

publications/2009/09/30, last accessed 5 December 2012). Moreover, the Russian-language newspaper *The Moscow Post*, which is published in Ukraine, routinely refers to the organization as Nashisti. Anyone who understands Russian knows exactly what they mean.

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Professor Hemment responds:

In their letter, Michael K. Launer, David Cratis Williams, and Marilyn J. Young fault me on three grounds: my characterization of NGOs; the definition of civil society; and the philosophical underpinnings and practical impact of Nashi.

I am well aware of the normative definitions of NGOs and civil society the authors point to, however, these definitions bear little resemblance to the projects that have been enacted in the region (or anywhere else, for that matter). The authors' objections suggest a fundamental misreading of my argument. I am stepping outside a normative framework of evaluative assessment in order to understand the specific structural and ideological forms NGOs assume in specific locales. Further, as an ethnographer, my task has been to examine NGOs, not as ideal types, or in terms of what they intend to accomplish, but in terms of what they delivered—the social fact of NGOs.

Contra the authors' assertion that the understanding of NGO is "simple," I argue for the instability of this social form. My point of departure is that "NGOs" and "civil society" are contested political symbols and ideological signifiers, not objective descriptors. What an NGO does is not clear-cut, nor can we expect it to fulfill in any pure way a political mission; it is shaped by existing power relations and competing interests on the ground. Analytically therefore, the normative approach falls far short of capturing actual practice. To undertake an analysis of form, structure, and effects, we need to move outside the binary of good/evil and to be far less certain of our definitions of what counts.

The authors assert that, "Most NGOs are seen as 'powerful sources for social change.'" But they do not ask—as seen by whom? Not by many Russian people, who regard them as self-interested vehicles for tax avoidance at best, or (especially since the color revolutions) as malign presences that seek to reshape Russian society in alignment with foreign interests at worst (the authors' distinction between Jeffrey Sachs's Harvard "mafia" and agencies such as Soros's Open Society Foundation is only possible with the benefit of hindsight, and many Russians do not make the same distinction). Indeed, the organizational forms donor agencies encouraged in the former Soviet Union during the 1990s were replete with contradictions. As Ruth Mandel has shown, oxymoronic formations such as government-organized NGOs (or "GONGOs" as development practitioners refer to them) were actually stimulated by U.S. donor activity, brought into being by these organizations' funding requirements (Mandel, "Seeding Civil Society," in C. M. Hann, ed., *Postsocialism: Ideals, Ideologies and Practices in Eurasia* [London, 2002], 279–96).

I do not question the *intentions* of agencies like the Open Society or Ford Foundation or of the people who staff them; what interests me are their (often unintended) effects, shaped by the historical and political economic context within which they are located. Indeed, it was my grounded research in Russia during the 1990s—undertaken

in collaboration with liberal-oriented feminist activists—that alerted me to the shortcomings of the internationally sponsored civil society project. By the late 1990s, even some of their staunchest advocates and participants were articulating disappointment at the NGOs that had taken form in Russia: many were elite and marginal; they often ushered activists into a narrowly circumscribed range of projects that did not make sense to most Russian people.

Writing at the prospect of resurgent forms of authoritarianism in Eurasia, anthropologist Caroline Humphrey wrote, “it seems to me probable that the way this is experienced internally is very different from the face put on it externally, for the benefit of international relations—and hence the need for anthropological studies.” She went on to note that the challenge will be “how to understand and interpret such situations without prejudging them from a Euro-American set of values” (Humphrey, “Does the Category ‘Postsocialist’ Still Make Sense?” in Hann, ed., *Postsocialism*, 15). My project has taken up this challenge.

I do not seek to defend or apologize for state-run organizations such as Nashi (and I am very well aware of the terms many commentators use to refer to them). Rather, I seek to get beyond a normative reaction to understand them from the inside. Unpalatable as it is to many of us, until very recently, Putin has had legitimacy among broad swathes of the population; youth (as other citizens) have participated enthusiastically in the campaigns and projects political elites have offered them. My aim has been to figure out why. To do so in this project, I have gone beyond the circles of liberal intelligentsia with whom it is easiest to accomplish accord in order to reach the ranks of the persuaded: those who choose to participate in these state-run projects and campaigns. I have sought to understand the reasons for their buy-in and acquiescence.

Proponents and supporters of democracy, human rights, and freedom of speech in Russia are extraordinarily vulnerable at this time. The murders and incarcerations taking place are indeed frightening and troubling. And yet our normative western categories and paradigms are unable to account for what is taking form. They result in depictions that demonize Russia’s authorities rather than explaining the public’s support for these leaders or their acquiescence to their policies. To go beyond such caricatures, the anthropological project is more important than ever. It offers tools to help us make sense of the appeal of these kinds of state-run projects, promising to yield insights that will assist those working for a more democratic Russia.

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To the Editor:

I am honored that James Cracraft, a prominent historian of Peter I and his era, has reviewed my recent book *Terror and Greatness: Ivan and Peter as Russian Myths* (vol. 71, no. 2). I wrote it in the conviction that dialogue between scholars trained in cultural history, such as myself, and those trained in social and political history could be a productive undertaking. In the interests of furthering such a dialogue I offer these reflections.

My book investigates the historical myths of Ivan IV and Peter I, as they appear in historiography, political rhetoric, literature, art, drama, and film from the early 1800s up to the 1940s. Cracraft’s central criticism is that I failed to “establish a reliable historical baseline against which to assess the historical accuracy, or otherwise, of the assorted ‘myths,’ ‘visions,’ and ‘representations’ of the two historical figures.” In Cracraft’s view, the chief task of a study of historical myth should be to reveal its deviations from historical truth. Instead, I place these myths in their own time and