society'/NGO sector after 2008. Although my contention is that the underlying trends have not changed much, there have been notable shifts in the development agencies, new avenues for funding such as monitoring public procurement and new actors who compete for funding against NGOs such as consultancy companies. Furthermore, there has been increased funding for youth since 2014.[217] The youth groups have grown in number, in a large measure thanks to the support of our small community. This signifies an ascendance of a new generation of activists, people who were born after the 'transition' and are more adapted to the market economy and neoliberal ideology. By and large, the youth have not engaged in, nor have we been able to guide them towards, a systematic critique of neoliberalism. Without a strong understanding of a structural nature of our challenges, the new generation of leaders may not effectively lead the way to social change. Exploring more recent trends would shed light on these issues.

I wrote the chapter on the 1990s with a constant feeling of regret that I could not reach rummage in the stacks of boxes containing my personal archives. I was in New Zealand, the boxes were in Ulaanbaatar. We were not thoroughly computerized in the 1990s and our files were stored, if they were electronically stored, on floppy disks that are now obsolete. I had not anticipated this thesis would evolve into a historical one and was, therefore, unprepared for the possible need to access my archives. I had the same regret about not having access to my old photos. From around 2000, most of our files, including photos, were electronically available. Photos made a big difference in aiding my and my colleagues' memory. Luckily, I was able to access some old photos *via* Facebook. Having access to the old documents and photos would have been ideal.

I also often wished I could converse with my colleagues face to face, especially when it was about remembering long-ago events. I did have many conversations with my colleagues over Facebook and we were often amazed at how much we had forgotten and how we were able

---

[217] For example, both UNDP and UNFPA have run programs for youth. OSF has also been engaging youth and supporting youth groups financially.

to aid each other's memory. In some cases, we were able to piece together some of the events. Others we could not remember at all, even important things such as the large newspaper articles published by 'democratic' men to discredit out battle over the quota. None of us had kept those articles as evidence. While the purpose of reconstructing memory is not fundamentally about finding the 'truth,' having more immediate interactions with my colleagues would have helped to make the stories 'fuller.'

I also consider it a limitation of this thesis that I was unable to include important stories that would more clearly show the breadth and the depth of our activist labour with all its joys and anguishes. I enumerate some of these untold stories in the next section.

8.8 Stories left untold, left to be told

There are a number of stories that I particularly regret not having been able to include. These include the following:

8.8.1 The annual "Through Women's Eyes" forum

One of the key 'things' women activists *do* is organize public discussions, consultations and forums. The foremost example, as pointed out by the workshop participants and other colleagues, is the annual "Through Women's Eyes" forum, organized every year from 2006 to 2017 by MONFEMNET. This forum evolved as a multi-faceted independent space led by women's rights/human rights activists. It functioned as an important mechanism for strengthening and broadening the national movement for social change (gender equality, human rights, substantive democracy and social justice). The format/vehicle of the forum as well as other public discussions (whether called round table discussions - although round tables are rarely in sight - policy discussions, or consultations) have had to be learnt, analyzed (whether explicitly or implicitly), reflected on, created and re-created. There has been an intensive process of learning by doing and experimenting, which seems to be the essence of all work done by women activists in postsocialist Mongolia.

8.8.2 What really happens in our workshops

Most people outside our community and those who have not attended our training workshops misunderstand the nature of our workshops. Many who come to our sessions for

the first time expect to sit behind desks and take notes while we are lecturing or even to take a nap in the back of the room. Many are initially shocked, especially when they see us dancing before, during and after workshops, or when we begin to rearrange the hall by removing all the desks. Our training workshops have evolved into deeply participatory processes, capable of creating safe and comfortable spaces, encouraging open sharing, reflection, collective analysis and critical knowledge production, confidence-building, personal and collective transformation and solidarity-building. Often, our workshops are very emotional and these emotions have furthered our insights and strengthened our bonds.

8.8.3 Tanks, Tractors and Ninjas

In 2002, women activists supported northern farm workers who came to Ulaanbaatar to protest against unjust land laws. They were harassed by the local and central governments, maligned by the state-controlled media and subjected to mass arrests and physical abuse. In 2008, we mobilized to document human rights abuses by the state after the post-election violence and provided legal aid to the most vulnerable victims. Through this process, we gathered data and insights that appear to be missing in all existing accounts of the July 1st events. In 2010, we connected with artisanal miners, denigrated as 'ninjas' and learned that what happened in 2008 had been happening to them for years outside public attention. Our longitudinal perspectives and experiential witnessing of these events hold a strong potential of producing a deeper and more nuanced analyses of the workings of power structures in postsocialist Mongolia.

8.8.4 Material conditions of activist labor

What I was unable to do in this thesis is to take a systematic look at the kinds of labor – paid, underpaid and unpaid – women perform in our NGO community to highlight the physical, emotional and material costs of activist labor and their distribution among so-called stakeholders, particularly the state and international and bilateral development organizations. There is a need to take a closer look at the gendered and classed constructions of the NGO sector and civil society, to identify the ideological and practical mechanisms whereby women are encouraged to enter and stay in these spaces and how they are contained therein.

8.8.5 The politics of language and translation

As I wrote in the introduction, we had consciously engaged in discussions on key concepts, terms, their meanings, translations, interpretations and reconstructions of their meanings. This translation, interpretation and conceptualization has been an important part of our activist labor. Looking more deeply into this aspect of our activism will shed light on how seemingly universal concepts 'travel,' or do not, how local activists constructively or not so constructively engage with imported concepts, and how we domesticate, appropriate or resist them. An example would be our definition of the human rights-based approach, which was based on the UN definition but also enriched by the people-centered approaches from the Asia-Pacific.

8.8.6 Contradictions of the market approach to NGOs

This is an important area that needs to be systematically analyzed. At some point, international development organizations switched from grant-based funding for NGOs to tender-based funding. This shift was not merely about a mode of funding but about recasting NGOs from important actors in democratization and development to merely contractual service-providers who must offer the best (read: lowest) price and for the best (read: higher than the price) service or product and cater to the wishes of the paying customer. While NGOs are thus treated as any business in terms of competition, they are not allowed to own their assets, which are, in our cases, usually intellectual products such as training programs.

Through standard contracts, UN agencies, for instance, assume ownership of all intellectual and other products produced or acquired with 'their' funding (even when the funding does not cover the full cost of their production). Thus, our training programs become their property or, at best, our joint property. Frequently, these intellectual products are casually handed over to another NGO that may be competing for the same funds. This is a dangerously perverse system in which NGOs are systematically deprived of their hard-earned comparative advantage while being systematically pitted against each other to compete for the same meager funds. NGOs are thus encouraged to shamelessly appropriate the fruits of each other's labor or refuse to share their products, thereby limiting their potential positive impact

on society. In either scenario, the trust is broken, undermining the potential for solidarity and collective action.

8.9 Final reflections

In an interview, Anzaldúa (1999) explained the process by which she develops her ideas as follows:

> First there has to be something that is bothering me, something emotional so that I will be upset, angry or conflicted. Then I start meditating on it. … Usually I come up with something visual of what I am feeling … and I try to put that into words. So behind this feeling there is this image, this visual, and I have to figure out what the articulation of this image is. That's how I get into the theory. I start theorizing about it. But it always comes from a feeling. (p. 60)

This is very much how this research project originated and evolved. As I narrated in the introduction, this research arose from my activist experience. To be more precise, it arose from a feeling of anger, hurt and pure exhaustion. As I proceeded through the research, some of my anger and hurt, especially that caused by intra-community conflicts, were healed as I saw them more as effects of the external forces that pit us against each other. However, new ones arose as I began to see the extent to which the space of civil society and the NGO sector have been sites of not only empowerment but also, if not more, of containment, disempowerment, fragmentation and exploitation of women's energies, commitments and ultimately, lives.

I kept thinking, hypothetically, what might the political space look like in postsocialist Mongolia had the romanticized discourse on civil society not become hegemonic and the donor-funded NGO sector had not been opened up? Would the women have stayed inside the political parties and fought out their spaces within them? Would they have found themselves largely inside the channels that lead to direct state power? How is it that so much more energy and funding was poured into channelling women into the nominally non-partisan NGOs and so little, by comparison, into supporting women to carve out bases of power inside political society? And how is it that women's NGOs were so poorly supported despite this channelling? Now the answer seems to be that, in the neoliberal scheme of

things, NGOs were more useful for cutting public spending on social services for the public. Since the goal was to cut costs, NGOs were never going to be sustainably funded.

On the other hand, this space has been an amazing journey for us as women and as activists. We have developed greater capacity to work together, to make sense of our realities together, to create something new and to recreate something old. We have learned to stand tall and speak loudly as if the flimsy foundations of our fragile organizations were blocks of granite. We have learned to look power in the eyes and speak our truths without mincing words, so we could all 'live in truth.' We have been weaving new patterns into, onto, under, above and beside our society's torn fabric, thread by tiny thread, piece by little piece, recycling experiences, knowledges and values and playing with new ones. These new patterns are incomplete, patchy, often mismatched but sometimes seamless, marred by holes and blotches and brightened by sparkles and flowers. There have been tears but more often there has been laughing, even when nothing was funny. The laughing has been happy, sad, triumphant, defiant, frustrated, challenging, comforting, self-deprecating, self-reassuring. There has always been laughing.

