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Sarah L. Henderson. *Building Democracy in Contemporary Russia: Western Support for Grassroots Organizations*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2003. xii + 229 pp. \$29.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8014-4135-6.

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It is not enough to do good; one must do it the right way.[1]

Sarah Henderson is among the young American academics who went to Russia in the late 1990s to help Russians construct a democracy in the unpromising terrain of the former Soviet Union. They went to Russia to do good, but they discovered that it is not easy to know how to do good. Indeed, it is not even clear what doing good means in that dismembered and impoverished land.

Now an assistant professor of political science at Oregon State University, Henderson's book analyzes the usefulness of some of those western efforts to assist in the construction of democracy in Russia. Her methods include survey research, field visits and interviews and a great deal of reliance on personal experience.

Henderson investigated women's organizations in Russia and the contributions which they make toward the democratization of the country. The Tocquevillian premise of her research (which will be analyzed below) is that Russian democracy needs a stronger civil society in which NGOs in general and women's organizations in particular play countervailing roles to the Russian state. Western governments and private foundations, accepting this premise, poured millions of dollars into Russian civil society in the 1990s. Henderson's research asks whether, and to what extent, these western dollars have had a democratizing impact in Russia.

Less than two percent of all women's groups in Russia succeed in obtaining western funding. Funded organizations, Henderson finds, engage in more activities and with greater frequency than do unfunded groups. However, these differences do not necessarily mean that

the funded groups have had a positive impact upon democratic development. She finds that western aid to women's organizations has had a mixed and sometimes paradoxical impact upon Russian democracy.

Henderson finds that the mere fact of receiving western funds tends to isolate funded organizations from Russian society. The funded organizations become dependent upon western donors, rather than upon their own clientele, or other local Russian state and nonstate actors, for their survival. To satisfy their foreign donors, funded women's organizations must dance to the western tune. In the 1990s, the prevailing tune was advocacy, as in advancing women's rights or a feminist agenda. (Unfunded groups, by contrast, tend to focus on providing traditional social services which Russians, including women, so greatly need.) Funded groups tend not to network well with nonfunded groups for fear of losing their privileged relationship with western donors. Enormous resentment by unfunded groups toward funded groups develops, sowing seeds of bitterness, leading to information hoarding and exacerbating the lack of social trust that already exists in Russian society. In short, western funding helps create an "oligarchy of powerful, well-connected [to western donor agencies] women's civic groups" which is not conducive to democratic social development.

Henderson's discussion of western good intentions gone bad supports numerous other western analyses. Some of them emphasize the role of corrupt agents on both the western and Russian sides. Other studies advance culturalist arguments on the persistence of a Russian tradition antithetical to democracy or of a "Soviet mentality" to account for poor results from good inten-

tions. Henderson adds a valuable third interpretation to the debate, a neoinstitutional approach focusing upon the interests and procedures of the donor institutions. From her own experience working in the Moscow branches of western funding agencies she demonstrates that the incentive structure of donor-client relations encourages both sides to pursue short-term benefits over long-term development. Her arguments are persuasive.

There is good news in these bad consequences. Overcoming a culture of corruption is relatively difficult, at least in the short run. Overcoming antidemocratic cultural legacies is even more difficult. But overcoming mistakes in the foreign aid process is much more doable. In her conclusion, therefore, Henderson offers some suggestions for doing just that. For instance, she recommends western funding for Russian organizations that provide social service benefits to the general population, not just funding for advocacy groups (or groups that learn to speak in the fads and buzzwords of western donor language) who now receive the bulk of western aid.

The problem is larger, however, than merely spreading western largess more broadly, as Henderson herself seems to recognize. The problem lies with the theoretical basis of Henderson's argument, the applicability of a Tocquevillian perspective to Russia. In its contemporary form, interpreted by Robert Putnam and other academic civil society advocates of global democratization, the Tocquevillian approach emphasizes the importance of voluntary associations in promoting democracy in a new or underdeveloped state. Widespread citizen participation in voluntary associations performs several prodemocracy functions: mediation between the individual citizen and the state, schooling for citizenship skills, creation of social capital and countervailing power to a possibly overweening state apparatus. The western funding agencies in Russia were heavily guided by this model.

Unfortunately, as Henderson concludes, western aid based upon a Tocquevillian perspective is not having a demonstrable prodemocracy effect. What is wrong? The answer, I suggest, lies in Morley's observation that "it is not enough to do good; one must do it the right way." What is the right way by which American and western aid can be delivered to Russia so as to promote, rather than hinder, the development of democracy?

