

**Re-imagining the Collective:  
The role of informal networks, NGOs, and the state  
in providing welfare for pensioners in Cherkassy, Ukraine,  
2011-2012.**

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## **ABSTRACT**

Within a post-socialist context marked by loss and contradiction, this thesis explores the role of informal networks, non-governmental organisations, and the state, in providing welfare and mediating vulnerability experienced by pensioners in Cherkassy, Ukraine.

Using analytical tools based in Bourdieu's social capital theory and semantic analysis, it is argued that at the grassroots, informal networks amongst pensioners are often fragile and eroded, whilst they have the ability to transform and reconfigure in order to meet the changing needs of this demographic. Where the state appears to be discriminatory and inconsistent in terms of welfare provision, it contributes to the vulnerability of pensioners through ceding its responsibility of care to kinship/informal networks, based on an idealised notion of networks which often does not exist amongst the most vulnerable. This creates a two-fold vulnerability for pensioners: through lack of state support, and lack of familial or network-based support. In this case, there is a great potential role for the embryonic third sector in Ukraine to work to protect the vulnerable elderly. In examining two models of community-based organisations working in this area, it is suggested that NGOs are particularly effective in enhancing welfare where they emulate kinship or informal networks, and rebuild, or re-imagine, the sense of the communal or collective that has often been eroded.

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# INTRODUCTION

## 1. Overview

The *babushka*<sup>1</sup> plays a key part in the visual and cultural landscape of Ukraine. She is ever-present: on benches outside apartment blocks, selling flowers or vegetables at the road-side; she is highly-skilled at winning sought-after places on packed trolleybuses. With her headscarf tied tightly in place, she is a symbol of a former age, immortalised in the *matryoshka* dolls sold to tourists by the dozen. The *babushka* is present, and yet in many ways she is not acknowledged. How do pensioners in Ukraine survive? What does their day-to-day life look like? These questions do not seem to be considered by many, and are certainly not discussed in the public sphere. Understanding answers to these questions is particularly important given the risk of poverty to the elderly in Ukraine - with 20% of elderly households estimated to be living in poverty in 2008 (Libanova et al, 2009:103), coupled with the impact of dramatic demographic changes - “rapidly ageing and shrinking populations” (Chawla et al, 2007:xix) - that have taken place over recent decades. Understanding vulnerability, and the nature of support available to older citizens is of vital importance if vulnerability is to be addressed in relevant and appropriate ways.

Within a post-socialist context marked by loss and contradiction, this thesis explores the role of informal networks, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), and the state, providing welfare and mediating vulnerability experienced by pensioners in Cherkassy, Ukraine. In doing so, three research questions are addressed:

1) To what extent do informal networks enhance pensioners’ welfare in Cherkassy?

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<sup>1</sup> Translated as ‘grandmother’, or ‘old woman’.

- 2) To what extent do NGOs impact upon the livelihoods of pensioners in Cherkassy?
- 3) How adequately does the state in Ukraine address problems faced by pensioners?

In exploring these questions, I argue that, at the grassroots, informal networks amongst pensioners are often fragile and eroded. At the same time, however, they have the ability to transform and reconfigure in order to meet the changing needs of this demographic. Meanwhile, the state contributes to the vulnerability of pensioners through ceding its responsibility of care to kinship/informal networks, based on an idealised notion of these networks, which often does not exist amongst the most vulnerable. This creates a two-fold vulnerability for pensioners: through lack of state support, and lack of familial or network-based support. In this case, there is a great potential role for the embryonic third sector in Ukraine to work to protect vulnerable pensioners. In examining two models of community-based organisations working in this area, I suggest that NGOs are particularly effective in enhancing welfare where they emulate network ties, and rebuild or re-imagine the collective, or the communal, that has often been eroded.

