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Frustration and Creativity: Environmentalism in the Republic of Moldova

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FRUSTRATION AND CREATIVITY:
ENVIRONMENTALISM IN THE REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA

by

Amy Samuelson

A Dissertation Submitted in
Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree of

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ABSTRACT
FRUSTRATION AND CREATIVITY:
ENVIRONMENTALISM IN THE REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA

by

Amy Samuelson

The University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, 2013
Under the Supervision of Professor Tracey Heatherington

Through an ethnographic exploration of the diverse ways environmentalism has emerged in the Republic of Moldova, this dissertation seeks to provide insight into the changes occurring in Moldovan society. At first glance, Moldova's small yet diverse environmental community appears scattered and divided by age, Romanian or Russian language use, and urban or rural project location. While some environmentalists blame these divisions for the lack of a coherent movement, many also use these and other binaries in strategic ways to advance their projects. However, these categories cannot be so easily separated. Environmentalism, like many aspects of life in Moldova, is characterized by interconnections, overlaps, and ambiguity, stemming largely from the country's long history as a borderland. Though this ambiguity sometimes results in contradictions within projects, it can also result in a useful flexibility. Another thread that ties Moldovan environmental projects together is their embeddedness in the country's larger modernization strategy. Development programs are very visible in Moldova, a former Soviet state with a struggling economy and a weak government at the edges of both Europe and the former Soviet Union. Moldova's economic disadvantages and its

historical ties to those across its borders contribute to an inclination to look abroad for solutions, and many environmentalists rely in part on international funding and environmental models to solve local problems. Moreover, a sense of how “the West” judges them contributes to a Moldovan tendency to see their country as “backward,” and environmental projects often aim at “modernizing” the country in some way. The three case studies in this dissertation illustrate the themes of ambiguity, flexibility, and modernization through a focus on how environmentalists define and respond to various obstacles. The first case study looks at several rural projects using environmental funding to address sanitation problems in Moldovan villages. The second focuses on a protected areas project involving several well-established environmental NGOs in Chişinău. The third considers an attempt by urban, internationally-focused young people to create a new “eco” movement in Moldova.

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For Heidi

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION: ENVIRONMENTALISM IN MOLDOVA

Environmentalism takes many forms in the Republic of Moldova, including rural sanitation initiatives, nature conservation, and bicycling and recycling programs. The environmentalists I met during fieldwork in 2009 and 2010 worked on a wide variety of projects, such as installing Ecosan toilets in villages, trying to better protect Moldova's forests, and encouraging young people to explore nature and appreciate the environment both locally and globally. While they identified many obstacles to meeting their goals and often became frustrated by the corruption and lack of resources they associated with their post-Soviet context, these activists also displayed creativity and a determination to bring about positive environmental changes in their country. This dissertation follows their efforts and explores the diverse ways environmentalism has emerged in Moldova, providing insight into the changes occurring within Moldovan society.

At first glance, Moldova's small yet diverse environmental community appears scattered and divided by age, language, and urban versus rural project location. While some environmentalists blame these divisions for the lack of a coherent movement, many use these and other binaries in strategic ways to advance their projects. However, these categories cannot be so easily separated. Environmentalism, like many aspects of life in Moldova, is characterized by interconnections, overlaps, and ambiguity, stemming largely from the country's long history as a borderland. Though this ambiguity sometimes results in contradictions within projects and ambivalent attitudes held by individual environmentalists, it can also result in a useful flexibility, a theme explored here.

Another thread that ties Moldovan environmental projects together is their embeddedness in the country's larger modernization strategy. Development programs are very visible in Moldova, a former Soviet state with a struggling economy and a weak government at the edges of both Europe and the former Soviet Union. The European Union (EU), relying on international development organizations, seeks to keep Moldova on a path toward European integration through anti-corruption and transparency projects, while the Kremlin uses various tactics to keep Moldova partially dependent on Russia. The Moldovan government generally aims to create closer ties to the European Union, and environmentalists in particular focus on meeting EU regulations and connecting themselves to "global" environmentalism through the adoption of Western narratives. Moldova's economic disadvantages and its historical ties to those across its borders contribute to this inclination to look abroad for solutions, and many environmentalists rely in part on international funding and environmental models to solve local problems. Moreover, an awareness of how "the West" judges them contributes to a Moldovan tendency to see their country as "backward," and environmental projects often aim at "modernizing" the country in some way.

The three case studies in this dissertation illustrate these themes of ambiguity, flexibility, and modernization through a focus on how environmentalists define and respond to various challenges. The first case study looks at several rural projects carried out by urban-connected non-governmental organizations (NGOs) that seek environmental funding to address sanitation problems, especially the lack of potable water and sewage systems, in Moldovan villages (see Figure 1). The second case study focuses on a

protected areas project involving several well-established environmental NGOs in Moldova's capital, Chişinău, which differ in terms of Romanian or Russian language use but have similar views of science and corruption and the same desire for international connections. Finally, the third case study considers an attempt by urban, internationally-focused young people to create a new "eco" movement in Moldova, aiming to combat what they see as the lack of an environmental consciousness and to solve environmental problems through the creation of a "green" economy.

In this chapter, after briefly situating my research within the anthropological literature on Moldova, I review some of the ways that anthropologists have understood environmentalism, focusing especially on studies of the emergence of environmental movements in Central and Eastern Europe as well as the former Soviet Union. Then I briefly examine the ways that Moldova's environmental history has allowed for the creation of an environmental community that differs in certain ways from those of its neighbors, discussing in particular how environmentalism fits into Moldova's larger modernization project. Next I discuss the methods I used during 14 months of ethnographic fieldwork between 2009 and 2012, with the main research occurring during 12 months in 2009-2010. Finally I give an overview of the dissertation.



Figure 1. Moldova.^{1, 2}

¹ Source: University of Texas Libraries, the University of Texas at Austin (http://www.lib.utexas.edu/maps/commonwealth/moldova_pol01.pdf).

² The rural projects discussed in chapter 3 took place in villages north of Chișinău: the Ecosan toilet project near Strașeni, the two villages with contaminated water near Florești, and the nitrate-testing project near Drochia.

Anthropology of Moldova

There is a small but growing literature in anthropology focusing on the Republic of Moldova. My work both builds upon existing work and contributes to the conversation by considering the youth demographic. I focus on two threads in particular: the complexity of identity in Moldova and the obstacles citizens face due to the country's economic disadvantages. On the theme of identity, Jennifer Cash (2004, 2007, 2011) has written about the folkloric movement, which emerged in the 1980s and stresses the diversity of village identity in Moldova. Cash argues that the failure to recognize the importance of village identity has contributed to the failure of larger national discourses, an argument I revisit in chapter 2. Related to this, Rebecca Chamberlain-Creanga's (2006) ethnographic research in the breakaway republic of Transnistria explores how well the official rhetoric of a Transnistrian identity resonates with the public. She finds that while such a discourse may fit "the aristocracy of labor," it does not fit everyone and "discounts internal labor, ethnic, and rural and urban stratifications that impinge on national-political belonging" (Chamberlain-Creanga 2006:397). Similarly, I found that Moldovan environmentalists stressed many different, often overlapping identities in various contexts, and that they did not consider a national Moldovan identity discourse particularly helpful in advancing their projects.

On the second theme, anthropologists Monica Heintz and Leyla Keough have looked at the strategies Moldovans have developed to survive in the face of economic challenges. Heintz, who has also written about national identity (Heintz 2005) and the importance of village identity (Kaneff and Heintz 2006), has studied illegal trade and

migration in Moldova (2007). Drawing on fieldwork in a village near Moldova's border with Ukraine, she explores the discourses people use to justify these activities, finding "economic rationality and the tradition of trade between the ex-Soviet republics" to be the most commonly expressed reasons for crossing the border illegally and smuggling in goods (Heintz 2007:21). Keough (2006, 2003) focuses on rural women traveling from Moldova to Turkey to perform domestic labor. While some villagers blame these migrants for the social disorder in Moldova, she finds that the migrants justify going abroad by stressing the role of economic dislocation in their decision and insisting that they are in fact good mothers, "selflessly sacrificing for their children" (Keough 2006:432). My research similarly considers strategies developed in response to economic obstacles and the lack of opportunities in Moldova, but I focus on a demographic with different goals and a different set of tools at their disposal, namely well-educated, urban-based environmentalists. Moreover, I consider generational differences in advocacy practices and look specifically at how Moldovan youth are seeking new ways to deal with a range of problems.

Anthropology of Environmentalism

Kay Milton (1996:33) defines environmentalists broadly as people who have a "concern to protect the environment through human effort and responsibility" and are therefore labeled, by themselves and others, as environmentalists. Such a broad definition is necessary because environmentalism cannot be defined in a single way; it emerges differently in each setting. Local manifestations of environmentalism often draw ideas

and inspiration from the ecology-based discourses of “global environmentalism.”

Bringing together “the universalist morality of the 1960s social justice politics and the transboundary expertise of an emergent ecological science” (Tsing 2000:331), global environmentalism comprises a set of discourses, movements, and institutions whose dominant ideas are generally based in Western science and technology, and guided by the view that environmental problems and thus their solutions are global (Brosius 1999, Goldman and Schurman 2000). Local groups often use particular narratives in order to create ties to the global movement and attract funding from international donors.

While the use of certain narratives in order to obtain funding can limit the possibilities of environmental NGOs, such narratives can also be appropriated, transformed, and used as a form of resistance. Krista Harper (2006:7), who has conducted research on Hungarian environmentalism, argues that “although environmentalism is a global social movement, the meaning of environmental politics is constructed at the local level of practice, as activists creatively translate environmental issues into novel cultural idioms and political processes.” In the case of Hungary, for example, environmentalists have transformed environmentalism, which acted as a form of resistance to the state during communism, into a wedge between the market and the state in an attempt to tame the forces of “wild” capitalism (Harper 2006).

Based on multi-sited fieldwork in Indonesia, Anna Tsing (2005) also describes how environmentalists use “universals,” or knowledge that moves across cultures, to mobilize people. Environmental projects, she argues, come to life only through the creative friction produced in practical encounters; in the Indonesia case, these encounters

involve not just environmentalists and ecological science but foreign investors, international funding organizations, Brazilian rubber tappers, foreign mountaineers, village elders, and urban student nature lovers. In addition, she challenges the idea that a “global environmentalism” can even exist independently of particular movements, pointing out that “global” and “local” scales are themselves produced through practice. She argues that “around the world, environmental activism depends on distinctive cultural ways of recognizing the environment. ‘Global environmentalism’ – whether coercive or collaborative – can only exist in the dialogues and overlaps among these distinctive concerns about nature” (Tsing 2005:153).

Tracey Heatherington (2010:10) also points out that we cannot take environmental advocacy at face value, but that “the objectifying discourses of both ecology and resistance are always fundamentally embedded in, and regenerative of, understandings about cultural identity and cultural difference.” In the case of a proposed national park in Sardinia, Heatherington discusses how some park proponents portray local residents as bandits who do not care about the environment, while local opponents to the park draw on narratives of tradition and indigeneity to make their own claims to the land. The use of such essentializing discourses can serve to obscure the “complexity in relations between culture and environment” (Heatherington 2010:234). However, an alternative “post-environmentalism” is also possible, when diverse actors form environmental partnerships which “put aside stereotypes of indigenosity and recognize local perspectives on their own terms” (Heatherington 2010:237). In Sardinia, for instance, educated elites who

share many concerns with local residents have acted as “mediators” in sustainable development projects like the park.

Sometimes actors with very different goals can also form productive partnerships, especially when key discourses become available or when spaces for critique disappear. For example, Kim Fortun (2001) shows how grassroots political activists in India used environmentalism as a strategy to bring together various seemingly unrelated groups and ideologies in the aftermath of the Union Carbide disaster in Bhopal. As in Bhopal, many communist countries in Central and Eastern Europe saw activists from diverse spheres unite to protest environmental destruction during the last years of communism. Communist regimes in countries such as Hungary and Czechoslovakia largely overlooked environmentalists as harmless nature lovers, hikers, and mushroom collectors (Snajdr 2008). Environmental activism thus became a space in which diverse groups could come together to protest not only environmental neglect and destruction by those in power but also the communist regimes more generally (Snajdr 2008). For example, Edward Snajdr (2008) describes how the Slovakian environmental movement of the 1980s attracted multiple groups with different interests; together they challenged and ultimately contributed to the overthrow of the communist regime. Most of these groups disappeared or changed significantly after the fall of communism, though this history of environmental activism created a space for such activities to reemerge after 1989.

In the Soviet Union during perestroika, various environmental movements appeared, but as Jane Dawson (2000:33) argues, these groups “represented far more than simple crusades for environmental purity,” being “in fact political movements aimed at

protesting Moscow's imperial control over the periphery." In other words, environmentalism acted as a surrogate for stifled nationalisms and the desire for self-determination against the Soviet state. In various places across the USSR, groups of activists emerged to protest the effects of industrialization, focusing on issues such as the dangers of nuclear energy and the disappearance of the Aral Sea due to large-scale irrigation projects (Feshbach and Friendly 1992). The anti-nuclear movements in particular had strong nationalist undertones, and thus largely disappeared when the Soviet Republics regained sovereignty with the collapse of the USSR (Dawson 1996).

In Eastern European and former Soviet countries with relatively weaker nationalist traditions, environmentalism was less overtly attached to resistance to state control. Dawson (1996) argues that in Russia, for example, activists were unable to mobilize to the same degree as their Soviet neighbors because of their relative lack of a strong national identity. In the post-Soviet republic of Kazakhstan, ethno-nationalism has long been low due to a highly diverse population (Schatz 1999). In fact, Soviet propaganda hailed Kazakhstan as an international republic and "a model of interethnic relations" (Schatz 1999:149). Although these ideas often did not resonate with reality in Soviet Kazakhstan, internationalism remained an important discourse after independence. This diversity, combined with the fact that environmentalists focused most of their attention on nuclear testing, an international issue, led activists in the late Soviet period to adopt an "eco-internationalist" discourse and seek international funding from anti-nuclear environmental organizations (Schatz 1999:150).

In Romania, a true grassroots environmental movement did not emerge during the communist period, as the Ceaușescu regime strictly controlled even environmental groups (O'Brien 2005). During this period, industrialization led to air and water contamination from mining projects, soil pollution due to industrial agriculture, and water pollution from agricultural development in the Danube Delta. Dragomirescu et al. (1998:171) point out that “immediately after the revolution conservationists came out of the woodwork and many ecological groups arose” to focus on these problems. Two parties with ecological platforms gained seats in the 1990 parliamentary election, but this initial enthusiasm quickly tapered off as the dire economic situation led people to favor job creation over environmental protection. Thomas O'Brien (2005:6) adds that the popularity of the environment as a topic of concern during the early “transition” years in Romania in part reflects the fact that “general opposition to the regime was still limited through state control of the media and the continued existence of the Securitate,” the Romanian secret police. As a result, environmental activism became a safe space to express concerns during the early post-communist years in Romania, as it had elsewhere before 1989.

While these histories have contributed to contemporary environmentalism in the region, post-communist movements have had to draw on different discourses and adopt new strategies. The same activists who helped overthrow communism in Slovakia, for example, were unable to adapt their message to the rapidly changing conditions of post-socialism (Snajdr 2008). Snajdr (2008) argues that the emergence of image politics and a tendency to focus on single issues rather than larger environmental visions have

prevented the creation of a coherent national environmental message in Slovakia since 1989. He cites as evidence several recently formed NGOs with ties to Western organizations like Greenpeace, which focus on issues such as animal cruelty and nuclear energy rather than issues of more immediate local concern, like the construction of dams.

While environmentalism in Central and Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union often acted as a surrogate for nation-building projects during communism, more recently it has been associated with sustainable development and modernization. In Latvia, for instance, Katrina Schwartz (2006) finds that narratives of biodiversity conservation and sustainability have been introduced to the region by development agencies through the implementation of sustainable development projects. She explores the ways that Latvians reimagine nature as it is shaped by international values and markets; for example, the biodiversity narrative stresses that nature transcends national borders and thus must be managed internationally. This management is codified, and the value of the biodiversity to be protected is determined by the EU. However, Schwartz also finds that while these narratives shape environmental debates, the outcome is also influenced by local variables; in Latvia these relate especially to nationalism. In Moldova, environmentalism is often embedded in a larger development project and activists are influenced by a desire to “modernize.” The next section gives an overview of Moldovan environmentalism.

Environmentalism in Moldova

Moldova did not see the emergence of a serious environmental movement during the Soviet period. This is in part due to the fact that Moldova did not have a nuclear industry or other large-scale, environmentally destructive projects during this time, but instead relied on a mostly rural agricultural economy. In keeping with Dawson's (2000:34) observation that "rather than focusing on broad environmental demands," environmental clubs in the USSR "tended to focus on specific threats to their local communities," several informants mentioned to me that during the late Soviet period in Moldova, concerned ecologists worked on combating problems such as the overuse of chemicals in agriculture. The Soviet government provided large amounts of chemicals to farmers, who often over-applied them, leading to run-off into surface water as well as groundwater contamination. As Moldova has undergone very little industrialization since independence, its main environmental problems still relate to agriculture, specifically erosion and the overuse of chemicals. These issues are discussed further in chapter 3.

Most of the individuals that I encountered matching Milton's (1996) definition of environmentalists in Moldova were under 35, with the notable exception of the group of middle-aged male scientists who head the five strongest environmental NGOs in Chişinău. After the fall of communism, Western aid organizations directed much of their funding to such organizations, which they saw as essential to the growth of "civil society" and thus the promotion of democracy in the region (Mandel 2002, Wedel 2001). NGOs multiplied rapidly during this period, and although many have since disappeared, Western donors continue to target such groups. These Chişinău-based groups arguably

belong to what Steven Sampson (2002) classifies as an elite class of NGOs, as they control much of the aid that comes to Moldova for environmental projects. Smaller groups and those in rural Moldova complained that it is difficult to compete with these powerful groups for funding. Most environmentalists are affiliated in some way with an NGO, most of which are urban-based or at least have urban connections even if they focus on rural projects. Many base themselves in Chişinău, as locating one's NGO in the capital can mean greater access to funding, although it can also mean that the NGO is farther away from the people and places it protects (Cellarius 2004). Some groups based in *raion* (district) centers obtained funding occasionally for a small number of projects, but NGOs in small villages found it almost impossible to attract funding.

On the surface, Moldova's environmental community seems fragmented, particularly by age, urban or rural location, and language. This mirrors perceived divisions within Moldovan society more generally. In addition to the relatively powerful NGOs in Chişinău, which can be categorized as either primarily Romanian or primarily Russian speaking and are led by middle-aged men, there are a small number of groups run by young people in Chişinău, as well as rural groups in various locations in Moldova. Groups in the latter two categories generally do not try to compete with the more powerful NGOs for funding or work on the same higher profile projects, but seek their own funding directly from international organizations to address specific concerns. While the powerful NGOs tend to work on projects focusing on the protection of biodiversity and saving endangered or unique species – themes that follow the concerns of international donors – the smaller groups have diverse goals. Some carry out urban

projects focused on individual actions such as recycling and bicycling, for example, while others carry out rural projects focused on sanitation or educating young people about the importance of protecting the environment.

Common concerns expressed by environmentalists in Moldova include a lack of public awareness about the importance of the environment, a lack of funding for environmental projects, and widespread governmental corruption, which is seen to impede the mitigation of many environmental problems and the prevention of new ones. The perceived lack of environmental consciousness leads many groups to focus on education and awareness-raising projects. Insufficient government funding has led environmentalists to develop various tactics to acquire support from elsewhere. Several Moldovan environmentalists told me that funding from the European Commission has dropped significantly in recent years, despite the fact that the EU is now supporting Moldova in meeting European environmental standards. As a result, most environmental NGOs in Moldova rely heavily on funds from international environmental or development organizations. In fact, as mentioned above, most environmental projects in Moldova fit into a larger modernization project taking place in the country. A brief overview of the development framework helps place Moldovan environmentalism within this paradigm.

Development and Modernization

The concept of development has been analyzed and understood in many ways; here I am interested in development as the economic and political framework that became

the dominant approach for dealing with poverty in disadvantaged nations after World War II. The concept has roots in colonialism, when Enlightenment ideals of reason and progress justified the control of weak countries by powerful ones; these ideals persisted into the postcolonial period as industrialized countries continued to exert political and economic influence over the newly independent nations. After World War II, two thirds of the world's people were defined as poor based on an arbitrary baseline income; the obvious solution to this economically-defined problem was economic growth (Escobar 1995). Economic development therefore became the accepted approach, and Western science and technology were the favored tools, being supposedly "neutral, desirable, and universally applicable" (Escobar 1995:27). In this way, Western science became a method of control for powerful states over their former colonies (Abraham 2000). Various fields of expertise emerged within the development field, serving to normalize the discourse (Agrawal 2005:228).

The idea of development was readily accepted in powerful countries, as it fit the existing metaphor of the "third world" as a child that needs the help of the adult "first world" (Escobar 1995). Countries that were defined as "underdeveloped" were considered earlier versions of developed countries through allochronism (Gupta 1998). Development gained further support as an approach to maintain U.S. hegemony in the face of anticolonial struggles in Asia and Africa, nationalism in Latin America, and the Cold War (Escobar 1995). Furthermore, the U.S. desired to find new markets for their products and to invest surplus capital. After WWII, the development policies designed by the Bretton Woods Institutions (the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund)

continued to follow a modernization paradigm, which was stated most clearly by W.W. Rostow (1960) in “The Stages of Economic Growth.” Rostow (1960), whose ideas were not just explanatory, but prescriptive, argued that all countries inevitably progress through five stages, at different rates, starting from “traditional” and ending in a period of “high mass consumption.” The idea that so-called backward societies can progress toward modernity through economic development played an important role in the creation of the development industry in the 1950s, and although this industry has gone through various transformations and has given rise to many diverse organizations and projects, a narrative of progress still underpins its basic motivations.

Although the development industry first targeted the “third world,” since the fall of communism, countries in the former “second world” have also been encouraged to Europeanize and modernize through the process of development. Janine Wedel (2001:21) argues that change has been more dramatic in Eastern Europe than in the third world, because developers consider the former to be “misdeveloped” rather than underdeveloped. The idea of Eastern “recovery” from this misdevelopment has created an image of East Europeans as helpless (Borneman 1998). Many Western aid organizations therefore design projects based on the assumption that knowledge transfer from the enlightened West to the backward East is a fundamental part of the process (Wedel 2001).

Social scientists have long been critical of the development framework, the modernization theory underpinning it, and its negative consequences for those it has sought to help.³ James Ferguson (1990) encouraged social scientists to focus not just on

³ For more on the history and failures of development, see Richard Peet (2003), James C. Scott (1998), and edited volumes by Majid Rahnema and Victoria Bawtree (1997) and Wolfgang Sachs (1991).

development's failures, but on the actual effects of projects on local communities. Arturo Escobar (1995) points out that while some development approaches certainly have had the potential to help people, the side effect of each one has been to increase power and control over the people it purports to help. He argues that the biggest problem with the discourse of development has been its exclusion of people, since development is a "top-down, ethnocentric, and technocratic approach, which treated people and cultures as abstract concepts" (Escobar 1995:44).

Recent critiques have focused on the ways that the development model has changed in the past three decades, especially its increasing embrace of neoliberal economics. For example, Edelman and Haugerud (2004:96) point out that the development framework has moved significantly away from Rostow's and other modernization theorists' ideas about progress, which focused not so much on economic growth as a criteria for development, "but rather increasing structural complexity in the economy." It wasn't until after the economic crises of the 1970s that neoliberal economics, with its focus on growth, became more influential both in general and in the domain of development.

Sustainable Development and Neoliberal Conservation

Projects based on the development paradigm have had drastic consequences for the environment, and approaches to environmental problems have also shifted with the trend toward more neoliberal economic approaches. When development practitioners and critics began to call attention to the environmental destruction resulting from many

development projects, the World Bank and other organizations shifted to a sustainable development approach. Sustainable development was initially outlined in “Our Common Future,” also known as the Brundtland Report, which was published in 1987 and significantly influenced the 1992 Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. “Our Common Future” argues that the environment is a global commons requiring shared solutions, and it promotes sustainable development, which it defines as “development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs” (World Commission on Environment and Development 1987:n.p.). Sustainable development acknowledges the earth’s ultimate limits and is theoretically based on reduced consumption in the North (Baker 2007).

Michael Goldman (2005:7) details how the World Bank adopted the sustainable development framework and then incorporated it into its neoliberal economic agenda, resulting in a new paradigm he calls “green neoliberalism”:

The most recent development regime of the World Bank, green neoliberalism, rose to prominence in the early 1990s when widespread popular protests against the World Bank forced it to come to terms with the environmentally and socially deleterious effects of its projects. Activists never anticipated, however, that the Bank’s response would be to reinvent and expand its neoliberal economic agenda to include new social and environmental dimensions, helping it to intervene into more geographical territories and lifeworlds and in ways that its earlier work never permitted. This process ushered in a new regime of environmental practices that involved civil-society actors from development organizations, environmental groups, academic institutes, and state agencies. It fundamentally altered the defining features of the Bank’s neoliberal agenda by adding as a goal the restructuring and capitalization of nature-society relations that exist as uncommodified or underutilized by capital markets.

Due to the World Bank’s incredible power and influence, green neoliberalism has become the dominant approach to development. As Goldman (2005:6-7) argues, “that

few development practices, beliefs, and truths can be expressed today outside the parameters of environmentally sustainable development, on the one hand, and neoliberalism, on the other, is a testament to the efficacy of the Bank's latest power/knowledge regime." One source of their power has to do with access to information; the World Bank has access to so much data that they are considered authoritative, even by environmental NGOs, allowing the Bank to absorb many of its critics (Goldman 2005).

One consequence of this shift to green neoliberalism has been the emergence of neoliberal conservation. Nik Heynen et al. (2007) explain that as neoliberalism has worked to expand investment opportunities by changing the relationships between the state, the market, and civil society in order to encourage increased production and exchange, relationships between human and non-human systems have also changed. With decreasing regulation and increasing privatization in sectors like agriculture, water, and forestry, ecologies are also transformed; most importantly, "they provide opportunities for new markets and systems of extraction, which in turn lead to new environmental outcomes" (Heynen et al. 2007:11). Over time, the focus has shifted "from how nature is used in and through the expansion of capitalism, to how nature is conserved in and through the expansion of capitalism" (Büscher et al. 2012:4). This new approach is known as neoliberal conservation, "an amalgamation of *ideology and techniques* informed by the premise that natures can only be 'saved' through their submission to capital and its subsequent revaluation in capitalist terms," as this is believed to be the only way that "rational" economic actors will pursue conservation (Büscher et al. 2012:4). The major problem with this approach, according to Bram Büscher et al.

(2012:14), is that in focusing on the profit potential involved in protecting the environment, “it privileges as a solution the very structures and processes of neoliberal capitalism that produce the socio-ecological damages it seeks to redress.”

In Eastern Europe, the shift to green neoliberalism and neoliberal conservation began in the 1990s at the same time as Eastern Europe underwent privatization and market liberalization. In relation to the dominant discourse that the region had been “misdeveloped” (Wedel 2001), another common Western narrative held that while the communist state had been wasteful, capitalism was more efficient (Gille 2007). In her study of changing regimes of waste in Hungary, Zsuzsa Gille (2007) challenges this notion, showing how both communism and capitalism are wasteful in their own ways. In the former, shortage produced waste in two ways: some resources became waste because of the lack of other resources necessary to make products, and inferior products became waste because they were produced with substituted resources. In capitalism, waste results mainly from overproduction and “the objective necessity of absorbing surplus through planned obsolescence and accelerated need creation” (Gille 2007:32). Nonetheless, green neoliberalism has swept into the region, along with its assumption that capitalism can benefit the environment.

Gille (2007) argues that due to the strength of Western narratives of socialist wastefulness and capitalist efficiency, European environmental standards have been introduced to Eastern Europe along with neoliberalism without learning from Western mistakes related to the wastefulness of capitalism. Elizabeth Dunn (2005) shows that this process of blindly adopting EU standards in Eastern Europe can have dire consequences

for local environments and human health. Dunn's (2005) ethnographic research of the Polish agricultural and meatpacking industry discusses how the EU has expanded its "technozone," a homogenous space cutting across various divisions, by imposing new standards. In this case, the standards were developed for a set of problems related to Western European industrial agriculture, and did not make sense everywhere in the technozone. The EU considered Poland a risky producer because it did not conform to Western standards, even though their low level of industrialization meant that their practices posed a low risk to human health. The enforcement of EU standards forced many small producers into the informal economy as a result of their inability to implement expensive changes, and larger, corporate operations more likely to harm human health and the environment were able to thrive (Dunn 2005). In this and many other cases, following the EU's procedures was considered more important than finding local solutions. When these procedures are based on green neoliberalism, local communities and environments can suffer.

Neoliberalizing trends have also influenced environmental activism in significant ways, in Eastern Europe and elsewhere. Although environmental activism often provides resistance to neoliberal ideas and their effects on the environment, it has also "provided equal evidence of the power of neoliberal orthodoxies to circulate through and hybridize with environmentalism" (Heynen et al. 2007:11). For example, groups like the Nature Conservancy have used the privatization of nature as a tool of environmental protection; while this can lead to preservation, however, it does not subvert property rights over nature, and it can be elitist and exclusionary (Heynen et al. 2007). Moreover, the trend of

“green-washing,” or the creation of incentives for corporations to sponsor neoliberal conservation, produces the appearance of environmental protection while in fact opening the environment to capitalist expansion (Büscher et al. 2012:18). Guldbrandsen and Holland (2001) argue that the spread of ecological modernization, a related approach privileging further economic development especially through technical approaches as the best way to improve the environment, accommodates corporate environmentalism and thus “threatens to undermine the possibility of grassroots politics. It threatens as well the moral and political standpoint of social justice issues and more critical versions of environmentalism.” Just as its proponents made it difficult for environmentalists to remain critical of sustainable development, it is more and more difficult for environmentalists to resist the forces of green neoliberalism, especially in Moldova where ideas about development and modernization have become hegemonic.

Modernization in Moldova

The development discourse, ideas about modernization and progress, and the neoliberal conservation approach have all played and continue to play an influential role in Moldova, as will be seen throughout this dissertation. Ideas about modernization are rooted in a development framework defined largely by the EU and international organizations, and are compatible with the common local assumption that solutions are to be found largely outside of Moldova. Goals such as economic growth, progress toward EU accession, and decreasing dependence on Russia underpin many development projects. The development community is prominent in Moldova, where projects are

managed by entities such as the World Bank, the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), the Soros Foundation, and various European governments.

One outcome of development is a tendency for weaker countries to accept dominant discourses, adopting the view of their own countries as backward and inferior (Abraham 2000, Pigg 1997); the reluctance to question or resist these ideas often follows from long histories of structural violence (Heatherington 2010). I often heard narratives based on the notion that Moldova is “backward” and in need of help from Western countries who know the “correct” way to do things. The assumption that Moldova needs to modernize emerges from the assessment by various international observers, including EU policy-makers, that Moldova lags behind the rest of Europe. News articles almost invariably describe Moldova as “the poorest country in Europe,” and some have internalized this idea. For example, when my acquaintance Mrs. Varvara asked my visiting parents what they thought of Moldova, they told her that it was a beautiful country and that the people were very welcoming.⁴ She responded, “Da, dar suntem foarte săraci, nu?” [Yes, but we are very poor, right?]. My parents were saved from answering by the confusion of translation and Varvara’s son’s annoyance at his mother’s question. Yet her question reveals Mrs. Varvara’s internalization of the narrative of Moldovan poverty.

The more recent and ongoing expansion of the neoliberal market similarly depends on the creation of new subjectivities, so that while “policies like forced privatization and structural adjustment are a form of violence perpetrated against those

⁴ All of the names used in this dissertation are pseudonyms. Here I use the title “Mrs.” (*Doamna* in Romanian) to reflect the way that younger people and students such as myself generally address adults in Moldova. For older men, I use “Mr.” (*Domnul* in Romania).

who pay a real price in their health and very lives,” the victims often blame themselves for their failures on the market rather than questioning the concept of the market itself (Elyachar 2005:214). In her study of female migrant workers from the autonomous Gagauzian region of Moldova who do domestic work in Turkey, Keough (2006:440) shows how local people have developed narratives that support the very neoliberal paradigm that has contributed to their exploitation. Due to a lack of jobs in their own country, many Moldovan women find they have no other choice but to seek work abroad in order to support their families.⁵ However, as mentioned above, many of those who stay in Moldova blame the women who leave for various societal ills. In response, the migrant workers have created an alternative narrative presenting themselves as hardworking mothers trying to bring order to their lives (Keough 2006:453). These women’s “gendered justifications for going abroad to find work instead of expecting their state to provide jobs for them...align with the neoliberal practices of the Moldovan state and non- and inter-governmental organizations influential in Moldova” (Keough 2006:454).⁶ Both the claim that migrant women are hurting society and the competing claim that these women are doing what they can to help their families deflect attention away from the state, which has been too weak to resist the power of the global capitalist economy and the development industry or to offer any alternatives.

⁵ Keough (2006) argues that post-socialist Moldova, like the “third world,” has experienced the effects of the “feminization of poverty,” the increasingly heavy burden placed on poor women around the world to support their families in the face of economic reforms promoted by the World Bank and the IMF.

⁶ In fact, as they have realized the severity of the poverty and lack of jobs and social services in the country, the International Organization for Migration (IOM) in Moldova has been forced to shift from a strategy of preventing migration and creating jobs at home to one that encourages migration and reworks it as a development tool to “capture remittances” (Keough 2006:454).

Some environmental projects in Moldova also reflect an internalized view of backwardness and the desire to modernize, as well as an acceptance of neoliberal economics. For instance, rural projects focus on improving sanitation and replacing outhouses, often markers of backwardness, with more modern facilities (chapter 3). Also, young environmentalists in particular complain of the backward “Soviet” mentalities of the older generations, and worry that they will never be able to replace these viewpoints with more up-to-date, Western views; many also advocate green neoliberal solutions to environmental problems (chapter 5).

Neoliberal conservation has appeared in various ways in Moldova, and it has spurred ambiguous responses, with both old and young environmentalists alternatively resisting and embracing these ideas. Older ecologists involved in a protected areas project have tried in vain to critique the sale of Moldova’s forests in an attempt to “protect” them, but they have also used neoliberal conservation narratives in order to gain funding (chapter 4). Similarly, a few young people have ideological problems with capitalist approaches to environmental problems, but most embrace these ideas, and even some of those who have resisted them have adopted ideas about the “green” economy in order to attract funding and participants for a budding environmental movement (chapter 5). Before previewing the three case studies, however, I want to explain how I came to know the Moldovan environmental community.

Finding Moldova

In the fall of 2008, I applied to the Fulbright Program for a student fellowship to conduct research on environmentalism in Romania. I had traveled to Romania for a short trip as a research assistant and again on my own to scope out potential projects, and I wanted to return for a longer period to conduct fieldwork for my dissertation. I knew that there were environmentalists carrying out recycling projects and bicycle rental programs in Bucharest, for example, as well as more radical groups trying to prevent environmental destruction by foreign mining and energy corporations, and I hoped to learn more about them. One day at the end of March 2009, a Fulbright representative called to tell me that I had not been selected to go to Romania, but that I could revise and resubmit my proposal for the Republic of Moldova, as they had received no applications for that country. I told the representative that I would have to think it over, and she gave me a few days to do so.

The only thing I knew about Moldova was that it used to be a part of Romania. I also had a vague sense that it might be dangerous. A former classmate in a Romanian language course had lived in Moldova for a few months. Racking my brain, I remembered him mentioning that while he had generally felt safe, he would not want to be a woman alone there. I later convinced myself that he had been talking about Transnistria, the breakaway region of Moldova known for arms smuggling and human trafficking. My hesitations were also countered by the results of a Google search on Moldova, which returned pictures of rolling hills, sunflowers, and vineyards, and a quick review of Moldovan history and politics, which revealed a complex and fascinating past resulting in a difficult present and an uncertain future. In short, I quickly became

captivated by the country and excited about the prospect of doing research there, so I hurried to adapt my research proposal for resubmission to Fulbright.

Shortly after I submitted my new proposal, in early April 2009, violent protests erupted in Chișinău, the capital of Moldova. Again I wondered what I was getting myself into. I was glued to news websites and broadcasts from Moldova, and when the Moldovan government shut off all communication out of the country, I watched news broadcasts from Romania. Images of young people ransacking the government building and burning what they found made me nervous, to say the least. But I assumed that the Fulbright program, sponsored by the U.S. State Department, would not put me into a dangerous situation. Months later, in Moldova, a friend told me that the protests had been confined to the city's central square, and that a block away, mothers were safely pushing their babies in strollers. Moreover, the protests quickly died down, though the political controversy continued, a topic I return to in chapter 2.