To go back to the questions I posed at the beginning:

- Have we, as women, been empowered or exploited through the NGO sector? YES and YES
- Is working through civil society the right strategy to achieve our goals for social change? NEED TO THINK MORE
- Have we unwittingly corroborated the neoliberal reforms through our activism? YES and NO
- Have we been sufficiently savvy about the interconnections between patriarchy, democracy, market economy, and neoliberal globalization? NO

One thing this research journey made clear to me is that no one will tell our stories as we can. It is even more dangerous when male academics legitimated by western universities write their biased texts over our experiences, either making us invisible or painting us as Mongolian

Malinches,[218] traitors to the nation, the ages-old witch-hunting disguised in academic tongue. Uncritical transpositions of postcolonial critiques of civil society and NGO-ization grown on other soils with other histories and power configurations and casual repetitions of established dichotomies between social movements and NGOs result in the same colonization of the complexity and contradictions of our activist lives. More of us, women activists, need to engage in auto-research from our specific postsocialist Mongolian locations. We need to tell many more stories from our lived experiences to make indents, if not holes, in the walls of invisibility, erasure and misrepresentation.

---

[218] Chicana feminists (Alarcón, 1989; Anzaldúa, 1999; Elenes, 2011) have analysed how the misogynistic construction of La Malinche as a traitor, an Indian woman who "sold" her people to the Spanish conquistadores, lies at the core of male-dominant Mexican and Chicano culture and identity and patriarchal oppression of Mexican and Chicana women.

References

Accessible sources

Adams, T. E., Jones, S. H., & Ellis, C. (2014). *Autoethnography: Understanding qualitative research*. Oxford, England: Oxford University Press.

Alarcón, N. (1989). Traddutora, traditora: A paradigmatic figure of Chicana feminism. *Cultural Critique*(13). Retrieved from https://www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/1354269

Amarsanaa, J. (2013). Mongol uls dakhi irgenii niigmiin sudalgaany toim [Literature review of the studies of civil society in Mongolia]. In J. Amarsanaa & D. Baasansuren (Eds.), *Mongol dakhi irgenii niigmiin tuluvshil* [Formation of civil society in Mongolia] (pp. 5-17). Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia: ADMON.

Amarsanaa, J., & Baasansuren, D. (Eds.). (2013). *Mongol dakhi irgenii niigmiin tuluvshil* [Formation of civil society in Mongolia]. Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia: ADMON.

Amarsanaa, S. (2015, February 26). Ardchilsan khuvisgalyn tovchoon [The chronology of the Democratic revolution] [Facebook post]. Retrieved from https://www.facebook.com/Mongoliademrevolution/posts/776528132431919?__xts__[0]=68.ARD_9nqFNyLozUsxh-fMeHeS9DV3ffHg4u4psTTKwXVEGfV8lET26N3QyS-EydEHuR6pgXqAHSqksDJRAf9205IUmu0UMcbK99UT4itpr5Z5QDw86oIA4RNwikY32_TP3J0xX_E_QtKek5TWQaqvyDTxwueMTqXfEYY5EYgsV5tZxJvvcKJzj59GulLBdiiEd5cw3W4G9pPKEN3ZB6PBVyePbHlfTji_vq5-7POZMOOS39jf0PaQRPOL6-w4uKIxUJVp3eWryHr7KyuUYrx8LwtmrNWtCIAEMk-r7gYIilf6HnVngPMyZj7bp6FRfslRlkKH_4BMc5mIHFDbjFE&__tn__=-R

Amartuvshin Dorj. (2014, November 30). "Erkh chuluund suurilsan hugjliin tukhai yaria" tsuvral lekts-yariltslagyn ene doloo honogiin zochnoor MUIS-Khuuli zuin surguuliin bagsh, Khuuli zuin doktor O. MUNKHSAIKHAN "Khunii erkhem chanar buyu human dignity" sedveer neelttei yariltsana [This week's guest for the "Freedom-based talk about development" lecture-discussion series guest MNU Law school lecturer O. MUNKHSAIKHAN, Ph.D. in law, will talk openly under the topic of "Khunii erkhem chanar or human dignity"] [Facebook post]. Retrieved from https://www.facebook.com/groups/freemarketcenter/permalink/764776763615791/

Ankhny ulsturiin ulsgulun [The first political hunger strike]. (2015, March 9). *Ugluunii sonin*. Retrieved from https://news.mn/r/689391/

Anzaldúa, G. (1999). *Borderlands/La frontera. The new Mestiza* (2nd ed.). San Francisco, CA: Aunt Lute Books.

Aronoff, M., & Kubik, J. (2012). What can political scientists learn about civil society from anthropologists? In *Anthropology & political science : A convergent approach* (pp. 198-239). New York, NY: Berghahn Books.

Asian Development Bank. (2009). *Country poverty asessment* [Draft]. Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia: Author.

Assa.mn. (2014, December 7). Shine devshilt kholboo ba Mongolyn Undesnii Shine Devshliin Nam [New Progress Union and Mongolian National New Progress Party]. Retrieved from http://www.assa.mn/a/27250

Assa.mn. (2014, November 26). Ankhny doloo [The first seven]. Retrieved from http://www.assa.mn/a/26911

Astrada, S. R. (2010). Exporting the rule of law to Mongolia: Post-socialist legal and judicial reforms. *Denver Journal of International Law and Policy, 38*(3), 461-525. Retrieved from https://heinonline.org/HOL/Page?handle=hein.journals/denilp38&div=17&id=&page=&collection=journals

Atal, Y. (1999). Introduction. In Y. Atal (Ed.), *Poverty in transition and transition in poverty. Recent developments in Hungary, Bulgaria, Romania, Georgia, Russia and Mongolia* (pp. 1-32). New York, NY: Berghahn Books and UNESCO Publishing.

Baabar. (2007, November 25). Togtvortoi baidlyn geree ba luivar [Sustainability agreements and fraud]. Retrieved from https://www.forum.mn/p_pdf.php?obj_id=1974

Baasansuren, D., & Bold-Erdene, D. (2013). Irgenii niigem dekh sonirkhlyn buleg ba uls turiin nam [Interest groups in civil society and political parties]. In J. Amarsanaa & D. Baasansuren (Eds.), *Mongol dakhi irgenii niigmiin tuluvshil* [Formation of civil society in Mongolia] (pp. 45-55). Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia: ADMON.

Bagchi, A. K. (2008). *Perilous passage: Mankind and the global ascendancy of capital*. Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield.

Bair, J. (2015). Taking aim at the New International Economic Order. In P. Mirowski & D. Plehwe (Eds.), *The road from Mont Pelerin: The making of the neoliberal thought collective* (pp. 347-385). Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Balleza, M. C. (1998). Woman in action: Vanessa Griffin shares her views about the place she calls home. Retrieved from http://www.isiswomen.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=551

Baran, P. A. (1957). *The political economy of growth*. New York, NY: Monthly Review Press.

Bars, B. (2014, May 26). "Shine uye" nuuts bulgemees ekhtei ardchillyn khudulguun [Democratic movement emerged from the Shine uye secret group]. *Fact.mn*. Retrieved from http://www.fact.mn/169954.html

Batchuluun, B. (2010). *Erkh chuluunii daisan: Libertari uzliin undsuud* [The enemy of freedom. The foundations of liberarianism]. Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia: MONSUDAR Publishing House.

Batsumberel, N. (2014, June 12). MAN ba MAKhN neriin tuukhiig sukhukhui [Reopening the history of the names MPP and MPRP]. *Sonin.mn*. Retrieved from http://www.sonin.mn/news/easy-page/28346

Bawden, C. R. (2009). *The modern history of Mongolia*. New York, NY: Routledge.

Bayartsetseg, A. (2014). Shok emchilgee: Neoliberalizm Mongold irsen ni [Shock therapy: Arrival of neoliberalism in Mongolia]. *Shinjeech, III*(1), 44-62.

Beck, L. (2008, June 30). Mongolians await result of dead heat election race. Retrieved from https://www.reuters.com/article/mongolia/mongolians-await-result-of-dead-heat-election-race-idUSPEK27165720080630

Behar, R. (1993). *Translated woman. Crossing the border with Esperanza's story*. Boston, MA: Beacon Press.

Bernal, V., & Grewal, I. (Eds.). (2014). *NGOization: States, feminisms, and neoliberalism*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

BMV897. (2012, January 22). I don't think you've given due credit to Mr. Munkhbayar, or to the United Movement for Mongolian Rivers and Lakes (which started with Ongii River Movement and Mongolian Nature Protection Coalition) [Comment on "Mine, all mine"]. Retrieved from https://www.economist.com/node/21543113/comments

Boikova, E. (2002). Russians in Mongolia in the late 19th-early 20th centuries. *Mongolian Studies, 25*, 13-20.

Boldbaatar, J., Sanjdorj, M., & Shirendev, B. (Eds.). (2003). *Mongol ulsyn tuukh* [History of Mongolia] (Vol. V). Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia: The Institute of History of the Mongolian Academy of Sciences.

Bradford, S. (2014). *A major left wing think tank in Aotearoa: An impossible dream or a call to action?* (Doctoral thesis, Auckland University of Technology, Auckland, New Zealand). Retrieved from http://aut.researchgateway.ac.nz/handle/10292/7435

Bugd Nairamdakh Mongol Ard Ulsyn ankhdugaar Undsen khuuli [The first consitution of the People's Republic of Mongolia]. (1924). Retrieved from http://tuuh_niigem.blog.gogo.mn/read/entry361153

Bulag, U. E. (1998). *Nationalism and hybridity in Mongolia*. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.

Bulag, U. E. (2009, January/February). Mongolia in 2008: From Mongolia to Mine-golia. *Asian Survey, 49*(1), 129-134.

Bulganzaya, T. (2007, May 25). B. Delgermaa: Emegteichuudiin kvotyg khuulichilsan ni tom amjilt [B. Delgermaa: The legalization of women's quota is a big success]. *Ardyn Erkh, 104*(636). Retrieved from http://archive.olloo.mn/modules.php?name=News&file=article&sid=57739

Bumochir, D. (2018). Mongolia. In A. Ogawa (Ed.), *Routledge handbook of civil society in Asia* (pp. 95-109). London, England: Routledge.

Burawoy, M., & Verdery, C. (Eds.). (1999). *Uncertain transition: Ethnographies of change in the postsocialist world*. Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield.