At first Henderson accepts the Tocquevillian model but says it is not applied well. Western donor agencies need to broaden the number of funded Russian women's organizations. But Henderson seems to recognize that

this change will not go very far. So in her concluding chapter, Henderson cautiously begins to question the model itself. She writes that some foreign donor groups have taken Tocqueville "too much to heart" for Russian conditions (pp. 171-172). Tocquevillian analysis emphasizes the importance of the voluntary association, the NGO if you will. But Henderson observes that in the former Soviet Union Russians were "hyper-organized," leading post-Soviet Russians to shy away from participating in voluntary organizations now. Might it not be better, Henderson notes, for foreign donor groups to recognize this legacy of Soviet "misdevelopment" and focus upon instilling a sense of efficacy in individual citizens instead?

So far so good. But Henderson's realization that all may not be well in the Tocquevillian world needs to go a few steps further in order to explain the failure of western funding efforts to promote democracy in Russia via the civil sector route.

Henderson writes about Russia during the Yeltsin period, when the state was looted wholesale by powerful nonstate actors (oligarchs) who benefited from working with state-entrenched ideologues ("democrats") who justified their main policy (shock therapy) by reference to support from western governments and foundations. Henderson refers often to the social misery in the country, especially as it affects women and women's organizations. But she does not connect that misery to the national politics of the period. The reason is that her Tocquevillian model has nothing useful to say about the forces then in play. At a time when the Russian state was painfully and unprecedentedly weak, her model emphasizes the desirability of creating a strong civil sector that would be yet another check upon already weakened state power. This desirability, one should point out, is also promoted by the same western governments and foundations that sponsored the disastrous shock therapy policy.

The problem lies with the civil society model that she and others use to analyze and prescribe for Russia. The prevailing (in America) interpretation of Tocqueville tends toward a liberal model of society-state relations, a model that emphasizes the desirability of countervailing power.^[2] But a different, statist model society-state relations might better fit the Russian case. In this view, society and the state are seen as "integrally related, part of the same organic whole."^[3] A civil society should be interpreted, in Russian conditions, not as standing counterpoised to the state but rather as complementing and completing it. A weak or checked Russian state per-

mits the kind of wholesale looting that took place in the 1990s under Yeltsin. In the context of a weakly developed political system such as Yeltsin's Russia in the 1990s, to strengthen (by foreign funding, no less) advocacy demands (as by funded women's groups) can overburden the political system and possibly hinder, rather than bolster, the chances for the emergence of political democracy.[4] What is needed now, therefore, is the construction of "democratic mechanisms of stability" and the political institutionalization of the state, not the strengthening of extrastate or antistate forces.[5]

Are Henderson and other American supporters of Russian democracy guilty of intellectual ethnocentrism? Are these well-intentioned people falling into one of the oldest intellectual traps, the belief that what is good for us must also be good for others? Ironically, the liberal Tocquevillian model that undergirds so many of these efforts may be wide of the mark even on its home turf. Perhaps voluntary associations even in American political history sometimes worked in close symbiosis with, rather than countervailing opposition to state power.[6]

Dr. Sarah Henderson makes two valuable contributions with her well-written book. The first and intended contribution is an excellent account of the interaction between western funding agencies and Russian women's organization recipients. The second and unin-

tended contribution is to reaffirm the aphorism that, "it is not enough to do good; one must do it the right way." The next task, therefore, is to figure out what the right way or ways might be.

Notes

[1]. John, Viscount Morley of Blackburn, *On Compromise*, 1874.

[2]. Henry E. Hale, "Civil Society From Above? Statist and Liberal Models of State-Building in Russia," in *Demokratizatsiya* 10, no.3 (Summer 2002): 306-322.

[3]. Alexander N. Domrin, "Ten Years Later: Society, 'Civil Society,' and the Russian State," in *The Russian Review* 62, no. 2 (April 2003): 193-211.

[4]. Omar G. Encarnacion, "Tocqueville's Missionaries: Civil Society, Advocacy and the Promotion of Democracy," in *World Policy Journal* 17, no. 1 (Spring 2000): 9-18.

[5]. Larry Diamond, "Toward Democratic Consolidation (Rethinking Civil Society)," in *Journal of Democracy* 5, no. 3 (July 1994) as cited in Domrin, "Ten Years Later."

[6]. Theda Skocpol, "Unraveling From Above," in *The American Prospect*, no. 25 (March-April 1996): 20-26.

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