In May, I received word from Fulbright that my application had been accepted and I would be going to Moldova at the beginning of October. I decided to continue reading up on the country. In addition to scholarly work, one of the first books I picked up was the mainstream non-fiction book *Playing the Moldovans at Tennis*, by Tony Hawks (2000), a quick and entertaining read in which Hawks, a British comedian, travels to Moldova after betting a friend that he could beat each member of the Moldovan soccer team at tennis. Hawks' physical descriptions of Chișinău stayed with me most as I tried to imagine what I would find there. For example, he describes the dark streets and missing manhole covers, stolen by organized gangs to melt down and sell for profit. Although

many of Hawks' descriptions proved accurate – the dreary-looking communist apartment blocks, the crowded maxi-taxis, the bumpy roads – I realized when I arrived in Moldova that these descriptions were also partial and reflected a Western imaginary of Eastern Europe. Although many apartment buildings seemed dreary from the outside, for example, I discovered that inside they tended to be cheery and welcoming. I also noticed that some changes had taken place since Hawks' visit in the late 1990s. Street lights had been turned back on by the time I arrived in Moldova, for instance, although many side streets were still relatively dark.

In the daylight, I found Chişinău to be a very pleasant city with sprawling parks and tree-lined streets. The main drag is *Bulevardul Ştefan cel Mare* (Stephen the Great Boulevard), named for Moldova's greatest hero. Walking up and down the street, one sees government buildings, banks, restaurants, high-end clothing boutiques, electronics stores, pharmacies, and many small shops where money sent home by family members working abroad can be exchanged. Many of the stores are housed on the ground floors of beautiful old buildings that could easily be overlooked by those distracted by the advertisements covering the storefronts. In almost any weather, pedestrians fill the sidewalks and old women sell flowers to passersby. A statue of Ştefan cel Mare stands at the entrance to one of two central parks on either side of the main street. At the entrance to the other park stands *Arcul de Triumf* (the Triumphal Arch). Both parks are well cared for, with tree-lined paths and benches full of people young and old on warm days. The parks have free public wi-fi, so young people can often be spotted sitting on park benches, hunched over their laptops. As soon as it warms up in the spring, and especially

during summer afternoons and evenings, the parks fill with people strolling, talking, and people watching. Vendors sell popcorn, ice cream, and beer, and children can ride around on motorized toy cars. A fountain sits at the center of one park, a perfect spot for meeting friends. A beautiful cathedral, the main cathedral of the Russian Orthodox Church in Moldova,⁷ sits at the center of the other park, and old ladies often sit nearby, talking and feeding the birds.

In the fall, the changing leaves and clear, sunny skies make Chişinău beautiful. One of the first events I attended in the main square, *Piaţa Marii Adunări Naţionale* (the Great National Assembly Square, or PMAN), was Chişinău Day on October 14. Moldovan, Romanian, and European Union flags hung on the side of the opera house and over the street, placed there by the newly instated pro-European government, discussed further in chapter 2. Vendors filled the square and *Parcul Catedralei* (Cathedral Park) selling homemade wine and honey, grilled meat, and pastries. Performers and festival-goers alike danced the *Hora*, a traditional circle dance, variations of which can be found throughout the region. As the sun began to set, thousands of people flooded into the main square near the Arch to watch Moldovan and Romanian singers perform on a huge stage. When it grew too cold and dark for me, I headed home. The next morning, I awoke to the news that an explosion had occurred at the concert, late in the evening near where I had been standing. Someone had thrown a Russian-made hand grenade into the crowd. Initial explanations ranged from hooliganism to a terrorist attack, but judging from threatening

⁷ Most Moldovans belong either to the Russian Orthodox Church or the Romanian Orthodox Church. Some celebrate Christmas with the former, in January, and others with the latter, on December 25. Many celebrate both Christmases, as well as both New Year's Days. This ambiguity extends to many aspects of life in Moldova and is discussed further in chapter 2.

calls the government had received the same evening, it seemed most likely that some fringe group (perhaps based outside Moldova) had carried out the attack in an attempt to intimidate the public due to their support for the new pro-Europe coalition in parliament. The push and pull between Russia and Europe, also discussed in the next chapter, can be felt in many aspects of life in Moldova.

Winter in Chișinău arrived forcefully in December, the beginning of the coldest and snowiest winter the country had experienced in recent years. Many people commented that they had not seen so much snow since their childhoods. In contrast to the grumbling I hear from many Americans when it snows, almost everyone I talked to in Chișinău was delighted by the snow. In fact, it seemed to put the whole city in a festive mood; grown men ran and slid on the ice, and vendors selling Christmas trees and decorations near *Piața Centrală*, the central market, greeted passing shoppers, smiling and laughing. It became bitterly cold in January, and by February I had grown weary of navigating the treacherous sidewalks, which were covered in layers of ice and snow. Home owners and businesses are not obligated to clear the sidewalks, and the government does not have the means to do so, although the walkways in front of the mayor's office always seemed to be dry.

One night after my language lesson, Elena, my tutor, and I walked outside into the cold. Freezing rain was falling, and the sidewalks had become slick. We came to a set of icy stairs, and Elena managed to climb down with the help of her spike-heeled boots, and then held my arm as I slowly made my way down. We continued on our way, sliding everywhere and thankful that traffic was light. A trolleybus passed, sending huge sparks

from the ice-covered cables. Streetlights reflected off of the icy trees, making the scene dark and bright at the same time. “It was kind of eerie,” I wrote in my field notes. I went on:

We were clutching on to each other so as not to fall, and I asked Elena if she had far to go after she took the bus to Botanica. She said no, then suddenly she saw a bus that she could take, and said she would get on and take it home. She let go of me and shuffled quickly but carefully over to the bus and got on. Then the bus took off and she was gone. I continued to walk very slowly toward my street, turned right and went toward the grocery store. I remembered to stop in and buy some coffee. I then continued on, through the icy parking lot and into my building. I was so glad to be home. [Author’s field notes, February 12, 2010]

Elena texted me several minutes later, as I thawed out with a cup of tea, to make sure I had arrived home safely and to let me know that she had made it home as well. The kindness and warmth expressed by Elena and so many others helped me through the winter and made my initial apprehensions about coming to Moldova seem like a distant memory.

Finding Environmentalism

Throughout the fall and winter, I conducted interviews and attended meetings in Chişinău, especially in relation to the protected areas project discussed in chapter 4. When the snow melted and spring arrived, I participated in more and more environmental projects, both in Chişinău (chapter 5), and in the countryside (chapter 3). However, my research did not start out so smoothly. During my first two months of fieldwork, I felt as though I were trying to research something that did not exist. I met with one person after another who told me they could not help me, but that they could give me the name of someone who certainly could. Many people told me that environmentalism simply did

not exist in Moldova. Nonetheless, I continued the search, meeting with anyone and everyone willing to talk to me, whether their work seemed directly or only tangentially related to “environmentalism.”

Gradually I realized that environmentalism certainly exists in Moldova; it just looks much different from how I envisioned it before I arrived. Most importantly, I determined that I would not be finding radical activists, as I had perhaps expected based on my experiences in Romania and knowledge of environmental activism in the U.S. and Western Europe, but rather individuals involved in various projects related to modernization and development. I started meeting with leaders of NGOs, professors of ecology, students participating in environmental projects, and representatives of internationally funded projects. I conducted semi-structured interviews, using very open-ended questions in order to get a sense of what people found important, what obstacles they faced in their work, and how they approached these challenges.

After getting to know people, I began to participate in project activities whenever I could. Sometimes I found out about meetings and events only after they happened; despite telling my contacts that I wanted to attend anything I could, they often told me after the fact that they hadn’t called me because they had thought that I wouldn’t be interested. In Moldova, people generally associate ethnographic research with the study of folklore (Cash 2011), so most people were unclear about my goals, even after my muddled attempts to explain my research to them. In fact, my own uncertainty about what I was finding and how it might ultimately fit together likely contributed to the confusion of my contacts. Luckily some of them realized that I was happy to attend and help out

with anything environment-related and began inviting me to various meetings and site visits. I also asked Mr. Vitalie, the leader of an NGO discussed in chapter 4, to add me to his email list so that I could find out about more environmental events in Chişinău.

As my research progressed, I used the multi-sited ethnographic technique of “following the people,” a method designed to observe individuals or groups in different settings in order to better understand the complexity of their actions and viewpoints (Marcus 1998:90). I followed individual environmentalists as they worked for NGOs, created partnerships with other people and groups, and worked on several projects at different stages. This approach worked well, and following individuals made more sense than alternative multi-sited approaches, such as trying to follow projects, which tended to start and stop frequently with long periods of inactivity. Moreover, many environmentalists worked only part-time on environmental pursuits, having many different goals and obligations, so following multiple environmentalists rather than focusing on one specific group was important to ensure that I could usually find somebody doing something. For example, Raluca, in her mid-thirties and the leader of one student-centered urban environmental NGO, told me that for her, environmentalism was a hobby. She had two other jobs and little time to commit to the NGO. Also, she told me she had difficulty motivating high school and college students to devote time to environmental projects, as most complained about being too busy with homework and exams. Mariana, a 30-year-old environmentalist, had four jobs, and Aliona, a woman in her mid-twenties, managed an environmental NGO full-time, but had no office. In

contrast, the older, male NGO directors had more predictable schedules, although the projects in which they were involved tended to have irregular timelines.

By focusing on individuals, which helped me to deal with the fragmented nature of Moldovan environmentalism and the choppy schedules of my informants, and by switching among various projects as they ebbed and flowed, my research approach became rather decentered. In their discussion of ethnographic research of social movements, Dorothy Holland, Gretchen Fox, and Vinci Daro (2008:97) explain that “a decentered approach calls for the ethnographic study of place-based – or situated – movement actors and the cultural identities, discourses and practices they promote.” It involves focusing on many groups occupying different places within a movement, trying to understand how each group’s particular context shapes the way they understand the movement and their place within it. Creating a coherent collective identity is challenging for most movements, and “a decentered approach...clarifies some of this complexity by recognizing that versions of the collective identity of a movement are being formed in multiple sites” (Holland, Fox, and Daro 2008:98).

Although the environmental community in Moldova probably cannot be described as a “movement,” it is small enough that people generally know each other, even if they do not work together. Each NGO or group can therefore be considered part of a larger whole; however, each has its own perspectives and goals, which a decentered approach helps to highlight. With this in mind, my fieldwork became a pattern of continuing to interview new contacts, attending any environment-related meetings and events I could find, and checking in with existing contacts periodically to ask about new developments.

While this approach sometimes felt disjointed and confusing from a methodological standpoint, it turned out to be useful from an analytical standpoint, in that it gave me a better picture of the perceived divides within the environmental community as well as the connections between its different parts.

I first became aware of these perceived divides early on when I met with Mr. Victor, a middle-aged nature enthusiast who leads weekend hiking and biking trips through the Moldovan countryside, and who gave me some of his thoughts about the environmental community. In particular, he told me about a split between two types of environmental NGOs in Chişinău: those that speak Russian and those that speak Romanian. As both a former part of Romania and a former Soviet state, Moldova is a largely bilingual country. In daily situations, most Moldovans readily switch between Romanian and Russian for the sake of practicality. However, many Moldovans perceive a divide between native Russian speakers and native Romanian speakers, a phenomenon described by Matthew Ciscel (2010) in his study of language attitudes in Moldova. This divide is largely related to Russians' historically higher social status, discussed further in the next chapter.⁸ These perceptions apply to the environmental NGO community as well, at least according to Mr. Victor and some others familiar with the group. As my research progressed, people told me about additional distinctions within the community, especially between young and old environmentalists and urban and rural projects. The case studies in this dissertation are organized around these categories, and although I argue that these

⁸ Moldovans' typical reactions to my own language skills illustrate this divide. When Romanian speakers found out that I was learning Romanian, they often expressed approval and even mild astonishment, telling me with mild scorn that some Russian speakers have been here for decades without learning Romanian. Native Russian speakers, on the other hand, either expressed surprise that I was learning Romanian instead of the more prestigious (and regionally useful) Russian, or awe and mild amusement that my Romanian was (allegedly) better than theirs.

distinctions are in some ways highly ambiguous, they nevertheless provide a useful framework, especially because my contacts often used these categories.

Several factors influenced how I interacted with people and how people viewed me. First, as a Fulbright student, I was expected to be a cultural ambassador for the United States. I was encouraged to participate in activities that promoted “intercultural understanding” and educational opportunities for Moldovan students in the U.S. I did this by holding a weekly English language discussion group at the Embassy-affiliated American Resource Center and participating in activities organized by this group as well as the English Teaching Resource Center, also associated with the U.S. Embassy. I also gave guest lectures at the Sociology and American Studies Departments at the State University. While I enjoyed doing these things, and in fact learned a lot from interacting with the young people I met, my desire to uphold the values of the Fulbright Program by presenting a positive view of the U.S. probably caused me to censor myself more than I otherwise would have. For example, many Moldovans were interested to learn how real life in the U.S. stacks up against the images they receive in the media. Although my affiliation with Fulbright led me to be measured in my responses, my first conversation group experience, in which we discussed gay marriage, racism, politics, and religion, led me to worry in my field notes that I had “scared everyone off.” This did not occur, however; even though some of the students disagreed with my progressive views, we all treated each other with respect and everyone returned the next week ready for more discussions. Finally, presenting myself as a Fulbright grantee automatically gave me some prestige, at least among those who had heard of this program.

Simply being from the U.S. probably affected the way people viewed me more than any other factor, since most Moldovans I met were eager to meet an American. While this sometimes made me self-conscious, I admit that it helped me greatly in making research contacts. Some people probably saw me as a potential link to money and powerful connections (those people were disappointed), but others simply valued me as a native English speaker with whom to practice speaking.

Being a woman, especially one who looked younger than my 30 years, definitely shaped my experience in Moldova. Contacts seemed to trust me and did not hesitate to share sensitive information, in part, I believe, because they saw me as a harmless young (female) student. While environmentalists occasionally made mildly critical comments about each other, especially about those they perceived to be in different categories from themselves, no one ever expressed discomfort about the fact that I was talking to or working with other groups. This might seem surprising, given the mistrust that can be found in Moldova and other post-socialist societies,⁹ but I think my status as a student and an outsider rendered me less of a threat.

On the other hand, my background in civil engineering perhaps made some contacts take me more seriously. The environmental consulting firm I mention in later chapters was excited to learn about this background, even trying to convince me to stay in Moldova and work for them. In fact, this became a problem when I offered to help them in return for their allowing me to “study” them, because they refused to do this unless they could pay me. Of course, I could not accept money from them, but they felt that they

⁹ See Giordano and Kostova (2002:75) on the social production of mistrust in Eastern Europe.

could not trust me to do the work if I were not being paid. Nevertheless, I became friends with the managers of the firm and learned about their work in a more informal way. Despite my initial difficulties, I felt very welcome in the environmental community in Moldova.

Chapter Previews

To support the argument that Moldovan environmentalism is embedded in a development project with an emphasis on “modernization,” I consider several representative projects in which groups looked for and used international connections to reach goals that support Moldova’s integration into Europe and the neoliberal capitalist global economy. Despite these general guiding themes, development projects are, as discussed above, shaped by local variables. In Moldova, the ambiguity resulting from the country’s position as a borderland results in projects full of contradictions; that is, project participants often expressed contradictory views, or their practices failed to reflect their expressed ideologies. Similarly, the perceived fragmentation of the small environmental community in Moldova contrasts with the overlaps I found among the different segments and the ambiguity within particular projects. In the next chapter, I talk about the Moldovan context from which such ambiguity arises, and then I explore these contradictions and the ways that they can help or hinder projects through three case studies.

The second chapter starts with stories from my trips across the border Moldova shares with Romania. These stories illustrate the ways Moldovans view the people and

places across their borders and the ways their own identities and practices can shift depending on the context. Using the anthropology of borderlands, I consider the present-day effects of Moldova's history as a borderland on identity, arguing that a flexible identity allows Moldovans to seek certain opportunities outside their borders. The tendency to seek solutions elsewhere also shapes environmentalists and environmentalism in Moldova in various ways, as will be seen in the case studies. The chapter briefly reviews the history of Moldova, a territory that has been controlled by various powers since the 14th century, becoming an independent state for the first time in 1991. I then examine Moldovan politics since independence in order to demonstrate the continuing influence of the country's borderland position. Considering the actions of politicians and the views of citizens about politics illustrates the particular complexities of identity in Moldova, and it introduces the highly uncertain context in which Moldovan environmentalists must work. Finally, I explore some alternative explanations of Moldovan identity construction, which help to explain the views and actions of Moldovan environmentalists.

Chapter 3 presents several case studies from the Moldovan countryside. It explores how environmentalists have turned sanitation, normally considered a public health issue, into an environmental issue in response to the state's inability to provide clean water and other sanitation services to many towns and villages. By defining sanitation as an environmental concern, various individuals and groups have been able to attract international funding earmarked for the environment. The chapter also examines how ideologies about development and modernization have shaped Moldovans' views of

the countryside as well as the design of projects to address rural issues. For example, a project replacing traditional outhouses with Ecosan toilets in several villages can be tied to ideologies of modernization and backwardness. I also consider how the binary categories of urban-rural, clean-dirty, and global-local shape projects. Accounts of two projects focusing on drinking water contamination illustrate how these can be useful but can also have unintended consequences.

Chapter 4 focuses on the dominant environmental NGOs in Chişinău and their participation in a protected areas project funded by the Global Environment Facility (GEF) and managed by the UNDP. Through an ethnographic account of two meetings and a workshop, I show that the NGO directors are critical of the UNDP's approach to the project, which allows Moldsilva, the semi-private agency that manages the forests, to use "sanitary cutting" and lumber sales to finance itself. The NGO directors criticized this approach for the environmental damage it causes, focusing their blame on corruption within Moldsilva and the Ministry of Environment. Moreover, they argued that only scientists such as themselves have the expertise necessary to properly manage protected areas, reflecting Russian and Soviet ideas about science and nature protection. Despite these critical views, however, in order to participate in the project, the NGO directors at times adopted the language of governance and development, a tactic that has also served them well in attracting international funding and gaining some leverage over the weak state.

Chapter 5 shifts to a younger generation of environmentalists in Chişinău. It focuses on a project called EcoWeek, which aimed to teach a group of urban young

people about the environment, to carry out small projects, and ultimately to lead to a new environmental movement, Green Moldova. The chapter considers the ways in which the EcoWeek participants attempted to distance themselves from the older generations, including ecologists as well as politicians. Next, the participants adopted various practices associated with global environmentalism, reflecting a global outlook and a desire to be more Western or European, as well as a common feeling of being stuck in Moldova with no opportunities. Finally, I examine EcoWeek organizer Violeta's shift from a critical environmentalism to a more mainstream, sustainable development approach.

The concluding chapter examines the notion of change in Moldova through the lens of environmentalism. I focus first on the frustration felt by a few environmental activists in their mid twenties to early thirties who expressed views that differed from mainstream, pro-Western, neoliberal views, in order to present alternative assessments of Moldova's challenges in relation to environmentalism and development. Second, I reflect on the views of younger environmentalists, who also want to change their country but tend to look for creative ways to work within a neoliberal economic framework. I end the chapter by considering the future of environmentalism in Moldova.

CHAPTER 2

THE MOLDOVAN BORDERLAND

In May 2010, I took the overnight train from Chişinău to Bucharest to visit friends. As Moldovans cannot enter Romania without a visa, I traveled alone. On my return trip to Moldova, the train was crowded. I found an empty cabin and settled in for the night. Just before the train left the Bucharest station, a handsome young man wearing a fedora peeked into my cabin. He asked if I would mind sharing a cabin with him, since he couldn't find an empty one. I said it was fine. He settled in as well, then offered me some of his McDonald's fries and proceeded to tell me about himself. It turned out that he was a pop singer who had won a talent search competition in Romania and earned second place in the Romanian Eurovision finals. He played me his latest single from his cell phone, and entertained me with stories about the wild parties he had been to. The young singer, who has both Moldovan and Romanian passports, was on his way to Moldova to visit his mother. Although he is Moldovan, he had decided to move to Bucharest and compete as a Romanian in order to further his career. While he misses his mother, especially her cooking, living in Romania gives him access to more opportunities. Moldova also competes in Eurovision, but the Romanian contest is larger and more prestigious. As a Romanian-speaking Moldovan, he shifted to a Romanian identity in order to help his career.¹⁰

A year and a half later, while living in Bucharest, I decided to take the train again to visit friends in Moldova for the weekend. On the way back to Romania, I shared a

¹⁰ The singer competed in the Romanian Eurovision contest again in 2012, but he was criticized by another performer who asked, "How can a Bessarabian represent us at Eurovision?" (Realitatea 2012). This suggests that identity shifts are not always easy and may be contested.

cabin with a chatty Moldovan woman who lived in Bucharest. Of her three grown children, one lived in Chişinău, and the other two lived in Western Europe. Talking about Moldova, the woman used a narrative that I had heard many times during my dissertation fieldwork about the relationship between Moldovans and Romanians. Although Moldova has ties to Romania and they all speak the same language, she said, “*Avem istoria noastră*” [We have our own history]. In describing themselves in this way, many Moldovans simultaneously claim that they are and are not Romanian. Such ambivalence is not uncommon in borderlands. Indeed, populations with ties to those across borders often “must evolve a *modus vivendi* which incorporates contradictory identities” (Wilson and Donnan 1998:13). Both the woman on the train and the young singer had developed strategies in which they worked in Romania but maintained family ties in Moldova, incorporating these dual identities.

Moldova has a complicated relationship with Romania, its neighbor to the west with which it shares ties of language and culture, but not the same history. Thomas Wilson and Hastings Donnan (1998:13) point out that “one of the most obvious, and perhaps most problematic, situations in which people’s national identity must be negotiated is where a border is drawn with little reference to the ties of blood and/or culture which in some cases bind those across its reaches.” In such cases, “citizenship, state nationalism, and various other social ties draw border people away from the border, inward, to the centers of power and culture within the state. Borderlanders are often simultaneously pulled across the border by similar ties of ethnic and national unity” (Wilson and Donnan 1998:13). This applies particularly well to Moldova, the only

former Soviet state in which the titular nation (the Moldovans) is related by origin story and language to the titular nation in a state across the border (the Romanians) (Skvortsova 2002:159).

More recent studies of borders have moved away from a focus on the boundedness of particular localities to a study of borders “as processes, as floating signifiers, as waypoints and conduits in the flow of peoples, ideas, goods, capital and threats to the body politic” (Wilson and Donnan 2012:17). This shift is useful for understanding Moldova, where borders have become increasingly porous as more and more people leave to work abroad, both legally and illegally, and as politicians attempt to open the borders to foreign capital investment.¹¹ Moreover, the country’s borders are certainly “floating signifiers,” in that many Moldovans’ understandings of borders as well as their own relationships to those across them can change depending on the context.

My encounters during trips across the Romanian-Moldovan border illustrate the identity flexibility that Moldovans employ in various aspects of their lives, for pragmatic reasons above all. This chapter explores identity in Moldova, as this topic is useful for understanding the practices of Moldovan environmentalists. I argue not only that it is difficult to define a Moldovan identity, but that for many Moldovans it is more beneficial to avoid making such a definition. I begin by drawing on the anthropology of borderlands to show how research in such locations has contributed to our understandings of identity construction and identity flexibility. I then briefly sketch Moldova’s history as a

¹¹ John Borneman (2012:119-120) refers to the latter trend as the “victory of capitalism,” arguing that this victory was “the condition of possibility for the radical changes in cultural, territorial, and economic borders” in German, Lebanon, and Syria where he has conducted fieldwork. As shown throughout this dissertation, the influx of foreign capital and ideas has influenced Moldova in significant ways since independence.

borderland, providing a broader context for the border crossing stories described here and for the case studies that will follow. Focusing on more recent history, I describe the nationalist discourses that have competed for dominance especially since independence in 1991, explaining how these discourses and Moldova's current geopolitical status as a borderland between Russia and the European Union affect present day Moldovan politics. Then, following arguments by some scholars that to understand the spread or rejection of nationalism we must understand how such discourses do or do not resonate with people's life experiences, I discuss why neither of the two dominant discourses have caught on among the general population. Finally I argue that like many other Moldovans, environmentalists are largely unaffected by nationalist discourses, instead embedding their projects within a larger state development project stressing modernization, as suggested in chapter 1. Moreover, I argue that flexibility is important in the environmental community, where my contacts often demonstrated a strategic ability to shift between different identities and to hold multiple, sometimes conflicting viewpoints simultaneously.

Anthropology of Borderlands

At a friend's birthday party in Chişinău, I stood chatting with a group of people.

"What are you studying, exactly?" one young man asked me.

"Please don't say identity," said Silviu, a Moldovan acquaintance, smiling.

Everyone laughed, and he continued, "the Moldovan identity is to avoid having an identity."

While identity is always constructed, many researchers have recognized that this is especially clear in borderlands. Various anthropologists have thus explored identity flexibility in border regions. Some have described what they call a hybridized identity, which combines elements of two or more groups to create something new. For example, based on his research on the U.S.-Mexico border, Renato Rosaldo (1989:209) finds that people living in borderlands are “endowed with a curious kind of hybrid invisibility. They [seem] to be a little of this and a little of that, and not quite one or the other.” Akhil Gupta and James Ferguson (1992:18) argue that a borderland contains “incommensurable contradictions,” and can be described as “an interstitial zone of displacement and deterritorialization that shapes the identity of the hybridized subject.” In her study of the borderland between the former Yugoslavia and Italy, however, Pamela Ballinger (2004) argues that describing inhabitants as having hybrid identities in the end reproduces essentialist identity frameworks rather than subverting them. Furthermore, she points to the importance of considering power relationships in the production and use of particular identity discourses, whether of hybridity or purity. Similarly, Daphne Berdahl (1999) stresses taking borderland power dynamics into consideration, as these can lead to cultural confrontations.

The borderland concept has proven useful in several studies of postcommunist Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union. In Germany, Berdahl (1999) explores the influence of reunification on identity in a German border town, Andreas Glaeser (2000) examines identity formation in the Berlin police department after reunification, and John Borneman (1992:1) describes the fluid or even “chameleon nature” of Berlin leading up

to the fall of the wall. Mathijs Pelkmans (2006:13) finds that inhabitants near the southern border of the Republic of Georgia have been eager to “define and solidify ideas of identity and difference” since the Soviet border opened in 1991. In contrast, Sarah Green (2005:10) examines ambiguity along the Greek-Albanian border, finding that inhabitants insist on “a continual, though rarely entirely explicit, assertion that things cannot, and perhaps even must not, be pinned down, be fixed, be clarified.” While ambiguity is usually considered something to be avoided or hidden, Green (2006:12) is told “to stay confused” about identity, concluding that “ambiguity can be as hegemonic and subject to disciplinary regimes as clarity; confusion, lack of a means to pin things down, can be as actively generated as positive assertions and constructions of truth.” This insistence on maintaining ambiguity is similar to what I found in Moldova.

Historian Charles King (2000:5) argues that throughout history, “the territory of present-day Moldova has been a classic borderland, fought over and divided by outside powers eager to remake the Moldovans in their own image.” Various political entities have attempted to build a coherent Moldovan identity since independence, but have failed in part because of this legacy as a borderland. Moreover, the country lies at the margins of different power centers; it is “an ‘institutionalized’ borderland, in the sense that it has always been located in a peripheral position with respect to centers of political and often also economic power” (Kaneff and Heintz 2006:7). Anthropologist Jennifer Cash (2009:276) points out that “as a border state to the EU, with a long history of being a borderland, and divided by internal borders, Moldova’s geopolitical status is inherently unstable.” Not only is it on the edge of Europe, even more so after Romania entered the

EU in 2007, it is also on the edge of Russia, especially “due to its continued economic and political dependence on Moscow” (Kaneff and Heintz 2006:9). As a result, Moldovans can be seen to embody what Green (2006:4) terms “ambiguous marginality,” in which “to be marginal...is to be in between rather than on the peripheries: it is to be neither one thing nor another, or possibly too much both one thing and another.”

While the question of Moldovan identity has drawn various scholars to this subject (e.g. King 2000, Cash 2007, Heintz 2005, Kaneff and Heintz 2006, Skvortsova 2002, Cărauş 2003, van Meurs 1998), I found Moldovans themselves to be less concerned with identity. Sebastian Muth and Frederik Wolf (2010:3) confirm that while every post-Soviet Moldovan government has accepted and to some degree promoted the idea of a separate Moldovan identity, “the people of Moldova largely ignored such discourse on national identity.”¹² Indeed, Silviu’s remark, above, while primarily meant to elicit laughter, reflects not only the popularity of identity as a topic of research in Moldova, but also an aversion to discussing this issue. While most Moldovans I talked to about this subject did not voice their distaste as Silviu did, most were nevertheless uninterested in discussing it at any length.

Silviu’s suggestion that Moldovans prefer to avoid having an identity reveals another important point. As a small, weak country in between the EU and Russia, Moldova does not offer many advantages to its citizens. Many Moldovans have been pushed or pulled to look elsewhere for opportunities to make a living. In order to do this,

¹² In contrast, Tamara Cărauş (2003:20) found that during the 1990s, identity was a popular topic of conversation. “In Moldova,” she writes, “national identity is regarded as a necessary condition for human survival and there is a lot of ‘identity talk’ – ‘Moldova has lost its identity,’ ‘Moldova is in search of identity,’ etc.”

they have developed ways to make the best of the ambiguity resulting from their location on the margins. As King (2000:12) states, “the history of shifting borders and political allegiances has long been reflected in the overlapping and situational identities of Bessarabia’s inhabitants, including their descendants in present-day Moldova.” While it is certainly difficult to define a Moldovan identity, Moldovans in fact have few incentives to make such a definition; in this case flexibility is more useful than fixity. The case studies in the following chapters suggest that ambiguity can be useful in the context of environmental projects as well. My contacts demonstrated a strategic ability to shift between different aspects of their identities and to hold multiple, sometimes conflicting viewpoints simultaneously. These are related to Romanian and Russian language use (chapter 4), urban and rural identities (chapter 3), local and global outlooks (chapters 3 and 5), and political and apolitical stances (chapters 4 and 5).

A History of Shifting Borders

A brief overview of the history of Moldova sheds light on the complexity of Moldovan identity. Two thousand years ago, various diverse groups occupied the region that today comprises Romania and Moldova. The Romans conquered the area in 106 AD, and the resulting population spoke a Latin-influenced language recognized by the 17th century as Romanian (Heintz 2005). Later Slavic and other immigrants also combined with the local population and influenced the language. The name Moldova first appears in 1359, referring to a principality encompassing the region in present-day Romania known as Moldova, a small part of present-day Ukraine, and the portion of present-day Republic

of Moldova to the west of the Nistru River (King 2000). Moldova was one of three kingdoms in a larger Romanian-speaking region that also included Transylvania and Wallachia (Heintz 2005). This region lay at the confluence of the Austro-Hungarian, Ottoman, and Russian Empires, each of which controlled different parts of the region at certain times (see Figure 2). The Austro-Hungarian Empire controlled Transylvania (as well as northern Moldova starting in the 18th century) while the Ottoman Empire held sway in Walachia and Moldova.



Figure 2. Romanian principalities 1793-1812.¹³

Moldova's most prominent hero, *Ștefan cel Mare* (Stephen the Great), held off the Ottomans during his rule as prince from 1457 to 1504. The Ottomans finally took over

¹³ Source: Wikimedia Commons (<http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Rom1793-1812.png>). Permission to share granted under the GNU Free Documentation License and the Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 3.0 Unported license.

the territory in 1538, controlling the region until 1812 (van Meurs 1998). After the Russian-Turkish war (1806-1812), the Sultan ceded the region between the Prut and Nistru rivers to the Russians, and the area became known as Bessarabia (van Meurs 1998). During Russian rule, immigrants from throughout the region settled in Moldova, and the Russian language played an important role in their integration (Skvortsova 2002). Michael Hamm (1998:19) describes Bessarabia as “an open frontier” that “attracted the adventuresome and the refugee.” These included the Gagauz, a group of Orthodox Christian Turks that immigrated to Bessarabia from Bulgaria between the mid-18th and early 19th centuries, as well as Germans, Poles, and Jews, Bulgarians escaping Ottoman oppression, and Russian and Ukrainian escaped serfs and religious dissenters (Hamm 1998, Kaneff and Heintz 2006). Free land allotments made Bessarabia a particularly attractive place to settle (Kaneff and Heintz 2006).

During the early 20th century, a Moldovan national movement gained strength on both sides of the Prut (van Meurs 1998), and in 1918, Bessarabia voted to become part of Greater Romania, remaining so throughout the interwar period (Heintz 2005). The occupying Russian troops withdrew and were replaced by the Romanian military, and the Bessarabian portion of present-day Moldova became part of Romania. However, Romania had difficulty integrating this new territory, which had been influenced by over a century of Russian rule (Skvortsova 2002). Meanwhile, Stalin designated a small strip of land to the east of the Nistru River (the Transnistrian portion of present-day Moldova) as the Moldovan Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic (MASSR). This area had not previously belonged to Moldova, although some Romanian speakers lived there, having

settled along both sides of the Nistru during the initial expansion of the Moldovan principality in the 14th and 15th centuries (Cash 2011). Although Bessarabia was officially part of Romania, the Soviets throughout this period considered the western border of the MASSR to be the Prut rather than the Nistru River (van Meurs 1998). In 1940, citing the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact, in which Germany expressed its lack of political interest in Bessarabia, the Soviets annexed all of this area and combined it with the MASSR to form the Moldovan Soviet Socialist Republic (MSSR) (King 2000). In “exchange” for Transnistria, Stalin gave some Bessarabian land to the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic (Heintz 2005). Soviet Moldova is depicted in Figure 3.



Figure 3. Moldova and Romania.¹⁴

¹⁴ Source: Wikimedia Commons (http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Romania_2000.png). Permission to share granted under the GNU Free Documentation License and the Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 3.0 Unported license.

In order to justify the new borders and weaken Moldovan ties to Romania, with which they shared a language and many cultural traditions, the Soviets began to promote the idea of a separate Moldovan identity (King 2000, Heintz 2005). For example, they claimed that Moldovans spoke a different language than Romanians, “Moldovan,” which they began writing in Cyrillic rather than Latin. Moldovans desiring higher education had to learn Russian. To further encourage Sovietization, the Soviet government deported thousands of rural Moldovan families to Siberia, and industrialization encouraged the migration of Russian laborers to Moldova (King 2000). Additionally, Romanian intellectuals in the MSSR who had not fled were deported, and throughout the communist period, contact between Romania and the MSSR was minimal (Heintz 2005). The Soviets reduced Moldovan history and literature to the portion linked only to Moldova and Russia (Heintz 2005).

Moldovan Independence and Competing Nationalisms

As the Soviet Union collapsed, most of the newly independent states celebrated the revival of their own national identities. In Moldova, however, a pro-Romanian national movement rejected the notion of a separate Moldovan identity, dismissing it as a Soviet fabrication and “a vast exercise in Stalinist denationalization” (King 2000:4). Led by these nationalists, Moldova stopped using the Cyrillic alphabet, and on August 31, 1989, Moldovan (called Romanian in the 1991 constitution) became the only official language of the country (Heintz 2005). They also adopted the Romanian flag colors and national anthem. On August 27th, 1991, the Republic of Moldova became an independent

state for the first time in history. The pan-Romanian intellectuals who led the independence movement, along with many outside observers, assumed that Moldova would reunite with Romania. The strength of the national movement was limited, however. While pro-Romanian nationalists claimed that the Moldovan identity was only a Romanian identity “spoiled” by Russian influence, not all Moldovans felt this way. Thus the period of “pan-Romanian euphoria” was short-lived, and reunification with Romania did not happen (King 2000:169). The post-Soviet, pro-Romanian nationalist movement proved successful only so long as it focused on independence from the Soviet Union, losing support when unification with Romania became the goal (Skvortsova 2002).¹⁵

Nonetheless, leaders in Transnistria cited fear of reunification as justification for secession from Moldova after a violent conflict in 1992 (Heintz 2005). This breakaway region aims to unite with Russia, but its independence is not recognized internationally. Political rhetoric on both sides of the Nistru River at the time portrayed Transnistria as different from the rest of Moldova. Such rhetoric first emerged toward the end of the USSR, pitting pro-Romanian Moldovans against pro-Soviet Russian speakers. The pro-Romanian rhetoric, stemming from this group’s minority status during Soviet times, accused “the Russians” of ruining the economy and told them to go home to Russia (Munteanu 2002). The pro-Soviet rhetoric over-emphasized the possibility of Moldovan unification with Romania in order to instill fear in Russian speakers, many of whom did not speak Romanian. Eventually, “a combination of a deep sense of communal insecurity and anxiety about being cut off from Russia motivated aspirations of territorial secession

¹⁵ Polls have found that two-thirds of Moldovans want to be part of the EU, but that the majority do not want to reunify with Romania (Bidder 2010).

on the east bank of the Dniester” (Munteanu 2002:213). Fear of reunification with Romania also led the Gagauz in southern Moldova to seek and obtain autonomy in 1995. Both Transnistria and Gagauzia are shown in Figure 4.