Burchell, G. (1991). Peculiar interests: Civil society and 'the system of natural liberty'. In G. Burchell, C. Gordon, & P. Miller (Eds.), *The Foucault effect* (pp. 110-150). Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press.

Burchell, G., Gordon, C., & Miller, P. (Eds.). (1991). *The Foucault effect*. Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press.

Buyandelger, M. (2008). Post-post-transition theories: Walking on multiple paths. *Annual Review of Anthropology, 37*, 235-250. Retrieved from https://www.annualreviews.org/doi/abs/10.1146/annurev.anthro.37.081407.085214

Buyandelger, M. (2013). *Tragic spirits: Shamanism, memory, and gender in contemporary Mongolia*. Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press.

Center for Citizens' Alliance. (2006). *State of civil society in Mongolia: 2004-2005 civil society index report for Mongolia*. Retrieved from https://cswatch.org/user/37/article/civicus-civil-society-index-country-report-mongolia

Central Intelligence Agency. (2000, August). *(Deleted) The Asia Foundation*. Retrieved from https://www.cia.gov/library/readingroom/document/0001088617

Chandrasekhar, C. P. (2015). A window of enlightenment? Revisiting Bretton Woods to reinterpret the history of hegemony. *Development and Change, 46*(6), 1401-1414. https://doi.org/10.1111/dech.12202

Chari, S., & Verdery, K. (2009). Thinking between the posts: Postcolonialism, postsocialism, and ethnography after the Cold War. *Comparative Studies in Society and History, 51*(1), 6-34. Retrieved from http://www.jstor.org/stable/27563729

Chatterjee, P. (1993). *The nation and its fragments: Colonial and postcolonial histories*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Chimid, E., Ginsburg, T., Amarjargal, P., Batchimeg, M., Davaadulam, T., Odonkhuu, M., & Solongo, D. (2016). *Assessment of the performance of the 1992 Constitution of Mongolia*. Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia: United Nations Development Program & Parliament of Mongolia.

Choudry, A., & Kapoor, D. (Eds.). (2010). *Learning from the ground up: Global perspectives on social movements and knowledge production*. New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan. Retrieved from http://ebookcentral.proquest.com

Choudry, A., & Kapoor, D. (Eds.). (2013). *NGOization: Complicity, contradictions and prospects*. London, England: Zed Books. Retrieved from http://ebookcentral.proquest.com

Chuluunbaatar, G. (2013). Orchin uyeiin irgenii niigmiin unet zuil, shalguur uzuulelt [Contemporary civil society's values and criteria]. In J. Amarsanaa & D. Baasansuren (Eds.), *Mongol dakhi irgenii niigmiin tuluvshil* [Formation of civil society in Mongolia] (pp. 118-145). Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia: ADMON.

Chuluunbaatar, G., & Gan-Ulzii, C. (2013). Irgenii niigmiin sudalgaany philosophi, arga zuin asuudal [Philosophical and methodological questions of civil society study]. In J. Amarsanaa & D. Baasansuren (Eds.), *Mongol dakhi irgenii niigmiin tuluvshil* [Formation of civil society in Mongolia] (pp. 18-30). Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia: ADMON.

Chuluunjav, D. (2012). *Irgenii niigem ba ardchilsan bie khun* [Civil society and the democratic person]. Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia: Institute of Philosophy and Sociology of the Academy of Sciences.

CIVICUS. (2011). *CIVICUS civil society index: Assessing and strengthening civil society worldwide*. Retrieved from https://www.civicus.org/index.php/media-resources/reports-publications/1885-civicus-civil-society-index-assessing-and-strengthening-civil-society-worldwide

Civil Society Monitoring for Fair Elections Network. (2008, July 14). Mongol Ulsyn Ikh Khurlyn 2008 ony songuuliin negdsen dun [Compiled results of the 2008 election of the Mongolian State Great Khural]. Retrieved from http://sanal.mn/story/236/2008-07-14

Civil Society Monitoring for Fair Elections Network. (n.d.). [Webpage]. Retrieved June 11, 2018, from http://www.sanal.mn

Collier, S. J., & Ong, A. (2005a). Global assemblages, anthropological problems. In *Global assemblages: Technology, politics, and ethics as anthropological problems* (pp. 3-53). Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing. Retrieved from http://ebookcentral.proquest.com

Collier, S. J., & Ong, A. (Eds.). (2005b). *Global assemblages: Technology, politics, and ethics as anthropological problems*. Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing.

Collins, P., & Gallinat, A. (Eds.). (2010). *The ethnographic self as resource: Writing memory and experience into ethnography*. New York, NY: Berghahn Books.

Comaroff, J. L., & Comaroff, J. (Eds.). (1999). *Civil society and the political imagination in Africa*. Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press.

Combellick-Bidney, S. (2012). Mongolia's mining controversies and the politics of place. In J. Dierkes (Ed.), *Change in democratic Mongolia: Social relations, health, mobile pastoralism, and mining* (pp. 271-296). Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill.

Constitution of Mongolia. (n.d.). Retrieved from http://www.crc.gov.mn/en/k/xf/1q

Consulting and Business Center of the Academy of Management, Gender Center for Sustainable Development, & Consulting Unit LLP. (2000). *Turiin bus baiguullaguudyn niigmiin salbart kheregjuulsen tusul, khutulburiin sudalgaa* [Study of projects and programs implemented by NGOs in the social sector]. Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia: UNDP.

Coston, J. M., & Butz, J. L. (1999). Mastering information: The birth of citizen-initiated voter education in Mongolia. *International Journal of Organizational Theory and Behavior, 2*(1&2), 107-139.

D'Souza, R. (2018). *What's wrong with rights? Social movements, law and liberal imaginations*. London, England: Pluto Press.

Dalaibuyan, B. (2012). Mobilizing against dispossession: Gold mining and a local resistance movement in Mongolia. *Journal of the Center for Northern Humanities, 5*, 13-32.

Das, M., Kar, S., & Nawn, N. (Eds.). (2016). *Economic challenges for the contemporary world: Essays in honour of Prabhat Patnaik*. New Delhi, India: Sage Publications.

Dasha, G. (2016, May 21). 26 jil zavsarlasan zaluu uran buteelchdiin zuvluguun bolno [Young artists' convention to be held after a 26-year hiatus]. Retrieved from http://eagle.mn

Davaasuren, E. (2008). Undesnii uzel ba emegteichuud [Nationalism and women]. In MONFEMNET National Network (Ed.), *Emegteichuudiin erkh ba khevlel medeelel (Tavan keis sudalgaa)* [Women's rights and media (five case studies)] (pp. 1-18). Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia: Munkhiin Useg Group.

DeFrancis, J. (1993). *In the footsteps of Chinggis Khan*. Honolulu, Hawaii: Hawaii Press.

Democracy Education Center (DEMO). (2005). *NGOs in Mongolia. Survey report*. Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia: Open Society Forum.

Dierkes, J. (2015, June 8). Planning for 2016 UIKh Election. *Mongolia Focus [blog]*. Retrieved from http://blogs.ubc.ca/mongolia

Dosman, E. (December 2001). Markets and the state in the evolution of the "Prebisch manifesto" *CEPAL Review, 75*, 86-102. Retrieved from https://www.cepal.org

Elenes, C. A. (2011). *Transforming borders: Chicana/o popular culture and pedagogy*. Lanham, MD: Lexington Books.

Enkhbat. (2008, June 10). Datakomyn Enkhbat Forumyn Enkhbat bolson tuukh [The story of how Datakom Enkhbat became Forum Enkhbat]. Retrieved from https://enkhbat.typepad.com/media/2008/06/

Enkhtsetseg, D. (2015, December 11). Uls turiin nam, evsel, ner devshigch songuuliin sankhuujiltaa [sic.] yaaj burduuldeg ni todorkhoi bus [Election financing of political parties, coalitions and candidates is unclear]. Retrieved from http://vip76.mn/content/37174

Eruugiin khuuli (shinechilsen nairuulga) [Criminal code (revised law)]. (2015). Retrieved from https://www.legalinfo.mn/

Escobar, A. (1995). *Encountering development: The making and unmaking of the Third World*. Princeton, N.J: Princeton University Press.

Ewing, T. E. (1980). Chi'ing policies in Outer Mongolia 1900-1911. *Modern Asian Studies, 14*(1), 145-157.

Falk, B. J. (2018). The power of the powerless and Václav Havel's "responsibilityism". *East European Politics and Societies and Cultures, 32*(2), 328-333. https://doi.org/10.1177/0888325417745130

Ferguson, J., & Gupta, A. (2002). Spatializing states: Toward an ethnography of neoliberal governmentality. *American Ethnologist, 29*(4), 981-1002. Retrieved from http://www.jstor.org/stable/3805165

Fernandes, L. (1997). *Producing workers: The politics of gender, class, and culture in the Calcutta jute mills*. Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press.

Fernandes, L. (1999). Reading "India's Bandit Queen": A trans/national feminist perspective on the discrepancies of representation. *Signs, 25*(1), 123-152.

Fernandes, L. (2010). The violence of forgetting. *Critical Asian Studies, 42*(2), 265-272. https://doi.org/10.1080/14672715.2010.486652

Ferrara, A. (2017). Curbing the absolute power of disembedded financial markets: The grammar of counter-hegemonic resistance and the Polanyian narrative. In B. Bargu & C. Bottici (Eds.), *Feminism, capitalism, and critique* (pp. 167-184). Basingstoke, England: Palgrave Macmillan. Retrieved from http://ebookcentral.proquest.com

Fischer, K. (2015). The influence of neoliberals in Chile before, during and after Pinochet. In P. Mirowski & D. Plehwe (Eds.), *The road from Mont Pelerin: The making of the neoliberal thought collective* (pp. 305-346). Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Fish, M. S. (1998). Mongolia: Democracy Without Prerequisites. *Journal of Democracy, 9*(3), 127-141. https://doi.org/10.1353/jod.1998.0044

Foucault, M. (1991a). Governmentality. In G. Burchell, C. Gordon, & P. Miller (Eds.), *The Foucault effect* (pp. 87-104). Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press.