Influenced by socio-anthropological scholarship in post-communist Europe (such as Bridger & Pine, 1998, Burawoy & Verdery, 1999; Hann, 2002; Stenning, 2005; Stenning et al, 2010), a micro-level approach is adopted here that is centred upon the voices of the demographic in question. In doing so, this research attempts to reveal “hidden histories” (Bridger & Pine, 1998:11) - that is, the stories of groups of people who lack representation and resources, and who are neglected in policy, practice, and more widely in society. The precarious welfare situation of these people is exacerbated by a lack of understanding in terms of their needs and lived realities - at a regional, national, and international level, and by governmental and non-governmental agencies alike. Highlighting the interactions of pensioners with the three spheres outlined above reflects the aim here to develop holistic understanding - to see in the figure of the *babushka*, a citizen, a welfare recipient, a neighbour, a loved one, a friend. This approach does not

privilege the micro over the macro level, but recognises the importance of the role of detailed and thoughtful analysis at the micro-level in shaping policy (see Alapuro et al, 2004:12).

A Bourdiean conceptualisation of social capital (1986; 1993) - understood as the “interactions that occur between individuals” which may strengthen their capacity to survive and cope (Round, 2006:18) - is utilised here to examine pensioners’ interactions and resources. This, together with an ethics of care literature (Sevenhuijsen, 2003; Staeheli & Brown, 2003; Shubin, 2012) which stresses the value of the communal and the “transformative potentialities of care” in the community (ibid:96), establishes the theoretical basis of this thesis. Grasping the context of post-socialism in Ukraine, is, however, considered key to analysis, as I argue that this context gives rise to specific threats to pensioners’ welfare - namely, discrimination and marginalisation. In light of this, I utilise a specific understanding of ‘post-socialism’ which acknowledges elements of loss and contradiction described by pensioners.

This research has potential implications for the policy and practice of welfare provision: in providing models of how NGOs can function effectively and sensitively in Ukraine’s post-Soviet environment; and in providing a framework through which the needs of pensioners - as they are shaped by their context of ‘post-socialism’ - can be understood and met. This research also highlights how grassroots networks function as networks of care and concern (Shubin, 2011). Such networks are usually disregarded in analysis of civil society, and civil society is commonly regarded as non-existent in the region (for example, Putnam, 1993b; Raiser et al, 2001; Rose, 2000). As such, this research also sheds light upon how ‘civil society’ might be understood in the Ukrainian context, with networks as ‘building blocks’ of society that might be instrumentalised by NGOs.

## 2. Literature Review and Analytical Approach

With foundations in social anthropology and an applied research approach, a number of complementary literatures are brought together in this thesis. Interviews with pensioners, and representatives of organisations working in their interests, form the basis of enquiry. Emphasis was placed upon inductive analysis and creative synthesis in discovering and exploring important patterns, themes and interrelationships (Patten, 2002:41).

### 2.1 A Wider Framework: *Post-Socialism*

Ukraine's post-socialist context is central to this paper's framework; however, the concept of 'post-socialism' must first be problematised in order to avoid misleading analysis. Indeed, the very relevance of 'post-socialism' has been questioned in recent debates. Kideckel (2002:115), for instance, suggests that defining a state by the *absence* of something is theoretically unhelpful. This concern seems legitimate when the term is applied to diverse and seemingly incomparable states - from Poland to Tajikistan (King, 2000). Humphrey notes (in Hann et al, 2002:12,14) that where "people themselves reject the category, we... should not cling to it, but pay attention to whatever other frameworks of analysis arise from within these countries themselves". King (2000) and Sampson (2002) suggest that concepts of 'post-post-communism', or 'post-post-socialism' are more suitable, because "the shock of the new has worn off" (ibid:298).

One attempt to bypass some of the problems associated with 'post-socialism' is to instead refer to post-colonial studies (Stenning, 2005:125; Verdery in Hann et al, 2002:15-20). If Beissinger (2008:8) is correct, the presence of a subjective "sense of the alien or foreign character of power" points to the existence of empire, and thus, Soviet rule might be defined as colonial. Therefore, "just as post-colonial studies examine the colonial pasts that

shaped societies in present-day Africa, Latin America and Asia, so we might now explore these same processes for Soviet imperialism” (Verdery, in Hann et al, 2002:16).

A third framework does not discard ‘post-socialism’, and instead continues to ascribe relevance to the socialist past, today. Humphrey (in Hann et al, 2002:12-13) notes that ‘post-socialism’ remains a useful category because, “there never can be a sudden and total emptying out of all social phenomena and their replacement by other ways of life”; ‘actually existing socialism’ was a “deeply pervasive phenomenon, existing not only as practices but also as public and covert ideologies and contestations”. With reference to her study on Hungarian collectivisation, Lampland (2002:39-40) states that, “the cultural world of former socialist citizens has been profoundly altered by socialism... affect[ing] a wide range of practices and routines”. In order to understand people’s lives today, according to this view, the socialist past must be taken into account.