Figure 4. Administrative divisions of Moldova.¹⁶

¹⁶ Source: Wikimedia Commons (<http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Moldadm.png#file>). Permission to share granted by Anonimu under the GNU Free Documentation License and the Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 3.0 Unported license.

In addition to the pro-Romanian national movement (as well as Gagauz and Transnistrian identity discourses),¹⁷ a pro-Moldovan view carried over into independence. Moldovan researcher Tamara Cărauş (2003) examines these two very different identity discourses, which have existed at least since 1956 with de-Stalinization. While the Romanian-oriented discourse used by protesters in 1989 emphasizes Moldova's ethnic ties to Romania and assumes the inevitability of reunification with Romania, the Moldovan-oriented discourse emphasizes Moldova's distinction from Romania from a political standpoint, stressing Moldova's separate identity before unification with Romania during the interwar period. The former view is ethno-nationalistic, as proponents argue that only ethnic Romanians should automatically be considered Moldovan citizens, while others should have to prove their ability to speak Romanian (Cărauş 2003). By contrast, the pro-Moldovan stance is not ethnicity-based but location-based. The government followed this latter view in 1991 in defining citizenship to include all individuals living in Moldova when sovereignty was declared in 1990, regardless of ethnicity or language ability. This definition's inclusivity reflects "the multiethnic heritage of Bessarabia" (King 2000:169).¹⁸

While intellectuals in both the Romanianist and Moldovanist camps had remarkably stood together during the Soviet period to fight Russification, and again in

¹⁷ See Chamberlain-Creanga (2006) for a discussion of Transnistrian identity.

¹⁸ Statistics from the 1989 census break down the population as follows: 64.5% Romanian-speaking, 13.8% Ukrainian, 13.0% Russian, 3.5% Gagauz Turks, 2.0% Bulgarian, and the remainder smaller minorities (King 2000:xxviii). The next census, held in 2004, found the following numbers: 75.8% Moldovan, 8.4% Ukrainian, 5.9% Russians, 4.4% Gagauz Turks, 2.2% Romanians, 1.9% Bulgarians, and 1.0% other nationalities; 0.4% registered no nationality (Statistica Moldovei 2006). The latter does not include numbers from Transnistria, and there was some confusion about the distinction between Moldovan and Romanian identity; there were claims that some census takers encouraged those who responded with Romanian to choose Moldovan instead (Rusnac 2006).

1989-1991 to fight for independence, after this period, “when divergences among intellectuals started to become obvious, tension and reciprocal blame grew rapidly and strengthened” (Cărauş 2003:38). Cărauş argues that the increasingly sharp contrast between the two discourses throughout the 1990s and beyond makes it impossible for a single Moldovan national identity to emerge. Cărauş (2003:24) points out that while nation formation generally requires forgetting certain aspects of history, “in Moldova, what is forgotten by one discourse is stressed by another.” For example, some Romanian authorities treated Moldovans badly during the interwar period; the Romanian-oriented discourse forgets this behavior, while the Moldovan-oriented discourse exaggerates it (Cărauş 2003). Romanian anthropologist Monica Heintz (2005) argues further that because of the similarities and overlaps between Romanian and Moldovan symbols of identity, it is difficult to define a Moldovan identity based on unique characteristics. Instead, Moldovan officials have generally tried to create a Moldovan identity in opposition to the Romanian identity, often “by denigrating both Romanians and Romania as a state” (Heintz 2005:7).

While Heintz, Cărauş and others may indeed be correct that a single Moldovan national identity would be impossible to create, discussions about national identity continue to play a role in Moldova, especially in the political arena. The next section illustrates how these discourses, along with pro-European and pro-Russian stances, create a complex political situation in which politicians also must shift identities depending on the context. This discussion also highlights the political uncertainty with which environmentalists and others must contend.

Political Uncertainty after Independence

From the beginning of my fieldwork in the fall of 2009 until March 2012 when I was writing my dissertation, Moldova did not have a permanent president. Protests in April 2009 against alleged election fraud set in motion a period of instability due to deadlock in Parliament between the Party of the Communists of the Republic of Moldova (PCRM) and the opposition, four parties which in the summer of 2009 formed the Alliance for European Integration (AIE). In order to understand how this situation developed, and what has happened since, I must first briefly review what happened in the 1990s and 2000s.

During the first years of independence, the question of Moldova's identity in relation to Romania took center stage in Moldovan politics. Mircea Snegur, a former official in the Communist Party, won an uncontested, direct presidential election in 1991 as an independent candidate. Snegur favored maintaining independence rather than uniting with Romania, and since 1994, subsequent Moldovan governments have more or less shared this outlook (Cash 2009). Petru Lucinschi, another former Communist Party official, won the 1996 direct election as the Agrarian Party candidate to become Moldova's second president. In snap parliamentary elections called by Lucinschi in 2001, the PCRM won the majority of votes. In accordance with constitutional changes stipulating a parliamentary election of the president, the Communist majority voted in the head of their party, Vladimir Voronin. While Moldova's first two presidents had emphasized building a relationship with the West, the PCRM had run on a platform that focused on returning to communist policies and seeking a closer relationship with Russia,

on whom Moldova depends for gas, oil and electricity (Cash 2009, Crowther 2007).

During the first years of Communist rule, the government attempted to implement policies such as the reintroduction of Russian as a mandatory school subject and replacing the History of the Romanians class with a History of Moldova class, resulting in mass protests (Cash 2009). By the 2004 campaign, however, the PCRM had shifted its message, embarking instead on a path toward Europeanization (Crowther 2007). This reflected “both a pragmatic response to Moldova’s changing geopolitical position on the borders of Europe and an effort to capture wider voter support” (Cash 2009:260). Cash (2009) describes how this put many Moldovans in the strange position of being anti-Communist and pro-European at the same time as the Communists became pro-European. In any case, the PCRM won reelection, and Parliament elected Voronin to a second term.

Leading up to the 2009 elections, the PCRM officially maintained a commitment to Europeanization, but in the context of a perceived lack of EU interest in Moldova during the country’s political turmoil, Voronin again sought to strengthen Moldova’s ties to Russia (O’Neill 2009). In contrast, the opposition parties displayed an unwavering commitment to Europe. In addition, Voronin had a troubled relationship with the Romanian government, potentially weakening Moldova’s ties to Europe even further. The results of the April parliamentary elections gave the PCRM 60 of 101 seats, one short of the three-fifths majority needed to elect a president. The results led to initially peaceful protests by thousands of young people in Chişinău who believed the vote had been rigged. The protests turned violent, and hundreds of protestors were arrested; many have

reported being abused by police officers (Schwartz 2009), and four deaths are alleged to have been linked to the protests (Grosu 2009, Radio Free Europe 2010b, Nine O'clock 2009, Unimedia 2009). In the aftermath of the protests, Voronin accused Romania of orchestrating the events (Turgut 2009), while opposition parties claimed that the violence was incited by the PCRM itself to justify a government crackdown (Barry 2009).

Although Romanian President Traian Băsescu denied any involvement, Voronin retaliated by expelling the Romanian ambassador from Moldova and requiring that all Romanians acquire a visa to enter the country. Băsescu replied by relaxing the requirements for Moldovans to obtain Romanian passports.

As a result of claims of voter fraud and result manipulation made by the protesters and the opposition parties, a recount was held which confirmed the initial results. In response, the opposition parties – the Liberal Party (PL), the Liberal Democratic Party of Moldova (PDL), and the Party Alliance Our Moldova – formed a coalition and refused to vote for the Communists' choice for president, then Prime Minister Zinaida Greceanîi. (As president for two consecutive terms, Voronin was not eligible for reelection.) One vote short, the PCRM failed to name a president and had to dissolve Parliament, scheduling snap elections for late July. In the meantime, Marian Lupu, a leader in the PCRM, defected to join the very small Democratic Party of Moldova (PDM). He attracted enough support away from the PCRM that the July 29, 2009 elections ended with the opposition parties earning 53 seats and the Communists only 48. The four opposition parties subsequently formed a coalition, the Alliance for European Integration (AIE), but still did not have enough seats to elect a president without help from some of

the Communists (ITAR-TASS 2009). Voronin finally resigned his position as president in September 2009, at which point the president of Parliament, Liberal Party leader Mihai Ghimpu, automatically became acting president. Ghimpu, who personally favored reunification with Romania but promised that he would not seek such a union as acting president, created some controversy in 2010 when he refused to attend the Victory Day celebration in Moscow (Kyiv Post 2010), and then declared June 28 to be “Soviet Occupation Day” (Radio Free Europe 2010a). Even the other leaders of the AIE expressed disapproval of this decree, fearing it would push votes to the PCRM. Despite support for the holiday from the academic community, the Constitutional Court cancelled the decree (RIA Novosti 2010). Shortly after the incident, Russia drastically reduced imports of Moldovan wine, allegedly due to quality concerns (Auyezov 2010).

According to the constitution, new parliamentary elections could not be held for at least a year. On September 5, 2010, in an attempt to break the stalemate, the government held a constitutional referendum that would have reintroduced direct presidential elections. Due to low voter turnout, however, the referendum failed. Explanations given for the low turnout included apathy after nearly a year without a president and disappointment in the AIE, insufficient education about the referendum, and efforts by the PCRM to encourage people not to vote (Radio Free Europe 2010c). Rumors swirled that the PCRM was trying to create animosity between ethnic groups by targeting young

people, suggesting to them that the AIE would seek unification with Romania.¹⁹ After the failure of the referendum, Parliament was again dissolved and new elections were held on November 28, 2010. This time the AIE won 59 seats, still two short of the 61 needed to elect a president. Ghimpu stepped down at the end of December, Prime Minister Vlad Filat of the PDL (and AIE) briefly acted as president until Lupu was named acting president on December 30, 2010. In the fall of 2011, three members of the PCRM decided to defect in another attempt to break the deadlock; however, these three and the AIE could not agree on a candidate. Finally in March of 2012, Parliament elected the relatively unknown judge Nicolae Timofti to the presidency. Timofti quickly confirmed his dedication to the project of Europeanization. As I finished writing this dissertation in the spring of 2013, however, the Moldovan government collapsed amid infighting and accusations of corruption among members of the AIE, immediately raising questions about Moldova's commitment to Europeanization and the possibility that Moldova would again turn toward Russia (Tanas 2013, Roth 2013).

This discussion illustrates how Moldova's position on the edge of the former Soviet Union and the European Union and the lack of a single national identity influence politics in Moldova. Tension between the EU and Russia mean that although both generally overlook Moldova, the country can occasionally become the focus of power struggles, as both entities seek to hold sway in this and other border countries. This leads

¹⁹ Many of my Romanian-speaking friends announced on Facebook that they had voted. I asked two Russian-speaking friends if they had voted, and neither had, saying they did not feel this was the way to create change. The day after the referendum, I had lunch with an American friend, a Romanian friend, and a Moldovan friend. In response to the American, who could not understand why Moldovans would not want to directly elect their president, the Romanian and the Moldovan commented cynically that Moldovans just want a dictator to tell them what to do. Moreover, they complained that the leaders of the AIE had spent more time fighting amongst themselves in anticipation of the potential direct elections than creating a united front and explaining the importance of the referendum.

Moldovan politicians to walk a fine line between the two, not wanting to anger either one. They depend on Russia for gas and as a market for their wine, but they aspire to join the EU, through which they envision longer-term prosperity. Politicians' ability to shift their narratives, along with countless rumors about potential alliances between various parties to break political deadlock (e.g. Alexe 2010), illustrate the flexibility of identities even among politicians and parties with supposedly very different ideologies.

Failed Nationalisms

Earlier I described the two dominant national identity discourses in Moldova, the pro-Moldovan discourse and the pro-Romanian discourse. The discussion of Moldovan politics demonstrates that while Romanian nationalism in particular sometimes comes to the surface, it only instigates political disputes. And while the pro-Moldovan discourse has allowed for an inclusive definition of citizenship, its often harsh views toward Romania have made it unsuccessful in becoming a dominant national ideology as well. Politicians have thus largely shifted to narratives about Europeanization.²⁰ Even this subject elicits mixed reactions in the population, however. According to some social surveys, 70 to 75 percent of Moldovan citizens living in Moldova favor joining the EU (Actmedia 2011). In the same surveys, however, half of all respondents said that they “would still incline towards Kremlin,” reflecting ambivalent attitudes.

To understand why neither identity discourse has worked in Moldova, it is worth briefly considering the major theoretical frameworks of national identity. According to

²⁰ Of course, the European Union has faced its own challenges in integrating diverse populations – most with their own national identities – into a single European culture (Bellier and Wilson 2000, Abélès 2000, Shore 2000).

Ernest Gellner (1983:1), “nationalism is primarily a political principle, which holds that the political and the national unit should be congruent.” More specifically, “nationalism is a theory of political legitimacy, which requires that ethnic boundaries should not cut across political ones” (Gellner 1983:1). Several scholars have outlined necessary characteristics of nations or ethnic groups. Fredrik Barth (1969) maintains that an ethnic group must have social boundaries which allow members to define the differences between its own members and outsiders; these boundaries are continually negotiated and may or may not correspond to spatial boundaries. In Moldova, it is difficult to point to a physical boundary encompassing a Moldovan nation due to the identification of many Moldovans as ethnic Romanians, most of whom live in a separate state. Even if we do not consider location, this definition excludes those Moldovans who do not identify as ethnic Romanians. Anthony Smith (1986:24) adds that a nation must also have a shared origin myth or “common myth of descent” that traces a people to a common ancestor in a particular place and time. The pro-Moldovan narrative stresses the common history of those living within Moldova’s borders; however, due to their country’s long history as a home for migrants from many lands, most Moldovans also have ethnic ties to other places, which this narrative ignores.

While these theories of nationalism are useful in understanding successful nation-building projects, in order to understand why some projects fail, it is important to examine the perspectives of ordinary people. Alexander Motyl (1999:67) argues that even if a group of people shares a physical location and a common origin story, if the national discourse does not fit a people’s “lifeworld,” or lived reality, the discourse will be

rejected. Eric Hobsbawm (1992:10) argues that nations are “dual phenomena, constructed essentially from above, but which cannot be understood unless also analyzed from below, that is in terms of the assumptions, hopes, needs, longings and interests of ordinary people, which are not necessarily national and still less nationalist.” He goes on to explain why this is so:

First, official ideologies of states and movements are not guides to what is in the minds of even the most loyal citizens or supporters. Second, and more specifically, we cannot assume that for most people national identification – when it exists – excludes or is always or ever superior to, the remainder of the set of identifications which constitute the social being. In fact, it is always combined with identifications of another kind, even when it is felt to be superior to them. Thirdly, national identification and what it is believed to imply, can change and shift in time, even in the course of quite short periods. [Hobsbawm 1990:11]

Hobsbawm’s insights are especially useful in the case of Moldova. First, as mentioned above, nationalist movements in Moldova enjoyed widespread support only until the country gained independence. Researchers have explained this loss of support in various ways. Cărauş (2003:49) concludes that the “modernizing nationalists” fighting for unification were in effect “outside their society, mobilizing it from above,” rather than listening to the desires of the people. Cash (2007) points out that this result has precedent, as both 20th century nation-building projects in Moldova, the interwar attempt to create a Romanian nation in Bessarabia and the Soviet attempt to build a Moldovan nation, also failed. Iulian Frunţuş (2003:130) describes the difficulties the Romanian authorities had with the “implementation of their ethno-political project” in rural Bessarabia during the interwar period, citing the strength and importance of inhabitants’ local identities as an important complicating factor. Cash (2007:605) similarly argues that during Soviet times and after independence, the nationalist demands “that ethnic Moldovans prioritize

citizenship and nationality *over* other identities” proved unattractive to Moldovans, many of whom place higher importance on local village identities, for example, described further below. Kaneff and Heintz (2006) also provide evidence of the importance of village identity; many villages in the Bessarabian region (both in Moldova and Ukraine) remain largely monoethnic, each retaining its own traditions and languages while communicating with each other in Russian. Even neighboring villages from the same ethnic group “display variations in language and ritual practice,” indicating that “in some contexts even ethnicity does not serve the purposes of regional unification” (Kaneff and Heintz 2006:11).²¹

While the pro-Romanian and pro-Moldovan discourses have failed to resonate with Moldovans on a wide scale, Charles King (2000:6-7) maintains that there exists “a separate sense of identity among the Moldovans,” who “feel themselves to be something other than simply Romanians.” Kaneff and Heintz (2006) also argue that a feeling of unity exists among Bessarabians stemming from their shared history of immigration to the region during the 18th and 19th centuries and a shared influence from various regional powers in the subsequent years. These events made the Moldovan experience considerably different from the Romanian experience.²² When separated from the anti-Romanian sentiments of the pro-Moldovan identity discourse, this common history idea

²¹ For example, Kaneff and Heintz (2006) report that in the Bessarabian region of Ukraine, one village celebrates Christmas on January 7, a neighboring Moldovan village celebrates on December 25, and another neighboring Moldovan village celebrates on both dates.

²² A Moldovan friend told me that when she meets a Moldovan outside of Moldova, they always greet each other and chat. I asked how she knew someone was Moldovan and not Romanian or Russian, for example. She said she could just tell. Later I mentioned this separately to two other friends, who both agreed that they could pick out a Moldovan anywhere, even without hearing the person speak. They could not explain how this was possible, but the existence of this idea indicates a sense of unity, perhaps based on a commonality of experience.

does seem to be widely held. Romanian-speaking Moldovans often answered questions about identity with, “Of course we are Romanians, but...,” going on to explain that history has made the countries and the people different. A Moldovan friend living in Bucharest confirmed that even after ten years of living in Romania, he felt like an outsider.

In contrast to other post-Soviet countries, a large gap exists in Moldova between ethno-national identities, including not just the Romanian identity but Gagauz, Russian, Ukrainian, and other minority identities, and political identity, which uses a neutral framework that does not consider ethno-cultural origin in defining citizenship (Cărauş 2003).²³ While Moldovan citizenship is based on ideas about human rights, legal rationality and civic duty, surrounding countries including Romania, Russia and Ukraine define citizenship based on ethnic criteria. Importantly, Moldovans can also become citizens of these states by proving ancestral ties, demonstrating that while civic identity connects them to Chişinău, ethnic identity often ties them to places outside Moldova’s borders. According to Cash (2011:89), this reflects a distinction between patriotism and nationalism, which can be experienced simultaneously. For example, Moldovans can see themselves as Romanian in terms of nationality, yet at the same time they feel they are *not* Romanian, being instead Moldovan patriots.

Of course, a patriotic identity may not lead to particularly patriotic feelings. In fact, many of my own contacts in Moldova have stressed that they are *not* patriotic.

Having coffee with three girlfriends at their workplace one day, one friend announced

²³ This recalls Smith’s (1991:13) distinction between the Western civic and non-Western ethnic types of nations, although he insists that all nationalisms contain both “civic and ethnic elements in varying degrees and different forms.”

that she was proud of her country, and another responded, “You’re the only one.” Ilya, an opinionated Moldovan friend who identifies as Russian, told me that Moldovans are not patriotic, because they “don’t love themselves.” I often received skeptical reactions when I told Moldovans that I liked their country. “Really?” and “Why?” were common responses. When I first met Ianka, an environmentalist, she asked how I felt about Chişinău. “Don’t lie,” she said. I told her, truthfully, that I really liked the city. “How long have you been here?” she asked me. “Over three months,” I said. “You will change your mind,” she assured me. One evening I visited an American friend’s apartment to watch a movie with several Moldovans, including both Romanian and Russian speakers, and several foreigners. When a character in the film commented that his life could not get any worse, one of the Moldovans in the room said, “Come to Moldova!” and everyone laughed. Ilya describes Moldova as “a land of broken dreams” in which many people talk about how much better things were during Soviet times.²⁴

Having in mind these repeated claims that there is nothing good about their country, I suggest that Michael Herzfeld’s (2005) concept of cultural intimacy is a useful way to explain Moldovans’ shared sense of identity despite their rejection of official national discourses and their ethnic connections to other states. Cultural intimacy is “the recognition of those aspects of a cultural identity that are considered a source of external embarrassment but that nevertheless provide insiders with their assurance of common sociality” (Herzfeld 2005:3). In the case of Moldova, one shared aspect of identity

²⁴ Kristen Ghodsee (2011:180) describes a similar growing sense of nostalgia for the “security and order of communism” in Bulgaria, where a 2009 survey found that 62 percent felt they were worse off economically than they had been under communism. However, in Bulgaria and across the region, responses varied widely by age group, with older people more likely to express discontent with their current lives (Pew Research Center 2009).

appears to be a belief that they have nothing to be proud of. This results in negative evaluations of themselves and their country, yet at the same time it gives them something to laugh about together. The concept of cultural intimacy is especially useful in the context of anthropologists' studies of national identity formation, Herzfeld (2005:3) argues, "because it typically becomes manifest in the course of their long-term fieldwork, a site of *social intimacy* in the fullest sense. Anthropologists are in an unusually good position to know the forms of rueful self-recognition in which people commonly engage." Moldovans' self-described openness meant that it did not take long for me to become familiar with their self-deprecating narratives, and in fact their negative views of Moldova did not seem to be a source of great embarrassment, except perhaps in their common refusal to discuss politics. Nonetheless, their complaints about the Moldovan state illustrate the "active skepticism about official claims and motives" that results from the coexistence of "the formal operations of national states...with various realizations of cultural intimacy" (Herzfeld 2005:4). In other words, any claim of national unity made by the government can be challenged by the cultural knowledge that in fact this unity is false.

Finally, an alternative source of identity proved to be important for many Moldovans I met. Many of my contacts did express a sense of pride in being Moldovan, especially when talking about their home villages. Based on her research with Moldovan ethnographers and folklorists, Cash (2004:64) argues that an additional national discourse began to emerge in the 1980s along with the folkloric movement, which ran parallel to the national movement and "sought to uncover, document, and publicly reveal the variety

and richness of local customs and culture that had been ‘covered up’ by Soviet practices.” This movement sees Moldova as a nation of villages and stresses unity through diversity, as each village has its own unique traditions which are nevertheless recognizable to those from other villages (Cash 2011). She explains:

Because the majority of Moldova’s population has close family ties to villages, people weave their individual histories, memories, and experiences into a common narrative of identity. They use the trope of “the village” as if this place corresponds to any and all of Moldova’s physically existing villages. People’s intimate experiences in and of actual villages lend a sense of physical reality to their shared and idealized image of the village. [Cash 2011:133]

Narratives about “the village” are indeed common in Moldova, at least among Romanian speakers. Of course this leaves out Russians whose families moved to Moldova during Soviet times and thus do not have ties to a Moldovan village. In fact, while Moldovan folklorists claim to be apolitical, their search for “authenticity” often leads them to ignore what villagers tell them about influences from other communities and to assume that Gagauz communities, for example, do not have their own culture but have borrowed from Romanian traditions (Cash 2011). Thus even this group, in attempting to create a village-based national identity, relies on pro-Romanian ideas about tradition and authenticity.

Pragmatism and Environmentalism in the Borderland

This chapter has illustrated the complicated nature of Moldovan identity. As mentioned earlier, I found Moldovans generally uninterested in discussing identity, in part because of this complexity. Nonetheless, identity plays an important role in many Moldovans’ lives. Their difficult economic circumstances lead to a strong sense of pragmatism and a remarkable ability to use their identities flexibly. Along with the stories

from the train at the beginning of this chapter, a few instances from my fieldwork illustrate how identity comes to the surface, especially when it is particularly useful or when it is denied. For example, despite their lack of interest in reuniting with Romania, many Moldovans find the difficulty in obtaining a Romanian passport unfair, and some told me they felt “trapped” in Moldova.^{25,26} I had several Moldovan friends in various stages of the application process for a Romanian passport, which often includes rejection and reapplication. Catea, a project manager for UNDP, told me that getting Romanian passports for herself and her daughter was “a big headache.” She had to collect birth and death certificates for her grandparents; if something was spelled incorrectly (i instead of î, for instance), they would reject it and new certificates would have to be issued, she said. She had to go to Romania and wait outside an office for three days, and when she finally got in, her application was rejected. Two of her grandparents are Ukrainian, and their certificates had been translated into Romanian by a Moldovan. This was not acceptable; they had to be translated by a Romanian. All in all, the process took several years. I happened to be with another friend when she received word that her application had finally been accepted. We hugged and jumped up and down in celebration of this news. My friend was excited both because she feels Romanian in some sense, and because it opens up new travel opportunities in the EU.

²⁵ The barbed wire fence that still exists along portions of the Romanian-Moldovan border perpetuates this feeling, although Vlad Filat, the pro-Western Prime Minister of Moldova, announced plans in 2010 for the fence to finally come down (Ciocoiu 2010). Filat declared that “in the twenty-first century, when the borders are open across Europe, it’s an embarrassment to have a barbed wire fence on the border of the EU. We must clear away this remnant of the Soviet past” (Unimedia 2010).

²⁶ Even as the EU works to become a “borderless” zone, people living just outside this zone, like Moldovans, feel increasingly left out. These “shifts in what border regimes allow in or keep out” relate to “new forms of belonging and nonbelonging,” which can profoundly affect Moldovans’ sense of identity (Wilson and Donnan 2012:17).

In contrast to those situations in which identity becomes important, Moldovans' own descriptions of everyday life indicate that while ethnicity does shape social life in certain ways, ethnic differences generally are not seen as important. As Rogers Brubaker (2004:2) found through extensive ethnographic research in Cluj, Romania, a Transylvanian city comprising both ethnic Romanians and ethnic Hungarians, that "ethnicity 'happens' in a variety of everyday settings," but to the average Cluj resident, "ethnicity is indeed largely irrelevant." Moreover, the high percentage of intermarriages in Moldova mean that many people can identify with multiple ethnicities. Many of my Moldovan friends have one parent who is Ukrainian or Georgian, for example, or a Russian-speaking father and a Romanian-speaking mother. Combining this with the country's "severe economic problems and massive emigration," a nation-building project for "strengthening citizenship" is not a priority (Heintz 2005:1). That is, rather than stress identity as a driving concern, Moldovans tend to relate to identity in pragmatic ways.

This discussion of Moldova as a borderland and of failed nationalisms and flexible identities sets the stage for a discussion of Moldovan environmentalism. It also sets Moldovan environmentalists apart from some of those studied by other social scientists elsewhere in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union. As mentioned in chapter 1, some ethnographers in the region have found a sense of national identity to be an integral part of some countries' environmental movements (e.g. Snajdr 2008, Schwartz 2006, Dawson 1996). By contrast, I found very little nationalism in the Moldovan environmental community. Once on a site visit in southern Moldova, I came across a book written by an older Moldovan ecologist that talked about Moldova's natural beauty

using very nationalistic language. This stood out to me, because I had not heard such language from my contacts in the environmental community. This chapter has explained why such a discourse has not caught on in Moldova. In addition, many environmentalists expressed to me that Moldovans do not have an appreciation for or interest in the nature that surrounds them. For all of these reasons, the environmentalists I met did not consider nationalist narratives particularly effective. Instead of drawing on a Moldovan identity, then, environmentalists in Moldova emphasize international, global, and rural identities depending on the context. Furthermore, instead of embedding their activities within a nation-building project, they often embed them in a statewide project based on imaginaries of modernization and development. These factors and their consequences for Moldovan environmentalists will become evident through the case studies that follow.

CHAPTER 3

THE “REAL” MOLDOVA? RURAL SANITATION PROJECTS

I remember well staying in queue in order to drink a glass of water, buy a bun, go to the toilet in the school yard where the smell and the sanitary conditions were unbearable, then to spit on my hands instead of water, and the vest served as a towel...but I had no pretensions as I had seen something better only in movies or in the city, though I was dreaming of this luxury.

Reaching the age of adolescence, becoming involved in community actions, participating in many national and European meetings, I got wings and realized I can make a change for my village. I realized that my commitment as a citizen in my native village means a change! [Aliona, environmental NGO director, from a 2008 progress report]

Aliona's words attest to the difficult and often unsanitary conditions in Moldovan villages, many of which lack safe water sources. They also illustrate her view of urban and rural as separate, as well as unequal, one being unclean and the other representing luxury. Finally, her participation in national and international meetings and use of her new knowledge to help her village show how connections between global and local can bring about change. This chapter explores these themes through an examination of rural sanitation projects carried out by Moldovan environmental advocates.

Sanitation is not a typical concern of Western environmentalists, as it is generally considered a public health issue. Nevertheless, due to the failure of the Moldovan state to improve the situation, some Moldovan environmental advocates have devoted their efforts to addressing it.²⁷ Especially because of the high level of public awareness of these issues, my research focused in part on projects targeting sanitation issues in rural areas. Most of these were carried out by environmental non-governmental organizations

²⁷ Sanitation issues did, however, play a role in the creation of the modern environmental movement (Preston and Corey 2005).

(NGOs) based in Chişinău or strongly connected to organizations there, and many involved international funding and expertise. Here I focus mainly on three projects. One involves a small NGO based in Chişinău addressing the lack of sewage systems by installing Ecosan toilets in several Moldovan villages. Aliona, the young woman who founded the NGO, was born in one of the villages but lives in Chişinău. Two of my friends in Chişinău, Doina and Natalia, organized the second project, a 30-day online fundraising and awareness raising campaign to help two villages in northern Moldova find a solution for their lack of access to potable water. They hoped to attract the support of an American organization that would agree to create a partnership with the villages. The third project was carried out by a small NGO run by a middle-aged man named Mr. Anatole and headquartered in a *raion* (district) center in northern Moldova. Mr. Anatole's NGO received 5,000 USD through the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) in Moldova, which manages a small grants project funded by the Global Environment Facility (GEF), in order to test the nitrate levels of well water in several villages in the *raion*. I learned more about each of these projects through interviews, informal conversations and site visits.

Drawing on these three case studies, this chapter examines the ways that Moldovan environmental advocates try to bring attention to rural sanitation issues, focusing on the ways they frame problems and solutions. I noticed throughout my fieldwork that many people, including environmentalists, said contradictory things about rural Moldova. These contradictions often followed from the use of binary categories that organize discourse even though they are not so easily separated in practice. For example,

the countryside is seen as both “clean” and “dirty” depending on the context, and “urban” and “rural” tend to be more closely connected than common narratives suggest.

Anthropologists have long recognized the “cross-cultural practice of dualistic forms of thought and organization” (Borneman 1992:3-4). Claude Lévi-Strauss in particular advanced this argument with his discussion of dual organization, or the “universal tendency to use binary oppositions in classification” (Borneman 1992:4).²⁸ At least three sets of (often overlapping) binary categories, namely urban-rural, clean-dirty, and global-local, inform rural sanitation projects in Moldova. Although these binaries are simplifications, my research contacts often used them as a basis for narratives that helped them to pursue project goals. The chapter aims to illustrate the use of oppositions to make sense of problems and devise solutions. It also considers the ways in which these purportedly oppositional categories are actually intertwined. This sometimes results in contradictions and unintended consequences, but it also allows environmentalists to shift between multiple frameworks to advance their projects.

Rural Sanitation in Moldova

Water quality and sanitation are serious concerns in rural Moldova. Roughly two million people, over half of the population, reside in rural areas or small towns with insufficient access to potable water, as their groundwater has been contaminated with agricultural chemicals and other pollutants (Hugosson and Larnholt 2010). Most rural residents do not have access to a centralized water distribution network but instead

²⁸ See Lévi-Strauss (1963), in particular chapters VII and VIII, in which he discusses the importance of binary oppositions as a form of social organization using case studies from the Americas, Indonesia, and Melanesia.

retrieve their water from shallow wells. About 70 percent of Moldovans use groundwater and the remaining 30 percent of the population uses surface water, both of which are generally polluted and often fail to meet health standards (Hugosson and Larnholt 2010). Drinking water can be contaminated by “high concentrations of nitrates, sulphates, chlorine, fluorides, iron, minerals, color and hardness” (World Bank 2008:20). In addition, 16 percent of drinking water in rural areas has coliform bacteria and seven percent has fecal coliforms (World Bank 2008). Many rural residents are not connected to a sewage system. Trash collection is another problem; without this service, trash piles up on riverbanks or in various areas in the villages.

The CIA Factbook lists “extensive soil erosion from poor farming methods” and “heavy use of agricultural chemicals” as the two leading environmental problems in Moldova. The overuse of chemicals, including banned pesticides like DDT that remain from Soviet times, has contaminated the soil and groundwater in many locations. Of course, a Cold War mentality continues to pervade sources like the CIA Factbook and World Bank publications, which are structured by an east-west dichotomy and ideologies about modernity and backwardness, as discussed below. It is thus important to examine the effects of practices not just during Soviet times or with roots in Soviet-era practices, but also the influence of practices encouraged by Western “experts.” Chemical usage dropped at the end of the Soviet period, but as chemical pesticides and fertilizers have again become available, especially since the late 1990s as Western development agencies have encouraged the use of chemicals, usage has risen. When it rains, pesticides and fertilizers wash off fields into small streams, eventually infiltrating groundwater. During

the post-Soviet decollectivization, farmers received land not in consolidated areas but in narrow strips, often on hillsides, leading to serious erosion problems and increased run-off. Nitrates from fertilizers are especially harmful to human health, as consumption lowers the blood's oxygen capacity and can cause cancer and impede children's development when ingested in large amounts (Hugosson and Larnholt 2010). Many wells have unsafe levels of nitrates according to EU standards. In addition, persistent organic pollutants (POPs) can be found in many old pesticides. These can cause chronic health problems, including cancer and neurological problems, not only among those who have worked directly with the pesticides, but also among area residents because of the ability of POPs to enter into the food system and the environment (Hugosson and Larnholt 2010). Cancer is the second leading cause of death in Moldova (Ministry of Health 2008), and a recent study found a link between cancer rates and the number and location of POP warehouses in rural Moldova (Gisca 2012). Widespread poverty in rural Moldova exacerbates and is exacerbated by these water and sanitation issues.

Sanitation and Environmentalism

Sanitation projects do not often top Western environmentalists' lists of concerns; indeed sanitation is generally seen as a public health problem in Western contexts. However, when a state is weak and unable to provide basic sanitation services, as in Moldova, local actors must find alternative strategies to deal with this problem. One solution has been to treat sanitation as an environmental problem, although this approach comes with its own challenges. Sylvia Tesh and Eduardo Paes-Machado (2004) argue that

sanitation fits awkwardly with environmentalism's principles, and that categorizing sanitation as an environmental issue requires reframing some of the basic ideas of global environmentalism. The modern environmental movement is largely based on a narrative of "humans recently interfering with a fragile and intricate ecological network, destroying a once-unblemished natural order, and doing so out of greed, carelessness, or stupidity" (Tesh and Paes-Machado 2004:66). Dominant approaches to these problems have included trying to force or convince industries to stop harming the environment, and to educate people to appreciate nature and reduce their impact upon the earth. These approaches do not apply to sanitation problems, which often result from the failure of municipal governments to adequately deal with the waste produced by local residents. Although environmentalists do sometimes target governments,²⁹ the authors argue that this "just does not carry the moral outrage of railing against an industry for creating pollution," while "railing against the residents risks blaming the victim" (Tesh and Paes-Machado 2004:67).

In the case of Moldova, insufficient funding to improve rural water and sanitation issues and the perception of widespread corruption has led to a lack of confidence in the state to solve these problems.³⁰ Local actors feel that even if the state introduced a

²⁹ This was the case toward the end of communism in several Eastern European countries, for example. See Edward Snajdr (2008) on the role of environmental activists in the downfall of the communist regime in Slovakia, Krista Harper (2006) on the origins of the Hungarian environmental movement which formed in opposition to a state dam project in the 1980s, and Jane Dawson (1996) on the importance of anti-nuclear activism in various Soviet states during perestroika for channeling resentment and ultimately challenging the authority of the Soviet Union.

³⁰ Indeed, Moldova was listed at 66th on the 2011 Failed States Index, falling into the second-worst category, "in danger" (Foreign Policy 2012). They dropped to 73rd on the 2012 Index, making the list of the top ten most improved countries by rank, but were still considered "in danger" (Foreign Policy 2013).

sanitation policy, implementation would be unlikely;³¹ thus they consider lobbying the government a waste of time and have pursued different tactics. Sanitation's awkward fit within environmentalism creates a challenge for Moldovans trying to address the problem using this approach, however, as their funding must come from international sources guided by global environmental narratives. The case studies described here show some of the ways they have approached this challenge.