Foucault, M. (1991b). Questions of method. In G. Burchell, C. Gordon, & P. Miller (Eds.), *The Foucault effect* (pp. 73-86). Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press.

Foucault, M. (1994a). Truth and juridical forms. In J. D. Faubion (Ed.), *Power. Essential works of Foucault 1954-1984* (Vol. 3, pp. 1-89). London, England: Penguin Books.

Foucault, M. (1994b). Truth and power. In J. D. Faubion (Ed.), *Power. Essential works of Foucault 1954-1984* (Vol. 3, pp. 111-133). London, England: Penguin Books.

Foucault, M. (2008). *The birth of biopolitics: Lectures at the College de France, 1978-79* (G. Burchell, Trans.). Basingstoke, England: Palgrave Macmillan. Retrieved from http://ebookcentral.proquest.com

Fritz, V. (2008). Mongolia: The rise and travails of a deviant democracy. *Democratization, 15*(4), 766-788. https://doi.org/10.1080/12510340802191060

Gal, D. (2008, September 12). Saidyn tuslakh Kh. Khulan [Minister's aide Kh. Khulan]. *Unuudur newspaper*. Retrieved from http://news.gogo.mn

Gellner, E. (1994). *Conditions of liberty: civil society and its rivals*. London, England: Hamish Hamilton.

Gereltuya, A., Falkingham, J., & Brown, J. (2007). Determinants of current contraceptive use and method choice in Mongolia. *Journal of Biosocial Science, 39*, 801-817. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0021932007002003

Gilmour, J. (1976). Mongolian Girls. *Journal of the Anglo-Mongolian Society, 3*(2).

Ginsburg, T. (1997). Mongolia in 1996: Fighting Fire and Ice. *Asian Survey, 37*(1), 60-64. https://doi.org/10.1525/as.1997.37.1.01p0201i

Ginsburg, T. (1998). Mongolia in 1997: Deepening democracy. *Asian Survey, 38*(1), 64-68.

Globe International NGO. (2006, February 15). "Free Press" project - a DANIDA project with success. Retrieved from http://www.globeinter.org.mn/?cmd=Record&id=163&menuid=204

Government of Mongolia. (1996). *National Program on the Advancement of Women until 2000*. Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia

Government of Mongolia. (2002). *Jenderiin tegsh baidlyg khangakh undesnii khutulbur* [National program on ensuring gender equality]. Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia: Author.

Government of Mongolia. (2015). *Mongolia's national report "Managing the transition from the Millennium Development Goals to the Sustainable Development Goals"*. Ulaanbaatar

Gramsci, A. (1972). *Selections from the prison notebooks of Antonio Gramsci*. New York, NY: International Publishers.

Grant Thornton. (n.d.). *Financial statements and report of independent certified public accountants. The Asia Foundation. Years ended September 30, 2008 and 2007*. Retrieved from https://asiafoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/2016-0930-The-Asia-Foundation-FS.pdf

Hamann, T. H. (2009). Neoliberalism, governmentality, and ethics. *Foucault Studies,*(6), 37-59.

Hardin, C. (2014). Finding the 'neo' in neoliberalism. *Cultural Studies, 28*(2), 199-221. https://doi.org/10.1080/09502386.2012.748815

Harvey, D. (2007). *A brief history of neoliberalism*. Oxford, England: Oxford University Press. Retrieved from http://ebookcentral.proquest.com

Haug, F. (2008). Memory work. *Australian Feminist Studies, 23*(58), 537-541. https://doi.org/10.1080/08164640802433498

Heineman, E. D. (2001). Whose mothers? Generational difference, war, and the Nazi cult of motherhood. *Journal of Women's History, 12*(4), 139-164. https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1353/jowh.2001.0010

Helleiner, E. (2014). *Forgotten foundations of Bretton Woods: International development and the making of the postwar order*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.

Helms, E. (2014). The movementization of NGOs? Women's organizing in postwar Bosnia-Herzegovina. In V. Bernal & I. Grewal (Eds.), *NGOization: States, feminisms, and neoliberalism* (pp. 21-49). Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

History and Archeology Department of the Mongolian Academy of Sciences. (n.d.-a). Ardchilsan khuvisgal [Democratic revolution]. In *Mongolyn tuukhiin tailbar toli* [Mongolian historical dictionary]. Retrieved from https://mongoltoli.mn

History and Archeology Department of the Mongolian Academy of Sciences. (n.d.-b). Bukh ard tumnii sanal khuraalt [Universal referendum]. In *Mongolyn tuukhiin tailbar toli* [Mongolian historical dictionary]. Retrieved from https://mongoltoli.mn

History and Archeology Department of the Mongolian Academy of Sciences. (n.d.-c). Khun amyn usult [Population growth]. In *Mongolyn tuukhiin tailbar toli* [Mongolian historical dictionary]. Retrieved from https://mongoltoli.mn

Hobsbawm, E. J. (1992). Nations and nationalism since 1780 (2nd ed.). Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

Horn, R. V., & Mirowski, P. (2015). The rise of the Chicago School of Economics and the birth of neoliberalism. In P. Mirowski & D. Plehwe (Eds.), *The road from Mont Pelerin: The making of the neoliberal thought collective* (pp. 139-178). Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Human Rights under State of Emergency Monitoring and Protection Coalition. (2008). *Barimtjuulaltyn tailan* [Documentation report]. Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia: Open Society Forum.

Humphrey, C. (1993). Women, taboo, and the suppression of attention. In S. Ardener (Ed.), *Defining females: The nature of women in society* (pp. 73-92). Providence, RI: Berg Publishers Limited.

Humphrey, C. (1996). Myth-making, narratives, and the dispossessed in Russia. *The Cambridge Journal of Anthropology, 19*(2), 70-92.

Humphrey, C. (Ed.). (2002). *The unmaking of Soviet life: Everyday economies after socialism*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.

Huntington, S. P. (1991). *The third wave. Democratization in the late twentieth century*. Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press.

Hussey, I. (2012). "Political activist as ethnographer" revisited. *Canadian Journal of Sociology, 37*(1), 1-23.

ICSF Secretariat. (2003). *Draft narrative report. Civil society review round table discussion. August 14-15, 2003, Ulaanbaatar* [Personal archives]. Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia: Author.

Ider, D. (n.d.). Baabar ingej uguulev [Baabar said so] [Blog]. Retrieved from http://baabar.blogspot.com

Ilkhamov, A. (2001). Impoverishment of the masses in the transition period: Signs of an emerging 'new poor' identity in Uzbekistan. *Central Asian Survey, 20*(1), 33-54. https://doi.org/10.1080/02634930120055442

International Republican Institute. (1996). *Annual report*. Retrieved from http://www.iri.org

International Republican Institute. (2008). *Mongol Ulsyn Ikh Khurlyn songuuli. 2008 ony 6 dugaar saryn 29-nii udur. Songuuliin ajiglaltyn etssiin tailan [Mongolia's State Great Khural elections. Jun 29, 2008. Final report on election monitoring]*. Washington, DC: IRI.

IWRAW-AP. (n.d.). *Home page*. Retrieved June 18, 2018, from https://cedaw.iwraw-ap.org

Jambal, A. (2013). Irgenii niigmiin tukhai Gegeli bad Marksyn uzel sanaag kharitsuulakh ni [Comparing the thoughts on civil society of Hegel and Marx]. In J. Amarsanaa & D. Baasansuren (Eds.), *Mongol dakhi irgenii niigmiin tuluvshil* [Formation of civil society in Mongolia] (pp. 110-117). Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia: ADMON.

JDF. (n.d.). *Home page*. Retrieved from http://jargaldefacto.com

Johnson, U. A. (1969, June 7). *Memorandum for Dr. Henry A. Kissinger. The White House*. Washington, DC. Retrieved from https://www.cia.gov/library/readingroom/docs/LOC-HAK-1-5-33-8.pdf

Jordan, S., & Kapoor, D. (2016). Re-politicizing participatory action research: Unmasking neoliberalism and the illusions of participation. *Education Action Research, 24*(1), 134-149. https://doi.org/10.1080/09650792.2015.1105145

Kaplonski, C. (2004). *Truth, history and politics in Mongolia*. London, England: RoutledgeCurzon.

Kaplonski, C. (2011). Archived relations: Repression, rehabilitation and the secret life of documents in Mongolia. *History and Anthropology, 22*(4), 431-444.

Kapoor, D., & Jordan, S. (2009). *Education, participatory action research, and social change: International perspectives*. New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan.

Kelsey, J. (1995). *The New Zealand experiment. A world model for structural adjustment?* Auckland, New Zealand: Auckland University Press & Bridget Williams Books.

Keynes, J. M. (2010). *Essays in persuasion*. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-349-59072-8

Khonkhny duu bidniig seree. (2016, December 21). [The sound of the bell, wake us up]. *Ardchilal newspaper*. Retrieved from http://vip76.mn/content/43847

Khunii erkhiin tugeemel tunkhaglal [Universal declaration of human rights]. (n.d.). Retrieved from http://www.mn-nhrc.org/hrd7/landing.html

Kipnis, A. B. (2008). Audit cultures: Neoliberal governmentality, socialist legacy, or technologies of governing? *American Ethnologist, 35*(2), 275-289. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.2008.1548-1425.00034.x

Klein, N. (2007). *The shock doctrine: The rise of disaster capitalism*. New York, NY: Metropolitan Books.

Konrad Adenauer Stiftung. (n.d.). *Home page*. Retrieved June 1, 2018, from http://www.kas.de

Kregel, J. A. (2006). On the economic implications of (mis)undersatanding markets in transition countries. In K. Robbie & K. Polanyi-Levitt (Eds.), *Karl Polanyi in Vienna: The contemporary significance of The great transformation* (2nd ed., pp. 108-115). Montreal, Canada: Black Rose Books.