This final argument is deemed appropriate here. In the context of pensioners in Ukraine, the ‘socialism’ of ‘post-socialism’ is considered important in order to fully consider the impact of the socialist system in shaping the lives of this demographic as they exist today: in the patterns of behaviour they exhibit, and in the values and beliefs that are consciously or subconsciously accepted or rejected. Rejecting socialism as a “fatal ‘historical’ mistake” (Giordano & Kostova, 2002:78) denies this, as well as the possibility that socialism may have generated ‘positive side effects’. Socialism was “negotiated” and “domesticated” by citizens (Stenning et al, 2010:3) - people were pushed into “sites of socialism” (Stenning, 2005:240) rooted in Soviet practices and patterns, which, as is evident through this study, have generated important networks. The workplace, accommodation such as cooperative housing and the ‘*obshchizhitiye*’ (communal halls), constitute such sites. Within these tightly-knit units, people were forced to develop relationships and to rely on each other. Thus the state inadvertently created strong and lasting bonds through informal networks. As shall be

seen, many of these networks have persisted, although they are subject to erosion over time, through age, ill-health, and so on.

The ‘post-’ of ‘post-socialism’ is relevant as it denotes a *shift*, and accepts the introduction of something new - of new ideas and influences - after communism’s collapse. Elsewhere in the region, this ‘something new’ has been cast in the image of neoliberalism - the destructive implementation of Washington consensus-style policies (see, for example, Bridger & Pine, 1998; Hann, 2002; Stenning et al, 2010). In Ukraine, however, this does not quite ring true: like Collier (2011), I accept that, in this context, a caricatured idea of “neoliberalism” is the wrong “tool” for studying the complex processes “through which population, society, and economy are being reshaped as objects of governmental reflection and intervention” (ibid:26). The IMF, World Bank, and other international organisations do play a role in policy and in the financing of programmes in Ukraine (World Bank, 2000; 2011a, 2011b). However, when the case of pensioners is carefully considered, the shadow cast by an *absence* or *loss* of ideology and associated values seems more appropriate to analysis. It is the confusion created by the juxtaposition of ‘the old’ of socialism, ‘the loss’ of what came before, and ‘the new’, that I use to define the ‘post-socialism’ experienced by Ukraine’s pensioners. ‘Post-socialism’ is surely experienced differently across groups and across space: this definition does not seek to invalidate other interpretations of the same concept. In Ukraine, however, this forms a contradictory muddle of incoherent messages, an environment which in itself contributes to the alienation of older people who have lost meaning, context, and a way of relating to the world.

## 2.2 *Welfare*

‘Welfare’ is a concept used across disciplines and contexts such that it contains a variety of attributes and meanings: from the purely economic, measured in terms of GDP and

income, to well-being, and psychological happiness (Greve, 2008). Corresponding to the holistic approach that is sought here, 'welfare' in this context is understood in a broad sense, incorporating its physical, economic and social components. Although welfare and poverty are often considered together, I do not attempt to define or quantify poverty in analysis here; indeed, the pursuit of this would require another thesis entirely, given the complex debates that exist in this area (see Surinov, 2006, for a summary on these issues in the Russian context). Rather, given the general context of poverty revealed by indicators, established below (see Section 3.1), a wider concept of welfare is utilised to take the subjective, the "lived experience of citizens", into account (Abbott & Wallace, 2006:253; Fahey & Smyth, 2004). Welfare is not just about the fulfillment of material needs. Instead, it comprises "the socio-economic circumstances of individuals, entitlement, opportunities and rights and the ability of citizens to make positive choices to achieve collectively valued goals in their society" (Abbott & Wallace, 2006:253). In this thesis, it is the voices of the vulnerable that subjectively evaluate personal welfare within an objective situation of relative poverty. Although this definition may be accused of ambiguity or bias, it reflects the common trend in international development and social policy, catalysed by Amartya Sen's work on capabilities (1999), to move away from solely economic indicators and instead focus on human flourishing.