Urban-Rural

Mr. Dorin, a Moldovan ecologist, told me early in my fieldwork that I must travel to the countryside to experience the “real” Moldova, insisting that “Chişinău is not Moldova.” Sonja, an Austrian working for the UNDP in Moldova, similarly told me that Chişinău does not represent the country, and that leaving the capital to visit a village gives a visitor a new perspective. These opinions illustrate that Moldovans and visitors alike sometimes hold in their minds a dichotomy between urban and rural. Narratives about the peaceful countryside and its fresh, *aer liber* (open air) in contrast to the dirty, crowded city are common, and as seen in the previous chapter, “the village” is a powerful trope that is important to many Moldovans’ sense of home. Images of the country as “a natural way of life: of peace, innocence, and simple virtue” on the one hand, and “the city as a place of noise, worldliness and ambition” have a long history (Williams 1973:1). Raymond Williams (1973:1) describes how the English have historically made sense of economic and social changes related to industrialization using such narratives, arguing

³¹ One contact told me the story of an official who had announced that he had used government funds to open a new water treatment plant. A photograph of the plant circulated, but in reality no plant had been built. The photograph had been altered, and the money had “disappeared.”

that “a contrast between country and city, as fundamental ways of life, reaches back into classical times.”

Others have pointed to differences between urban and rural in the context of development. Drawing on fieldwork with environmental groups in rural Bulgaria, anthropologist Barbara Cellarius (2004:217) argues that “the interpretation of what constitutes sustainable development or even an environmental issue can depend upon one’s perspective,” and “an important variable affecting perspective is urban versus rural location.” Typical environmental projects in Chişinău certainly differ from those outside the capital; nevertheless, urban and rural are not so easily separated. Many connections exist between urban and rural space; Chişinău residents often have familial ties outside the capital, and many travel regularly between these places. Moreover, in the context of sanitation, some problems typically considered “rural” can also be found in towns and cities in Moldova. As we drove through one town during a site visit, for example, Cateia, the local project manager for the UNDP small grants project, pointed out a nine-story apartment building with sewerage but no running water. Residents must carry their own water up the stairs, as the building has no elevator, and some older people pay boys to fetch water for them. Finally, there are an increasing number of connections between Moldovan villages and urban centers abroad, where many villagers have moved for work due to a lack of opportunities in their villages.

The maintenance of the urban-rural dichotomy in the face of questions about what counts as rural, as well as the many practical connections between the two spaces, requires Moldovans to construct mental boundaries between these categories. Daphne

Berdahl (1999) describes how former East and West Germans continually remade their identities in relationship to one another as their former countries went through political and economic reintegration. In this way, “the wall in our heads” remained, continuing to separate *Ossies* and *Wessies* after the actual wall came down (Berdahl 1999:166). Based on fieldwork before and after 1989, John Borneman (1992:3) similarly examines coherence building in Berlin, examining how the east-west dichotomy persisted even as these two categories underwent “shifting significations.” In much the same way, Moldovans maintain a mental division between urban and rural, even in the face of many changes in what “rural” Moldova looks like.

In contrast to the tropes of the peaceful countryside and the crowded city, many Moldovans also associate the urban with “modern” and the rural with “backwardness.” These images also have long histories; Williams (1973:1) points out that “on the city has gathered the idea of an achieved center: of learning, communication, light,” and “on the country as a place of backwardness, ignorance and limitation.” Soviet ideology painted rural areas as backward, and many privileges were given to city residents. In describing the fate of Latvia’s “populist peasantry,” influential during the interwar period, Katrina Schwartz (2006:8) describes how “under Soviet rule, the ‘nation of farmers’ and its agrarian ethnoscape came under attack by the theoretical forces of Marxism-Leninism, with its frank hostility to all things rural, and the material forces of agricultural collectivization and modernization.” However, agrarian nationalism continued to thrive in Latvia throughout the Soviet period, due to the subsidization of the substantial agricultural sector and the promotion of rural folklore. Only when Latvia began its bid to

join the EU did their attempts to protect agriculture and the countryside from capitalist development begin to fail (Schwartz 2006).

Whether influenced by Soviet or capitalist ideology, or both, stories about the “backward” countryside flourish in Moldova, especially among urbanites. Catea, who was born in Chişinău but has family in rural areas, said she could never live in the village, even though transportation between the city and the country has improved. She told me during a drive through the countryside that the villages farthest from the road tend to be very poor and often still display statues of Lenin. People in the villages are cut off from information, she said, creating a large gap between the country and the city. For example, she had heard of groups of shepherds who still think the president of Moldova is Mircea Snegur, the first man to take office after Moldova gained independence.³² Over the course of my fieldwork, I also heard many people blame the “mentality of the people” for Moldova’s shortcomings. This explanation was often, though not exclusively, applied to rural dwellers. Catea told me that although Moldova once had drinkable water and vast forests, the people did not understand that these were non-renewable. Villagers cut down the trees and polluted the water, she said, and they still think the river and the forest belong to them, even though it is public land regulated by the government. Mr. Dorin, also an urbanite, told me that farmers think only of the short term and thus use improper irrigation techniques that damage the environment.

Similarly, Ecaterina, a friend born in Chişinău who works with retired American farmers who visit to give advice to Moldovan farmers told me that her organization must

³² She has also heard a story about one village that has two thousand people but only three surnames, so that people have to refer to each other not just by surname but by where they live. I heard similar “rural legends” from other Chişinău dwellers, both those born in the village and not.

choose its hosts carefully, as many Moldovan farmers are “not open to new ideas.” Those who do want advice, however, tend to be open to the American farmers’ ideas, because they feel that these visitors really understand the Moldovan farmers’ position. Often when retired American farmers arrive on Moldovan farms, Ecaterina explained, “they observe the situation and know what to do because they were in the same position 40 years earlier.” If someone from Chişinău were to come to the Moldovan countryside to tell farmers what to do, the farmers would not listen, she told me. Thus rural Moldovans also distinguish between city and country; in this case the Moldovan farmers identify more strongly with a rural American than with an urban Moldovan. This story also illustrates the widely-held idea that rural areas need to “develop,” apparently along the same timeline as did rural America. Retired American farmers often grew up with conditions similar to present-day Moldova, Ecaterina said, so visiting a Moldovan farm is like “going back in time” for them.

NGO director Aliona also told me that I must visit the rural areas to understand the contrast between Chişinău and the villages. From a village herself, Aliona pointed out that there tends to be discrimination against villagers in Moldova rather than help for them. Due to the perception that villagers are “simple,” urbanites – especially those without rural connections – often treat them badly. These attitudes stem in part from the Soviet period. Igor Munteanu (2002:207) explains that “a rigid social hierarchy existed in the USSR in which the collective farm worker was at the bottom of the social ladder”; this propaganda was supported by an income scale that created “significant socioeconomic disparities between the rural and urban populations.” Moreover, certain

Soviet policies resulted in structural disadvantages for the rural population (Munteanu 2002). For example, rural residents could no longer move to Moldovan cities without a residency permit, and even those who managed to acquire a permit had difficulty finding housing, as newcomers from elsewhere in the USSR were given priority.³³ Structural inequalities persist today as a result of these policies, perpetuating the idea of the urban-rural dichotomy.

Use of the Urban-Rural Dichotomy

In the context of Moldovan environmental projects focusing on rural sanitation, maintaining a division between urban and rural, despite their overlap and continual redefinition in practice, allows urban-based project managers to maintain and justify their control over projects. Portraying rural residents as ignorant about problems and even helpless creates the need for educated urban-based actors to control funding and project implementation.³⁴ Virtually all of the Moldovans I met working on environmental projects had, or were in the process of working toward, an undergraduate or graduate degree, and most had experience working on various different projects. Although this arrangement theoretically allows for knowledge transfer from urban to rural (and often West to East), in practice it can disempower rural groups.

³³ Urban-rural discrimination also contains an ethnic component. This is due in part to the influx of Russian speakers to urban centers in Moldova during Soviet times, even as Moldovan elites fled or were driven out of the country. Romanian-speaking Moldovans thus became a minority in major urban areas while continuing to make up most of the rural population. According to Munteanu (2002) these disparities have led to structural inequalities between ethnic groups that persist even today. See also Alla Skvortsova (2002) for an account of ethnic conflict in Moldova.

³⁴ Funding for environmental projects is skewed so far in favor of powerful urban groups that UNDP declared Chişinău-based NGOs ineligible to apply for the small grants program starting with the second round of funding in order to give smaller rural groups a chance. According to Cellarius (2004), such skewing is common in the region.

Doina and Natalia's attempt to use their expertise and connections to raise funds for two northern villages with contaminated drinking water failed to achieve its desired result. After our trip to the villages to collect information, described in more detail below, Natalia and I both posted stories and photos on a website. Unfortunately Doina and Natalia later learned that donations could not be made through the website after all. Nevertheless, they still hoped to find an American organization to help tackle the water problems in these villages. An American woman they knew through previous projects was looking for investment opportunities for her company. She visited Moldova and traveled with Doina and Natalia to the two villages. When I talked to Doina almost a year later, however, no investment had been made. She expressed regret that she and Natalia had not been able to make the difference they had wanted to make. While multiple factors contributed to the failure of the project – such as the fact that Doina and Natalia had other full-time jobs and could only devote their spare time, and that governmental uncertainty and corruption made attracting a funder more difficult – the urban-rural dichotomy played an important role. The assumption that these villages needed the help of educated professionals from the city, not to mention foreign funding and expertise, shaped the project in certain ways. For example, the group attended a meeting in the first town to present themselves to various people from the community. As Doina, Natalia, and the mayor entered a large conference room, they were given a round of applause, and a local official gave a speech thanking them for coming from Chişinău to help their village. That the project never lived up to its expectations suggests that ultimately this approach was ineffective. The portrayal of the urban experts as coming to the rescue of the rural

residents possibly even disempowered local residents, who may have been given the impression that they must wait for urban assistance rather than to seek solutions themselves.

In contrast, the Ecosan toilet project, which has been more successful in meeting its goals, illustrates the complex relationship between urban and rural locations and identities. The choice to focus on toilets, and the decision to use dry toilets rather than expand the sewage system and increase the demand for water, is above all pragmatic, as the lack of hygienic facilities makes this a pressing need. In addition, however, toilets signify both modernity and backwardness, narratives that have been deeply internalized in Moldova. Once during a drive to a project site with Catea, we stopped at a rest stop. Like other rest stops in Moldova, it consisted of a small wooden building concealing a hole in the ground. Catea told me that one visiting American expert had refused to use the toilets in rural areas, telling her that Moldova could never enter the EU with such facilities. Although she laughed at this woman's squeamishness, Catea agreed that these toilets definitely present a problem in the winter when it is 25 degrees Celsius below zero outside. Improving the toilets in rural Moldova has thus become a symbolic way to bring the villages "up to date" and increase their possibilities of European integration.

The leader of the Ecosan toilet project, Aliona, is a young woman from a Moldovan village living in Chişinău. She started an NGO to address rural sanitation issues, mainly through the installation of these toilets. The NGO has only two members, but has formed a partnership with two other environmental NGOs.³⁵ When she was just

³⁵ Small NGOs are not uncommon in the region, especially in small communities (Cellarius 2004). However, it does mean that as the NGO's key member, Aliona's involvement is "critical to organization stability and sustainability" (Cellarius 2004:220).

16, Aliona started a program in her village to empower young people, monitor water quality and clean up the village. She later moved to Chişinău to pursue a degree in sociology, and in 2003 she attended an annual international conference on water problems in Europe. In 2007 they held the conference in Moldova, and by conducting questionnaires, participants found that rural residents were aware of the water quality problem but had no strategy or method to improve the situation. Concerned with sanitation in her own village, Aliona started her NGO in 2007 with support from the international organization that had sponsored the water conferences. Influenced by the projects she had seen at conferences, her first priority was to deal with the lack of infrastructure for flush toilets, including the lack of access to a central water supply. Working with the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC), they looked into installing Ecosan toilets.³⁶ By early 2010, they had installed over a hundred Ecosan toilets in her village, in nine schools and many households, altogether benefitting five hundred residents.

Aliona's university education and international experience, combined with her rural roots and commitment to remaining in touch with villagers' concerns, shaped her approach to her work. Because the toilets were different from the village's existing outhouses, Aliona planned educational activities, including non-formal methods like flash mobs and hand-washing days, as well as brochures, lesson plans, and other materials to help teachers explain the process to students. The brochures used pictures to illustrate the

³⁶ Aliona traveled to Ukraine to see how the toilets work. The first time I met Aliona, at a dimly lit coffee shop, she pulled out illustrated educational pamphlets to explain the toilets to me. They are squat toilets, which are common in Moldova, with separate compartments for urine and feces, and they use a dry process to neutralize the waste. When working properly, the toilets have no odor.

problem to people, “so they would remember,” she told me. They made sure to involve local people to “put the responsibility on their shoulders” instead of having to return again and again to teach people. She especially wanted young people to become aware of the problems so that they could be inspired to teach others, especially older residents. Aliona emphasized the importance of monitoring the project and making sure the local authorities were doing their jobs, such as providing paper towels for drying hands. This process of transferring knowledge and monitoring behavior reflects Aliona’s international training and her position as the “expert,” both in her own eyes and in the eyes of the villagers.

In addition to stressing the knowledge she had acquired since moving to Chişinău, Aliona remained aware that rural knowledge was also essential to project success. Throughout our conversations, Aliona stressed the idea of participation of local people in the implementation of projects, and of listening to their concerns and their ideas. However, due to funders’ requirements, she has sometimes found her ideals difficult to uphold.³⁷ The SDC had supported the NGO’s first water and sanitation project, but this funding had ended the previous year. However, the SDC had delegated a new funder to take over the Ecosan project. This change proved problematic, as the new funder was a for-profit organization that at first treated Aliona’s organization as a service provider and tried to impose certain criteria on the projects. A year went by without the project moving forward as Aliona fought to preserve her group’s focus on social projects and local

³⁷ They had very little funding, she told me. In addition to SDC, they had received money from the Ministry of Environment’s National Ecological Fund, UNDP’s small grants program, and the Regional Environmental Center (REC) in Moldova, although REC’s funding had decreased in recent years.

education and input. Aliona felt that her persistence paid off, as her relationship with the funder had improved.

Aliona's rural ties and urban education have combined to make for a more nuanced, comprehensive approach to rural sanitation problems, illustrating the importance of urban-rural connections and thus problematizing the urban-rural dichotomy. As someone with a strong attachment to her natal village, and a respect and appreciation for the difficult life many villagers live, Aliona has many personal reasons for trying to realize successful projects. "We are a team that has rural spirit," she wrote in a progress report for a funder, "as we were born in the village and we feel this reality in our veins." Urban discrimination toward villagers, who are especially vulnerable in the bad economy, concerns her, and she told me that when she works in the village, she feels that the people there need her. This could be read as an assumption of helplessness on the part of the villagers. However, while she described villagers as "simple," she also called them "clever," and said she finds that it is most effective to be open and honest with them, rather than diplomatic or condescending like a politician. Unlike the first example, where the strict reading of urban expertise versus rural helplessness perhaps led to the disempowerment of local groups, the Ecosan toilet project reflects a better appreciation of the complex relationship between urban and rural. This has allowed for a more effective push and pull between "expert" knowledge and rural understandings.

These examples show that while the urban-rural dichotomy plays a strong role in shaping the way that Moldovans view society, a strict division does not exist in practice. Nevertheless, the dichotomy has been reinforced through Soviet policies, economic

inequality, and stereotypes about rural residents that can lead to discrimination. By basing their approach on this perceived division, Doina and Natalia were able to gain authority and maintain control over the project, but it also prevented them from fully involving rural actors in seeking solutions. Although Doina and Natalia were both born outside of Chişinău, neither had personal affiliations with these particular villages; such a connection could have potentially helped them to overcome the perceived urban-rural divide. By contrast, Aliona took advantage of the many overlaps between urban and rural, using her education and international connections to develop strategies and her ties to her own natal village to better understand the situation and put projects into practice.

Clean-Dirty

Chişinău residents, whether affiliated with environmental projects or not, often gave me their impressions of rural Moldova in the course of everyday conversations. Many, especially those with family living in the countryside, characterized villages as peaceful places where they could enjoy the fresh air and healthy, homegrown food. Romanian speakers in particular often have familial ties to villages, and several of my friends living and working in the city occasionally “escaped” to their parents’ homes in the countryside for a restful and relaxing weekend. Often my visits to the homes of these Chişinău dwellers included pickled vegetables, fresh baked *plăcinte* (sweet or savory pastries), or homemade wine prepared by parents or grandparents living in villages. Urbanites presented these as clean, healthy products, especially as compared to packaged foods available in urban supermarkets. Several people asked for my confirmation that

Moldova's homegrown produce tasted much better than that available in the United States. They often attributed this disparity to the rich, healthy *pământ* (soil) found in the Moldovan countryside.

At the same time, environmentalists and non-environmentalists alike who knew about my research told me that the lack of clean drinking water and adequate sewage systems created serious problems for village residents. Those working on rural sanitation projects often talked to me about the health consequences of contaminated water and produce; for instance, Aliona described the lack of clean water as *periculos* (dangerous). Catea told me personal stories about the negative health effects of contaminated water and other pollutants. Certain contaminants had caused dental problems; for example, her brother-in-law must get his teeth cleaned every six months to remove calcium build-up. Catea, 28, had a five-year-old daughter. She told me about complications during her pregnancy "from this Chernobyl thing." She believed that exposure to radiation in the soil and in fresh produce during the summers she spent as a child with her grandparents in Ukraine had caused these complications. During one UNDP site visit, local health experts told Catea and me about the negative health effects of their town's dirty air and soil, contaminated by persistent organic pollutants (POPs). For example, toxic chemicals had been found in local women's breast milk. Without testing, this problem remains invisible, illustrated by one doctor with a proverb, which asks rhetorically, "What healthy person goes to the doctor?" These health experts' solution involved educating the public about the toxic dangers in their environment. This narrative of danger was reinforced for us with a tour of an old pesticide storage building, abandoned in 1990. Old chemical residue

covered the dirt floor, and as we stepped around iridescent puddles, one of the experts commented that the situation was “*foarte serъezno (serezno)*” [very serious].

Occasionally the accuracy of the clean produce narrative is directly challenged. An NGO director in Chişinău, Mr. Eugen, described the lack of *apă potabilă* (drinking water) as *foarte serios* (very serious), telling me during a drive to a town in southern Moldova for a seminar on organic agriculture that “*situația nu este bună*” [the situation is not good]. At the seminar, he explained to local farmers that while many vendors at *Piața Centrală*, the central market in Chişinău, claim that their produce is *ecologic* (organic), this is inaccurate because of the overuse of nitrogen and other chemicals in their production. Here Mr. Eugen contrasted the “expert” designation of “organic” with farmers’ strategic labeling of their products as “organic,” countering the dominant discourse about healthy produce by explaining that products portrayed as “clean” are in fact often “dirty.” This also attests to the invisibility of the problem, as shoppers at the *pieța* have no way to know whether the produce they are buying is really “organic,” as they understand it.

Mary Douglas (1966:2) argued in “Purity and Danger” that “dirt is essentially disorder” so that “eliminating it is not a negative movement, but a positive effort to organize the environment.” Mr. Eugen and others’ insistence on the dangers of dirty water, soil, and air in the villages reflects this desire to gain control over the situation in order to improve the lives and health of villagers. Douglas (1966:3) went on to argue that “some pollutions are used as analogies for expressing a general view of the social order.” Based on comments made by many contacts about the incompetence of the government

and the corruption that has allowed some *raioane* (districts) to address problems while leaving others on their own, it is possible to see frustration about rural Moldovan pollution as a commentary on the state of Moldovan society. Cleaning up the problem would not only improve public health, but would also signal improvement in society more broadly.

Despite environmentalists' desire to clean up the countryside, the general persistence of narratives focusing on the clean village and its healthy products makes it difficult for environmental advocates to bring attention to the often invisible problem of polluted water, air and soil, despite competing narratives about the dangers of this contamination.³⁸ Melissa Caldwell (2010) finds similar persistent narratives about “ecologically clean” foods in post-Soviet Russia. Several factors support Russians’ belief that foods grown at family *dachas* are healthy and “natural.” For one, homegrown foods embody a “spirit of sociality” or connectedness between economic and social activities, an important idea from the socialist period (Caldwell 2010:87). This belief also reflects a geographic nationalism purporting that food grown in Russian soil is cleaner and healthier than that grown elsewhere, as well as the idea that foods gathered and processed within a social network are more trustworthy than those produced by impersonal commercial enterprises. Caldwell (2010:88) points out that “what is especially revealing of this symbolic ideology about the healthful properties of ecologically clean foods, however, is the insistence that Russian soil is clean and pure even when there are clear

³⁸ By contrast, trash is a much more visible problem, and it receives more attention. In 2011 and 2012 a group of activists organized Hai Moldova, countrywide trash cleanup days in which hundreds of volunteers picked up and disposed of garbage in parks, riverbeds, and other locations. Similar projects also take place on a smaller scale.

indications that the soil is contaminated.” Similar deep-seated ideas in Moldova make it difficult to counter the belief in the cleanliness and richness of the soil and the healthiness of the foods it produces in order to increase awareness of pollution and attract the support needed for its mitigation.

Dirty Water, Burning Water

I sometimes observed both clean and dirty discourses within the same research project, attesting to the difficulty of overcoming this contradiction. This was especially clear during my trip to two northern Moldovan towns with Doina and Natalia. On the morning of our trip, the three of us piled into a van along with the mayor of the first village we would be visiting, as well as Doina’s eight-year-old son, my Fulbright colleague who was working on a documentary about Moldova, and a driver. Shortly before we arrived in the town, we stopped on a breezy bluff overlooking a picturesque river valley, with sheep grazing below, an Orthodox church in the distance, and grasses and wildflowers growing all around us (see Figure 5). The mayor spoke with pride about the beauty of the countryside surrounding his village and the potential for tourism here. He expressed his frustration at his own inability to procure the resources necessary to clean up his town’s water supply.



Figure 5. On the bluff.

We stopped again a bit closer to the village, lower in the valley, and our driver walked to a spot near the river where water was bubbling up from a pipe protruding from the ground. The driver invited us to taste the water, and Doina's son volunteered. He took a small sip and immediately spit it onto the ground, complaining that it tasted *sărată* (salty). The driver and the mayor explained that nearly all of the wells in or near the village were either too salty to drink due to salinization from improper irrigation, or contained high levels of nitrates due to agricultural runoff. The village holds a special day each year to bless the wells that provide water to the community. However, only one well now had “clean” water, and even this had been questioned because the well's water had not been thoroughly tested.

When we arrived in the village, we talked to a medical assistant at the *primărie* (town hall). She told us about the health problems that have recently plagued the town. In 2005, several children tested positive for hepatitis A. While hepatitis A is often considered the “hepatitis of dirty hands,” she said, the disease was appearing in families with good hygiene. This seemed to defy logic, as “clean” and “dirty” were assumed to be separate. Soon 50 children had been diagnosed with the disease, so the family doctor from the *raion* center came to investigate. He sampled the well water and discovered hepatitis A. He used chloride to kill the virus, and the *primărie* provided covers for the wells. This solution was only temporary, however, and the situation needed to be investigated more fully because no one knew what other impurities might be present in the water. Again, the problem was complicated by its invisibility.

After leaving the town hall, we went to a school to talk to some students. Two 16-year-old girls told us they had been infected with hepatitis A during the outbreak. One had been hospitalized for two weeks, and her classmates were afraid to come near her. The other was still receiving treatment for a kidney problem that developed due to the disease. A 15-year-old boy spoke fondly of his town’s beautiful scenery, expressing his regret that most young people eventually leave the town because of its poor water quality. His mother’s teeth had turned brown from the water, and she had had to pay 1000 Euros for implants. Their washing machine was often broken because of the sand and clay in the water.

Eventually we returned to the van and drove to the nearby second village. Doina interviewed the mayor on a hill behind the town hall overlooking another idyllic river

valley as the sun began to set (see Figure 6). Against this beautiful backdrop, the mayor told us about a nearby Soviet military training facility from which leaked jet fuel had seeped into the ground water. The town's water contained so much kerosene that local residents – mostly older people and children – used it to start fires in their stoves. The school and the kindergarten had no potable water, as the authorities had tested their well and advised them not to use it anymore.



Figure 6. Doina (right) interviewing the mayor.

After the mayor spoke we walked down the road to a well, and several people gathered around. A woman drew water from the well with a bucket, poured some on the ground in front of her, and lit it with a match. The water burned away as we looked on. Natalia stood with her hands open in disbelief (see Figure 7). The contrast between the

beautiful scenery and the contaminated water, finally made visible by burning it, was striking. Also striking was the continued use of the natural food discourse. After watching the well water burn, we sat down for a *masă* (meal) with local officials featuring “healthy” homegrown produce. Our hosts were especially proud of the locally produced wine; perhaps they had grown accustomed to its faint taste of kerosene.



Figure 7. Burning water.

As in the wine, “clean” and “dirty” coexist in the Moldovan countryside, creating challenges for those trying to draw attention to water contamination. Talking about the health dangers of polluted water, soil, and air represents an attempt by environmental advocates to make these issues visible, but countering the strongly ingrained discourses about clean produce and the healthy countryside remains a significant obstacle. Ideas

about the superior taste and quality of Moldovan fruits and vegetables, especially over those produced industrially in the West, were a rare point of pride for many Moldovans I met. Thus the suggestion that these items could be contaminated is, not surprisingly, difficult to accept.

Global-Local

Tension also surfaced between the global environmental discourses used by many of my research contacts and the local sanitation problems on which they focused. In concentrating on the basic needs of villagers, many rural Moldovan environmental projects diverge from the global environmentalist discourse, which stresses issues such as climate change, protection of biodiversity and fragile ecosystems, and industrial pollution. Nevertheless, the environmental advocates that I worked with had sometimes internalized such narratives. For example, when I visited the UNDP headquarters in Chişinău to interview Sonja, the Austrian leader of the small grants program, and Catea, the local project manager, these two young women talked about a climate change adaptation strategy for agriculture as well as the importance of protecting biodiversity in order to protect rural livelihoods. They recognized these ideas as internationally conceived but also considered them globally applicable. Catea said, “As people are traveling more to conferences abroad, they see other countries’ experiences, and they become more globalized and more aware of all kind[s] of environmental issues.” During a drive to a site visit, Catea told me about her increasing interest in and concern for the environment. There had recently been three catastrophes in the news: a drought in Russia,

floods in Poland, and the B.P. oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico. In addition, she had recently attended a conference at the Ministry of Environment and heard a professor talk about the northern migration of killer bees and malaria-carrying mosquitoes. After learning about these disasters and dangers, she said to me, “I wonder what else climate change will lead to.”

Some of Catea’s interest in global environmental problems is connected to her experience in using of global narratives in funding applications. Due to the lack of domestic funding, Moldovan environmental NGOs depend largely on international funding. International funding organizations often expect environmental projects to address problems such as climate change and biodiversity protection, making it difficult to obtain funding for sanitation projects unless a connection is made with these global ideas. My contacts found creative ways to make themselves and their projects visible (and fundable) by framing them in global terms.

Drinking Water and Biodiversity

The UNDP funded water testing project in one northern *raion*, mentioned above, illustrates this situation. International organizations often target the area around this town for environmental projects because of the biodiversity in the Cubolta River that runs nearby. The recipient of this particular UNDP small grant was an NGO that wanted to test the water quality in the surrounding villages, as the well water was thought to be contaminated with nitrates, so that an improvement plan could be devised. Unfortunately, water quality and sanitation projects had technically been excluded from the UNDP small

grants program because the Rio Convention required the main funder, the GEF, to focus on other problems.³⁹ Catea told me later that the UN Millennium Development Goals and the GEF were “going in different directions.”⁴⁰ While one of the Millennium Development Goals was to provide drinkable water to everyone, funding from GEF did not cover potable water projects. “The only reason we received a GEF grant at all,” Catea said, “is because the Cubolta River flows into international waters.” Moldova’s UNDP office had been able to grant money to this project because the NGO had focused on the effects of their problems on the Cubolta in their grant application. While the local UNDP office had technically chosen the project based on its focus on an issue of international interest, protecting the river due to its high levels of biodiversity, in doing so they found a way to direct some of the GEF money to address a more pressing local need, water quality, at the same time.

Zsuzsa Gille and Sean Ó Riain (2002) point out that local actors must use global narratives in order to be visible. They argue that “references to global ideas and actors today provide an entrance ticket to participating in public discourse, and those unwilling or unable to formulate their claims in global terms often find themselves invisible” (Gille and Ó Riain 2002:283). In Moldova, as elsewhere, the relative absence of the state has destabilized “existing hierarchies of spatial scales,” making the connection between local

³⁹ The GEF is a financial mechanism created in 1991 in preparation for the 1992 Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro. The UNDP, one of the GEF’s three implementing agencies, uses GEF funds in their Small Grants Program. Following the Convention of Biological Diversity (CBD) and the Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), its priorities include biological diversity, climate change, international waters, land degradation, ozone layer depletion, and persistent organic pollutants (www.undp.org).

⁴⁰ The UN’s Millennium Development Goals range from ending poverty and hunger to improving child and maternal health and achieving universal access to education. They also include environmental sustainability, and unlike the GEF goals, this involves improving “sustainable access to safe drinking water and sanitation” (www.un.org).

and global even more direct (Gille and Ó Riain 2002:278). Gille (2000:261) finds a similar situation in the context of a debate surrounding a waste incinerator in Hungary, where “the national government has not only ceased to be the most important economic and political agent, but has practically dropped out of the picture altogether.” As discussed in chapter 4, many of my contacts complained that the state has no money for environmental projects, forcing NGOs to search internationally for funding. In doing so, they have discovered that “global forces...are less constraining and more enabling than they once were,” and that “local actors can use their imaginations to put those global forces to work on their behalf” (Gille 2000:261).

I observed this global-local connection frequently in my research with environmental advocates, many of whom were well-traveled, as they searched for specific global narratives while maintaining the capability to understand local issues. In 2009 my friends Dragoș and Ianka, who started the first environmental consulting firm in Moldova, traveled to Copenhagen for the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC); that same year, they also traveled to numerous Moldovan villages to conduct Environmental Impact Assessments (EIAs) for sanitation projects. During one conversation I had with the couple, Ianka complained of their inability to find a way for Moldova to participate in the global carbon market. Moldova has a negative carbon footprint and thus no obligations under the Kyoto Protocol, and their low carbon output make it difficult to attract foreign buyers of carbon credits. While the state could choose to enforce carbon emissions standards anyway, Ianka complained that the government is too bureaucratic and corrupt to take such steps. Dragoș, an incorrigible

optimist, suggested that instead of relying on the state, their company could promote local projects and perhaps convince enough companies to reduce their emissions so that together they would have enough carbon credits to sell. In this way, they could use their own position and capabilities to make a direct link between local and global.

My contacts often saw global and local as binary, despite ample evidence of the overlaps and interconnections between them. In the case of Moldovan environmental projects, this evidence includes the effect of global forces on local communities, local access to global resources, and individuals' understanding of both global discourses and local problems. Indeed, connections between global and local account for many problems (e.g. the presence of imported agricultural chemicals that cause water contamination) as well as solutions (e.g. access to international funding). At times my contacts internalized global discourses and found them relevant to their work, while other times they used these discourses strategically despite their perceived irrelevance to the local situation. In the latter case, they used the perceived divide between global and local to separate the practice of using global discourses like biodiversity protection to secure international funding from the practice of using this funding to implement local projects to address problems faced by disadvantaged villagers. In the case of the UNDP water testing project especially, the "categorical views of the global and the local in their minds" shaped project leaders' perceptions, despite the fact that these categories are not actually separate and in fact are closely interwoven (Gille 2000:262). Paradoxically, the very interconnection between global and local embodied in these actors allows for such shifts. They can make local problems visible within a global environmental framework, and

then use their insight into the local context to use funds creatively and solve problems effectively.

Overlapping Binaries

The water quality project illustrates not just the global-local dichotomy, but the urban-rural and clean-dirty dichotomies as well. In April 2010, I took a trip north with Catea to attend a town hall meeting related to the project. We arrived at the village *primărie*, where village residents had packed into a room at the top of the stairs, all talking and making their way to the front table with plastic bottles filled with samples of their well water. Behind the table, separated from the people, stood Mr. Anatole (the NGO director) and the mayor of the *raion* center, both dressed in suits. Behind them, a woman and a young man stood bent over another table, using testing sticks to check the water for nitrates. The woman recorded the results on a piece of paper, which was then passed to the mayor.

Catea and I watched as the mayor and Mr. Anatole addressed the crowd. Holding up the paper, the mayor would read a family name followed by a number corresponding to the nitrate level of that family's water sample. He sometimes said "*bun*" (good) or "*foarte bun*" (very good) after a low number, and "*rău*" (bad) or "*foarte rău*" (very bad) after a high number. One man whose sample had a very high number came up to the table to ask Mr. Anatole what he should do. Mr. Anatole reassured the man that he would visit him at home and talk to him about this. One woman claimed that her number was high because her house was next to a cemetery, so it was not her fault that her water was

polluted. The mayor told her that the water at the cemetery had also been tested, and it had low levels of nitrates, so it could not be the cemetery's fault.

The visual contrast and the physical separation between the mayor and Mr. Anatole on the one hand and the villagers on the other highlight the presentation of the two men as (urban) experts and of the (rural) villagers as ignorant about the issue. In Figure 8, one can identify the mayor (with his back to the camera and his hand outstretched) and Mr. Anatole (next to the mayor) by their formal suits, in contrast to the villagers in their work clothes. Moreover, these two men stood comfortably behind a table, while the villagers had to push through the crowd (toward the camera) to drop off their water samples. The men also reinforced their privileged position by calling out the numbers, thus quantifying the quality of the villagers' water, by reassuring the man with a high number that they would explain everything to him later and provide him with a solution, and by telling the woman that she was wrong about the effect of the cemetery on her water supply. Later I asked Catea if she thought people felt embarrassed when they heard their names called out with a high nitrate number, or if they perhaps blamed someone else for this situation. She did not think they were embarrassed, and they probably did not blame anyone, she told me, because this was something completely new for them. Her assumption that they knew nothing about this problem reflects her own position as an urbanite and reinscribes the perceived dichotomy between urban and rural.



Figure 8. Testing well water for nitrates.

Later, as we prepared to return to Chişinău, Mr. Anatole invited us to return to the *raion* in June for their summer river festival. The previous year, people had told him it was crazy to have such a festival because of the poor condition of the river. People called it a *râpa* (ravine, or ditch) instead of a *râu* (river), because they saw it as a place for garbage and not a true river. Their refusal to classify what is essentially a garbage dump as a river, which should be clean, allows them to avoid seeing the trash as “matter out of place” (Douglas 1966:35). This is a strategic move to deal with the fact that the state provides no waste disposal services, which people feel puts the problem out of their control. Of course, calling the river a ditch also lets the state off the hook, whereas calling it a dirty river could provide motivation to demand officials’ attention. In any case, the

river festival had been a big success, despite the naysayers, with cultural events for children as well as trainings in which residents learned about the importance of the river. People even began to call the river *râu* instead of *râpa*. The *râu-râpa* distinction, like the *bun-rău* dichotomy to describe water quality, mirrors the clean-dirty dichotomy. By teaching people to change their vocabulary, Mr. Anatole attempted to change the way they viewed the river, hoping that seeing it as something that should be clean instead of something dirty would inspire them to change their behavior and perhaps demand state assistance to improve the quality of the environment.

As seen throughout this chapter, dichotomies of urban-rural, clean-dirty, and global-local play significant roles in rural environmental projects in Moldova. Although these dichotomies simplify reality, environmental advocates use them strategically to try to make invisible rural sanitation problems visible. They have found that tangible pollution is easier to clean up than intangible pollution, as one is concrete and the other is abstract. Some make use of the strong dichotomy between urban and rural in Moldova to justify urban control over rural projects. Some use narratives about dirty water to try to increase local awareness of the serious problem of water contamination in Moldovan villages. Finally, some buy into global environmental discourses and imaginaries, utilizing particular narratives to acquire international funding and then channelling the money into sanitation projects.

However, the examples given here have also illustrated the ambiguity of these categories in practice. Narratives of the beautiful countryside and its clean, healthy produce coexist with warnings about the health dangers of contaminated water, air, and

soil, creating a contradiction that can be difficult for environmental advocates to overcome. Moreover, the interconnections between “global” and “local” mean that problems as well as solutions necessarily span perceived spatial scales. Similarly, the many overlaps between urban and rural cause difficulties for those who attempt to transfer knowledge from the former to the latter. Although these binaries can help to create strategic boundaries and open up new opportunities, they can also lead to unintended consequences, such as a misreading of problems or the disempowerment of local people. At times, however, those who accept the overlaps and ambiguity of these categories can find ways to effectively navigate them and reach positive outcomes.