Kubik, J. (2013). From transitology to contextual holism: A theoretical trajectory of postcommunist studies. In J. Kubik & A. Linch (Eds.), *Postcommunism from within: Social justice, mobilization, and hegemony* (pp. 27-94). New York, NY: New York University Press.

Kubik, J., & Linch, A. (Eds.). (2013). *Post-communism from within: Social justice, mobilization, and hegemony*. New York, NY: New York University Press.

Landman, T., Larizza, M., & McEvoy, C. (2005). *State of democracy in Mongolia*: International Institute for Democratic and Electoral Assistance (IDEA). Retrieved from https://www.idea.int/sites/default/files/pictures/sodMongolia05.pdf

Larson, F. A. (1930). *Larson, Duke of Mongolia*. Boston, MA: Little, Brown, and Company.

Lattimore, O. (1935). Prince, priest and herdsman in Mongolia. *Pacific Affairs, 8*(1), 35-47.

Lattimore, O. (1941). *Mongol Journeys*. New York, NY: Doubleday, Doran and Co., Inc.

Lattimore, O. (1962). Nomads and comissars. Oxford, England: Oxford University Press.

Library of Congress. Foreign Affairs and National Defense Division. United States. Congress. Senate. Committee on Foreign Relations. (1983). *The Asia Foundation: past, present and future*. Washington, DC: U.S. G.P.O. Retrieved from https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=pur1.32754077268153

Mayden, R. (2010). *Being ethnographic: A guide to the theory and practice of ethnography*. London, England: Sage Publications Ltd.

Mercy Corps. (n.d.). *Home page*. Retrieved from https://www.mercycorps.org

Mercy Corps Mongolia. (n.d.). *Home page*. Retrieved from http://mercycorps.org.mn

Michielsens, M. (2003). Memory frames: The role of concepts and cognition in telling life-stories. In T. Cosslett, C. Lury, & P. Summerfield (Eds.), *Feminism and auto-biography: Texts, theories and methods* (pp. 183-200). London, England: Routledge.

Miller, P., & Rose, N. (2008). *Governing the present: Administering economic, social and personal life*. Malden, MA: Polity Press.

Minh-Ha, T. T. (1991). *When the moon waxes red: Representation, gender and cultural politics*. London, England: Routledge.

Mirowski, P. (2015). Postface. In P. Mirowski & D. Plehwe (Eds.), *The road from Mont Pelerin: The making of the neoliberal thought collective* (pp. 417-455). Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Mirowski, P., & Plehwe, D. (2015a). Preface. In P. Mirowski & D. Plehwe (Eds.), *The road from Mont Pelerin: The making of the neoliberal thought collective* (pp. ix-xxii). Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Mirowski, P., & Plehwe, D. (Eds.). (2015b). *The road from Mont Pelerin: The making of the neoliberal thought collective*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Mohanty, C. T. (1991). Under western eyes: Feminist scholarship and colonial discourses. In C. T. Mohanty, A. Russo, & L. Torres (Eds.), *Third world women and the politics of feminism* (pp. 51-80). Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press.

Mohanty, C. T. (2003a). *Feminism without borders: Decolonizing theory, practicing solidarity*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

Mohanty, C. T. (2003b). "Under western eyes" revisited: Feminist solidarity through anticapitalist struggles. *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society, 28*(2), 499-535. https://doi.org/10.1086/342914

Mongol Ulsyn Ikh Khurlyn tukhai khuuli (shinechilsen nairuulga) [Law on the State Great Khural of Mongolia (revised law)]. (2006). Retrieved from https://www.legalinfo.mn/

Mongol ulsyn Undsen khuuli [Constitution of Mongolia]. (1992). Retrieved from https://www.legalinfo.mn/

Mongolian Women's Federation. (2009). *Taniltsuulga* [Introduction]. Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia: Author.

Moore, B. (1993). *Social origins of dictatorship and democracy: Lord and peasant in the making of the modern world*. Boston, Massachusets: Beacon Press.

Mosher, J. E. (2000). Managing the disentitlement of women: Glorified markets, the idealized family, and the undeserving other. In S. M. Neysmith (Ed.), *Restructuring caring labour. Discourse, state practice, and everyday life* (pp. 30-51). Ontario, Canada: Oxford University Press.

Munkhsaikhan MC Odonkhuu. (2014, April 4). Sain zokhiol buteeluudees orchuulagdaj baigaa ch uls turiin bolon yos surtakhuuny filosofiin suuri oilgoltuud Mongol khelnii onovchtoi ner tomyogoor buuj khevsheegui baina [Although good books and publications are being translated, fundamental concepts of politial and moral philosophy still have not been appropriately translated and introduced into regular use] [Facebook post]. Retrieved from https://www.facebook.com/groups/orchuulga/permalink/765555570123914/

Myadar, O. (2011). Nomads in a fenced land: Land reform in post-socialist Mongolia. *Asian-Pacific Law & Policy Journal, 11*(1), 161-203.

Naim, M. (2000). Fads and fashion in economic reforms: Washington Consensus or Washington Confusion? *Third World Quarterly, 21*(3), 505-528.

Narmandakh, S. (2013). Irgenii niigem - nutgiin uuriin udirdlaga [Civil society - local government]. In J. Amarsanaa & D. Baasansuren (Eds.), *Mongol dakhi irgenii niigmiin tuluvshil* [Formation of civil society in Mongolia] (pp. 103-109). Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia: ADMON.

National Statistical Office of Mongolia. (2007). *Time use survey 2007*. Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia: Author.

National Statistical Office of Mongolia. (2009). *Main output tables of the "Household socio-economic survey 2007-2008"*. Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia: Author.

National Statistical Office of Mongolia. (2017). *Aj akhuin negj, baiguullagyn 2016 ony ulsyn tollogo. Negdsen ur dun* [2016 national census of economic entities and organizations. Summary]. Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia: Author.

National Statistical Office of Mongolia. (n.d.). *Integrated statistical information database*. Retrieved May 17, 2018, from http://www.1212.mn

National Statistical Office of Mongolia, World Bank, & United Nations Development Program. (2004). *Main report of "Household income and expenditure survey/living*

standards measurement survey" 2002-2003. Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia: National Statistical Office of Mongolia.

Newt Gingrich. (n.d.). Retrieved June 4, 2018, from https://www.biography.com

Neysmith, S. M. (Ed.). (2000). *Restructuring caring labour. Discourse, state practice, and everyday life*. Ontario, Canada: Oxford University Press.

Nixson, F., & Walters, B. (1999). Administrative reform and economic development in Mongolia, 1990-1997: A critical perspective. *Policy Studies Review, 16*(2), 147-174.

O'Donnel, G., & Schmitter, P. (1986). *Transitions from authoritarian rule: Tentative conclusions about uncertain democracies*. Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press.

Ochir, A., & Enkhtuvshin, B. (Eds.). (2003). *Mongol ulsyn tuukh* [History of Mongolia] (Vol. IV). Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia: The Institute of History of the Mongolian Academy of Sciences.

Ochir, A., Ishjamts, C. D. N., Natsagdorj, S., Boldbaatar, J., Jamsran, L., Ishdorj, T., & Tseveendorj, D. (Eds.). (2003). *Mongol ulsyn tuukh* [History of Mongolia] (Vol. II). Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia: The Institute of History of the Mongolian Academy of Sciences.

Ong, A. (2006). *Neoliberalism as exception. Mutations in Citizenship and sovereignty*. Durham, England: Duke University Press.

Onon, U. (1972). *My childhood in Mongolia*. London, England: Oxford University Press.

Onon, U. (2001). Introduction. In U. Onon (Ed.), *The Secret History of the Mongols. The life and times of Chinggis Khan* (pp. 1-37). London, England: RoutledgeCurzon Press.

Open Society Forum. (2006). TV Forum [Information sheet]. Retrieved from https://www.forum.mn/p_pdf.php?obj_id=4042

Open Society Forum, Center for Human Rights and Development, Globe International NGO, Philanthropy for Development Center, Human Rights and Law Center, Mongolian Women's Fund, . . . Center for Citizens' Alliance. (2008, July 2). Civil society statement. Retrieved from http://sanal.mn/story/236/2008-07-14

Open Society Forum, Globe International, & IRIM Mongolia. (2008). *Khunii erkhiin zurchliin monitoring. Televiz, soniny monitoring (2008 ony 7 saryn 01-09)* [Human rights monitoring. Television and newspaper monitoring (July 1-9, 2008)]. Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia

Ornelas, A. (1997). Pasantias and social participation: Participatory action-research as a way of life. In S. E. Smith, D. G. Willms, & N. A. Johnson (Eds.), *Nurtured by knowledge. Learning to do participatory action-research* (pp. 138-172). New York, NY: The Apex Press.

Otgonjargal, D. (2014, December 4). Ardchilsan khuvisgalyn 25 jiliin oid: Martagdsan baatruud [On the occassion of the 25th anniversary of the Democratic Revolution: Forgotten heroes]. Retrieved from http://entertainment.mongolnews.mn/1egy

Palma, G. d. (1990). *To craft democracies*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.

Patnaik, P. (1997). *Accumulation and stability under capitalism*. Oxford, UK: Clarendon Press.

Peace Corps. (n.d.). *Home page*. Retrieved June 9, 2018, from https://www.peacecorps.gov

Piketty, T. (2014). *Capital in the twenty-first century*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Plehwe, D. (2015). Introduction. In P. Mirowski & D. Plehwe (Eds.), *The road from Mont Pelerin: The making of the neoliberal thought collective* (pp. 1-42). Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Polanyi-Levitt, K. (2006). The great transformation from 1920 to 1990. In K. Robbie & K. Polanyi-Levitt (Eds.), *Karl Polanyi in Vienna. The contemporary significance of The great transformation* (2nd ed., pp. 3-11). Montreal, Canada: Black Rose Books.