### *2.3 Social Capital*

Having established the wider framework, the details of analysis can now be developed further; first with a discussion of social capital. Social capital theory has grown in prominence over the last twenty years, and has become a pivotal idea in areas such as sociology, human geography, and international development (Fine, 1999; 2003; Harriss & de Renzio, 1997). However, the theory proves problematic in certain configurations and thus, criticisms of the theory have grown in parallel with its eminence.

Debate over social capital revolves around three main protagonists: Bourdieu (1986; 1993), Coleman (1998, 1990) and Putnam (1993a, 1993b, 1994, 1996, 2001). Each elaborates his own version of social capital, with the basic understanding that, like human, cultural and symbolic capital, social capital is an important “immaterial” resource co-existing alongside economic and material capital (Calhoun, 1993:69). Each theorist explores how relationships developed through trust and reciprocity can act as capital through which ‘goods’ of some kind can be obtained.

Putnam’s work has attracted the most attention, and the most criticism, in this field. According to Putnam, social capital is “the features of social life - networks, norms and trust - that enable participants to act together more effectively to pursue shared objectives” (1996:34). So, for Putnam, social capital facilitates collective action. Making a “leap from the individual to the societal” (Fine, 1999:6), he extrapolates social capital’s importance in democratisation and civil society formation. In his words, social capital “can improve the efficiency of society by facilitating coordinated action” (Putnam, 1993b:167). This, he proffers, is the key to “making democracy work” (Putnam, 1993a; Harriss & De Renzio, 1997:920; Marsh, 2000:185).

This approach, however, is highly problematic. Not only is social capital theory accused of being too flexible, too broad, and therefore meaningless (Woolcock, 1998:156; Jochum, 2003:5), it has led to attempts to ‘quantify’ social capital and democratisation through western models of civic engagement, using indicators such as membership of civil society organisations, voter turnout at referenda, and newspaper readership (Marsh, 2000:187), for example, regardless of context (Nikolayenko, 2005; Raiser et al, 2001; Twigg, in Twigg & Schecter, 2003; Petro, 2001 for example). This approach has resulted in bleak prognoses for democratic development in countries where social capital stocks are perceived to be “low” - particularly in post-communist countries (Marsh, 2000:183-4). Conversely, it has also lead

to the promotion of a western-centric remedy for social capital formation (Fine, 1999). Social capital theory of this type thus takes on a normative and judgmental property (Woolcock, 1998:156; Begum, 2003:5). In addition, by focusing on networks and relationships, Putnam's theory has been labelled gender-blind by feminist scholars, who note that power and gender are ignored in his work (Franklin, 2005:2).

Such criticisms are clearly substantial. However, scholars who view social capital through a critical lens draw on Bourdieu (1986; 1993) to develop a more nuanced and sensitive approach. It is this approach that forms the theoretical backdrop of this paper.

The key features of Bourdieu's theory are as follows. Firstly, Bourdieu describes social capital as:

“the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalised relations of mutual acquaintance and recognition - or in other words, to membership in a group - which provides each of its members with the backing of the collectively-owned capital” (1986:21).

Social capital is developed, accumulated and transmitted through networks or groups, in which “material and symbolic exchanges produce obligations and mutual recognition” (Edwards et al, 2003:5-6), which whilst practiced, reinforce the life of the group. Available social capital is dependent upon network size, the volume of capital possessed by an individual and their group members, reciprocity, and group status (ibid; Bourdieu, 1986:21). Secondly, relationships within the network are “the product of investment strategies, individual or collective, consciously or unconsciously aimed at establishing or reproducing social relations that are directly usable in the short or long term” (Bourdieu, 1986:22). Finally, the distribution of capital is socially and historically

determined, and access to it is “constrained and defined by social systems” (Castiglione et al, 2008:3; Franklin, 2007:2; Bourdieu, 1986:15).