The next chapter moves from the village to the city, and from weak NGOs focusing on rural sanitation to more established groups working on larger projects that fit more closely into the global environmental imaginary. The middle-aged men who head these NGOs encounter a different set of obstacles, mainly related to their perceptions of corruption and a lack of respect for their scientific expertise.

CHAPTER 4

SCIENCE, CORRUPTION, AND THE PROTECTED AREAS PROJECT

Moldova's environment reflects its position at the edges of three eco-regions: the mixed forest of Central Europe, the Pontic steppe, and the forest steppe of Eastern Europe (UNDP 2009). As a result, plants and animals here live at the edge of their natural ranges. According to official documentation for the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) project "Improving coverage and management effectiveness of the Protected Area System in Moldova," about 15 percent of the country is under its "natural" vegetation cover, though often in a degraded state, and 64 percent of this area comprises forest, mostly in the center of the country (UNDP 2009). The document also reports, however, that Moldova "has a rich biota relative to its size, especially considering that the highest elevation reaches only 430 m," including 116 rare, threatened and endangered animal species (UNDP 2009:4).

Moldova has designated 4.65 percent of its land as protected areas (UNDP 2009). The most important of these are Scientific Reserves, and they also include a Biosphere Reserve and a Ramsar site, although no national parks exist. The UNDP identifies the spread of agriculture, urban and industrial development, the use of wood to heat homes, and the spread of invasive species as threats to the protection of the natural steppe and wetlands. They also conclude that the current Protected Areas System does not sufficiently protect biodiversity. They identify the main barriers as "poor representivity of the protected area system; limited capacity to plan, administer and manage protected areas; and low levels of awareness of the values and benefits of protected areas" (UNDP

2009:4).⁴¹ In response to these barriers, the UNDP developed a project, funded by the GEF, the UNDP itself, and state and local governments, which aimed “to build the capacity of protected area institutions in Moldova to more effectively establish and administer a representative system of protected areas in Moldova” (UNDP 2009:1).⁴²

In early February 2010, William, an international expert from Great Britain leading the protected areas project, visited Moldova. He held a roundtable discussion with the heads of the major environmental nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) in Chişinău in order to elicit their concerns, as well as a workshop the next day at the Ministry of Environment for the NGO leaders and representatives from Moldsilva, a semi-private agency that manages Moldova’s forests, and the Ministry. The project “belonged to” the Ministry, since they would eventually oversee the management of the protected areas, while Moldsilva and the NGOs were included as the managers of the forest and the potential managers of other areas, respectively. After the workshop, several weeks passed while William prepared his recommendations for proceeding. In May 2010, the local project managers held a meeting at UNDP headquarters to describe the bidding process to potential area managers. I attended the roundtable meeting, the workshop, and the bid meeting along with the directors of several prominent environmental NGOs in Chişinău, and I also interviewed Sonja, a project manager from Austria, and Marius and Veaceslav, the local project managers.

⁴¹ In discussing the “value” of protected areas, the project follows the neoliberal conservation model outlined in chapter 1, aiming to commodify nature in order to “save” it. As seen in this chapter, part of the solution involved allowing Moldsilva to continue their management technique of selling lumber from the forest, also related to a neoliberal conservation framework.

⁴² Another goal was to comply with two EU directives, the Habitats Directive and the Birds Directive.

This chapter details the project from the point of view of the NGO directors, who want to protect the environment but feel frustrated at their lack of ability to influence the project in the ways they deem necessary. I begin by introducing the main environmental NGOs in Chişinău and their directors, all of whom participated in some way in the UNDP project, considering the goals of the organizations and the relationships and perceived divides between the different groups. I focus on the groups' commonalities, which became evident through their participation in the protected areas project. I then turn to ethnographic evidence from the roundtable meeting, the workshop, and the bid meeting to explore the themes of corruption and science. I explore the NGO directors' frustration toward the corruption they believe prevents proper protection of Moldova's natural areas. I then examine their claims about the disrespect of their scientific expertise and the influence of Russian and Soviet traditions that view science as a morally superior way of knowing. I argue that they essentially disagree with the project due to its neoliberal conservation-based approach, and that they frame their concerns as a critique of corruption and an insistence on the recognition of their expertise. In addition, while strong ideas about corruption and science dominate the directors' narratives, their practices reveal their ability to adopt different forms of knowledge in order to gain funding to do their own projects, and to work with allegedly corrupt actors in the context of the protected areas project. I consider how the NGOs' ties to international funding organizations allow them to bypass the weak Moldovan government in certain ways. However, I argue that this technique, like their participation in the protected areas project, requires the NGO directors to work within a Western development framework. Moreover,

this approach does not extricate them from a system of top-down policy making and implementation.

Environmental NGOs in Chişinău

Early in my fieldwork I obtained a small book, published in 2008 by the Regional Environmental Center (REC) of Moldova, listing all of the environmental NGOs in Moldova. At the time of my research, there were approximately 100 environmental NGOs registered throughout Moldova, although Mr. Vitalie, then the director of REC Moldova, told me that only about 30 of these were still active, and only 15-20 were “professional.”⁴³ Many NGOs had disappeared due to decreases in funding, he told me; the “big NGOs – they demonstrated that they are strong enough to survive,” while the “small NGOs – many of [them] disappeared.” In the end, I conducted formal interviews with the directors of four of the six groups that Mr. Vitalie listed as the strongest, full-time NGOs. The directors of these particular groups were all middle-aged men with professional degrees. One of the two remaining groups had no current projects, and the director of the sixth group participated in the protected areas project.

Other environmental NGOs existed in Chişinău, but Mr. Vitalie told me that these did not operate full time. I talked with two in particular, the one installing Ecosan toilets discussed in chapter 3 and SalvaEco, which will be discussed in chapter 5. Although Mr. Vitalie did not consider either one “strong,” and they generally did not participate in projects involving the Ministry, I found that both groups carried out important projects.

⁴³ For more on the proliferation of NGOs throughout Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union after the fall of communism, see Hann and Dunn (1996), Mandel (2002), Phillips (2008), Sampson (2002, 2003), Verdery (1996), and Wedel (2001).

However, their directors were younger women, who did not belong to the mostly male network of NGO directors who had been involved in the environmental NGO world together for many years. While this suggests clear age and gender divisions, in practice these categories can intersect. For example, when I returned to Moldova in 2012, Mr. Vitalie was involved in a project organized by SalvaEco, while Dragoș, one of SalvaEco's former directors, had become a Vice-Minister of Environment. Language turned out to be a similarly ambiguous category. Mr. Eugen, a former director of REC Moldova told me that Romanian-speaking NGOs and Russian-speaking NGOs often butted heads. Language use organizes the following brief descriptions of the groups I interviewed.

Russian-Speaking NGOs

The first two NGOs I visited were headed by native Russian speakers: Mr. Dmitri at Eco-Tiras and Mr. Fedor at Biotica. From my interviews, I discovered that the two groups had started out as one (Biotica) in 1993. In 2003, Mr. Dmitri, who earned a PhD in Biology in Moscow,⁴⁴ decided to form his own NGO. He explained that Biotica on its own could not attract enough money to fund all of the projects they wanted to carry out.⁴⁵ However, Mr. Fedor shed more light on the situation when I interviewed him, telling me that Mr. Dmitri left for “personal motivations” and alluding to a disagreement about group membership requirements. Mr. Fedor, whose training is in entomology and ecology, told me that Biotica was now an “organization of experts,” as he preferred it.

⁴⁴ During Soviet times, top students in Moldova often attended graduate school in Moscow.

⁴⁵ It is common in the region for NGOs to split into multiple factions in order to attract more funding (Cellarius 2004).

Biotica's membership over the years had dropped from over 60 to about 30, mainly due to deaths and emigration. This reflects the brain drain in Moldova (Găugaș 2004), as well as the fact that Biotica's goals do not include recruiting young activists, although Mr. Fedor told me that a student doing research on bats worked in the office across from his.

Eco-Tiras

Eco-Tiras is an umbrella organization for Moldovan and Ukrainian environmental NGOs, headquartered in Chișinău and managed by Mr. Dmitiri. It focuses on protecting the Nistru River, which crosses through Moldova, forming the border with Transnistria as well as between southern Moldova and Ukraine. They advise local authorities and residents on how to manage the river basin sustainably, using an approach called Integrated River Basin Management (IRBM). IRBM acts as the guiding principle behind the European Water Framework Directive, legislation passed in 2000 by the European Commission (Griffiths 2002). The approach argues that managing water resources "is best done in a highly participative way, involving all the major stakeholder groups, and in a way that achieves a balance between the level of economic development and the consequent impact of the natural resource base of a river basin as agreed by the stakeholders" (World Bank 2006). Eco-Tiras has carried out multiple projects related to the protection of the river basin, including improving management through the adoption of better governance and democratization, developing approaches to problems related to climate change and health, and acquiring knowledge through partnerships with European NGOs. These projects are funded by organizations such as the UN Economic

Commission for Europe (UNECE), the National Endowment for Democracy, the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) Mission to Moldova, and organizations in Germany, Switzerland, and Romania. Eco-Tiras organizes conferences for its member NGOs, holds seminars about legislation implementation, and sponsors educational field days on the river for teachers and students. The group also publishes scientific papers based on the results of its research.

Biotica

Biotica focuses on biodiversity conservation. They have developed management plans for multiple protected areas, organized conferences on sustainable development, and worked on projects related to rural tourism and high nature value (HNV) farmland. They recently collaborated with the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) to develop the National Ecological Network, part of the Pan-European Ecological Network and a requirement of an international biodiversity agreement. Biotica has also carried out field studies and held conferences on endangered species and habitats along the Nistru River. These projects have been supported by organizations such as the UN Environment Program (UNEP), the Frankfurt Zoological Society, the Earth Council, and American organizations such as USAID, the World Nature Association, the Audubon Naturalist Society, the Cottonwood Foundation, and the McArthur Foundation. Biotica has been active in the development of civil society in Moldova, developing legislation for the Moldovan government related to the non-profit sector and promoting high ethical standards for NGOs with funding from organizations such as the National Endowment

for Democracy. Finally the group has proposed amendments to Moldovan environmental legislation, working with European NGOs to encourage participatory decision-making.

Mr. Dmitri and Mr. Fedor had similar complaints about their work. The government does little to support environmental NGOs or to address environmental issues in general, they said, partly due to a lack of funding. Indeed, funding for the environmental sector made up only 0.2 percent of the national budget in 2010 (IES 2011:115).⁴⁶ Both men pointed to the consequent need to obtain external funding from international organizations, as this gives local NGOs the ability to carry out projects. They saw this funding as scarce as well, however. Mr. Fedor complained that funding organizations like the World Bank often targeted large projects, excluding their relatively small projects.

They also cited government corruption as an obstacle. For instance, Mr. Fedor told me that Biotica had secured funding from the Global Environment Facility (GEF) and the World Bank to establish a national park in the southeastern part of Moldova, had developed documents for the creation of the park with the approval of the Moldovan Academy of Sciences, and had even gained the support of many people living in the region, including the local authorities. Moreover, the portion of the park in neighboring

⁴⁶ In contrast to this perception, a Moldovan woman in the artistic field told me that the environmental sector receives much more funding than cultural projects. This is difficult to confirm, since funding for cultural activities is lumped together with funding for “sport” activities for youth in government documents. In any case, the perception of funding shortages is not confined to the environmental sector.

Ukraine had already been declared a protected area. However, Parliament was “playing games,” Mr. Fedor told me, ultimately canceling the project.⁴⁷

Romanian-Speaking NGOs

Funding woes and frustration with the government also stood out in my interviews with Mr. Vitalie of REC Moldova and Mr. Sergei of the Chişinău branch of *Mișcarea Ecologistă din Moldova* (the Ecological Movement of Moldova), or MEM.

REC Moldova

On my first visit to REC, I asked Mr. Vitalie if I could record our interview, and he responded wryly that he had no state secrets.⁴⁸ Mr. Vitalie, who was trained in Moscow in chemical engineering with a focus on environmental protection, took over as director of REC when Mr. Eugen stepped down. He described the organization as a resource center to support environmental NGOs, to provide training, and to involve both NGOs and the state in projects. Although the group at one time had 15 employees, now they had only seven. The European Commission had initially funded REC, but in 2006 the Commission had decreased their funding significantly and shifted from larger, program-based activities to smaller, project-based activities. REC had since had to seek

⁴⁷ A third party later told me that another problem in this case was a personality conflict between Mr. Fedor and others involved in the project; this person had heard that Mr. Fedor had tried to overstep his authority, appointing people to jobs when he did not have the authority to do so. Whether or not this is true, Mr. Dmitri confirmed that it was the government who stopped the project.

⁴⁸ I conducted the interview in English. Especially toward the beginning of my fieldwork, interviewees sometimes insisted on speaking English with me, both because their English was better than my Romanian and, as some told me, they were more comfortable discussing environmental subjects in English, because this is the language in which they write reports for funders.

their own funding. Mr. Vitalie told me that donors in recent years had been decreasing their funding for the environment. For example, REC's programs funded by the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) entailed "in the best years three, four million Euros per year. Now for next year we have secured only 400,000" Euros, he told me. "And [it's the] same situation with other donors, so we will see how it will be possible" to continue carrying out projects. One result, he continued, is that all groups

have to diversify their work, approach different donors, but sometimes this means loss of quality and loss of real sustainability. Because you have to adjust to the situation. It could be that the donor, for example, for next year supports only water issues, but I am an organization in biodiversity – what [can I] do? What [can I] do? Nothing. Write a project about fish?

Much of the funding available for environmental projects in Moldova, especially from the World Bank, the UNDP, and the GEF, goes directly to the Ministry of Environment. Similarly, the European Commission will likely give more money to Moldova, but it might be for climate change, for example, so it will also go directly to the government, because they have a climate change office. The government then decides where the money will go. According to Mr. Vitalie, "in Moldova, funds from the National Ecological Fund were in most cases awarded by political decision, not by real need." He went on,

We approached several years the National Ecological Fund, but because of some political reasons and the attitude of the Minister of Environment...towards REC and NGOs, this was not supported. Now it's a different situation; the government is more open for cooperation. We are happy that the new Minister of Environment met with NGOs several times, discussed priorities, discussed issues. But as you [can] see...the current government faces a lot of political uncertainty and changes, and how this will move forward – we will see.

In the meantime, REC Moldova had been able to secure funding from the U.S., Canada, Germany, Switzerland, Austria, and other places.⁴⁹

REC Moldova had been forced to change their approach due to the decrease in funding. They could no longer do much to help other NGOs, which were less numerous now anyway, except to provide literature and a meeting space. Instead they had to seek funding for their own projects, which currently involved waste management, organic agriculture, and the reduction of water pollution. They still tried to follow their original mission, which involved “awareness in the field of environment trainings, working with NGOs, involving NGOs and local authorities, and of course [the] Aarhus Convention,” which deals with the relationship between people and governments in the context of environmental issues, stressing accountability and transparency (Aarhus 1998).

Like Mr. Fedor and Mr. Dmitri, Mr. Vitalie complained about the effects of political corruption on environmental projects. For example, a railroad had been built in the last year,

and a small portion of 50 kilometers of railroad – which for Moldova is a big portion of railroad – unfortunately [passed] through the national protected areas and a Ramsar site.⁵⁰ And some NGOs were against [the project], but political issues were much stronger, [the] Communist Party [was] much stronger, and this voice was not heard.

⁴⁹ I noticed on the REC website that the organization no longer lists Moldova’s branch as a true REC, as it had when I first discovered REC in 2009, but as a “REC-like” entity, part of a RECs Network also including RECs in the Caucasus, Central Asia, and Russia. Although the website indicates that this change happened around 2004, before my research took place, no one I talked to at REC mentioned this change.

⁵⁰ Ramsar sites are designated based on the Convention on Wetlands, signed in Ramsar, Iran in 1971. Countries that have signed this treaty commit “to maintain the ecological character of their Wetlands of International Importance and to plan for the ‘wise use,’ or sustainable use, of all of the wetlands in their territories” (Ramsar 2011).

Not only was this a bad environmental decision, “it was a stupid decision from [an] economic point of view, because we have floods there, and these floods could destroy the railroad and millions [would be] wasted...but again, it was a political decision.”

MEM

Finally, I interviewed Mr. Sergei of the Chişinău branch of MEM. A kind man with a PhD in Sociology, Mr. Sergei shooed out a young man who had been working at a table in the office when I arrived. He offered me some tea, and then sat down and began to tell me about MEM. He proudly informed me that their organization had recently celebrated the completion of 20 years of projects. Like the others, he reported that his group had had more projects in the past. Currently they had two, the first being the publication of *Revista Apelor* (The Water Magazine), which reported information about water concerns in Moldova. Second, their experts conducted environmental impact assessments. MEM Chişinău had only five members; Mr. Sergei lamented the many people he had lost over the years, to other organizations and abroad. In the past, their experts had helped to write legislation for issues such as trash collection. They had also helped to sponsor *Ziua Pământului* (Earth Day), *Ziua fără Maşina Mea* (literally Day without My Car, elsewhere known as World Carfree Day), and other environment-related celebrations.

Although they had received funding from the UNDP, much of MEM Chişinău’s funding came from government sources, namely the Municipal and National Ecological Funds. In the past, they had also collaborated with the U.S. Embassy, but according to

Mr. Sergei the ambassador at the time was less interested in environmental initiatives. Mr. Sergei stressed to me that a person's politics did not matter; he would work with anyone from journalists to local authorities as long as they were professional. They had a partnership with the mayor, for example, from the Liberal Party. If a person was open to collaboration, "nu contează culoarea politică" (their political color doesn't matter). Later, however, he did mention that the Minister of Environment during the most recent Communist rule had been bad and not very *deschis* (open); like Mr. Vitalie, he had more hope for the new Minister and underscored the importance of transparency. He summarized his views on politics by saying that "unde nu e politică, e bine" [where there's no politics, everything's fine].

Competition and Project Focus

My interviews with environmental NGO directors provide some insight into the similarities and differences between the Russian and Romanian-speaking groups. Before the interviews, I had some expectations based on my meeting with Mr. Victor, whose organization led hiking and biking trips throughout Moldova. Like Mr. Eugen, he told me that both types of groups cared about their country and the environment, but that there was a border between them due to the language barrier. None of the men I interviewed mentioned the language barrier specifically, and Mr. Sergei reported that the NGOs often worked together and helped each other. Mr. Vitalie at REC Moldova, however, reported intense competition for funds and frequent disagreements. "It's a difficult situation," he told me. "First of all difficult because it's a competition for funds, second because they

disagree on many points; different leaders of NGOs, different positions – sometimes they don't have the same position on national issues, so that [can] create problems.” Mr. Vitalie tried to facilitate cooperation between the groups, but a lack of cohesion persisted. For example, he wanted to form a council of environmental NGOs, based on the national council of NGOs. He held a meeting of NGO leaders, but “because there are different positions, different leaders, different views of the process, they did not reach an agreement and everything stopped. So today we could [say] that the environmental NGOs – unfortunately they are not enough united to solve a problem.”⁵¹

One area in which differences emerged between the NGOs involved project focus. The Romanian-speaking NGOs generally focused on raising public awareness levels about environmental problems. In contrast, the Russian-speaking NGOs, especially Biotica, had more involvement in scientific research. One contact told me that the Russian-speaking groups carried out a lot of projects but were not as exposed to the public as the Romanian-speaking groups. Although this person was implying that the Russian-speaking groups were purposely withholding information, the Romanian-speaking groups' focus on public awareness projects also increased their visibility.

Another difference lies in the partnerships different groups make. Biotica and Eco-Tiras highlighted their transnational cooperation with groups from Transnistria and Ukraine. It makes practical sense that the Russian-speaking groups would seek partnerships with Russian-speaking neighbors. Similarly, the Romanian-speaking groups more often mentioned collaboration with their neighbors across the Prut River in

⁵¹ On the day of our interview, Mr. Vitalie had come from a press conference discussing the results of the recent UN Climate Change Conference in Copenhagen, and he expressed irritation that no NGOs attended. He lamented the lack of interest, conjecturing that everyone was just focused on his or her own projects.

Romania. Although Mr. Victor had told me that the Russian-speaking NGOs preferred U.S. funding to European funding, I did not find any NGO to be strict about their funding sources, with each one receiving funding from both the U.S. and Europe.⁵² As Mr. Vitalie said, “NGOs, they are searching for money all around the world.” Overall, while the groups differed somewhat in project focus and partner selection, I found their main concerns to be very similar. Some of the purported differences between the groups may reflect a perceived division between speakers of Russian and Romanian; like so many aspects of life in Moldova, reality is a bit more complicated.

The Protected Areas Project

While Mr. Vitalie stressed the disagreements between the NGO leaders, I had the chance to see the NGO directors come together and set aside their differences to participate in the protected areas project managed by the UNDP, as described at the beginning of this chapter. The following section uses observations from interviews and the roundtable meeting to examine one of the main concerns of the NGO directors in the context of this and other environmental projects: corruption. I then move on to the second theme that emerged in the meetings: science.

⁵² Mr. Vadim, an ecology professor I talked to, did express his confusion about why Moldova always imports environmental reports and expertise from Russia. “There is expertise in Romania and papers written in Romanian,” he insisted, “and these would be very useful here.” He thought things were changing, however.

Corruption

While the NGO directors shared a commitment to environmental protection, they also felt a sense of frustration at their inability to meet this goal. One view shared by all of the NGO directors to some degree was that corruption pervaded the Moldovan government, although some felt things would improve with the new Minister of Environment. All of the men I interviewed were frustrated in some way with the state of affairs in their country and the difficulty in making projects happen.⁵³

Perceptions of corruption are common in the former communist world, especially the former Soviet Union, where “corruption seems endemic” (Lovell 2005:75). For example, there is widespread cynicism in post-Soviet Russia about the moral corruption, cheating, and lying that pervade the country, especially in the economic and political upper classes (Ries 2002). David Lovell (2005) argues that by the 1980s in the USSR, public expectations of the state had changed, while the behavior of officials stayed the same. As governments moved toward rational-legal rule, political corruption became endemic (Lovell 2005:77). Many of my Moldovan contacts viewed corruption as highly pervasive in the government and had stories to prove it.⁵⁴

Many narratives of corruption involve the mafia. While the number of mafias in Russia alone is estimated at up to two or three thousand, Katherine Verdery (1996:219) argues that a “conceptual mafia” or “mafia-as-symbol” also exists, acting as “a symbol for what happens when the visible hand of the state is replaced by the invisible hand of

⁵³ Only a couple of my contacts, affiliated with less prominent NGOs, suggested that there was corruption among the environmental NGOs. I never personally witnessed any questionable behavior.

⁵⁴ One Moldovan friend told me that after her brother finished law school, he tried to get a job with a state anti-corruption agency, but was told that getting the job would cost 2000 Euros.

the market.” Much like the communist state, the mafia is considered a pervasive entity that might resort to violence to exert its power when necessary. Nancy Ries (2002) argues that at least in Russia, there are multiple conceptual mafias; for example, some mafia stories describe bandits as helpful and even generous. Michele Rivkin-Fish (2005) finds that paying a bribe for health care in post-Soviet Russia is even considered ethical. She explains that while the bureaucracy of the official health care system is considered unjust, “patients often view unofficial payments directly to their provider as constituting important, *moral* forms of exchange” (Rivkin-Fish 2005:49). The stories I heard from Moldovan NGO directors and others never attributed these positive characteristics to the mafias they described, from the “mafia” that controls the forest to that which controls the wine industry.⁵⁵ The Moldovan NGO leaders’ perception of *immoral* corruption everywhere around them would become a theme of the roundtable meeting and an obstacle to forming workable partnerships with others in the context of the protected areas project.

Roundtable Meeting

I arrived at REC Moldova on time for the morning roundtable discussion. Mr. Fedor and Mr. Dmitri, the Russian-speaking former partners, had arrived already and seemed to be avoiding each other. Mr. Fedor sat quietly at the round table where the meeting would take place, and Mr. Dmitri stood nearby reading an environmental

⁵⁵ People occasionally presented bribery in a more favorable or at least neutral light, however. For example, when my attempt to obtain a visa through the immigration office failed, several people suggested paying a bribe. Although they were discreet in discussing this, most seemed to accept that this was the way things were done. Another Moldovan friend complained to me that the only way to get a driver’s license was to pay for one. Despite being warned about this, she took a driving class and attempted to pass the impossibly difficult driving test on her own before she was forced to accept that only a bribe would work.

newspaper that had been placed on the table. Mr. Dmitri appeared happy to see me, taking my winter coat and scarf and hanging them on a coat rack in the corner.

Meanwhile, REC director Mr. Vitalie bustled around as usual, arranging everything. The other participants trickled in, including the other NGO directors, the two Moldovan project assistants, Marius and Veaceslav, and the international expert, William.⁵⁶

Marius started the meeting, introducing William as an international consultant. William briefly explained that he wanted to understand the NGOs' perspective, and then the other participants introduced themselves. William next gave an overview of the situation as he understood it. He explained that Moldova had reasonably good protected areas legislation, saying, "The law isn't bad; it's quite good, but the implementation leaves quite a lot to be desired." Although there were various types of protected areas, he wanted to focus on the five Scientific Reserves in the forest, saying, "Most people are telling me those sites are quite well managed," and asking if the participants what they thought. Mr. Dmitri responded, "It's true. It's true that these are the best managed, but in any case they are managed in a very bad way. [It's just that the] other sites are not managed at all." He suggested that the reserves suffered because their managers had "non-environmental interests." For 13 years a contradiction had existed in the law, he explained: the categories of "forest" and "protected area" overlapped, so it was unclear who controlled the forest. Although Mr. Dimitri felt that in theory the situation could be improved if the Ministry of Environment took control of the forest, he pointed out that

⁵⁶ William's translator, a young Moldovan woman, translated both the Romanian and occasional Russian comments of the participants into English for William, and the English comments from William and those participants who felt comfortable speaking English into Romanian for the non-English speaking participants.

the government currently had no interest in solving the problem, and “due to fear” and “prejudices concerning NGOs” the Ministry only permitted civil society to play a limited role. So, the NGOs had been independently keeping track of forest management in an attempt to uncover corruption.

Mr. Dmitri had told me an intriguing story during our interview about corruption in the forestry sector. The mafia controls the forest, he had told me, keeping people out by putting up fences that are not environmentally friendly and making rent contracts with loggers. His NGO, Eco-Tiras, went to court to try to get information about the management of the forest. The United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE), through the Aarhus Convention, requires that information concerning environmental matters be made available to the public. The court therefore ordered Moldsilva to share the information that Eco-Tiras requested, but Moldsilva still refused. At the roundtable meeting, Mr. Dmitri reported that they had finally acquired the rental contracts that they had requested from Moldsilva. He explained that the delay had resulted from a contradiction between government regulations, which restrict access to these contracts, and national legislation saying these should be made publicly available.⁵⁷ Mr. Fedor confirmed these difficulties, saying that while NGOs have little access to information, it is not the NGOs from whom information must be guarded, as they already know it.⁵⁸

⁵⁷ This contradiction in the law, as well as the overlapping definitions of “forest” and “protected area” illustrate that the ambiguity so often present in Moldova extends to legislation as well.

⁵⁸ He added that while gathering information such as this is often challenging, it had been even more difficult during the eight years of Communist rule in the 2000s, when there was no official access to information.

When someone asked Mr. Dmitri what the contracts said, he responded, “We still only received them yesterday, so I can’t say what we found, but I think we will find a lot.” Overall, the meeting participants did not question the idea that Moldsilva was fundamentally corrupt. At one point, however, Mr. Nicolai, another NGO director, pointed out that due to poverty, many rural dwellers living near the forest illegally cut wood and take food products, so that Moldsilva’s main objective had become guarding the plants and animals of the forest. Moreover, Mr. Fedor pointed out that Moldsilva received only 16 percent of their budget from the government and thus had no choice but to “self-finance.”⁵⁹ These acknowledgements of Moldsilva’s challenges contrast with the accusations of criminality made by Mr. Dmitri, as well as those made by Mr Nicolai and Mr. Fedor, discussed next.

William tried to bring the discussion back to the protected areas system. Mr. Fedor insisted again that these areas were not being protected adequately, because Moldova had a “criminal governance” and a “failed justice system.” William countered that one could not automatically assume criminality; the government “might just be incompetent or under-resourced.” Then Mr. Nicolai began to talk about *Reservația Codru*

⁵⁹ The UNDP project document confirms that the National Environment Fund provides 16 percent of Moldsilva’s funding, “while the remaining costs are subsidized primarily by income from ‘ecological logging’ (mostly for use as fuel wood)” (UNDP 2009:12).

(the Codru Reserve), the only large reserve in the country.⁶⁰ This forest reserve was founded in 1973, when Mr. Nicolai was a young researcher. Although the forest authorities knew about the plans for the reservation, they performed massive cuts anyway and only afterward allowed the reservation to be created. According to Mr. Nicolai, the area should now be reforested. NGOs must monitor this, he insisted, because otherwise “silvicii pot să fac un pas în stânga în dreapta necorect...nu mai spun criminal” [the forest authorities can take one step left, one step right, (in a way that is) improper...not to mention criminal], he said. The translator softened this for William, saying that if unmonitored, the actions of Moldosilva or the authorities “might lead to some consequences. Not pleasant ones.”⁶¹

Eventually William decided that the time had come to unveil information that he apparently had expected would win over the NGO directors. He said, in a way that seemed almost smug to me, that perhaps they were unaware that “in Romania and in the Republic of Macedonia, it is possible for NGOs to be the managers of protected areas.” The meeting participants shot this possibility down immediately. Mr. Dmitri scoffed and

⁶⁰ Mr. Fedor had been speaking in Russian, so the translator also switched from Romanian to Russian to facilitate dialogue between Mr. Fedor and William. Then Mr. Nicolai, a Romanian speaker, began speaking in Russian to conform to the switch. At this point, Veaceslav, one of the local UNDP representatives, stepped in and requested that everyone switch back to Romanian. The translator agreed that this would make it “*mai ușor*” (easier) for her to translate. Mr. Nicolai’s switch, along with Mr. Fedor’s general refusal to speak Romanian and the fact that the Russian speakers often spoke before the Romanian speakers, reflects a language ideology that views Russian as the prestige language, as well as the historically higher social position of Russian speakers in Moldova. However, this exchange also hints that this view is changing as Romanian gains more influence in Moldova. The older Mr. Nicolai switched to Russian without complaint, while the younger Veaceslav and the translator spoke up and requested they switch back to Romanian, even though this meant potentially offending Mr. Fedor.

⁶¹ I suspect the young translator changed the tone of Mr. Nicolai’s statement out of some degree of embarrassment, either about the corruption of which Mr. Nicolai spoke, or about the forceful manner in which he expressed his anger. As seen in chapter 5, many young Moldovans express frustration with the way older generations allegedly complain rather than act to solve problems. This incident illustrates one effect of the language barrier on the transfer of information between “expert” and “stakeholder.”

said, in Romanian, “Întrebați pe guvernaretori noștri dacă ele sunt în favoarea” [Ask our authorities if they are in favor of this].⁶² Dragoș, a younger man from the environmental consulting firm mentioned in chapter 3, spoke up, saying, “I think it’s a good initiative, but it’s unreal[istic] for Republic of Moldova. In European countries...protected areas are managed by private persons...and that’s normal for them, because they respect the legislation, they are afraid to make some mistakes. But here it’s another situation; it’s a Soviet-style living, still now.” Therefore the authorities will not allow control of protected areas to shift to the NGOs, he concluded. Then Mr. Dmitri joked that if such a plan were implemented, “immediately [there will] appear NGOs created by the Moldsilva people who will take [the area] and manage it as a factory.” Amidst laughter, Dragoș agreed, suggesting that there would soon be “more than the present number of NGOs.”

William, laughing but a bit taken aback by the speed and decisiveness with which his proposal had been rejected, responded, “That’s a very cynical view.” Mr. Dmitri countered that it is a realistic view; in fact, he claimed that this had already happened. According to Mr. Dmitri, in the northern part of Moldova, an NGO took over some land for reconstruction, but after three years the authorities cancelled the rent contract and reclaimed the land, because Moldsilva had insisted that it be transferred to them. William admitted that arrangements like the one he proposed do not always work; for example, sometimes the government just wants to get rid of the land, so it does not thoroughly research the NGO. Mr. Nicolai added that in Romania, much of the forest was privatized

⁶² Mr. Dmitri’s Romanian was slightly incorrect, as he stumbled over the word *guvernatori* (authorities) and used the feminine *ele* (they) to refer to the authorities rather than the masculine *ei*, used also for mixed groups. As Mr. Dmitri is a Russian speaker, I assume this was an innocent mistake, although Romanians do sometimes use feminine descriptors as insults directed at men.

after 1989.⁶³ Protected areas could not be privatized, however, so NGOs were able to take control of some of them. In Moldova, by contrast, the forest remains public property. Mr. Fedor added that in any case, the NGOs could not cope with the amount of work required to restore and protect these areas.

William decided to put the topic to rest, moving on to a discussion of different models of governance, also the focus of the next day's workshop. But the overall tone of the meeting had been stubbornness on the part of the participants, who insisted that the corruption within Moldsilva and its power to influence the Ministry made it nearly impossible to protect the forest and other areas adequately. At one point William sighed, saying that the fight would just go on and on. Mr. Dmitri tried to reassure him, saying, "Nu prea" [Not really], but William continued, complaining that people were reacting, not leading. "Who is leading?" he asked, exasperated. As the meeting drew to an end, someone again suggested putting Moldsilva under the Ministry of Environment; Mr. Nicolai joked that this would only increase the number of people not working. Instead, he said, his NGO should control Moldsilva; at least he could control them scientifically. The directors' views of science and their frustration when their expertise is not recognized are discussed in the next section.

⁶³ See Vasile (2009) for a discussion of the privatization of Romanian forests and the stories of corruption and illegal logging that subsequently emerged. Also see Verdery (2003) for a broader, in-depth study of land privatization in rural Romania after 1989.

Science

Roundtable Meeting

During the roundtable meeting, the directors expressed their concerns not just about corruption, but also about the perceived dismissal of their scientific expertise. At the roundtable, William mentioned that he had visited one of the forest reserves, saying with amusement, “I was quite surprised to find it’s not a strict reserve at all. Actually it’s a multiple use area,” which people used “for hunting, fishing,” and “this so-called sanitary cutting.” Citing the fact that Moldsilva had to generate most of its own income, he reasoned that rather than act as a reserve, the area is merely “functioning as something else, which is not automatically bad.”⁶⁴ In response to William’s defense of Moldsilva and their treatment of the forest as a multi-use site, Mr. Fedor said to William, agitated, “You make [your] second mistake, because this reserve was maybe the most conserved, most valuable forest area in Moldova. And such management is really violating [the] sense of this reserve, and violating the law.” Mr. Dmitri observed that “the legislation [had] followed the degradation”; that is, officials had changed the law to take the degradation into account. “In such [a] way we will destroy everything in Moldova,” he added.

During this exchange, the NGO representatives expressed stricter views about protecting the land than did the international expert. A common perception among global environmentalists and park planners is that national parks either protect “pristine” nature or return land to a “wilder” state (Schwartz 2006). As seen here, neither William nor the

⁶⁴ In my interview with Marius and Veaceslav, they confirmed that in the UNDP’s view, Moldsilva understands the problems of forest protection better than the other entities. The NGOs do not understand governance, they told me; they may understand management, but they do not understand the whole system.

environmentalists had any illusions that an untouched, pristine wilderness existed in Moldova; most of the forests had been cleared, wetlands had been polluted, and much of what remained had been in the UNDP's (2009) terms "degraded," or from another viewpoint used for local purposes. Nevertheless, the NGO directors stressed adamantly to William that strict rules must be implemented and enforced in order to save the beauty and biodiversity that remained.

While their reaction in part follows from their fears that corruption would ultimately destroy Moldova's natural areas, it also reflects the manner in which ecological science developed in Russia and the Soviet Union, specifically in the context of conservation. Douglas Weiner (1999:28) explains that like in the U.S.,⁶⁵ Russian natural scientists in the early twentieth century conceived of a network of nature reserves, or *заповедники* (*zapovedniki*), encompassing "tracts believed to be both pristine, intact ecological systems and representatives of even larger landscapes." Such a network was finally created in the mid-1920s in order to protect ecological communities, or biocenoses, each of which scientists believed was "largely self-contained and bounded, and existed in relative equilibrium" (Weiner 1999:28).