Polanyi, K. (2001). *The great transformation: The political and economic origins of our time*. Boston, MA: Beacon Press.

Prashad, V. (2007). *The darker nations: A biography of the short-lived third world*. New Delhi, India: Leftword Books.

Prashad, V. (2014). *The poorer nations: A possible history of the Global South* (paperback ed.). London, England: Verso.

Prebisch, R. (1950). *The economic development of Latin America and its principal problems, E/CN.12/89/Rev.1*. New York, NY: United Nations.

Prentice, S., & Ferguson, E. (2000). Volunteerism, gender, and the changing welfare state: A case-study in child daycare. In S. M. Neysmith (Ed.), *Restructuring caring labour. Discourse, state practice, and everyday life* (pp. 118-141). Ontario, Canada: Oxford University Press.

Press Institute of Mongolia. (n.d.). *Home page*. Retrieved June 3, 2018, from http://en.pressinst.org.mn

Presser, L. (2005). Negotiating power and narrative in research: Implications for feminist methodology. *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society, 30*(4), 2067-2090.

Public Relations and Information Division of the Office of the President. (2009, December 10). Ts. Elbegdorj: Khorin jiliin tuukhtei Mongolyn ardchilal bol bukh ard tumnii ololt yum [Ts. Elbegdorj: The twenty-year old democracy of Mongolia is the achievement of all the people]. *Olloo.mn*. Retrieved from http://news.gogo.mn/r/63304

Putnam, R. (1994). *Making democracy work*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Ramsay, U. (2014). The meaning of Mongol. *Ouch Blog*. Retrieved from http://www.bbc.com

Roblin, S. (2016, August 6). Why the Chinese military is still haunted by this 19th-century 'humiliation'. *The Week*. Retrieved from http://theweek.com

Rodriguez-Hernandez, M. L., & Montoya, E. (2011). Fifty years of evolution of the term Down's syndrome. *The Lancet, 378*(9789), 402.

Rose, N. (1996). *Inventing our selves: Psychology, power, and personhood*. Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press.

Rosen, G. (1985). *Western economists and eastern societies: Agents of change in South Asia, 1950-1970*. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press.

Rossabi, M. (1979). Khubilai Khan and the women in his family. In W. Bauer (Ed.), *Studia Sino-Mongolica: Festschrift fur Herbert Franke* (pp. 153-180). Wiesbaden, Germany: Franz Steiner Verlag.

Rossabi, M. (2005). *Modern Mongolia. From khans to commissars to capitalists*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.

Rossabi, M. (2009). Mongolia: Transmogrification of a communist party. *Pacific Affairs, 82*(2), 231-250.

Ruggie, J. G. (1982). International regimes, transactions, and change: Embedded liberalism in the postwar economic order. *International Organization, 36*(2), 379-415. Retrieved from http://ftp.columbia.edu/itc/sipa

Ruggie, J. G. (2016a). Introduction: Embedding global markets. In J. G. Ruggie (Ed.), *Embedding global markets: An enduring challenge* (pp. 1-10). New York, NY: Routledge.

Ruggie, J. G. (Ed.). (2016b). *Embedding global markets: An enduring challenge*. New York, NY: Routledge.

Rupp, L. J. (1977). Mother of the "volk": The image of women in Nazi ideology. *Signs, 3*(2), 362-379. Retrieved from https://www.jstor.org/stable/3173289

Sabloff, P. L. W. (2003). *Mongolia: Does democracy have a future?*: European Rim Policy and Investment Council (ERPIC).

Said, E. W. (1979). *Orientalism*. New York, NY: Vintage Books.

Sanders, A. J. (1987). *Mongolia. Politics, economics and society*. London, England Frances Pinter Publishers

Schwartz, J. S. (1979, September). Women under socialism: Role definitions of Soviet women. *Social Forces, 58*(1), 67-88.

Schwarz, H. G. (2006). Mongolia at 800: The state and nation since Chinggis Khan. *Inner Asia, 8*(2), 151-161.

Scott, J. C. (1989). Everyday forms of resistance. *Copenhagen Journal of Asian Studies, 4*, 33-62. https://doi.org/http://dx.doi.org/10.22439/cjas.v4i1.1765

Scott, J. C. (1998). *Seeing like a state*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.

Severinghaus, S. R. (1999). Mongolia in 1998 and 1999: Past, present, and future at the new millennium. *Asian Survey, 40*(1), 130-139.

Simons, H. C. (1934). *A positive program for laissez-faire: Some proposals for a liberal economic policy*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.

Sinclaire, G. F. (2017). *To reform the world: International organizations and the making of modern states*. Oxford, England: Oxford University Press.

Smith, A., & Rochovska, A. (2007). Domesticating neo-liberalism: Everyday lives and the geographies of post-socialist transformations. *Geoforum, 38*, 1163-1178.

Smith, D. E. (2006). George Smith, Political activist as ethnographer and sociology for the people. In C. Frampton, G. Kinsman, A. K. Thompson, & K. Tilleczek (Eds.), *Sociology for changing the world: Social movements/social research* (pp. 18-26). Black Point, NS: Fernwood Publishing. Retrieved from http://aut.summon.serialssolutions.com

Smith, G. W. (2006). Political activist as ethnographer In C. Frampton, G. Kinsman, A. K. Thompson, & K. Tilleczek (Eds.), *Sociology for changing the world: social movements/social research* (pp. 44-70). Black Point, N.S: Fernwood Publishing. Retrieved from http://aut.summon.serialssolutions.com

Smith, S. E. (1997). Introduction. Participatory action-research within the global context. In S. E. Smith, D. G. Willms, & N. A. Johnson (Eds.), *Nurtured by knowledge. Learning to do participatory action-research* (pp. 1-6). New York, NY: The Apex Press.

Smith, S. E., Willms, D. G., & Johnson, N. A. (Eds.). (1997). *Nurtured by knowledge. Learning to do participatory action-research*. New York, NY: The Apex Press.

Snow, K. H. (2011, March 11). Goldman Prizewinner shoots up foreign mining firms in Mongolia. Retrieved from https://dissidentvoice.org

Snow, K. H. (2015, May 22). Foreign mining, state corruption and human rights in Mongolia. Retrieved from https://www.globalresearch.ca

Socialist International. (n.d.). *Home page*. Retrieved June 10, 2018, from http://www.socialistinternational.org

Spivak, G. C. (1988). Can the subaltern speak? In C. Nelson & L. Grossberg (Eds.), *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture* (pp. 271-313). Basingstoke, England: Macmillan Education.

Standing Committee on State Structure. (2007, December 21). *Meeting minutes*. Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia: Parliamentary Secretariat. State Great Khural of Mongolia.

Standing Committee on State Structure. (2008, January 9). *Meeting minutes*. Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia: Parliamentary Secretariat. State Great Khural of Mongolia.

State Great Khural. (2005, April 21). *Mongol ulsyn myangany khugjliin zoriltuudyg batlakh tukhai togtool. Dugaar 25* [On the adoption of Mongolia's Millennium Development Goals. Resolution No. 25]. Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia: Parliamentary Secretariat. Retrieved from https://www.legalinfo.mn/law/details/6252?lawid=6252

Steiner-Khamsi, G., & Stolpe, I. (2004). Decentralization and recentralization reform in Mongolia: Tracing the swing of the pendulum. *Comparative Education, 40*(1), 29-53.

Steiner-Khamsi, G., & Stolpe, I. (2006). *Educational import: Local encounters with global forces in Mongolia*. New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan.

Sukhgerel, D. (2008). *Parliamentary election in Mongolia*. Retrieved from https://www.scribd.com/document/97333054/2008-Election-in-Mongolia

The Asia Foundation. (2018a). *2017 annual report. #change starts here*. Retrieved from https://asiafoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/2017-0930-The-Asia-Foundation-FS-Reissue.pdf

The Asia Foundation. (2018b). *Financial statements. For the years ended September, 2017 and 2016*. Retrieved from https://asiafoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/The-Asia-Foundation_Annual-Report_2017_update.pdf

The Asia Foundation. (n.d.). *Home page*. Retrieved June 1, 2018, from https://asiafoundation.org

The editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica. (n.d.). Henry A. Kissinger. United States statesman. Retrieved from https://www.britannica.com/biography/Henry-Kissinger

The World Bank. (2007). *A look into Mongolia's inflationary situation*. Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia. Retrieved from https://forum.mn

The World Bank. (2008, October). *Mongolia Quarterly*. Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia.

The World Bank. (2009, April). *Mongolia Monthly Economic Update*. Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia.

The World Bank. (2009, February). *Mongolia Quarterly*. Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia.

The World Bank. (2009, May). *Mongolia Monthly Economic Update*. Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia.

Thelen, T. (2011). Shortage, fuzzy property and other dead ends in the anthropological analysis of (post)socialism. *Critique of Anthropology, 31*(1), 43-61.

Tilly, C. (1990). *Coercion, capital and European states, AD 990-1992*. Cambridge, MA: Blackwell.

Tocqueville, A. d. (2000). *Democracy in America*. London, England: David Campbell Publishers.

Tomlinson, R. (1998, December 7). From Genghis Khan to Milton Friedman. *Fortune magazine*. Retrieved from http://archive.fortune.com

Toye, J. (2014). Assessing the G77: 50 years after UNCTAD and 40 years after the NIEO. *Third World Quarterly, 35*(10), 1759-1774. https://doi.org/10.1080/01436597.2014.971589

Ts. Batbayar. (1998). Open Mongolia and Mongol-Russian relations. *The Mongolian Journal of International Affairs,*(5), 38-46.

Tsenddoo, B. (2008, January 28). Mongol gergii: Turuu medeye gevel eree med [Mongol wife: Govern your husband if you want to govern the state]. *Udriin Sonin*.

Tulga, C. (2008, April 10). "Sant Maral" sangiin zakhiral L. Sumati: Sudalgaa khiikhed hkhetsuu baina. Ene songuuli kholion bantan bolno [It is difficult to conduct the survey. This election will be messy]. Retrieved from http://archive.olloo.mn/modules.php?name=News&file=article&sid=97904

Tumursukh, U. (2001). Fighting over the reinterpretation of the Mongolian woman in Mongolia's post-socialist identity construction discourse. *East Asia, 19*(3), 119-146.

Tumursukh, U. (2009). Arrested democratization and glimpses of hope: Mongolia's political culture as seen through the 2008 and 2009 elections. In *Election and democracy. Reflections on the Asian experiences* (pp. 137-164). Seoul, Korea: Korea Democracy Foundation.

Tumursukh, U. (2013). State of civil cociety development in Mongolia. *The Mongolian Journal of International Affairs, 18*, 52-68.

Tumursukh, U., & Davaasuren, E. (2009). *The field of women's organizing in Mongolia: Possibilities of a feminist movement. Qualitative study report*. Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia: Mongolian Women's Fund.

Ulaanbaatar City Statistical Office. (n.d.). *Valyutyn jiliin dundaj khansh 1 am. dollar=tugrug*. Retrieved June 25, 2018, from http://www.ubstat.mn/StatTable=94

Ulemj, D. (2012, December 5). S. Amarsanaa: Khoich uyeiinkhen tuukhee uneneer ni medekh erkhtei [S. Amarsanaa: The younger generations have a right to know the historical truth]. Retrieved from http://news.gogo.mn

UNIFEM. (2001). *Women in Mongolia: Mapping progress under transition*. New York, NY: UNIFEM.

United Nations. (1948). *Universal declaration of human rights* (Vol. 2018). Retrieved from https://www.ohchr.org/EN/UDHR/Documents/UDHR_Translations/eng.pdf

United Nations in Mongolia. (n.d.). *Home page*. Retrieved June 1, 2018, from
http://www.un-mongolia.mn

Ural Alexis Johnson (1908-1997). (n.d.). Retrieved from
https://history.state.gov/departmenthistory/people/johnson-ural-alexis

Urtnasan, M. (n.d.). *Final report: Training, advocacy and networking project for stronger
NGO sectors in Mongolia* Mercy Corps Mongolia. Retrieved from
https://mercycorps.org.mn/beta/documents/Mongolia%20TAN%20Final%20Report_
eng.pdf

USAID. (n.d.). Retrieved June 1, 2018, from https://www.usaid.gov

Vikipedia [Wikipedia]. Mongolyn Ardchilsan Kholboo [Mongolian Democratic Union].
Retrieved from https://mn.wikipedia.org

Weatherford, J. (2010). *The secret history of the Mongol queens: How the daughters of
Genghis Khan rescued his empire*. New York, NY: Crown Publishing Group.

Worden, R. L., & Savada, A. M. (Eds.). (1989). *Mongolia: A country study*. Washington, DC:
Library of Congress.

Ya. Byambajav. (2007). *Bodlogo bolovsruulakh, shiidver gargakh uil yavts dakhi TBB-yn
oroltsoo. Erkhzuin orchin ba institutchilal* [NGO participation in policy- and decision-
making processes. Legal environment and institutionalization]. Ulaanbaatar,
Mongolia: Open Society Forum.

Zoljargal, G. (2012). Televized irsen ter namraas khoish [Since the spring that I joined the
television]. Retrieved from http://www.sonin.mn/news/culture/7685

Archival sources

Altai, D., Bazar, Ch., Delgermaa, B., & Tsetsegmaa, B. (2007a). *Ulsyn Ikh Khurlyn erkhem
gishuun … tanaa. Khuselt gargakh tukhai* [Request to … esteemed Member of the
State Great Khural] [A letter from the Women's Partnership in Politics and
Governance Forum addressed to every MP].

Altai, D., Bazar, Ch., Delgermaa, B., & Tsetsegmaa, B. (2007b). *Ulsyn Ikh Khurlyn gishuun,
UIKh dakhi … namyn bulgiin darga … tanaa. Khuselt gargakh tukhai* [Request to …
Member of the State Great Khural, Leader of the … party group] [A letter from the
Women's Partnership in Politics and Governance Forum addressed to the leaders of
parliamentary party groups].

Center for Citizens' Alliance. (2006, February 4). *What lies behind and follows after the
forced resignation of Ts. Elbegdorj's government* [Position paper].

MONFEMNET National Network. (2007, December 21). *Civil Society New Year Party 2007:
Let's Meet the Year 2008 in a New Way!* [Announcement].

MONFEMNET National Network. (2007, December 25). *Urialga* [Appeal] [Appeal to MPs to vote for retaining the women's quota].

MONFEMNET National Network (Producer). (2008). *Kvot* [Quota] [Documentary].

MONFEMNET National Network. (2008, January 10). *UIKh-yn gishuun tanaa* [To the Member of the SGKh] [appeal to MPs to accept the presidential veto].

MONFEMNET National Network. (2007-2008). *Updates and alerts* [Compilation of e-mail updates and urgent alerts from December 26, 2007, to February 1, 2008].

MONFEMNET National Network. (2008, February 4). *Medeelliin khuudas* [Press release].

MONFEMNET National Network. (2008, March 7). *"Emegteichuudiin nudeer – Emegteichuudiin khucheer" 3-r chuulgany khutulbur* ["Through Women's Eyes – With Women's Power" 3rd forum program].

MONFEMNET National Network. (2008, May 7). *Narrative report to the Urgent Action Fund.*

MONFEMNET National Network. (2011). *Emegteichuudiin uls turiin manlailal, nuluulliin chadavkh bekhjuulekh surgalt. Surgagchiin garyn avlaga* [Training on strengthening women's political leadership and advocacy capacity. Trainer's manual] [Draft].

MONFEMNET National Network & "Hands Up for Your Rights!" Youth Campaign. (2011). *"Hands Up for Your Rights!" draft training manual.*

Munkhtuya, B., Gandi, T., Tuya, D., Oyun, S., members of the National Network of Mongolian Women's NGOs [members listed], members of the Women's Partnership in Politics and Governance Forum members [members listed]. (2008, March 1). *Mongol Ulsyn Yurunkhiilugch tanaa* [To the President of Mongolia] [Letter addressed to the President N. Enkhbayar on vetoing the revocation of the quota].

NGO Ethical Principles. (2007).

Parliamentary Secretariat. (2005, December 23). [Meeting minutes of the State Great Khural plenary session on the adoption of the revised election law].

Tumursukh U. (2008, January 11). *Male-Dominated Mongolian Palriament: Surprisingly Efficient and Predictably Unethical* [Article written for English-language newspaper Mongol Messenger].

Tumursukh, U. (2008, January 28). *Women's efforts vs. politicians' power* [Article written for English-language newspaper *Mongol Messenger*].

Zanaa, J. (2008, January 31). *Undsen Khuuliin Tsetsed urgudul gargakh ni* [Petition to the Constitutional Court].

Glossary of Mongolian words

Aimag   administrative sub-division similar to province or state, Mongolia has twenty one *aimags*

Akh   older brother, uncle, not necessarily related by kinship

Ard tumen   common people

Aryn khaalga   idiomatic expression for accomplishing something via connections, literally means 'back door'

Bayachuud   the rich people

Belenchlekh setgelgee   mentality of being/wanting to be spoon-fed

Borchuud   the poor or common people, literally meaning 'the brown ones'

Darga   boss, person in charge

Deel   traditional garment that looks like a robe

Dzud   winter blizzard that is devastating to herders and livestock

Egch   older sister or auntie, not necessarily related by kinship

Erkh   the word used to denote 'rights' but also often a component in compound nouns such as *erkh medel* (power), *erkh chuluu* (freedom), *erkh ashig* (interests), *erkh uureg* (rights and duties) etc.

Etsgiin erkht yos patriarchy

Ezen   master, owner

Ger   home as well as the felt tent used by nomads

Guai   an honorific term that follows the name of the person one is referring to, indicates respect for age, experience or position

Irgenii	citizen's, civic/civil
Irgenii niigem	citizens' or civil society
Khalaasny	(belonging in) a pocket, in reference to NGOs that are not independent
Khani	partner, companion, spouse, friend
Khereldekh	to quarrel
Khoshuu	administrative subdivisions created by the Manchu in Inner and Outer Mongolias, named 'banners' in English
Khuduu	countryside, rural areas
Khun	person, woman is *emegtei khun*, man is *eregtei khun*
Khu nam	abbreviated, somewhat disrespectful name of the MPRP
Khunii erkh	human rights
Khuvisgalt	revolutionary
Mongol bichig	the Mongolian script adapted from Uigur, also known as *Uigurjin bichig*
Namchirkhah	to act in a partisan manner, often fanatically
Namchirkhal	partisan politicization and polarization, often fanatical
Olon niitiin	of the masses
Olon niitiin baiguullaga	mass organization
Sain duryn	voluntary
Sekheeten	intelligentsia, one of three social layers during socialism, the other two being workers and herders
Sonirkhol	interest, hobby

Soum   administrative sub-division of *aimag*, Mongolia has over three hundred
                soums

Subbotnik   nominally voluntary but usually mandatory work that was initially organized
                on Saturdays, hence the name from the Russian *subbota* (Saturday)

Talbar   arena, field

Togoo   big wok-like pot

Tur   state

Turiin bus   not of the state, non-state

Turiin bus baiguullaga   Non-state or non-governmental organization

Uls turjikh   to be politicized, to do 'politics,' often used as a synonym of *namchirkhakh*

Uurchlun baiguulalt   *perestroika* in Mongolian

Uureg   duty, obligation

Zuil   thing, can refer to animate and inanimate, abstract and concrete
                phenomena

Appendices

Appendix 1. Ethics approval

AUTEC Secretariat

Auckland University of Technology
D-89, WA505F Level 5 WA Building City Campus
T: +64 9 921 9999 ext. 8316
E: ethics@aut.ac.nz
www.aut.ac.nz/researchethics

20 July 2015

Marilyn Waring
Faculty of Culture and Society

Dear Marilyn

Ethics Application: **15/261 Exploring the causes and consequences of Mongolia's 'Matriarchal' civil society.**

Thank you for submitting your application for ethical review to the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee (AUTEC). I am pleased to confirm that your ethics application has been approved for three years until 20 July 2018.