The *zapovedniki* differed from national parks in the U.S. in their organization and maintenance by scientists; no one else could enter the reserves, reflecting the Soviet "notion of protected nature areas as places from which humans should be

⁶⁵ The Western idea of protected areas stems from nature preservation movements in the nineteenth century working to counter the effects of industrialization. The concept was bolstered by the development of ecological science in the twentieth century, and eventually became an integral part of the environmentalist project to protect "untouched" nature (Schwarz 2006). In the U.S., these ideas resulted in a series of national forests and parks. Several ethnographers have documented the difficulties involved in establishing national parks, which are generally modeled after Western parks, elsewhere in the world, such as East Africa (Walley 2004), Sardinia (Heatherington 2010), and Latvia (Schwartz 2006).

excluded” (Schwartz 2006:120). Officially, scientists used the *zapovedniki* to study biological processes, with the ultimate goal of making recommendations to the government about the most economically favorable use of nature (Weiner 1999). In addition, however, even as ecological science outside the USSR, and eventually within it, moved beyond the idea of closed ecosystems and pristine nature, those scientists associated with *zapovedniki* held on to these ideas in order to continue to claim that they must be the ones to control the protected areas. They used this tactic to justify their research, maintain scientific authority, and ultimately protect these areas from government intervention, starting with collectivization and continuing through the Stalinist campaign to turn the *zapovedniki* “into the more productive ‘Communist nature’ of the future” (Weiner 1999:5).

The creation of the *zapovedniki* system must be understood in terms of the value placed on science in Russia. The desire to maintain scientific control over protected areas stems not only from a desire to protect pristine nature, but also from a more fundamental belief in the moral superiority of science.⁶⁶ This belief has roots in the 19th century Russian view of science as an alternative to the tsarist political system. While tsarism “proved limited and flawed, science held out the promise of nothing less than the secular redemption of the world” (Weiner 1999:24). Science became a calling and a moral profession, a view that continued into the 20th century and through the Russian Revolution. During Soviet times, natural scientists maintained the view that theirs was a superior form of knowledge that should be used to inform policy.

⁶⁶ In Western society in general, scientists enjoy a privileged position due to an assumption of scientific authority (Franklin 2002, Harding 2006); in the Russian case, an assumption of moral superiority further boosts this position.

The idea that science is a morally superior way of thinking continued to influence the Moldovan NGO leaders, who used this idea to bolster their argument that they should have some say over the management of the protected areas. They argued, for example, that Moldsilva had taken advantage of the ambiguity in the meaning of the term reservation, both in Russian (*zapovednik*) and in Romanian (*rezervație*). During Soviet times, the only *zapovednik* in Moldova was the Codru Reserve, and following the early 20th century definition of a *zapovednik*, it was a very strictly protected area accessible only by scientists. However, more recently Moldsilva had used a less strict definition to justify their management of the areas. The NGO directors accused Moldsilva of taking advantage of the fact that “reservation” is a complex notion.

In contrast to the self-interested behavior of Moldsilva, the NGO directors suggested that they, as scientists, would ensure the protection of biodiversity and work to return the areas to a more “natural” state. Their use of ecological knowledge would ensure that the nature would be preserved correctly, in both a scientific and a moral sense. Instead, however, they had had to watch helplessly as the environment had been degraded, first by the Soviet state and now, they contended, by Moldsilva.⁶⁷ Although scientists had control over *Reservația Codru* during Soviet times, according to the NGO directors they were only allowed to do “pure” scientific research without applying it practically. In addition, during Communist Party rule from 2001-2009 they were again barred from doing anything more than floral and faunal surveys to document biodiversity.

⁶⁷ Citing many examples of environmental destruction, Feshbach and Friendly (1992) argue that the Soviet government generally did not value environmental protection. Edward Snajdr (2008) calls this a “communist environmentality,” describing a similar situation in Slovakia, where the pre-1989 government covered up environmental problems and withheld information from the public.

The directors thus felt that their expertise had been and continued to be ignored. This feeling surfaced again several months later at the bid meeting related to the project.

Bid Meeting

In May 2010, I sat at a table in a small meeting room at the highly secured UNDP headquarters in Chişinău. Also sitting around the table were the UNDP protected areas project team and representatives from several of the NGOs, who were preparing proposals to conduct environmental assessments for some of Moldova's protected areas. The UNDP representatives had called the bid meeting in cooperation with the Ministry of Environment, a partner in the project, to clarify their request for proposals. The atmosphere became tense when Mr. Fedor insisted that the proposed timeline for the project was impossible, because the geobotanical assessments requested by the government would take too long if they included mapping. "It's absolutely crazy! Eu ştiu cum" [I know how (to do these assessments)], said Mr. Fedor, a Russian speaker, even using Romanian to make his point. Veaceslav from UNDP suggested that they could drop the map requirement. Still upset, Mr. Fedor said, "It's absolutely stupid!" Marius, another local representative of UNDP, replied, annoyed, "Nu este stupid" [It's not stupid]. Mr. Nicolai, an NGO director of whom Marius and Veaceslav had spoken highly, eased the tension by saying, "I agree it's not possible." He explained some of the difficulties in measuring the borders of the protected area. Eventually Marius conceded that maybe what the government wanted was impossible, and he agreed that the requirements could be modified. Still unsatisfied, Mr. Fedor insisted that determining the borders would be

more difficult than the government and the UNDP team anticipated, because sometimes the borders on paper were incorrect. Specialists explain what is possible, he said, “but you don’t listen.”

The NGO directors’ claims that Moldsilva did not have the scientific expertise to correctly protect the forest are connected to their argument that Moldsilva was too corrupt to do so. Moreover, their assertions at the bid meeting that neither the UNDP nor the Ministry of Environment understood the process of assessing a protected area indicate a belief that science is or should be separate from politics. However, as anthropologists have shown through ethnographic studies of scientists,⁶⁸ science is necessarily influenced by and influences politics. Laura Nader (1996:9) explains that “in the underlying politics of science, disciplines develop and are shaped by tension and power struggles,” and that, moreover, “the politicization of science is unavoidable, not only because politicians, corporations, and governments try to use what scientists know, but because virtually all science has social and political implications.” As we have seen through their interviews and statements during meetings, the NGO directors are necessarily political, competing with each other for funding, working or not working with certain officials, and expressing political views. The directors have an interest in maintaining the view that ecological science is politically neutral, however, because this supports the idea that they, and not Moldsilva, should control the protected areas.

As Nader (1996:9-10) continues, “when the notion of an elegant, pure science defines as external the context in which science is practiced, a wider dialogue is

⁶⁸ For example, Hugh Gusterson (2004) conducted ethnographic research at a nuclear weapons laboratory, Stefan Helmreich (1998) among artificial-life scientists, Paul Rabinow (1996) in a biotechnology lab, and Sharon Traweek (1988) among American and Japanese high energy physicists.

considered irrelevant. Purity in this case is the pursuit and the myth.” The goal of science is unbiased, politically-neutral knowledge, which is impossible. Yet when science is portrayed as unbiased and politically neutral, it becomes difficult to question its practices and results, thereby giving authority to the scientists. In an attempt to cut off any discussion about alternative ways to manage the forest, the NGO directors tried to perpetuate the myth that their particular scientific knowledge of this subject was politically neutral and morally superior to Moldsilva’s approach. In different contexts, however, these same men used alternative forms of knowledge to pursue their goals. As seen in my interviews with the directors, for example, they adopted narratives associated with sustainable development, democratization, and other key ideas when applying for funding from international organizations. Before examining the particular knowledge system adopted by the directors for the UNDP project, the next section outlines a political spatial framework to understand how the NGO directors have gained some power over the government to advance their own projects.

Transnational Governmentality

To understand how the NGO directors have improved their ability to carry out their own environmental projects through the adoption of particular narratives, it is helpful to consider their position in relation to the state and to funding organizations. Nongovernmental organizations are generally considered part of “civil society,” and in Eastern Europe after the fall of communism, their numbers increased dramatically with the support of Western aid organizations. Cold War ideologies led Western donors to view

economic and political factors as linked; in order to supplant communism, these donors made the implementation of democracy through civil society-building a particularly important aspect of economic development (Mandel 2002; Wedel 2001). Western donors assumed that civil society did not exist during communist times, and that by allowing such a sector to develop, their aid programs would help to build “the connective tissue of a new democratic political culture” (Wedel 2001:85). Moreover, these funders viewed nongovernmental organizations as the building blocks of civil society (Mandel 2002; Wedel 2001). However, while the attempt to export democracy from donor countries to post-socialist Eastern Europe has involved increased flows of people, money, and ideas from West to East, there have also been “blockages, diversions, distortions and local selection” (Sampson 2003:329). Many anthropologists have discovered tensions between the idea of civil society and actually existing practices in the region.⁶⁹

In their article “Spatializing States: Toward an Ethnography of Neoliberal Governmentality,” James Ferguson and Akhil Gupta (2002) lay out a framework to help explain changes in the ways that governments claim legitimacy in light of new political spatial arrangements. First they introduce the concept of verticality, which refers to the idea that the state is somehow above civil society, community, and family. More specifically, civil society is generally considered “a kind of buffer between low and high, an imagined middle zone of contact or mediation between the citizen, the family, or the community, on the one hand, and the state, on the other” (Ferguson and Gupta 2002:983).

⁶⁹ For example, see Gal and Kligman (2000), Sampson (2002, 2003), Cellarius (2004), Ghodsee (2005), Mandel (2002), and Phillips (2008).

This concept has been used not only by states but also by scholars examining the relationship between state and society.

The authors do not claim that verticality is necessarily an inaccurate way to portray state-society relationships; they just argue that it is a constructed image, one that states often use to express authority. However, in a world increasingly characterized by transnational connections, local actors can more easily challenge state claims to authority. The authors introduce the concept of transnational governmentality, which takes into account the new strategies being used on a global scale by entities such as the World Trade Organization (WTO), the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank, as well as transnational partnerships between local groups and international funding organizations.⁷⁰ Generally scholars have conceptualized this new arrangement by stretching the idea of verticality, with institutions like the WTO seen as “above” the state. Ferguson and Gupta (2002), however, contend that this portrayal is incomplete, as there are many entities that do not fit clearly into the hierarchy, such as NGOs. These have generally been considered local, grassroots operations, and thus “below” the state. However, the proliferation of transnational NGOs and their partnerships with local groups, which can then potentially challenge the state’s claims to superiority, render this vision problematic.⁷¹ Indeed, all of these are “integral parts of a transnational apparatus of governmentality,” (Ferguson and Gupta 2002:994). As a result of this new

⁷⁰ They based this concept on Michel Foucault’s concept of governmentality, which is concerned with “the myriad ways in which human conduct is directed by calculated means” by state institutions and others (Ferguson and Gupta 2002:989).

⁷¹ Marc Abélès (2008) argues that the weakening of the state and the increasing power of transnational NGOs reflects a shift in attention from issues of sovereignty to new forms of governmentality related to the economics of survival.

arrangement, states and many non-state organizations have become “horizontal contemporaries,” so that “it is necessary to treat state and nonstate governmentality within a common frame, without making unwarranted assumptions about their spatial reach, vertical height, or relation to the local” (Ferguson and Gupta 2002:994).

This framework can be used to conceptualize the configuration of entities involved in environmental projects in Moldova, and how each one uses particular tactics of government to try to exert its verticality over the others. As the “experts” in the protected areas project, the UNDP project team might be expected to see themselves as above the others. However, William, the international consultant from Great Britain hired by the UNDP, maintained that protection laws and even the definition of a protected area should be created not from the top, but locally according to “traditional” means. During the workshop discussed below, a participant asked William which model of governance would be best for Moldova. William responded that he was not qualified to make this determination, and that Moldovan experts would have to do this. In contrast with this expressed dedication to learning from the participants, however, William said to me at a lunch break that “even if [the participants] don’t get what they want, at least they will feel better that they got the chance to express their views.” It is important to include the various stakeholders at the planning stage, he told me, because at least they will feel that their voices have been heard.⁷²

⁷² William’s comment evokes a common critique of the participation framework, which originally became part of development projects based on the recommendations of social activists and aid organizations’ own experts who recognized that projects involving local people had more success than ones relying on top-down management. However, this approach has increasingly been used not to gain insight from those who will be affected by projects, but instead to create the appearance of consent. For critiques of this approach, see Rahnema (1991), Sachs (1991), Goldman (2005), and Walley (2004).

While William took many notes and called the meetings “enlightening,” he would nevertheless be the one making recommendations on how to proceed with the project, so in this sense the UNDP remained above the other stakeholders. Nevertheless, their success depended largely on cooperation from the Ministry.⁷³ Local project managers Marius and Veaceslav told me that working with the Ministry in the first place is “risky” due to uncertainty in the government. When the Alliance for European Integration (*Alianța pentru Integrare Europeană*, or AIE) replaced the Party of Communists of the Republic of Moldova (PCRM) in 2009, Marius and Veaceslav had been forced to have certain aspects of the project re-approved by the new Minister of Environment. They expressed some concern that another change in government would set them back again, indicating their understanding that the relationship between the UNDP project team and the Moldovan state was in some ways not a “horizontal” relationship.

Ferguson and Gupta (2002) argue that states have had an increasingly difficult time maintaining claims of verticality as transnational relationships have become more common. For the Moldovan state, many challenges exist.⁷⁴ Since independence in 1991, it has proven especially difficult for the Moldovan state to claim legitimate authority for governance, in part due to the political uncertainty discussed in chapter 2. In light of the difficulty Parliament had electing a president, much of the public tends to see the

⁷³ The Ministry’s actions did little to inspire confidence in this regard. When the Ministry representatives failed to return to the workshop immediately after lunch, for instance, William noted, “I’d be really disappointed if no one from the Ministry came back; this is supposed to be their project.” While a few Ministry representatives did eventually return to the workshop after lunch, they did not seem particularly engaged in the project.

⁷⁴ In the Moldovan Soviet Socialist Republic (MSSR), by contrast, the state could relatively easily make the case that it was “above” the people due to the centrally planned economy, which controlled everything down to workers’ salaries. In much the same way, the central Soviet government in Moscow could easily claim to be “above” its satellite states. Each state had its place in the planned economy; Moldova, for example, was an agricultural state expected to produce fruits, vegetables and wine for the USSR.

Moldovan government as something of an embarrassment. When I tried to ask people, especially young people, about politics, they often refused to talk about it. In addition, in a country as small as Moldova, where people half-jokingly refer to the capital city as a “big village,” politicians tend to be highly visible, making it difficult for them to prove their spatial superiority to the rest of society.⁷⁵

Despite politicians’ day-to-day visibility, Moldovans generally consider them to be above society, albeit in a negative way. Many people I talked to saw governmental officials as corrupt elites who did not care about their constituents, a view often perpetuated by the media.⁷⁶ As a result of popular perception, politicians find themselves in the tricky position of having to legitimate their authority while at the same time portraying themselves as trustworthy and “one of the people.”⁷⁷ Finally, the common perception that government workers do absolutely nothing all day makes it even more difficult for the government to prove its legitimacy or its place above the people.

While the people can denigrate politicians, the government still wields some power over them. However, in the context of cases like the protected areas project, the state must also compete for power and legitimacy with any organizations that now in

⁷⁵ I saw the prime minister at a concert and later dancing at a festival, and I spotted a member of Parliament picking out produce at the grocery store. When my family visited, we were taking a walk when I pointed out then-acting president Mihai Ghimpu, who happened to be walking down the street in the opposite direction (albeit surrounded by guards on his way to an official function). In fact, Mr. Ghimpu lived in the same building as my first apartment in Chişinău.

⁷⁶ Mr. Victor told me that ProTV, one of the first independent stations in Moldova, has ruined several reputations by exposing politicians’ lies. One evening prior to an election, a Moldovan friend and I watched a TV interview of an independent candidate running on an anti-corruption platform. He showed photographs allegedly depicting certain politicians’ yachts in Odessa to expose their corrupt behavior.

⁷⁷ I witnessed an attempt to do so at a Holocaust Memorial Day event at the Jewish Center in Chişinău. While most of the speakers gave their speeches on stage, Marian Lupu, then the AIE’s candidate for president and later Moldova’s interim president, walked from his seat and stood in front of the stage on the same level as the audience to give his speech.

some respects share its “horizontal plane.” In the context of the UNDP project, these include environmental NGOs and Moldsilva, which have both found ways to bypass the state.⁷⁸ As the NGO leaders emphasized, due to a shortage of state funding, their groups must often turn to transnational organizations to obtain money for projects. Mr. Dmitri told me that securing foreign funding forces the government to cooperate, as otherwise powerless NGOs gain bargaining power with which to convince the government to support their projects. In addition, NGOs and the state have become competitors.⁷⁹ The Ministry of Environment uses many of the same tactics as NGOs, getting funding from the UNDP, the GEF, SOROS, USAID, and others. One environmentalist at the roundtable meeting joked that the Ministry is “just another NGO.”

Environmentalism as Development

While the environmental NGOs examined here were able to successfully bypass the state through the use of international connections, this also required embedding themselves in a Western development framework, which was also necessary to participate in the UNDP protected areas project. After defending their own strict views of nature protection at the roundtable meeting and rejecting William’s suggestions based on the UNDP’s more flexible understanding of protected areas, the NGO directors adopted the UNDP’s narrative of governance to participate in a workshop the next day. In contrast to their insistence during the roundtable meeting that their scientific approach is the only

⁷⁸ According to the NGOs, Moldsilva exerts its power over the state through less visible (i.e. corrupt) means.

⁷⁹ This has occurred elsewhere in the former Soviet Union; see Mandel’s (2002) study of NGOs in Kazakhstan, where civil society has become a para-civil service, taking over when state services collapsed.

correct way to manage the protected areas, the NGO directors largely adopted the language used by the UNDP during the workshop and cooperated with the Moldsilva and Ministry representatives. Their use of two different frameworks, one influenced partially by Soviet ideas about nature protection and the other based in a development paradigm, reflects the presence of overlapping influences in Moldova and the flexibility to hold and utilize different views. In addition, their participation in a state project despite their expressed distrust of the government and aversion to political involvement suggests a strategic disconnect between their ideology and their actions. The following section considers the “green knowledge” associated with neoliberal conservation used by the UNDP, and then describes how the various stakeholders interacted during the workshop, held at the Ministry.

Green Knowledge

The day after the roundtable meeting, the UNDP held a workshop at the Ministry of Environment for representatives from the Ministry, Moldsilva, and the NGOs. During the workshop, the UNDP representatives used claims of expertise in an attempt to encourage the participants to think about the problems and solutions in a particular way. In his ethnography of the World Bank and its shift to green neoliberalism, which combines sustainable development with neoliberal economics, Michael Goldman (2005) describes how the Bank produces “green knowledge,” sometimes through tactics such as suppressing information about project outcomes that conflicts with the Bank’s vision. As discussed in chapter 1, this green knowledge has become so pervasive that it is difficult to

think in alternative ways. The Moldovan NGOs had already adopted many of these ideas, partly to gain funding for other projects from international organizations which have also adopted a green neoliberal approach. Here I argue that this common knowledge allowed the different parties to communicate, but the underlying tension prevented open dialogue and the development of true partnerships.

The workshop took place in a large conference room at the Ministry of Environment. William gave a PowerPoint presentation about governance, which he defined as the way that an organization, country, or institution is run.⁸⁰ One slide showed the three components of governance in a Venn diagram with three equally sized, overlapping circles: *statul* (the state), *societatea civilă* (civil society), and *sectorul privat* (the private sector). Through the spread of neoliberal capitalism, the relationship between these sectors has been transformed to allow for increased commodification and production (Heynen et al. 2007). William went on to describe different models of governance, such as state centralization, private management, and co-management. He had explained at the roundtable meeting the day before that the idea of governance was “very fashionable at the moment.” Indeed, “in the margins of the new Europe, projects to streamline and enhance governance of landscapes, populations, and resources abound” (Heatherington 2010:147). As Tracey Heatherington (2010:147) argues, “under the conditions of late capitalism, these projects may be less important as administrative tools than for their capacity to generate powerful cultural representations that naturalize new articulations of authority, capital, and expertise.” These projects emphasize flexible

⁸⁰ The slides were in Romanian, but William spoke in English, which was translated into Romanian by a translator.

partnerships between various actors; the UNDP protected areas project aimed to create a form of governance based on partnerships between the Ministry, Moldsilva, and the NGOs, although the formation of such partnerships turned out to be difficult.

William's presentation illustrates his attempt to enlighten his audience with a particular form of green knowledge. He had already disseminated this knowledge to the local managers of the project, Marius and Veaceslav. The week after the workshop, I went to visit these two young men at their office. They had been evasive about granting me an interview, but I had a recording of the roundtable discussion that they wanted, so they finally agreed to a trade. I found out that Marius had a degree in economics, while Veaceslav had degrees in economics and forestry. They told me that they did not have experts in the field of protected areas in Moldova, and that every day they learned something new. Veaceslav said he had thought that he knew everything before he started working on the project seven months before, but that now he knew that he didn't know anything. In other words, he was still in the process of acquiring the green knowledge deemed necessary by the GEF and the UNDP to carry out the project. I asked them what they had thought about the workshop, and they told me that they considered it successful because it allowed them to better understand the visions of the stakeholders, so they could more easily convince them of their plan. They also said that it was useful to include both Moldsilva and the Ministry of Environment; neither of these entities would accept a proposal from the other, but if the two groups worked together to create a proposal, Marius and Veaceslav reasoned, it might be acceptable. These responses call into question the UNDP's stated goal of allowing the stakeholders to participate in developing

their own approach to management, and they illustrate the UNDP's plan to direct the stakeholders toward their neoliberal conservation approach, while allowing the stakeholders only the illusion of being heard.

Forced Cooperation at the Workshop

The NGO directors were well aware all along that the UNDP representatives were trying to promote a particular viewpoint,⁸¹ and the roundtable meeting had made it clear that the NGO directors had viewpoints and interests that they believed ran counter to the views of the other stakeholders. Specifically, they disagreed with an approach that allowed the forests to be commodified and logged in order to support Moldsilva in “protecting” them.⁸² The animosity was mutual; William told me that he had also heard complaints from both Moldsilva and the Ministry about the other entities. With all three groups resisting each other, the project seemed to be stuck. At the workshop, the UNDP team attempted to overcome the stalemate by providing the common language of governance, described above, and the NGO directors and other participants capitulated to some degree by working within this framework.

During the afternoon session, the participants broke into groups to discuss which type of governance would work best for Moldova's protected areas. To determine the groups, Sonja, the local project leader from Austria, wanted to form teams randomly, but

⁸¹ After the roundtable meeting, I asked my friend Dragoș, who was there representing his environmental consulting firm, what he had thought of the roundtable meeting. “Boring,” he answered simply. The UNDP has already decided what they will do, he said, so what is the point?

⁸² As Mr. Nicolai pointed out at the roundtable discussion, Moldsilva was “protecting” the forests from nearby villagers, who use the forest for subsistence. This attitude follows the green neoliberal view that resources in the South are “undervalued” and thus “poorly utilized”; this view blames environmental ills on poor populations who are seen to be “wasting” resources (Goldman 2005).

Marius insisted that he would determine the groups so that each one included at least one representative each from the Ministry, Moldsilva, and the NGOs. I joined the group focusing on top-down, centralized government management. Our task involved filling in one portion of a matrix, which listed categories of protected areas vertically and types of management horizontally. We were to determine whether each category should be managed by a federal agency, delegated to an official agency, or contracted out to a company or NGO. My group included four men in their fifties and sixties, including Mr. Fedor, one man from the Ministry, and two men from Moldsilva.

Although I had been anticipating some sort of confrontation all day, based on the harsh words the NGO directors had used when describing the practices of Moldsilva and the Ministry, the participants worked together quite well.⁸³ Mr. Fedor even briefly switched from Russian to simple Romanian so that the others could better understand him. Overall, the group work seemed to be the most productive part of the day, with participants from different stakeholder groups sharing perceived obstacles and potential solutions, at least on a conceptual level. The availability of the common, neutral language of governance outlined by William facilitated this cooperation. Their politeness allowed the workshop participants to work amiably together, but by forcing them to discuss the problems in terms of governance, it also prevented a truly open discussion or perhaps an argument.⁸⁴

⁸³ When I discussed this cooperation with a Moldovan friend later, she suggested that this reflects a culture of fear instilled by the Soviets that leads Moldovans to avoid confrontation.

⁸⁴ On the other hand, Sonja later told me that she had been impressed by the willingness of participants to express their views openly. Indeed, during the morning meeting, several men conveyed various frustrations in front of the entire group, although the NGO directors who spoke were significantly more reserved than they had been at the roundtable. However, during small group work, the men in my group at least remained agreeable.

Unfortunately William had to cut the exercise short due to time constraints. He made a few concluding remarks, stressing the importance of developing a strong partnership through a common plan. He tried to hide the frustration in his voice with laughter when he said that Moldovans always tell him that he does not understand the situation in their country; they say that they cannot work together and that they are waiting for this or that to happen. “I hear exactly the same thing everywhere I go. We’re just people! But we are capable of changing,” he said. These comments, along with his question at the roundtable meeting about who is leading, reveal his view that all of the people involved in the project tended to complain about the situation or react to it rather than trying to change it, and that by changing their thinking and behavior they could overcome the obstacles they faced. More specifically, by learning a neoliberal conservation approach through the adoption of good governance practices, William believed that they could change the old system.

William’s suggestion that the stubbornness of the NGO directors is a result of their being stuck in the past is too simplistic, however. It ignores the new tactics they have adopted to meet their goals, including building international partnerships and their strategic use of different scientific narratives to gain funding and participate in projects. It is true that the directors at times displayed a strict, Soviet-inspired understanding of science and a refusal to compromise and work with others. However, these tactics in fact represent an active attempt to resist a neoliberal approach to conservation. Their refusal to accept a model which includes “ecological logging” shows that they adhere to an ideology that disagrees with the tenets of “green” neoliberalism. They expressed their

disagreement by appealing to their scientific expertise, and through recourse to a well-known and accepted post-Soviet narrative: complaining about corruption. Furthermore, these attitudes stem from their disapproval not only of the new system for managing the forests proposed by the UNDP, but also what they consider to be the “old” system. In this way, their stubbornness, their dismissal of William’s ideas, and their insistence that they know best how to protect Moldovan nature reflect a rejection of both the old, corrupt system exemplified by the “mafia”-controlled Moldsilva and the incompetent government, as well as the new system proposed by the UNDP, which the NGO directors considered inadequate since in their view it would essentially reproduce the existing management structure.

Their strong statements and refusal to compromise also contrast with their belief that they would never actually be allowed to take control of the protected areas. Ideally, they wanted to see control of the forest and other areas be taken away from allegedly corrupt entities like Moldsilva and the government, who wished to profit from nature, and for more influence to be given to scientists like them who wanted to truly protect it. They complained vehemently during the roundtable in an attempt to make William understand their point of view. In reality, however, they never expected to be handed control over the protected areas, and indeed admitted they lacked the capacity to manage them properly. Therefore, while William and others may have seen the directors as stuck in the past, in fact the directors were well aware of their weak position and knew they had to take a strong approach to have any chance of influencing the project at all. In the end the NGOs did not walk away but attended the bid meeting, prepared to participate in the project

while continuing to assert their disagreement with the project's approach. William may have been right when he commented that allowing all of the stakeholders to voice their opinions would be enough to convince them to participate in the project. From another perspective, however, the directors did their best to get their ideas across during the planning phase and continued to participate in the project as well as to critique it.

This chapter has demonstrated that while the Moldovan context provides a certain amount of ambiguity and perceived divisions that can result in conflict, the NGO directors overcame this in various ways. Not only did they work with each other despite language differences, they also worked with the Ministry of Environment and Moldsilva, despite their views that these groups were corrupt, and they used the UNDP's governance framework even though they had stressed the superiority of their own scientific approach at the roundtable. Their continued critiques, such as Mr. Fedor and Mr. Nicolai's insistence at the bid meeting that the environmental assessments be carried out in a particular way indicate that they will not back down from their own views when they do not agree with an approach.

Nevertheless, William's conclusion that many Moldovans are simply stuck in the past is a common one. He commented to me after the workshop that in reality he did not expect this group of people to change; he was convinced that it would take a generation for any progress – in this case toward a Western, neoliberal conservation approach – to be made. While I was a little surprised at *his* cynicism, I had heard a similar sentiment from many Moldovans. The fact that several of these NGOs reported losing members over the past years reflects a gradual power shift to younger generations. The next chapter begins

to explore how a group of young environmental advocates, who often share William's view that the older generation is incapable of change, has begun to develop alternative tactics to address environmental problems in Moldova. Many young environmentalists' willingness to embrace green neoliberalism suggests that William might have been right about some of the changes taking place in the younger generation.

CHAPTER 5

ECOWEEK AND GREEN MOLDOVA: URBAN YOUTH ACTIVISM

We are speaking here about ecology, eco-ethics, environmental problems, and it all seems so huge and big. And all the problems that Steve [the American expert] showed us, they're really, really important and deep, and we are just small human beings. We are 30 people here in this room, who don't have any influence on the big politics of the world; we don't even have influence on the politics of Moldova, which doesn't have influence on the entire world, so what can we actually change? And why are we actually here? Then let's put the hands down and just go home. It doesn't make sense [to be here] if we cannot change anything.

I am not a person who does believe a lot in politics. Politics is one ruling force of the world. But politics is created by people, right? Who are those politicians who sit in the *Duma*, in the Parliament? They are just people...who have their own understanding of the world. And those politicians are not doing the things we like; they're not doing the things that are sustainable. Okay, so let them do what they want. We are also people with our own will, our own power, and we can also change something. Although we are still students...we are the way. We will be the people who in five, maybe ten years...be the decision makers, okay? And it all starts from us. [Violeta, 21, organizer of EcoWeek]

Violeta's impromptu, heartfelt speech came toward the end of the first day of EcoWeek, a project for young, urban Moldovans that she designed and carried out with several colleagues and the support of German and American funding in April 2010. I first met Violeta at the end of December 2009, when she was visiting her family in Chişinău during a break from her undergraduate geocology studies in Germany. I waited for her outside of McDonald's, a favorite gathering spot for young people, as a light snow fell. Violeta, with her long dark hair and furry boots, arrived with Andreas, her German boyfriend, and Irina, her Moldovan friend and the co-organizer of EcoWeek. I instantly felt at ease with Violeta, whose sincerity and patience seem to allow her to connect with anyone. When Violeta learned that my family had just arrived in Moldova for a visit and were waiting for me at a café, she insisted that we join them. Over coffee, Violeta,

Andreas, and Irina enthusiastically discussed their plans for EcoWeek, encouraging me to become involved. Violeta told us that she had become interested in the environment because of her mother, a biology teacher, who had her young students do active projects like examining anthills. Over the years her passion for the environment had grown, and by age 21 she had already organized multiple projects, though EcoWeek would be the biggest one so far. Violeta's positive energy set the tone for EcoWeek and seemed to spread to every participant.

EcoWeek involved about 30 high school and college students from Chişinău. According to Violeta, EcoWeek aimed to impart global and local environmental information to young people, to give participants a chance to plan and carry out practical activities, and to create networking opportunities. I learned of Violeta and her project through mutual friends, and I volunteered to help in any way I could. Along with Violeta's colleague Irina, an undergraduate economics student, I helped to interview the applicants for the project. I participated in planning sessions and, at Violeta's request, recruited Steve, an American graduate student specializing in global environmental problems, to speak to the group. I also participated in the week's events, including educational sessions, a trip to the local wastewater treatment plant, a movie and networking night, a tree-planting day, and the planning and execution of small environmental projects. After EcoWeek, I hosted voluntary follow-up meetings with participants and helped to plan eco-movie nights.

The larger aim of the project was to start an environmental movement of young people, something the organizers felt did not exist in Moldova. At the end of EcoWeek,

Violeta and others formed a Facebook group called Green Moldova in order to maintain the ties created during EcoWeek and to attract new members. Several meetings and events, such as annual Earth Hour celebrations, took place in the two years following EcoWeek. Violeta and Green Moldova then began to plan a new, larger project called ActivEco, which aims to continue to raise environmental awareness in Moldova as well as to distribute the information necessary to build a “green” economy in Moldova.

In this chapter, I consider the narratives and practices of the EcoWeek participants in relation to three themes. First, organizers and participants expressed a belief that the older generations cannot change, so that change must start with the younger generations. Participants also expressed an aversion to politics and to the practices of older ecologists (such as those in chapter 4). However, I found that their frustrations often echoed those of the older generations, and they sometimes found common ground and collaborated with these older ecologists. Moreover, the participants came to realize that they could not always avoid political involvement. Although this challenged their anti-politics ideology, in fact some found that in Moldova, political engagement can actually be worthwhile.

Second, one way the students tried to distance themselves from local approaches to the environment, which they see as outdated, was to associate themselves with the global “eco” movement. This approach reflects the strong global awareness of many urban young people in Moldova, who report feeling trapped in a country with few opportunities. In fact, some students’ participation in the project related at least as much to a desire to be part of this global trend and to make useful contacts as to solve environmental problems. Despite the desire to connect themselves to a larger movement

and move beyond “old” approaches, however, the students could not help but focus on the problems they saw around them, even if these did not always conform to the concerns of “global” environmentalism. These problems, which they listed at a brainstorming session, included garbage in parks and on streets, the bad smell from the wastewater treatment facility, lake and river pollution, people cutting down trees and burning leaves, old cars, the lack of recycling services, the lack of bicycle lanes, plastic bags everywhere, energy inefficiency, and poor air and water quality.

Finally, in contrast to their focus on grassroots individual efforts, I argue that the views of many EcoWeek participants, as well as Violeta’s new project, largely fit into a “green” neoliberal framework, outlined in chapter 1. Although Violeta voiced anti-capitalist views during EcoWeek, many students expressed their belief in the ability of capitalism to solve environmental problems. Over time, Violeta’s approach also shifted. In a funding proposal for ActivEco, her project to encourage the development of Moldova’s green economy, Violeta followed the the same ecological modernization strategy used by the EU, stressing the compatibility between environmental protection and economic development. This puts the project squarely within the neoliberal sustainable development framework favored by funders, and it reflects a strong orientation toward Europe and “the West,” common among Moldovan youth.

Generational Shift?

Violeta told me that the goal of EcoWeek was “to see what we as people, as students, can change in our own environment, with our efforts.” Her focus on young

people reflects her desire to start a new kind of environmental movement in Moldova, particularly in contrast to the community of environmental NGOs I focused on in chapter 4, which is run mainly by middle-aged men. At a planning meeting for EcoWeek, I suggested inviting Mr. Vadim, a middle-aged ecology professor, to give a talk, since I had just interviewed him and he seemed passionate about the environment. Violeta appeared unenthused about this idea, saying, “These old men just like to give big speeches. They want to show up and look good, but they don’t actually do anything.” She insisted that her movement would be different.

Reflecting the visibility of age polarization in Moldova, young people frequently cite generational differences to explain societal problems. EcoWeek participant and high school senior Ștefan, for example, broke society into three groups. People under 25, like himself, were born in a “different world” than their parents and have a “greater capacity to succeed,” he said, while those over 50 simply don’t want to accept new ideas. “The middle generation is gone,” he went on; the economic disaster has forced many to emigrate from Moldova to find work, leaving a population at home that is concentrated in the oldest and youngest groups.⁸⁵ Ștefan explained to me that with so many people in their thirties and forties working abroad, it feels like a generation is missing, at times causing pronounced conflict between young and old. “Society must hear the voice of the young, and accept the wisdom of the old,” Ștefan told me. “But when the middle is gone, it doesn’t work.” This smoldering tension surfaced in April 2009, when thousands of

⁸⁵ I observed this contrast, evident in the city but especially stark in the villages where one sees mostly older people and young children. Moldovan population statistics from 2010 support this observation, as 65% of young people (ages 0-15) and 62% of older people (men ages 62+ and women ages 57+) live in rural areas, compared with 56% of people of working age (men ages 16-61 and women ages 16-56) (Statistica Moldovei 2010:39). The actual numbers are likely even more skewed, as many in the middle group are working abroad at least part of the year but may still be counted in statistics.

young people gathered in Chişinău's central square to protest elections they believed had been rigged by the Communist Party (see chapter 2). I often heard people complain about the "Soviet mentality" that pervades the older generations and is seen to prevent real change in the country. In practice things are not so clear cut, however.

Avoiding Political Engagement

During educational sessions that took place on the first two days of EcoWeek, Violeta expressed her view that political engagement is a waste of time. During the EcoWeek educational sessions, pessimistic attitudes about corruption and the incompetence of the Moldovan state often contributed to a defeatism when discussing ways to protect Moldova's environment. Violeta stressed to EcoWeek participants that going through political channels would not help them effect change. Working with the Ministry of Environment makes no sense because of its small budget, she told them. Moreover, demanding that the state pay attention to environmental issues makes no sense either, because the state is so corrupt and incompetent that it will not listen. The students often expressed similar views. In discussing ways to address pollution, one participant suggested that the government could collect taxes from polluters. In response, Adrian, a high school senior, asked where the tax money would go; "You get corruption out of this," he insisted. During an EcoWeek follow-up meeting with a handful of participants, I asked if they agreed with Violeta's view of politics. They did. Vova, for example, said that politics "is a power world, and we can't go there."