AUTEC wishes to commend the researchers on the excellence of the application.

As part of the ethics approval process, you are required to submit the following to AUTEC:

- A brief annual progress report using form EA2, which is available online through http://www.aut.ac.nz/researchethics. When necessary this form may also be used to request an extension of the approval at least one month prior to its expiry on 20 July 2018;

- A brief report on the status of the project using form EA3, which is available online through http://www.aut.ac.nz/researchethics. This report is to be submitted either when the approval expires on 20 July 2018 or on completion of the project;

It is a condition of approval that AUTEC is notified of any adverse events or if the research does not commence. AUTEC approval needs to be sought for any alteration to the research, including any alteration of or addition to any documents that are provided to participants. You are responsible for ensuring that research undertaken under this approval occurs within the parameters outlined in the approved application.

AUTEC grants ethical approval only. If you require management approval from an institution or organisation for your research, then you will need to obtain this. If your research is undertaken within a jurisdiction outside New Zealand, you will need to make the arrangements necessary to meet the legal and ethical requirements that apply there.

To enable us to provide you with efficient service, we ask that you use the application number and study title in all correspondence with us. If you have any enquiries about this application, or anything else, please do contact us at ethics@aut.ac.nz.

All the very best with your research,

Kate O'Connor
Executive Secretary
Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee

Cc: Undariya Tumursukh tundarya@gmail.com

Timeline of Mongolian History
The pre-socialist period

1206 — The first Mongol state is founded by Chinggis Khaan

Tibetan Buddhism begins to spread — **Mid-1600s**

1636 — Inner Mongolian clans submit to the Manchu rule

1691 — Khalkha Mongols swear allegiance to the Manchu Emperor

The First Opium War, waged by the British — **1839-1842**

1856-1860 — The Second Opium War waged by the British and the French

Increased taxation of Outer Mongolia by the Manchu & growing financial control by Chinese firms — **Mid-1800's**

1901 — Manchu-Chinese efforts intensify to colonize Outer Mongolia

The Chinese Revolution, establishing the Republic of China (ROC) — **1911**

1911 — Outer Mongolia declares independence as a Buddhist theocratic state

Tri-partite Khiagta agreement, formalizing Sino-Soviet pact to recognize Outer Mongolia as part of the ROC — **1915**

1919 — Invasion of Outer Mongolia by the ROC army

Mongolian People's Party (MPP) is formed — **1920**

1921 — Baron von Ungern-Sternberg ousts the Chinese and nominally restores the theocracy

Timeline of Mongolian History
The state-socialist period

1921
The Mongolian Revolutionary Army and the Russian Red Army oust the White Russians, establishing a nominally constitutional theocracy

The First Constitution of Mongolia is passed, establishing the Mongolian People's Republic (MPR)
1924

1925
MPP adds 'revolutionary' to its name, becoming MPRP

Stalinist purges, establishing Soviet control and MPRP's communist-style dictatorship
1930's

1945
Popular referendum for Mongolia's independence based on the Yalta agreement

Khruschev's thawing, followed by purges against 'nationalist' and 'bourgeois' intellectuals
1950's

1960
The Third Constitution, cementing the monopoly of the MPRP and close ties to the Soviet Union

Mongolia becomes a member of the UN, consilidating its formal soveriegnty
1961

1985
Beginning of political liberalization under the influence of perestroika

Appendix 4. Post-socialist Mongolia Timeline

Timeline of Mongolian History
The post-socialist period

1988 Dissident groups begin to emerge

The Second National Convention of Young ArtistsMass demonstrations begin growing consolidation & coordination of dissident movements
1989

1990 Mass mobilization, Hunger strikes Opposition parties emerge: MDP, MSDP, MNPP et al. Interim parliament & government form following multi-party elections

Government Resolution No. 20 - start of the 'shock therapy'
1991

1992 Independent women's organizations begin to emerge: LEOS & WSP Democratic Constitution is passed, establishing Mongolia as a parliamentary democracy based on market economy MPRP wins the election

The NGO law is drafted with TAF support. NCAV & WIRC are established NGO capacity-building programs proliferate
1995

1996 Coalition of opposition parties - MNDP (merger of MDP, MNPP, etc.), MSDP et al. wins the election, aided by IRI, KAS & TAF

NGO law is passed with TAF support VEC is established by WSP
1997

1998 Murder of S. Zorig, a prominent democratic leader

MSDP, MNDP et al. merge into MDP MPRP wins the election The Mongolian National Network of Women's NGOs (MNNWNGOs) is founded CHRD is formed
2000

2004 Mobilization of anti-corruption and environmental movements Beginning of MANAN: MPRP & opposition form a grand coalition The Law on Combatting Domestic Violence is passed

Women's 30% quota included in the new election law
2005

2007 The MNNWNGOs is reformed as MONFEMNET National Network The women's quota is revoked

Mobilization of 'Third Forces' in civil society in opposition to MANAN July 1st events: the first post-election violence, state of emergency, mass violations of HRs Consolidation of MANAN: MPRP & MDP grand coalition
2008

A highly controversial mining agreement signed with Rio Tinto subsidiary Ivanhoe Mines
2009

Appendix 5. Accusations and criticisms against women activists

In one of the five research workshops during my field work in 2015, I and my colleagues identified key accusations and criticisms we have been subjected to as women NGO activists. We came up with a long list of accusations/criticisms (presented below). Some of these are more general, i.e. leveled against NGOs/civil society in general or other civil society sub-sectors besides ours. Others are more specific, i.e. primarily target women's/human rights NGOs (e.g., 'import foreign ideas'). However, even when the accustions are more general, they may often be more intensely deployed against women activists for social change.

Accusations/criticisms against women's/human rights NGO activists

All talk, no real work	Only interested in money	Un-Mongolian, westernized	No or poor capacity	Just individuals, not real organizations
Exist for their own sake	Corrupt, "eat" project money	Donor-led	Ungrounded, unprofessional, amateurs	Organizationally weak, poor management
Do not serve the people	Do not know reality outside UB	Copycats/ import foreign ideas	"Own" their issues *(asuudlaa umchildug)*	Unable to unite and work together
Sit in nice offices, in comfort	Do not reach the aimags, rural areas	Aggressive, unpleasant, with "black" energy	Always criticise, focus on the negative, not constructive	Same old faces

Appendix 6. Translation of 'Dignity'

Comparison of the English text and the Mongolian translation of the UDHR. The English text is available on the United Nations web site: http://www.un.org/en/universal-declaration-human-rights. The Mongolian text is available on the website of the National Human Rights Commission of Mongolia: http://www.mn-nhrc.org/hrd7/Article/article1.html. The table only contains the excerpts pertinent to the translation of the term 'dignity' into Mongolian. The emphases in the selected excerpts are mine.

English	Mongolian
Chapter 9 **Preamble**	
Chapter 10 Whereas recognition of the inherent *dignity* and of the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family…	Chapter 10 Хүн төрөлхтний ам бүлийн гишүүн бүхэнд угаас заяасан *нэр төр* болон тэдний адил тэгш, салшгүй эрхийг хүлээн зөвшөөрөх нь…
Whereas the peoples of the United Nations have in the Charter reaffirmed their faith in fundamental human rights, in the *dignity* and worth of the human person…	Chapter 11 Хүн үндсэн эрхтэй, хувь хүн *нэр төр*, үнэ цэнэтэй, эрэгтэй, эмэгтэйчүүд тэгш эрхтэй гэдэгт Нэгдсэн Үндэстний улс түмэн итгэл төгс байгаагаа дүрмээрээ нотлохын хамт…
Article 1	
All human beings are born free and equal in *dignity* and rights.	Хүн бүр төрөхөөсөө эрх чөлөөтэй, *нэр төр*, эрхийнхээ хувьд адил тэгш байна.
Article 22	
Everyone, as a member of society, has the right to social security and is entitled to realization, through national effort and international co-operation and in accordance with the organization and resources of each State, of the economic, social and cultural rights indispensable for his *dignity* and the free development of his personality.	Chapter 12 Хүн бүр нийгмийн гишүүний хувьд нийгмийн хангамж эдлэх, түүнчлэн *нэр төрөө* хадгалах, биеэ боловсруулж хөгжүүлэхэд зайлшгүй шаардлагатай эдийн засаг, нийгэм, соёлын эрхээ улс бүрийн бүтэц, нөөц бололцоотой уялдуулан үндэсний хүч чармайлт хийгээд олон улсын хамтын ажиллагааны замаар хэрэгжүүлэх эрхтэй.
Chapter 13 **Article 23** (third para.)	
Chapter 14 Everyone who works has the right to just and favourable remuneration ensuring for himself and his family an existence worthy of human *dignity*, and supplemented, if necessary, by other means of social protection.	Chapter 14 Ажил хөдөлмөр эрхэлж байгаа хэн боловч хувийн болон ам бүлийнхээ ахуй амьжиргааг *хүний зэрэгтэй** авч явахад хүрэлцэхүйц бөгөөд зайлшгүй тохиолдолд нийгмийн хангамжийн эх үүсвэрээр нэмэн арвижуулсан, хийсэндээ таарсан, хүртээмжтэй шан хөлс авах эрхтэй.

* Interestingly, in Article 23, the Mongolian translation departs from the term *ner tur* and states, instead *khunii zeregtei* (as a human being, at the level of humans).