These views about politics evoke the complaints of activists who have participated in recent protests worldwide (e.g. Juris 2012, Collins 2012). One common thread tying these protests together involves protesters' frustrations related to a lack of political representation, leading to calls for "real" democracy (e.g. Butler 2011, Hardt and Negri 2011, Nugent 2012). Anthropologists have described the emergence of "alternative democracies," each of which translates global discourses into local versions that can spur political struggles (Nugent 2008). These researchers have found it important to pay attention to how discourses of democracy change and become more or less useful based on the context (e.g. Paley 2008, Banerjee 2008, West 2008). In some occupy movements, practices of direct democracy have emerged (Razsa and Kurnik 2012). In a related move, although on a more modest scale, the EcoWeek participants decided to ignore politics and make their own decisions.

In accordance with their view that political engagement is a waste of time, Violeta and the EcoWeek participants based their activities on the premise that change must come from them rather than from the top. They decided to educate themselves about environmental problems and then teach other people and lead by example. Violeta explained to me early in the planning process that because she had set aside only the first two days of EcoWeek for education, she only planned to present "superficial information" to the participants. This would still be useful, she insisted, because "even ecology students at the state university do not learn this information." During the first day, participants watched the short online film "The Story of Stuff," an illustrated explanation of consumerism from production to consumption and the environmental and

social problems this process creates. When the movie ended, Ștefan promptly announced, “Until this moment, I wanted an iPhone. But now, I will remain with my Nokia.” The next day, one participant told us she had gone straight home the night before and told her mom everything. Larisa had watched another video on the “Story of Stuff” website about bottled water. She confessed that she had had two bottles of water in front of her while she watched. “Shame on me,” she said, telling us that she planned to buy a filter now instead of more bottled water.

While participants agreed that they would start changing society by changing their own lives, the conversation often drifted to how they could convince others, especially the older generations, to change their behaviors and attitudes. For example, Andreas, Violeta’s German boyfriend who was working on a master’s degree in environmental management and came to help with the educational sessions, talked about the importance of recycling. He explained that in Germany, everyone separates his or her garbage without thinking about it. One participant asked him where he learned this attitude, and he answered, “I think the most important educators were my parents.”

The participant responded, “So you see in our country, we should educate our parents, instead of...”

“Yeah,” Andreas broke in. “And there was somebody who said, ‘oh nobody ever...these old people, you won’t move them.’ And I think that’s correct. I think it’s really hard to change old people’s lives. I think this is why EcoWeek is such a good thing, because it’s us.”

Another participant asked whether they used the mass media in Germany to encourage people to recycle. “No,” Andreas said, “it’s already common sense” not to throw away recyclable items.

Yet another participant suggested, “For us it will be a big stretch,” as it is difficult to change people’s mentality. “How can we teach people to sort the garbage?” she asked.

Andreas suggested that they would have to frame things differently. “If you say, ‘people, hey, come on, bring your own bag to *Piața Centrală*,’ or ‘collect glass,’ or ‘send kids around to collect paper,’ that smells like Soviet times, yeah?”

Adrian concurred, adding, “Old people think it’s propaganda when you try to explain something to them.”

Andreas told me about his own experiences living in Moldova for two years when he had been teaching German. For instance, each time he had taken his own reusable bags to the grocery store and the cashier reached for a plastic bag, he would tell her please not to use them. She would generally respond, “Why not? They’re free.” To many Moldovans who remember being forced to use a reusable *pungă* (bag) to carry their items, plastic bags represent a kind of freedom. But for young people who don’t remember Soviet times, Andreas believed, the new reusable canvas bags could be seen as cool. Similarly, the EcoWeek participants felt that their peers and young children could learn to recycle; they were more concerned about their parents and grandparents, whom they see as unable or unwilling to learn a new behavior. A recycling program had been started in some Chișinău neighborhoods several years before, but there had been no educational program to show people how to separate garbage, and many adults just threw

all their trash in the bins together. Similarly, one student told a story about an event he had attended in which organizers told participants to throw their garbage in bags; the kids did as they were told, but the adults did not. As a result, they decided to take Violeta's advice to change their own behavior and hopefully inspire other young people, at least, to change their behavior as well. In this way, they would form Moldova's first "eco-generation." This decision guided the projects they carried out, including an art project for children (Figure 9), handing out stickers to college students with ways to "save the planet," distributing recycling information, bicycling through Chişinău to promote this as an alternative means of transportation (Figure 10), and encouraging people to trade their disposable plastic bags for reusable canvas ones (Figure 11).



Figure 9. Art project for children.



Figure 10. EcoWeek bicycling group.

Political Engagement in Practice

While participants' ideology about the futility of political engagement influenced the dialogue during EcoWeek's educational sessions, in fact the project did involve the Ministry of Environment. Violeta invited her friend, a new Vice Minister of the Environment, to give a presentation at EcoNight, a networking event on Wednesday evening during EcoWeek. Audience members seemed bored with the vice minister's rehearsed speech, however, and the next day EcoWeek participants told me that while he had talked about many solutions, he had said nothing to demonstrate any action taken by the Ministry. Nonetheless, his participation illustrates the access that Moldovan environmentalists have to politicians, largely due to Moldova's small size. That Violeta

had a good friend in the Ministry of Environment indicates that participation in government seems within reach here.

Dragoș, another friend of Violeta's, also presented at the EcoWeek networking event, telling the audience that "everything is possible," and that constantly complaining and protesting does nothing. "We should instead promote actions in favor of the environment," he insisted. Dragoș had worked for environmental NGOs before starting the first environmental consulting firm in Moldova. In 2011, Dragoș also became a Vice Minister of the Environment. Similarly, several EcoWeek participants later took part in government-sponsored projects, such as Hai Moldova, a country-wide trash clean-up day, and Youth Parliament, a program affiliated with the Moldovan Parliament, which sometimes debated environmental issues. Thus, although the EcoWeek participants viewed their government officials as corrupt, and talked about avoiding political engagement, in practice they did not treat the system as so impenetrable that they could not find ways to participate. Moreover, many had confidence that, like Dragoș, they would eventually have the opportunity to participate directly in politics.

In addition to the discovery of political opportunities, activities after EcoWeek made some participants start to question the practicality of Violeta's eschewal of political engagement. When participants Vlad, Larisa, and Nina talked of planning a trash art project, I arranged for them to meet with Mariana, an environmentalist in her early thirties who expressed interest in giving them some advice. Sitting around a table at a dark, cozy restaurant the students continued the brainstorming they had started at a previous meeting. Mariana interrupted, asking the students what they wanted to

accomplish with the project and what they wanted to see as an end result. They seemed unsure, but said vaguely that they wanted to send a message that people can reuse stuff. Mariana insisted that even abstract art must have a message. Then she began to list the practical steps they would have to take to plan such an event, such as finding funding and receiving permission from the mayor. The students had little interest in discussing these details. Instead they began mentioning similar projects they had seen elsewhere. Mariana interrupted them again, saying that while she was “so glad to see someone with enthusiasm,” she worried that they did not appreciate the practical difficulties they would face in putting together such a project. She insisted that they needed to realize that they would be dealing with bureaucracy. She had planned many projects and had learned that these pitfalls are unavoidable, but that the students could deal with them if they planned ahead.

At this point, Mariana excused herself to rush to another meeting. For a minute the students stared at each other, looking stunned and a little discouraged. Recognizing that Mariana considered them naive, Nina expressed her opinion that Mariana’s advice had been unreasonable. They agreed that Mariana had overstated the bureaucratic obstacles, and that they could plan a project without considering these issues. After all, Violeta had encouraged them to find ways to work outside of the political system. However, the project never got off the ground, as the students realized that they were not equipped to deal with a seemingly unavoidable bureaucracy.

Change, or More of the Same?

Ideas about generational divisions also proved less strict in practice. In the end, Violeta did invite Mr. Vadim, the ecology professor I told her about, to give a speech at EcoNight, a symbolic gesture to show the importance of engaging people of all ages. This was not the only time I saw younger members of the environmental community collaborate with older ones. For instance, Mr. Vitalie participated in an Earth Hour celebration organized by Violeta and other young people from the NGO SalvaEco when I visited Moldova in March 2012. By then Mr. Vitalie had left REC Moldova for a job at the Ministry of Environment. His colleague Dragoș, by then a Vice Minister, participated in Earth Hour as well.

At times, EcoWeek participants also drew inspiration from the older generation. At the end of EcoWeek, a young woman from the anti-plastic bag team (shown in Figure 11) told us that while her group was standing outside of the Gemini shopping center, trying to convince passersby to exchange their plastic bags for fabric ones, an old lady came over from her spot selling flowers nearby to find out what was going on. Soon the old lady returned with some flowers, the young woman told us, “și cele mici ne le-a dat toate noi aici, ne-a mulțumit că noi existăm” [and she gave these small flowers to all of us here, thanking us for being there]. She went on, “Acest lucru pentru mine sincer mă simt foarte mult la inimă, și mă bucur că în țara noastră există așa persoane” [For me, this sincerely touched my heart, and I’m glad that there are such people in our country].



Figure 11. Anti-plastic bag team.

In contrast to this hopefulness, and despite the proactive attitude formed by participants during EcoWeek about changing their own behaviors and leading by example, the follow-up meetings I held afterward often veered toward discussions about why implementing environmental projects in Moldova is difficult if not impossible. For example, Eugenia said in the first meeting that Moldovans have big plans, but they never finish anything. Her opinion was that they “don’t have the brain” to finish projects, but Vlad argued that it is all about money, an idea he got from Steve, the American ecology graduate student I recruited to lead educational sessions at EcoWeek. Later, however, Vlad said that the biggest problem is people’s mentality. Eugenia suggested that this could be addressed by “encouraging people to be curious again,” to which Vova said

sarcastically, “Come on.” At the second meeting, participants posited that people have been brainwashed and do not care about the environment. Also, Moldovans have become consumers, they said; young people receive money from their parents working abroad and they just buy disposable items. Some suggested that education should be improved, so people learn to stop burning leaves and throwing garbage in the street and in the river. However, someone pointed out that kids *have* been educated, at least in urban areas; they already know what to do, but they are taught in school to be silent and not make trouble. This stems from Soviet times, they insisted, when it was dangerous to say or do certain things because you could go to prison or be killed if the wrong person found out. This has led to “social impotence,” they told me; people are passive and feel they cannot point out a problem or do things differently even if they think it would be better for the environment. As seen below, these beliefs about the persistence of Soviet attitudes influence young people’s desire to look elsewhere for answers. Reflecting the strength of their deeply held ideas, they refused to listen to anything critical I said about the U.S. or the neoliberal capitalist system, including the “social impotence” experienced by many critics of capitalism.

The pessimism conveyed in these conversations resembles the pessimism expressed by the NGO leaders in the previous chapter, and indeed a pessimism that I heard at times from various contacts. Such an attitude has also been described elsewhere in the post-Soviet world. Environmentalists young and old complained about the rampant corruption in Moldovan society, mirroring the cynicism that Nancy Ries (2002) has found in Russia. In addition, young people grumble about the inability or unwillingness of the

older generations to do things differently and, ironically, about older people's propensity to complain instead of taking action. Despite all that divides the generations, this continuous thread of pessimism ties them together. Various researchers in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union argue that while young people have many new opportunities, the ways that they approach them are necessarily linked to old societal structures (Walker and Stephenson 2010). In his study of generational change, sociologist Karl Mannheim (1952:315) explains that even when a new generation develops its own attitudes, there are still "certain basic attitudes which exist over and above the change of generations as enduring (though nevertheless constantly changing) formative principles underlying social and historical development." In this case, a cynical attitude continues to permeate the younger generation at least to some degree. They are torn between wanting to do things differently and contending with what they see as social realities blocking their way at every turn. Violeta's speech at the beginning of this chapter illustrates her recognition of this pessimism among the EcoWeek participants, as well as her hope and vision for young people to overcome their doubts and difficulties to create lasting change in Moldova.

Global Environmentalism

One way the participants tried to distance themselves from the older generations and local political constraints was to connect themselves to the global environmental movement. In his ethnography of environmentalism in Hong Kong, Timothy Choy (2011:135) argues that "modes of being, feeling, and identifying with worlds outside

one's supposed own are (at) the very heart of environmental action in Hong Kong." He argues further that "the environmental marks a space of transcendence," including transcendence of the local, which "enables imagination of, and action for, a political alternative," and transcendence of prior ways of thinking, through which global environmental ideas allow activists to leave behind an imagined, backward local mind-set. In much the same way, young Moldovan environmentalists try to move beyond local political hurdles and the local "Soviet mind-set" by looking outside of Moldova for solutions and connecting themselves to global environmentalism.

During the second day of EcoWeek, participants expressed satisfaction that they were finally learning about "real" environmentalism – about failing species, deforestation, and pollution, for example – in contrast to the local environmental messages they considered inferior, such as "Don't throw trash on the streets." As in the other environmental projects I researched, such as the Ecosan toilets, Violeta looked for assistance, ideas, and expertise from outside of Moldova. She acquired German and American funding to support the project, and she recruited one American and one German ecologist to lead educational sessions. I found throughout my research more generally that Moldovans tend to seek solutions to problems outside their borders. Many have emigrated for work in response to the weak local economy, and young people in Chişinău especially have a strong global awareness, in part due to a lack of opportunities at home. As a result, many EcoWeek participants mentioned a desire to make connections and practice their English in addition to learning about the environment. Here I consider

the challenges that lead to these attitudes and consider the contrast between the resulting desire to be “global” and the necessity of being “local.”

Lack of Opportunities and Emigration

Moldovan young people face many challenges, the main one being a lack of educational and job opportunities in their own country. After the disintegration of the Soviet Union, the economies of the former republics collapsed. Moldova’s economic dependence on Russia exacerbated the country’s economic problems, resulting in high unemployment and poverty levels, and leading many Moldovans to leave the country in search of work elsewhere (Heintz 2007).⁸⁶ In fact, “migration is considered to be the most important and visible feature of social life in the country and it is the hottest topic of daily debate” (Heintz 2007). Many of my friends and acquaintances in Moldova discussed this topic regularly. A local blogger posted “27 motive să mă mut din Chișinău!” [27 reasons to leave Chișinău] (Lebedev 2011), followed less than ten hours later by a rebuttal, “27 de motive să rămân în Chișinău” [27 reasons to stay in Chișinău] (Vicol 2011).

One day in September 2010 I wrote in my field notes, “Everyone I talked to today wants to leave Moldova.” I had dinner with two friends in their early thirties at our favorite Greek café, and they discussed the merits of staying and leaving. My male friend saw nothing good about staying in Moldova and wanted to move to Canada. My female

⁸⁶ It is estimated that close to a quarter of the economically active population is working abroad at any given time, and that remittances account for over a quarter of GDP (World Bank 2005). However, the estimated number of Moldovans working abroad varies widely, from 16 percent reported by Luecke et al. (2009) to over 40 percent or even 50 percent reported by local newspapers (Pantiru et al. 2007; Heintz 2007). Monica Heintz (2007) attributes some of this disparity to the fact that most migration is illegal and not tracked by the state. These numbers increased especially after the 1998 Russian financial crisis (World Bank 2005), but appear to have leveled off around 2008, even before demand for Moldovan labor abroad declined due to the global financial crisis (Luecke et al. 2009).

friend, who has a graduate degree from the U.S. and has worked in several countries as part of her job, had a more ambivalent view. While she agreed that ideally she would like to leave Moldova, she was hesitant because she had a good job here. She complained that as a Moldovan, her options were limited.

While people in their thirties or older tended to highlight the volatility and instability of society over the past two decades, many other young Moldovans I talked to had more positive outlooks. Pamela Abbott et al. (2010:584) observe that young Moldovans “have watched the changes during their formative years and been brought up by parents and teachers who themselves had no clear idea of what the future would bring or even whether the country would survive.” While these parents and teachers continue to view life in terms of change and uncertainty, however, young people have only ever known change. In her study of post-Soviet Russian youth, Fran Markowitz (2000:4) found that while adults tended to experience the “transition” as a series of “jolting, unanticipated, and even threatening changes,” teenagers who had lived their entire lives during this period “witnessed and experienced these changes rather as a knobby fabric of constancy – which became their cultural ballast of stability and coherence.” Change also seemed to be the norm among many of the urban Moldovan youth I met.

That same evening, I left the Greek café and headed to a coffee shop to meet with EcoWeek participant Vova. A 20-year-old law student and Russian speaker, Vova told me that he also wanted to leave Moldova. He gave me a different explanation, however. He told me that he felt lucky to be from Moldova, because it had given him the motivation to do something different, to see different parts of the world and have new experiences. If he

had been born in the U.S., he reasoned, he might be content just staying in one place and having no ambitions. His dream was to move to the U.S. to work as a cook and eventually open his own restaurant. Although not everyone in Vova's age cohort shared his optimistic view, I did encounter it more often among the younger generation than among those over 30.

Edmunds and Turner (2002:5) would argue that Moldovan youth like Vova belong to a "global generation," in the sense that they share some common experiences as well as knowledge and ideas with youth across the globe. They are increasingly connected through the Internet to youth worldwide, with unprecedented access to pop culture and information from countless diverse sources, in some ways resulting in a "global identity" (Pilkington and Bliudina 2002:14). Nevertheless, globalization has not created homogenization, and an understanding of local dynamics continues to be essential for any analysis of youth cultures (Nilan and Feixa 2006). Additionally, young Moldovans' goals and expectations have become more individualistic as their options have expanded. In an increasingly individualized world, "young people's successful 'socialization' is not achieved through the internalization of given norms but through learning how to be self-reliant" (Pilkington and Bliudina 2002:15).

During a weekly English conversation group that I attended throughout my Fulbright-sponsored fieldwork period, I met many students who aimed to study or work abroad. One young college student told the group that she would like to go abroad, but her mother did not want her to. She was an only child, and her mother did not understand why she wanted to leave, even though she had no opportunities in Moldova. A 16-year-

old boy said that he had the opposite problem; his parents kept telling him to leave, as he would have more chances to succeed elsewhere. Both students felt pressure from their parents and uncertainty about their futures, but both also seemed determined to make an individual choice that felt best to them.

With individualization comes “the freedom to choose one’s own biography; to explore new opportunities in the labour market; to find themselves in an expanding world” (Walker and Stephenson 2010:524). At the same time, however, increasing economic stratification and continued corruption in post-socialist states means that new choices are not uniformly available. Individualization appears not just as liberation, but also as compulsion (Walker and Stephenson 2010:525).⁸⁷ For many, the choice to move abroad does not reflect excitement about the chance to do something new, as it does for Vova, but desperation in the face of a dearth of opportunities at home (White 2010).

One day at conversation group, I met Anton, a high school student who wanted to attend college in the U.S. like his cousin had done. He was very eager to get advice, and one day via Skype chat he asked me about books to read in English and tips for the SAT. I asked what subject he wanted to study. He wrote, “I want to study nanotechnology. Moldova is far far away from this and because of this my main goal is studying in [the] U.S., but with the salary of my parents my only hope is a full scholarship.” I asked Anton if he would come back to Moldova after earning a degree, and he said no. I told him it was too bad there weren’t more opportunities in Moldova. Anton responded,

⁸⁷ Over 70 percent of male migrants (which make up about 60 percent of all Moldovan migrant workers) and over 40 percent of female migrants work in Russia, and nearly 30 percent of female migrants work in Italy (Pantiru et al. 2007). Emigrants to other countries in the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) are more likely to leave due to “push factors,” such as poverty and the lack of jobs in Moldova, than emigrants to the EU and other countries, for whom “pull factors” such as better working conditions and social networks in destination countries are relatively more important (Luecke et al. 2007).

You know, there are, but...all of the native citizens know that without help from some relative who already has a business or is somewhere in the Parliament, nobody can reach something. It's just impossible. That is the politic[s] of Moldova. You know, when I was...14 years old, I didn't [have] any thought to leave Moldova, but after living [with] my father [who was working] in Portugal, I understood that there is nothing to search for in Moldova.

For Anton, new opportunities abroad seemed desirable but possibly unreachable. At the same time, the lack of opportunities at home made finding something outside of Moldova feel like a necessity.⁸⁸

The young people I came into contact with through my research with environmentalists in Chişinău belong to a specific subset of Moldovan youth: well-educated and urban. While youth in this demographic throughout the post-Soviet world are the most likely to support and work toward democratic change in their societies, they are also the most likely to want to emigrate (Wallace 2000).⁸⁹ Similarly, while they are the group most likely to benefit from changes in their societies, they are also most likely to be frustrated by the lack of reform and lack of career opportunities. This subset of youth is “the most talented and flexible group and the group that is likely to be the biggest loss to their own countries” (Wallace 2000:18).

Unfortunately, migration and international travel is one factor preventing the development of an active, youth-based environmental community. It is difficult to form a

⁸⁸ Although he was unable to get a scholarship to the U.S., in 2012 Anton started his undergraduate education at a university in Bulgaria.

⁸⁹ In contrast to many countries, a significant proportion of Moldovan migrants are relatively well educated, 76 percent having at least completed secondary education, 26 percent having completed higher education, and 51 percent having completed college and/or professional school (Pantiru et al. 2007). Many also have employment experience, a third in the public sector and a quarter in the private sector or self-employed (Pantiru et al. 2007); however, more than 60 percent work in unskilled positions, such as household labor or construction, in their destination countries (World Bank 2010). Nearly 30 percent of Moldovan migrants are professionals, leading to a well-documented brain drain (Găugaş 2004, Pantiru et al. 2007, Luecke et al. 2009, World Bank 2010).

coherent, consistent community when the pool of potential members is constantly changing. Many of the well-educated and well-traveled urban youth likely to be interested in such a movement are often abroad, for work and travel or study abroad programs, for volunteer opportunities, to visit parents working abroad, or even to attend foreign universities. This factor made it difficult to plan post-EcoWeek projects, as several of the most motivated students left for internships, work and travel programs, or school shortly after EcoWeek.

Education in Ecology

Young Moldovans who want to learn about ecology in order to address environmental problems face a specific obstacle: the lack of strong higher educational programs in ecology and environmental science.⁹⁰ Two young Moldovan women who faced this problem include Violeta, the organizer of EcoWeek, and Lilia, who worked at the Ministry of Environment before quitting to move to the Netherlands to pursue a master's degree in urban environmental management. Lilia explained to me over Skype that she had been unsatisfied with her bachelor's and master's degree work at the State University of Moldova (USM) in agricultural science. Similarly, Violeta decided to study abroad after completing two years of the ecology program at USM, when she realized she wasn't learning anything about ecology.⁹¹

⁹⁰ A similar situation exists in primary education. Although students at all levels learn about nature in school, planting trees and flowers in the spring, for example, some of the students reported that they do not receive in-depth information on ecology or global environmental issues.

⁹¹ Violeta even claimed that the ecology students do not care about the environment; indeed only one ecology student applied to participate in EcoWeek. She said the only reason people sign up for ecology is that it is the cheapest major at USM, since there are no job opportunities in this field.

Lilia had worked at the Ministry for five years, but she had become disillusioned. I asked if she planned to return to Moldova after earning her degree, and she hesitated. She said maybe, but every time she gives Moldova a chance she is disappointed. She had hoped that things would change during her five years at the Ministry, but “nothing really did change.” For two years they worked on a draft to comply with a 2008 EU law, but the government still had not adopted it, and even if they did, she did not believe they would implement it. “Things change slowly, very slowly,” she told me, “and I want things done quicker!”

While Lilia plans to stay away from Moldova indefinitely, Violeta remains determined to change her country. As the EcoWeek participants can attest, her enthusiasm for projects that create positive change is infectious. Violeta told me that during her school years, her mother took Violeta along on field trips with her biology students to the sewage and water treatment plants so they could observe things in the real world. Through an exchange program, she lived in the U.S. for a year. She found Americans to take more initiative to solve problems, and was particularly influenced by the prevalence of women active in environmentalism in the U.S. and Western Europe. “This is one area where they have more power,” she claimed.⁹²

Violeta’s motivation to organize EcoWeek stemmed from her observations of problems when she comes home, such as her family using too much water when washing dishes. “Most people don’t understand these things,” she said, “but it is my ‘essence,’” an

⁹² When more women than men applied to participate in EcoWeek, however, Violeta suggested during the selection that we privilege the male applicants. Irina disagreed, but Violeta insisted, saying that we might need men to do physical tasks, like installing bike racks and planting trees. Here Violeta’s views on female power in environmentalism, influenced by her time in the U.S. and Germany, contrast with her ideas about “natural” gender role divisions prevalent in Eastern Europe (Gal and Kligman 2000).

ecological feeling that inspires her to try to change things. Most of her colleagues carried out their required projects in Germany, but she felt that while a project there would amount to “a drop in the ocean,” the same amount of time and effort could make a significant difference in Moldova. So she decided to find Moldovan students with a “passion for the environment” and to give them the tools to do something about the problems. “You can’t change Moldova in a day,” she realized, “but this is a step.” When she tells people in Moldova, even her family and friends, that she is coming back home to do projects, they ask her why. Moldova is a dead place, they tell her; it is a waste of time to try to change things here, so she should stay in Germany. She laughed at this for now, and she hoped she could “keep the fire” to continue with projects in Moldova.

Motivation to Participate

Violeta looked for students with a passion for the environment, and while a few of the participants had been interested in environmental topics for some time, most had only recently become interested in the subject. In order to attract participants, Violeta and Irina publicized EcoWeek at high schools and universities in Chişinău and using social media. Students in 11th and 12th grade as well as university students in their first three years were eligible. As Violeta explained, these students could still make the decision to choose environment-related careers, and she hoped to inspire some to do so.

The students’ reasons for applying to participate in EcoWeek varied, and I gained further insight into their motivations during voluntary follow-up meetings after EcoWeek. The most common reason given for applying was to gain knowledge about the

environment. A few participants, including a tourism major, a food sciences major, and an environmental engineering student, wanted to gain practical experience. Two participants were active in Youth Parliament, in particular the newly formed Green Party, and wanted to gain ecological knowledge to use in their mock debates.⁹³ Some high school students participated so that they could decide on a college major: biology, ecology, or environmental chemistry, for example.

A few participants had already known most of the information presented during EcoWeek, but they had wanted to make connections with others interested in the environment. Vlad, an architecture student, was very interested in eco-architecture and wanted to meet others who shared his vision. To his surprise, he met people at EcoNight who were working on solar and wind energy in Moldova, and he planned to work with them even before he graduated. Mirela, an 11th grade student, told me that she had long looked for a group with an ecological focus and had been eager to meet more people who shared her interest.⁹⁴ Victoria, a 12th grade student who planned to study environmental chemistry in the U.S., used to be a member of Green Peace. Since the organization did not have an office in Moldova, she could only send informational emails, and she never saw any results. EcoWeek gave her the opportunity to work with other environmental advocates face to face.

⁹³ One of these young men made sure to specify that he was not part of the real Green Party in Moldova, which he characterized as a small group of old men who were not using their money wisely. For him, a “green” approach to politics fit with his philosophy of peace, non-violence, and respect for Mother Nature.

⁹⁴ As seen in chapter 4, a community of middle-aged to older professional men controls most of the environmental nongovernmental sector, and young people are unlikely to know about these organizations or unlikely to want to join them. Moreover, these NGOs tend to be highly professionalized, a trend throughout the post-socialist world (Snajdr 2008), and look for members with scientific training. A small number of other environmental NGOs exist in Chişinău and have young members, but these were unknown to the EcoWeek participants.

For others, environmental projects were completely new. At one follow-up meeting, most of the students told me that they had not been fully aware of their impact on the environment, about their ecological “footprint,” or sustainability. They had not realized how harmful plastic bags were, and they came to realize that people have too much “stuff” in general. One young woman, Larisa, directs the local Hillel group and had applied to EcoWeek in part because she wanted to make sure their office was eco-friendly. She became upset that she had purchased plastic cups before she found out they were bad for the environment, and she decided to replace these with glasses.

A few people mentioned that one of their goals in applying for EcoWeek was to get a chance to practice their English. Violeta required that applicants fill out their applications in English, and at the end of the week I asked her why she had made this decision. She gave me a variety of reasons. First, this was a way to ensure that foreign experts would participate in EcoWeek. It also limited the number of applicants. In addition, English was preferable to Romanian for the two native Russian speaking participants. I heard one of them, Larisa, beg her team to speak English instead of Romanian during a planning session. Although her Romanian was perhaps better than her English, speaking English would have put her on same level as the rest of the group, while speaking Romanian put her at a disadvantage. Violeta herself felt more comfortable with English than Romanian, since her mother is Georgian and they spoke Russian at home. Moreover, since she had been living in Germany and speaking German, she no longer felt as comfortable explaining ideas in Romanian.⁹⁵ Finally, Violeta said that

⁹⁵ Violeta pointed out that the Romanian-language news teams who came to cover the EcoWeek projects preferred to talk to Irina, a native Romanian speaker. Irina’s Romanian is smooth, whereas Violeta’s Romanian makes it obvious that she is a Russian speaker, Violeta told me.

students in Chişinău should simply know English. In the villages, she said, not knowing English is understandable, but in the capital it is inexcusable. If students in their last years of high school or college have not learned English, “I’m sorry, but they’re lazy,” she said.⁹⁶

Finally, Violeta said that she wanted students to have a chance to practice their English. Although I wanted to practice my Romanian, most of the time participants insisted that I speak English so they could hear a native speaker. After the tree planting event on Saturday, I walked back to the city with Vova and Dorel. They wanted me to walk between them so that they could both hear me. “My English is so damn bad!” Vova lamented, telling me that he had not paid enough attention in his English classes and now regretted this. Participating in EcoWeek, a project with international funding and international experts, not only gave participants a chance to practice speaking English, but also the chance to improve their resumes.

When I returned to Moldova for follow-up research in the spring of 2012, I found that more and more environmental projects had begun to appear.⁹⁷ One was Hai Moldova, a national trash clean-up day. One of the organizers told me that the network of young environmentalists in Moldova was finally expanding; it had just taken certain people meeting each other and coming together through intersecting projects. Crossing some of the perceived boundaries of Moldovan society, the network includes participants of

⁹⁶ Irina heard this and countered that Violeta must also take into account the fact that some English teachers are not very good.

⁹⁷ Increased external funding from development agencies played a large role; two of my good friends, neither with any background in environmental work, were now working full time on environmental projects, one a UNDP-run project on biomass, the other on an organic agriculture program managed by a Czech NGO.

different ages, from both the public and private sectors, and from government as well as NGOs. Violeta had also noticed this growth since EcoWeek, saying during a planning meeting for her ActivEco project, discussed below, “Environmental sustainability topics are in the air now,” and people are interested. Later she said, “We’re making environmental consciousness trendy.” As we have seen, the desire to be a part of this global trend had a major impact on EcoWeek participants. The next section shows how local factors influenced their projects.

Local Environmental Challenges

During a brainstorming session on the second day of EcoWeek, participants identified various environmental problems they faced in Chişinău. While the students had been excited to learn about environmentalism from a global perspective, and said they were tired of hearing about trash and not littering, their list included concerns stemming from common local narratives and their own observations in addition to global concerns. As mentioned above, their concerns included garbage disposal, air pollution from the wastewater treatment facility, water pollution, trees being cut down, burning leaves, old cars, a lack of recycling services, a lack of bicycle lanes, plastic bag waste, and wasted energy.

Violeta conducted the brainstorming session, and she made sure to let the participants come up with all of the ideas themselves. During planning meetings, she had stressed that the organizers must allow the participants to determine the problems and solutions themselves. This did not prevent the planners from discussing what they hoped

the participants would choose, however. As a bicycling enthusiast who had installed the country's first bike rack a year or two before when he was teaching German in Moldova, Andreas hoped one group would install another one. Andreas and Violeta also hoped that one group would focus on replacing plastic bags with reusable ones, especially because they had designed a fabric bag and ordered hundreds of them with some of their funding.⁹⁸ Finally, Violeta mentioned that recycling would be a good topic for a project because trash is a big problem for Moldova. Steve, the American expert helping with the project, agreed, saying that it would be "pretty bad if they missed that one."

During planning sessions, Steve's desire to control the direction of the educational sessions conflicted with local NGO director Raluca's desire to ensure space for local perspectives. When Raluca, who planned to run a session on recycling, said she wanted to make sure that participants gave us their own ideas about environmental problems in Moldova before we told them anything, Steve suggested that he could talk about the problems from his perspective first and then ask for their perspective. Raluca agreed to this with little argument, deferring to Steve's authority.

Violeta had told me at our first meeting in December that when she had conceived this project, she had envisioned having an American expert present ecological information to the group, so she was overjoyed when I told her one of my colleagues was a graduate student conducting research on the environment in Moldova. In addition to a lack of Moldovan experts,⁹⁹ the specific desire to recruit an American expert reflects

⁹⁸ The bags were bright green and said, "Plastic bag? No, thank you!" in many different languages.

⁹⁹ Several people working on environmental projects mentioned the lack of environmental experts in Moldova to me, a problem which is in part due to the brain drain and in part due to the lack of a serious educational program focusing on these issues. The experts discussed in chapter 4 had been invited to Moscow during Soviet times to study for their degrees, an arrangement that no longer exists.

Violeta's privileging of Western science, a viewpoint also reflected in her decision to study in Germany. As seen in the next section, Violeta criticized both communism and capitalism as systems that destroy the environment; however, she did not criticize the idea that the Western scientific view is the best or only way to understand and address environmental problems. The first time she met Steve, she enthusiastically agreed with his view that we must approach environmental problems from a global perspective. They talked excitedly together about the unstoppable "green wave" of environmental awareness, eco-ethics, and green jobs that is spreading from Western Europe around the globe.

On the one hand, Violeta wanted to use local ideas for her project, but on the other hand, she wanted to involve American expertise and Western science. Drawing on her ethnographic research with young nature lovers in Indonesia, Anna Tsing (2005:153) argues that environmentalism there is characterized by a self-conscious "cosmopolitan specificity." She explores the ways in which "widely circulating knowledges become local" as environmentalists throughout the country draw on certain international ways to talk about and enjoy nature, in the process creating an environmentalism that is specific to Indonesia. Similarly, Violeta and the young Moldovan environmentalists adopted particular narratives from "global" environmentalism and used them in ways specific to the Moldovan context. Tsing (2005:3) argues further that "emergent cultural forms – including...environmental advocacy – are persistent but unpredictable effects of global encounters." These encounters are characterized by what she calls friction, "the awkward, unequal, unstable, and creative qualities of interconnection across difference" (Tsing

2005:4). As mentioned in chapter 1, the term friction is used here not to imply conflict but in a productive sense; global connections come alive through friction in practical encounters. The interactions between Steve, Andreas, Violeta and Raluca, and the use of Western ecological knowledge to inform and inspire local solutions to environmental problems in Moldova, are examples of this friction in action.

An important quality of friction is that it “gives purchase to universals, allowing them to spread as frameworks for the practice of power” (Tsing 2005:10). Setting aside debates about whether any true universals exist, Tsing encourages an examination of how universals actually work in practice. In the context of environmentalism, groups of scientists have at times been able to work together across national borders to create international policy, based on their “common universalist faith in environmental objects of knowledge” (Tsing 2005:7). This common faith can be influential in other contexts as well, including small-scale projects like EcoWeek. As mentioned above, Violeta found during her year studying abroad that Americans have more “power” than Moldovans in terms of initiating environmental projects. Her decision to study ecology in Germany, as well as her desire to involve an American ecological expert in her project, reveal her belief that Western environmental knowledge can infuse her work in Moldova with this same kind of power. Many young Moldovans, especially those who are urban and well educated, have grown frustrated with what they see as a lack of progress in their country, telling me that they have much to learn from Americans and Western Europeans. The final section in this chapter explores how one Western force, green neoliberalism, has become influential in Violeta’s plans for a new project.

From Anti-Capitalism to Green Neoliberalism

While the EcoWeek participants talked about a grassroots approach in which they would lead by example, they also expressed views that follow the neoliberal, sustainable development framework discussed in chapter 1. In the context of environmental as well as development projects more generally, people often expressed the view that Moldova could move forward or “modernize” by following the recommendations of the EU and other foreign or international organizations. In the context of EcoWeek and especially ActivEco, Violeta’s most recent project idea, these narratives often follow the ecological modernization framework favored by the European Union and funding agencies. This approach is based on the idea that further economic development can be undertaken to improve ecological outcomes (Baker 2007). Strongly related to neoliberal economics and a preference for market-based strategies, it “uses cost-benefit analysis rather than moral argument” and “eschews biocentrism and other more radical strands of environmentalism in favor of accommodating capitalism” (Guldbrandsen and Holland 2001:126). In this approach, “environmental issues become framed and understood primarily as technical ‘management’ issues, precisely through leaving many issues unsaid and untouched” (Büscher 2012:14-15). The pervasiveness of such thinking makes it more difficult for critical forms of environmentalism to survive. Büscher et al. (2012:22) explain that as green neoliberalism becomes more hegemonic, “critical messages are often ignored by mainstream organizations and media, and if they are acknowledged, often denied or twisted to suit particular neoliberal objectives.”

In the context of EcoWeek, Violeta similarly discovered that her own radical views tended to be ignored by her peers, and that a different approach was necessary to attract funding. As many people voicing dissent have come to realize, “neoliberal has now become a frame of mind, a cultural dynamic, an entrepreneurial personality type, and a rule of law that penetrates the most intimate relations people have with each other, state apparatuses, and their natural environments” (Goldman 2005:8). In what follows I describe Valeria’s changing approach as she encountered the pervasiveness of green neoliberalism.

During EcoWeek, whose participants included many economics students, some discussions touched on the development of a “green” economy based on neoliberal principles.¹⁰⁰ Some students suggested that while communism had destroyed the environment, capitalism could save it. Violeta responded,

In Marxism, everything belongs to everybody. This doesn’t work. Capitalism doesn’t work either, because a small number of people own everything. They think about their own profit and externalize costs. What could be the golden middle? The earth and resources are limited, so we need a solution.

Not everyone shared her views; one economics student argued that capitalism is much better than communism, so we should work within this framework. Violeta laughed at this, but Steve compromised, agreeing that capitalism is better but insisting that “we need to make it even better.” Irina, Violeta’s friend and co-organizer, also had an approach to the environment that reflected her role as an economics student learning

¹⁰⁰ This neoliberal approach to environmentalism contrasts with environmentalism elsewhere in Eastern Europe. For example, environmentalists in Hungary “challenge the ‘naturalness’ of the market economy... by challenging the underlying assumption that there are no politically legitimate alternatives to global capitalism” (Harper 2006:11). Environmentalism, which resisted the state during communism, now tries to protect the state from the forces of “wild” capitalism.

about free market principles. During the EcoWeek interviews, she asked some of the groups to develop an idea for a profitable green business. Moreover, Violeta herself invited two industry representatives to present their companies at EcoNight. This illustrates a tension between Violeta's anti-capitalist ideology and a desire to include as many people as possible from Moldova's small environmental community, even if they did not share her views.¹⁰¹

The form of environmentalism emerging in Moldova reflects local realities. A tension exists in Moldova between the anti-capitalist ideologies expressed by Violeta and a few others and the power of the ecological modernization paradigm associated with Europeanization and development projects. Although Violeta and others have idealistic goals, reality sometimes pushes them to do things in a different way if they feel it is the only way to make a difference. I saw Violeta begin to become frustrated in late August 2010, several months after EcoWeek when she visited Moldova again and called a meeting for any interested EcoWeek participants. She also invited Dragoș and Ianka from the environmental consulting firm. We met on a Monday afternoon in a park outside the center of Chișinău (see Figure 12). After welcoming us and getting updates on various projects, Violeta told us excitedly about a battery recycling program she wanted to start in

¹⁰¹ During comparative research on environmentalism in Romania, I found a similar tension which has led to a divide in the environmental community there. On the one hand, the two most active NGOs in Bucharest have embraced capitalism, relying almost exclusively on corporate funding. Private companies – often large polluters – are eager to contribute money to environmental causes through their corporate social responsibility (CSR) programs. (See Benson [2008] and Welker [2009] for critiques of CSR.) On the other hand, environmentalists such as those involved in the Save Roșia Montană campaign, which aims to stop a Canadian mining firm from opening Europe's largest open-cast gold mine near a group of 16 villages in the Romania's Apuseni Mountains, have critiqued their government's ties to industry and what they see as Romania's takeover by foreign corporations.

Moldova. I relate the discussion here at length in order to illustrate the tension between Violeta on the one hand and Dragoş and Ianka on the other.¹⁰²

Violeta: There is one more project idea which is actually very realistic but rather difficult. It came from Larisa's friend who lives in Sweden, and he wants to do a European Union project between Romania and Moldova about recycling of batteries. You know, reused batteries, if they're thrown in the trash somewhere, the metals are spilled out, it's so toxic it's crazy. So he wants to organize a chain of collection of these batteries at schools, so that there is a collection point at each school and then maybe universities and then more and more and more. It should also start as a small project, so it could consist of three parts. First it is informing people about batteries, how dangerous they are to throw them just in [the] garbage, second is installing these collecting points – of course, it should be confirmed by the school director and university dean and stuff like that – and the third part is transporting them to a waste treatment center or something. We don't have [a recycling facility] in Moldova (laughter), but there are some in Romania, the guy from Sweden said. He's trying to get ahold of the partners in Romania, because if it's an EU project, then it should be...it should involve an EU country and some non-EU country. He cannot do it just for Moldova. Please what do you think about it?

Dragoş: Uh, if it's a waste, we cannot export it.

V: We can't export it?

D: Even if [it's to] the EU or [to] another non-EU country. If it's a waste we can't export it.

V: But look, how is that guy in Ungheni, [Moldova] doing [it]? That Austrian business man. He's exporting the sorted waste to Romania. Like, he sorts all the garbage, plastic and paper.

Ianka: Yeah, but he exports those materials as...for recycling. It's not actually waste. Yeah, it is, but he exports the garbage in order to recycle it and then to make again bottles of plastic and stuff like that. And I mean the value of that material is not zero. (V: Yeah?) It has kind of an importance. So, in this way, he can export the garbage, let's say. But about the batteries, I don't think that those metals that you mentioned that are very toxic can be recycled somehow and reused. (V: Mm-hmm.) So in this case it's really a garbage. It is something that

¹⁰² As during EcoWeek, Violeta held the meeting in English, in large part because of her higher comfort level in discussing environmental issues in English rather than Romanian, both of which for her are second languages.

[has] no value. The value of [the used batteries] is almost zero, I mean, you cannot reuse it anymore. So I think this is a problem. (V: Okay.) And you have to deal somehow with that. Maybe, I don't know. I like the idea of this project, but... We have to think how to export it to Romania. Because you know the legislation is really, really very tough, because this is a toxic material (V: Yeah.) and it's not so easy.

V: It also doesn't have necessarily to be exported. His other idea is, if we cannot export it to Romania, then he wants to... (I: If we, yeah, um...) do something with them in Moldova (I: Yeah, this-) because he has some partners in Sweden (I: Okay.) who have expertise in this domain about battery recycling.

I: Okay. So, I think for this project the best option – this is my opinion – we have to conclude a feasibility study...a kind of feasibility study, because we have to evaluate or assess different alternatives, different options. How do we, I don't know, destroy these toxic materials. Or we can somehow find a gap in the legislation and export it to Romania. Or do we have to install, I don't know, a kind of equipment in order to destroy this material. We have to analyze different options. (D: Mm-hmm.) I mean, all the options that we have, and last we have to conclude the best alternative for us. And also, these alternatives imply some costs and we have to know them. It's really important, for a project to work, we have to know the exact sum of money we need. And, uh, the project is really interesting, but I think first of all we need to conclude a feasibility study on this.

V: Okay. So we can start the project with a feasibility study.

I: Yeah, and this is the best option because it has to assess the technical part of this idea and also the economic part. (V: Mm-hmm.) It's really important to know both aspects of the project. (V: Okay.) And we need some good specialists because, well, you know, this is a toxic material and it has to be an expert which is really good in toxicity. Because it's really important to know... How do we have to treat these materials? What is the procedure, what does the law say? It's really... It's really a complex problem.

V: Does your company have expertise to do such a feasibility study? Or should it be done somewhere else?

I: Uhhh... Well, we have not done such kind of studies, I mean on toxic materials. And...but I know that Dragoș is [a] toxicolo...gist? How to say? Because he has done [an online course] on toxicology. And he is the best person to speak, but not to sing, now!

(Throughout the conversation, Dragoș has been strumming his guitar and whistling, slowly getting louder.)

V: (laughing) Dragoș, do you have something to tell us? (Dragoș keeps whistling, then stops and puts down his guitar.)

D: Yes. What [do] I want to say? (Dragoș then tells us about a Romanian company that is doing research into the reuse of computer batteries.) But we don't have any yet. Any line of technology of reusing toxic wastes. And the European Union legislation [regulates] waste as waste itself.

V: Okay, so we understand [that] we don't export any batteries to Romania, but how can we collaborate with Romania, because if he (the Swedish friend) writes an EU project, he cannot just write it for Moldova. (I: Yeah, we have to involve Romania somehow.) Maybe we can bring people from Romania here and make, like, I don't know, some type of expertise exchange, something like that. Do you guys have any partners in Romania? Does [anybody] know somebody in Romania who is active in environmental fields? Maybe they're not specialists in toxicology or batteries? Some NGOs? Or companies?

D: Some NGOs, some companies. Some individuals.

V: Do you think [some] of them could be interested in such collaboration?

D: Yes. But we have to start in my opinion from another part of the problem. (V: Mm-hmm.) We have to know exactly [what] is the volume of batteries here on the market. Because even if you want to create a technology of reusing waste, you have to know the volume.

I: Yeah, but I think this is [a] subject [for] your feasibility study. Because when you start to analyze something, you analyze it from A to Zed. So in a feasibility study you have to analyze the volume, the total volume of the batteries, the total volume of those toxic materials, and after that you have to bring up some solutions to this problem. So, I don't know, as to me I see it as a feasibility study first of all.

V: Uh, let's see. I think it's really good to make it...if you want to make it like a business investment, but what...I think what that guy wants to do is just like an improvement project to make people *think* something different. (Dragoș starts strumming his guitar and whistling again.) And I don't think that the goal is to gather all the batteries from Moldova, just some new generation of people who go to schools, that they understand that batteries are not to throw in the garbage, they are to recycle. And they are to bring to these collection points. And if it's one

battery or two batteries per school, it's still okay. (Violeta sees Ianka disagreeing and laughs, exasperated.) It will not be feasible?

I: I see, I see because really the Minister of the Environment has to deal with this problem. I mean, collecting all the batteries and all the raw material... But still, even in our case, even in a small scale project, we have to do it in our best way. I mean, any... We have to analyze the best option for...how to say...destroying those batteries. (V: Mm-hmm). And because it has to sound really good when... If you collect two batteries we have to, you know, to find the best way to destroy those batteries, you know? To show the people, to increase their awareness about this problem, to show it like [a] positive thing, like the best option...a good pilot project. (V: Mm-hmm.) Anyway, I think we have to think about this.

V: In the worst case, we just put them, just put like 100-200 batteries together in our backpacks, and he goes to Sweden and puts them into a supermarket... And somebody goes to Germany, and somebody goes to Romania, and just put them in collection points and that's fine. (Everyone laughs.) No official expert, nothing. Yeah, it's a very small start, but it's... Yeah, I know what you mean Ianka, it's a huge thing.

I: Yeah, it has to be somehow efficient.

V: It's a little... It's somewhat big. Okay. So I will speak to him again, I'll tell him...

D: And we'll disappoint him.

I: We don't want to disappoint him.

V: No, no, no. We'll see, maybe he really wants to make a small, just educational project and just get these 50 batteries and bring them to Sweden. And maybe next time, if... (laughing) Andreas always brought like ten or something to Germany after a couple of months. Last time he was moving he had a box of batteries...of used batteries.

I: (laughing) We'll have to do, you know, a kind of Moldovan-EU student project. Each student, or each EU student, when he goes back to his country, he has to take three batteries from Moldova or stuff like that.

V: That's really possible because... (laughs)

I: Because I don't see any other option. (laughs)



Figure 12. Meeting for EcoWeek participants.

Violeta on the one hand and Dragoş and Ianka on the other had different ideas about how to solve the battery disposal problem. Violeta had many ideas that she felt could be easily implemented, but Dragoş and Ianka, who often worked with foreign funders, repeatedly told her that a successful project would require experts, calculations, and feasibility studies. While Dragoş and Ianka followed an ecological modernization approach, Violeta had in mind a grassroots approach outside of experts, funders, and legislation. Moreover, they had different views of the problem itself. Violeta wanted to educate people about the toxicity of batteries, while Dragoş and Ianka wanted to find a way to recycle them on a large scale. Their differences in part reflect their age and experience levels. Dragoş, in his mid-thirties, and Ianka, in her late twenties, had more

education and experience working on environmental projects. While all three had idealistic ideas about how they would like to see Moldova change, Dragoș' and Ianka's perspectives had been tempered by interactions with the "real world" through their consulting work. While Violeta believed that avoiding official channels and working around regulations could be effective, Dragoș and Ianka felt that even Violeta's modest goals would be more difficult than she thought.

Two years after EcoWeek, when I returned to Moldova to participate in Earth Hour, I found that Violeta, too, had adopted narratives relating to the green economy. "Environmental consciousness and action are perfectly compatible with economic development," she wrote in a funding application for ActivEco, a new, larger project. In Moldova, where international aid organizations have a strong presence and much public discourse focuses on economic development, a form of environmentalism that fits with neoliberal capitalism may seem like the path of least resistance, and indeed the only practical way to attract funding. Moreover, the ecological modernization approach fits Violeta's ideologies in its claim to be apolitical. It portrays the growth of a green economy as a neutral way to effect change without the need for political involvement. According to this framework, "forms of environmentalism not encompassed by ecological modernization are 'political' and so must temper their positions," (Guldbrandsen and Holland 2001:132). While this misleading view may threaten the development of more radical, grassroots forms of environmentalism, Violeta eventually decided that such grassroots ideas meet too much resistance to gain traction in Moldova.

In the end, Violeta had decided that it was more effective to follow Dragoș and Ianka in using the language of development than to fight against this system. However, while her project proposal included the promotion of “sustainable development and economically sound solutions,” it also retained a focus on the education of local people. According to a funding application Violeta asked me to edit, ActivEco would “motivate young people for environmental activism and give them necessary tools and know-how to develop and conduct their own projects.” She therefore combined two different approaches. The first, in focusing on economically feasible projects, reflects a “neoliberal environmentality,” which involves providing “incentives sufficient to motivate individuals to choose to behave in conservation-friendly ways,” (Fletcher 2010:176). The second, in highlighting education about how to solve environmental problems, uses a “disciplinary environmentality” described by Agrawal (2005) and others, “which is an effort to create ‘environmental subjects’ through diffusion of ethical norms” (Fletcher 2010:177). Robert Fletcher (2010:177), who outlines several environmentalities and the ways that they can be combined, argues that a project can integrate these two environmentalities, as ActivEco aimed to do, by emphasizing both economic incentives and ethics “in its efforts to motivate local participation.” However, as it becomes ever more difficult to conceptualize environmental issues outside of a neoliberal framework, the alternative environmentalities tend to fade away, “blunt[ing] the radical edges of the environmental movement” (Guldbrandsen and Holland 2001:126). In a country like Moldova, with a small and constantly changing environmental community, realistic options are limited, as Violeta came to realize.

CHAPTER 6

FRUSTRATION, CREATIVITY, AND THE FUTURE OF MOLDOVAN

ENVIRONMENTALISM

By exploring a variety of environmental projects, this dissertation has highlighted the diversity of viewpoints and strategies that I found within the Moldovan environmental community. Various contrasts, especially between urban and rural projects and between older and younger environmentalists, reflect a wide range of ideas about how to define and approach problems and organize projects. One theme I heard repeatedly among both environmentalists and non-environmentalists, however, was that Moldova needs to change. Everyone had their own thoughts about how this change should occur, though these often reflected imaginaries of modernization and Westernization. Moldovans' sense of how "the West" judges them informs many of their ideas about identity and progress, and many of their concerns and proposed solutions are shaped by the advice of international "experts." At the same time, however, as with many aspects of life in the Moldovan borderland, people often hold ambivalent views about Western development. A focus on environmentalists can shed light on this ambivalence by considering the diverse ways Moldovans envision the future and understand their roles in effecting change, as well as how these views vary, particularly by generation.

In chapter 1, I argued that Moldovan environmentalism is embedded in a larger development project drawing on ideologies of modernization and progress. As described in the case studies, rural projects tried to modernize sanitation systems, the UNDP project aimed to apply a Western model of governance to Moldova's protected areas, and

EcoWeek aimed to move beyond “old,” local ideas and teach students about “real,” global environmentalism. However, within each of these projects, environmentalists’ viewpoints varied, and individuals sometimes shifted their approaches depending on the context. At times they displayed resistance to the dominant narrative of progress, and at other times they found creative ways to work within this framework. For instance, the older NGO directors discussed in chapter 4 were deeply critical of the state, Moldsilva, and the UNDP team, all of whom were involved in integrating Moldova’s protected areas more completely into a market economy. While the NGO directors voiced opposition to this trend, they also adopted the UNDP language of governance in order to continue to participate in the project. In other projects carried out by their individual NGOs, the directors found ways to either bypass the state or “force it to cooperate,” but in order to do so, they used the language of sustainable development to attract funding from international organizations.

A combination of strategies, including some that openly resist dominant frameworks and others that try to create change from within the system, can be found among younger environmentalists as well. A small handful of environmentalists I met explicitly criticized the idea of development rooted in a Western model of neoliberal economic growth, though like the older generation of NGO directors, they also worked within this system in certain ways. The first part of this chapter explores some of their frustrations, focusing in particular on three environmentalists in their mid twenties to early thirties. The second part of the chapter discusses the views of younger

environmentalists and the creativity they have displayed in finding ways to change Moldova, ending with a consideration of the future of Moldovan environmentalism.

Frustration

We don't love our country. We have stress because we are Moldovans. [Mariana, 30, environmentalist]

When I first met Mariana, a Moldovan woman my age with an infectious enthusiasm for environmental protection, she was working at REC Moldova. The NGO had not been able to pay her for several weeks, so to make ends meet she was also working as a consultant for international aid organizations, designing websites, and occasionally working as a translator. I sometimes visited Mariana at REC's office, and although she was generally quite busy writing grant reports or editing REC's journal, she always took a break to tell me excitedly about the latest electric car or the proposal she was writing for a recycling plant in Moldova. Mariana had big dreams for her country, and despite some health concerns, she remained energetic and determined to bring about change in the face of many deterrents. She had earned a master's degree in environmental science and policy in the U.S. but decided to return to Moldova after graduating in anticipation of the changes she expected to see after the April 2009 protests.

Mariana and I became friends over several months, seeing each other at various environmental events and occasionally having long chats. One spring Friday, Mariana invited me to attend an environmental conference in Drochia focusing on rural development. On the way there, we both dozed, as the Moldovan bus driver carefully avoided all potholes to ensure a safe, relatively smooth ride for the two German

consultants who were riding along. The trip back was much faster and bumpier, as the German men had stayed behind in Drochia, so we remained wide awake. As the fields flashed past us, Mariana and I chatted about many things. She told me about how she tries to involve her family in environmental projects. She had planted a garden at her family's house in Chişinău, in addition to the garden at their house in the countryside. Her father was working on an energy project that would allow their household to use energy from the air and heat from the sun. She also talked about the problems she had encountered with government bureaucracy while working on environmental projects. As always, I was struck by her combination of optimism and pessimism, motivation and disappointment.

Over the course of our conversations, I learned about Mariana's frustrations related to what she described as a "self-esteem problem" among many Moldovans. Mariana had her own "green" vision for Moldova's future, but she felt that Moldovans' lack of appreciation for their own country in part prevented their adoption of environmentally friendly practices. She wanted Moldovans to realize how good their food tastes. "If it smells like a tomato, it's Moldovan," she insisted. Farmers do not necessarily have to become organically certified, she said, but they should continue to use their "traditional methods" and not spray their produce with chemicals. Mariana continued,

Principles from the West are good, but they come in and take away all of the good things, the traditional things from Moldova that are better. We could just take what is good from the Western principles, but keep our traditions that are better anyway for our health. But Moldovans should be more confident in their own powers. They are waiting for someone to come and solve their problems and tell them what to do.

Mariana told me that this attitude did not surprise her, because during communist times, people were told what to do and they learned not to think for themselves. Moreover, she said, they received no support from the outside during that time, so after independence when they allowed Western people and ideas to enter Moldova, they were too eager to accept everything. “Yes, we need good foreign relations,” Mariana said, “but we also need to keep our own good things and maintain our personality. We threw many of these things away in the 1990s.” She went on,

A big problem is that people are away from the land. There are only a few left working the land. A love for the land needs to be renovated. A connection to the earth is healthy in many ways; it is good for physical movement, and for the land. The bacteria in soil decrease anxiety and increase serotonin levels, and this makes people more easygoing. Everyone should have the chance to do something for their country and for themselves. This could rejuvenate patriotic feelings!

For now, however, Mariana remained frustrated with the lack of national pride she perceived as preventing the realization of her dreams for Moldova.

Like many other Moldovans, Mariana often viewed things in terms of a traditional versus modern binary. However, unlike those who looked to “the West” for help, Mariana believed that Western knowledge should be adopted selectively and that many “traditional” practices could become part of a strategy to deal with twenty-first century economic and environmental challenges. For Mariana, economic development went hand in hand with the loss of important Moldovan practices and perspectives, making an environmentally sustainable society much less attainable. In contrast to this view, some anthropologists have argued that individual societies adopt those aspects of “modernity” they find useful and incorporate them into their existing culture. As a result, they may simultaneously embrace Western society and have a critical attitude toward Western

things (Arce and Long 2000). Similarly, Arjun Appadurai (1996) maintains that culture has become less a *habitus*, or prescribed set of behaviors, and more an arena for conscious choice. However, based on his research in Africa, James Ferguson (2006) argues that this view is often too idealistic and ignores the homogenization that can result from the sheer force of globalization. Mariana's concerns fit most closely with the latter view, as in her opinion she had witnessed not a thoughtful combination of new and old ideas, but people throwing away effective practices in favor of something more "modern."

Some environmentalists I knew also worried about Moldova's determination to follow the path set out for them by the EU and international development organizations and funding agencies. Aliona from the Ecosan toilet project complained about the gaps between the aims of groups with Western funding and the real problems of Moldova. She had so far not been impressed by the new Moldovan government, especially their decision to accept so many loans from the IMF and others. This was "not too clever," she told me, because it would cause problems when they had to pay the loans back. As Aliona predicted, Moldova has already begun to feel the effects of the loan and debt cycle. The IMF's "structural adjustment policies have supported the state's retreat from job creation and social service programs that had already collapsed" (Keough 2006:438).

In addition, although Moldova does not currently have a large ecological footprint,¹⁰³ and most of its environmental problems relate to basic problems like water quality and sanitation, Aliona worried that the manner in which these problems are solved

¹⁰³ According to data from 2007, Moldova's ecological footprint was 1.39 global hectares per person, putting them just below Vietnam and above Iraq. In comparison, the U.S. had a footprint of 8.00, Germany 5.08, Russia 4.41, Romania 2.71, China 2.21, and India 0.91 (Global Footprint Network 2010).

could have damaging effects on the environment. For example, she was concerned that centralized water and sewage systems would encourage people to use too much water. For now, rural Moldovans tended to use water very efficiently, since they often had to transport it from wells or buy bottled water from the store. Moreover, they used outhouses instead of flush toilets. Aliona was afraid that if water became available from the tap and for indoor flush toilets, water consumption would increase dramatically. Water, an increasingly scarce resource, especially as farmers in Moldova use more for irrigation, would be wasted. Aliona described this possibility as “dangerous.” Similarly, Mariana worried that the rush to become more Western would lead to an increased ecological footprint and destroy the environmentally-friendly practices Moldovans had used for many years.

Viorel, a young man working on alternative energy projects for the Ministry of Environment, had a different perspective on rural practices and an alternative explanation for the failure of environmental projects in Moldova. He told me that his office had carried out some public awareness projects in rural districts. “What we have found out,” he said, “[is] that people don’t really care about [the] environment. You talk about climate change, ocean level rise, temperature increase, floods, droughts; but the question is: how do we pay our bill? How do we pay for natural gas?” Viorel felt that a link exists between economic development and environmentalism. He explained,

When you fulfill your basic needs, when you fulfill your present day [needs], and you are sure about the second day, then you think about the third day. Yeah? But when everything is so uncertain in the first day, and you don’t know what’s gonna happen in the second day, I mean, how the hell can you think about the third day? Sincerely, I don’t know how it is possible, in a developing country, to make people think about the environment.

In Sweden, where Viorel earned a degree in environmental engineering, people had all their needs met, he said, so they could afford to think about the environment. But in Moldova, people were struggling; everything was expensive, and being environmentally friendly was even more expensive. Rather than paint rural dwellers as “backward,” Viorel understood the seemingly anti-environmentalist views of many villagers as economic-based.¹⁰⁴ While Mariana worried that a “lack of self-esteem” may prevent Moldovans from holding on to “traditional” techniques, and Aliona feared a desire to be “modern” would cause rural residents to abandon sustainable practices, Viorel argued that their lack of economic security may be a stronger factor pushing Moldovans to adopt Western practices; they may see no other choice, especially when Western organizations offer them funding to make certain changes, such as adopting agricultural technology. Mariana agreed with Viorel that “the poor state of the country makes it difficult” to implement organic agriculture and other practices. “But,” she continued,

I have this idea, and when I tell people, they say they have never thought about it this way. People in Moldova can live without lots of money in a world like this. They can grow a garden and have good, healthy food. They can have a cow and use the manure instead of overusing pesticides and fertilizer.

Despite their critiques of Western development, Aliona and Mariana both continue to try to solve problems with the help of international development organizations. Aliona is trying to address the rural sanitation crisis with alternative, environmentally responsible solutions like Ecosan toilets, which she learned about through her association with a French NGO. Mariana continues to work on various foreign-funded projects, such

¹⁰⁴ Ferguson (2006) also argues that in many parts of Africa, the search for modernity involves not only the adoption of Western cultural norms, but also the more fundamental desire of local people to improve their often dire economic conditions.

as the development of organic farming, in order to make sure that the health of the environment is taken into account along with the health of the economy. Like the older NGO directors, both women are trying to create change within and through these institutional frameworks. Aliona tries to make sure rural voices are heard (see chapter 3), while Mariana holds strongly to her beliefs by promoting alternative practices. By contrast, younger environmentalists more often seek alternative ways to make a difference outside of these particular institutional structures, yet often within a green neoliberal one.

Creativity

Throughout my fieldwork, I was struck by the many young people I met in Moldova who were trying to make positive changes in their country. EcoWeek participant Ștefan told me that foreigners are often surprised by how active the youth is in Moldova. He contrasted this with young people in the U.S. and Western Europe who “don’t give a shit.” He reasoned that when someone is in a bad situation, he or she works to change it. Change is one theme I heard again and again from young people.

Moldovans often point to intergenerational tension to explain social problems, and many young people insist that dramatic change is needed. In his 1923 article, “The Problem of Generations,” Karl Mannheim argued that new generations approach existing traditions and ideas from a novel perspective; this fact “alone makes a fresh selection possible when it becomes necessary; it facilitates reevaluation of our inventory and teaches us both to forget that which is no longer useful and to covet that which has yet to

be won” (Mannheim 1952:294). In general, he maintained, the evaluation and selection of ideas and traditions takes place unconsciously, but during times of major historical and social change, “the necessary transformation can no longer be effected without conscious reflection” (Mannheim 1952:295). Periods of rapid change can therefore result in radical shifts in perspective. While those in the older generations tend to hold on to orientations formed in their youth, those in the young generation “are dramatically aware of a process of de-stabilization and take sides in it” (Mannheim 1952:301). Moreover, “that...youth lacks experience means a lightening of the ballast for the young; it facilitates their living on in a changing world” (Mannheim 19252:296). In other words, youth are in the best position to envision and work toward a different future for their societies.

Mannheim’s description of generational change seems particularly apt in Moldova, where age divisions are highly visible, especially due to the “missing” middle generation, and where many young people strongly desire to break with the past. Young people throughout Eastern Europe have tried to reject old forms of authority by forming new social movements, such as the color revolutions in Ukraine and Georgia (Ó Beacháin and Polese 2010). As young Moldovans continue to grow disillusioned with their government, they too have increasingly turned to more creative, grassroots efforts to try to effect change. Unlike activists in Ukraine and Georgia, however, the activists I met did not directly target the state, but largely ignored it, looking for ways to transform society on their own. Violeta’s determination to collect used batteries in Moldova and then export them one person at a time to recycling facilities in the EU illustrates young people’s determination to create their own change (see chapter 5).

Young Moldovans' frustrations often relate to a feeling that they are being denied a better life. Their increasing exposure to and contact with the West has led many to expect or desire certain outcomes; instead they continue to see corruption and a lack of opportunities. The hope that surrounded the April 2009 protests and the resulting parliamentary elections faded as the new government failed multiple times to elect a president and political infighting prevented many promised changes (see chapter 2). Meanwhile, rather than being offered a chance to move up in the world, as the development paradigm has led them to expect, Moldovans are being pushed further to the margins. Joining the global neoliberal economic system has not guaranteed success and economic security, and while some have benefitted from this change, it has made many worse off. Yet while many of their frustrations are related to their disadvantaged place in the global economy, many Moldovan young people continue to seek solutions within a neoliberal framework.

In general, I found young Moldovan environmentalists to be reluctant to challenge neoliberal economic approaches to change. Violeta did initially tell EcoWeek participants that capitalism was incompatible with a sustainable environment, and that environmentalists must lead the way to an alternative, environmentally sound society. In this way, she tried to challenge the common view among EcoWeek participants (and proponents of neoliberal conservation) that the environment can be saved through its integration into the market. When Violeta met resistance from the students and realized that anti-capitalist views do not generally resonate in post-communist Moldova, she

decided to aim for smaller changes.¹⁰⁵ Moreover, as discussed in chapter 5, she adopted a green neoliberal model for her latest project proposal, partly in order to attract funding.

Many of the EcoWeek participants, especially those studying economics, had views grounded in neoliberal economic principles and wanted to incorporate an environmentalist vision into this approach. One day architecture student Vlad and I traveled across town to visit his grandfather, an ecologist who had agreed to let me interview him about his research on the harmful effects of pollutants on human health in Moldova. As we walked to catch a maxi-taxi to his grandfather's office, Vlad asked me if it was true that the main obstacle to solving environmental problems was people's mentality, and that the best way to change this was to start with kids, who would then teach their parents. I felt uncomfortable giving a definitive answer, especially because I did not have one. I stalled for time as Vlad waved down a maxi-taxi. After we climbed on and found a seat, he asked me the question again. I told him that this was certainly one theory, but he insisted that he really needed to know, because he was developing an environment-themed computer game based on this thesis. He was convinced that a definite answer to his question existed, and that as an American, I must have this information. After the interview with Vlad's grandfather, it was such a nice afternoon that we decided to walk back to the city center. He brought up the computer game again, telling me that he wanted to find funding to develop the game. I suggested working with an environmental NGO. He adamantly refused to "volunteer," however, unless he would get something out of it. "I have a really good idea," he told me, "and I don't want to

¹⁰⁵ Even Dragoş from the environmental consulting firm, in response to two friends who were teasing him about his past work for the government, angrily insisted, "I am not a Communist!" adding less forcefully, "I am a capitalist."

waste it.” In other words, he wanted to make money while he helped the environment. When it became clear that I did not have the answers he was looking for, he said he really wanted to talk to Steve, the other American graduate student who helped at EcoWeek, because Steve had stressed that the only way to improve the environment is to develop economically beneficial projects.¹⁰⁶

Vlad’s idea for the computer game, along with many EcoWeek students’ ideas for “green” businesses, fits a neoliberal model emphasizing individual entrepreneurship and a belief that the adoption of conservation practices depends on the availability of economic incentives, an approach I critiqued in chapters 1 and 5. My initial reaction to Vlad’s profit-based motivations, and to Violeta’s adoption of sustainable development narratives in her funding proposal, was one of disappointment. Upon reflection, however, it seems important to wait and see how young Moldovans’ creativity will unfold and what kinds of positive changes they can make using a neoliberal approach, perhaps in combination with alternative strategies. Moreover, as shown throughout this dissertation, it is necessary to pay attention to the ways apparently strict views are often flexible and how seemingly opposed elements are in fact mutually entangled.

Anna Tsing (2005:269) argues that while it is difficult to think past the narrative of neoliberal globalization, “this story is not enough... Instead of inscribing structures of self-fulfillment, we might immerse ourselves in the drama of uncertainty of global capitalism and transnational liberalism.” She goes on to offer an alternative way of viewing this drama, describing how both good and bad can result from, and even depend

¹⁰⁶ Vlad’s aversion to doing volunteer work also stems from the common perspective in Moldova is that a volunteer is “cineva care nu are treabă” [someone who has no job].

upon, the same circumstances and technologies. Indeed, Moldovan environmentalists have found many ways to work within challenging circumstances, sometimes making use of the ambiguity and complexity they find. Environmentalists Aliona and Mariana have identified various potential dangers related to globalization, yet at the same time they continue to use strategies made possible by this process, namely seeking international funding and expertise to prevent and solve problems. Violeta, Vlad, and other young people also draw hope and energy from their global connections. While they often appear uncritical of green neoliberalism, in fact they are constantly seeking creative, effective solutions from both inside and outside this framework.

No matter how our ideologies clashed or coincided, I could not help but feel inspired by the young environmentalists I met in Moldova. During the boisterous final lunch at end of EcoWeek, Violeta told the participants she hoped they would continue to learn about the environment, teach others, and organize future projects. Someone declared, “Noi să facem EcoYear!” [We’ll make it EcoYear!]. “Nu, EcoLife!” [No, EcoLife!] someone else yelled as the other students cheered. Violeta ended by saying,

Sper că noi ținem legatură, și eu vreau să spun că eu numaidecât mă întorc în Moldova. Mă întorc, numaidecât. Și o să mai fie proiecte în viitor... [I hope that we keep in touch, and I want to say that I will return to Moldova as soon as possible. I’ll be back, by all means. And there will be more projects in the future...].

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Education

PhD in Anthropology, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, May 2013

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Research Grants

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Research Experience

Ethnographic research on environmentalism in Moldova (14 months) and Romania (13 months), 2009-12

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Graduate research assistant, Colorado State University, Department of Anthropology, 2005-06

Graduate research assistant, Colorado State University, Ethnographic field school at Pine Ridge Indian Reservation, 2005

Teaching Experience

Graduate teaching assistant, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, Department of Anthropology, 2012-13, 2006-08

Writing tutor, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, the Writing Center, 2012-13

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Chancellor's Graduate Student Award, UW-Milwaukee, 2006-08

European Union Center of Excellence Fellowship for Language Study, Indiana University, 2007

James E. Ellis Memorial Scholarship, Colorado State University, 2005-06

Department of Anthropology Graduate Fellowship Award, Colorado State University, 2004-05

Harold P. Brown Fellowship, Washington University in St. Louis, 2001-03

Publications

Youth and environmentalism in post-socialist Romania and Moldova. *New Europe College Yearbook* 2011-2012.

Seeds of an environmental movement: Decentered urban ethnography in Chişinău, Moldova. *In* *Noi Culturi Noi Antropologii* [New Cultures New Anthropologies]. V. Mihailescu, B. Iancu, and M. Stroe, eds. Pp. 321-333. Bucharest: Editura Humanitas. 2012.

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Conference Presentations

The reemergence of protest in Romania: An ethnographic account. AES/APLA Joint Spring Meeting, Chicago. 2013.

“When the middle is gone, it doesn’t work”: Intergenerational tension in Moldova. Sixth Annual Interdisciplinary Romanian Studies Conference, Indiana University. 2013.

“We need water, not gas!” A Romanian community takes on Chevron. 73rd Annual Meeting of the Society for Applied Anthropology, Denver. 2013.

Protest in Romania and Wisconsin: A comparative perspective. Remember Madison? Student-faculty roundtable, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee Anthropology colloquium series. 2013.

“This is what democracy looks like”: Political activism in Wisconsin (2011) and Romania (2012). 111th Annual Meeting of the American Anthropological Association, San Francisco. 2012.

Global discourses and European integration: Environmental activism in Romania and Moldova. International Congress on Romanian Studies, Sibiu, Romania. 2012.

Global connections, local solutions: Environmentalism in the Republic of Moldova. Black Sea Symposium. New Europe College, Bucharest. 2012.

Border crossings: Flexible identities in the Republic of Moldova. 19th International Conference of Europeanists. Council for European Studies, Boston. 2012.

Dirty water, burning water: Addressing the rural sanitation crisis in post-Soviet Moldova. 11th International Postgraduate Conference on Central and Eastern Europe, University College London. 2012.

Etnografie descentrat și miscarea ecologică în Republica Moldova [Decentered ethnography and environmental movements in Moldova]. Ethnographic Museum Conferences, Chișinău. 2010.

Civil society and democracy in Eastern Europe: Case studies from cultural anthropology. International Conference on American Studies. State University of Moldova, Chișinău. 2009.