Simply put, social capital is a “resource... which yields power” (Calhoun, 1993:69). Framing social capital as a resource rooted in group membership allows Bourdieu to scrutinise ideas of power, class relations, social disadvantage, and marginalisation; notions absent from Putnam’s analysis. This is so because social capital forms a part of the “resources that individuals and groups use to reproduce both the conditions in which they live and the relative relations of power characterising society” (Castiglione et al, 2008:3). This approach does not force an artificial separation between forms of capital, but creates inter-connections between them, where, for example, the prospects of a child might be captured in a combination of the human capital (perhaps educational background), economic capital, cultural capital (social status) and social capital (contacts) of the parents, which are all mutually reinforcing. In addition, through including concepts of power and inequality in his analysis, Bourdieu opens social capital theory up to be of relevance to policy, helping to “conceptualise the social world as the site of policy intervention” (Franklin, 2007:3). This is particularly useful for this study which explores (non-)governmental responses to potential marginalisation.

Bourdieu, of course, is not without his critics, and there are a significant number of academics who reject any form of social capital theory. Amongst them, Fine (1999:7), confines Bourdieu’s work to nothing more than “an abstract theory... which focuses on the logistics of networks”. Whilst such criticisms are noted, the insight which Bourdieu’s theory can provide when correctly contextualised is recognised as legitimate and useful to the aims of this paper. Bourdieu’s social capital theory facilitates the actor-centric approach sought in this paper, providing a close-up view of interactions and informal responses to everyday needs (Round, 2006:16). Focusing on *social* capital lends insight into how the vulnerable survive, despite an apparent lack of other forms of capital. Finally, Bourdieu contributes

understanding to the “downsides” of capital and networks that might exist in embedding and entrapping individuals within marginalised communities (Walker, 2010:651-664).

#### *2.4 Ethics of Care*

The ethics of care literature is utilised in analysis to develop Bourdieu’s theory. It emphasises that “people need each other in order to lead a good life and that they can only exist as individuals through and via caring relations with others” (Sevenhuijsen, 2003:183). The ethics of care is shaped by core concepts of relationality and interdependence, the practice of which can provide a context for personal growth, and building ties, commitment and community, in which there is a place for every community member to give as well as to receive care (Sevenhuijsen, 2003:183). Thus, the ethics of care ascribes value to the communal in and of itself, where Bourdieu in essence understands networks and associated resources as a vehicle in the pursuit of distinction, wealth and power (Calhoun, 1993:70-71).

The ethics of care speaks particularly to the context of pensioners in post-socialism. Interviews indicated that the lives of respondents are still framed by socialist models of practice, and informed by values such as community, shared living, and entitlement through work (see Chapter 1). If post-socialism is defined in part by the loss of these values in the public sphere, pensioners become anachronistic, disregarded by policy-makers, and increasingly marginalised (see Chapter 3). In the words of Shubin (2012:89), the ideological muddle at a decision-making level produces “isolated, disengaged and decontextualised caring interventions [which] often ignore situated possibilities and traditions of care and overlook what matters to poor people”.

Adopting the ethics of care provides a theoretical tool which recognises the values of many pensioners, and a framework for understanding how welfare might be provided in a more relevant format which ascribes esteem to this group. It reveals “an unexpected hope and an alternative way of dealing with poverty” (Shubin, 2012:95). The practice of mutual support, for example, points to the “transformative potentialities of care... bring[ing] people together in unexpected ways in everyday spaces and encourag[ing] unexpected actors to respond in a caring way which can facilitate positive change” (ibid:96). The social capital approach, in connecting social and economic capital, underlines this, enabling “what is usually viewed as a negative heritage... thought to inhibit development, into an economic resource potentially valuable for... progress” (Creed, 2002:62).

Understanding care in this way is particularly relevant in the context of post-socialism experienced by pensioners, especially when their position vis-à-vis the state is considered. As outlined in Chapter 3, I argue that the loss or absence experienced in post-socialism creates a ‘disconnect’ - through the state’s lack of understanding, communication, and concern towards pensioners. According to Creed (2002:66), under socialism, it was the “system itself that created social capital by forcing citizens together” into “sites of socialism” (Stenning, 2005b:240). It was the state which placed ideological importance upon these collectives, sanctioned approved forms of collective activity (and suppressed other ‘unsanctioned’ collectives) (Ashwin, 1998:193-5), and created fora for collective action, such as the Komsomol, and youth and professional organisations, in which many interviewees in this study participated. A remnant of the social capital formed through the communal connections developed in these environments has remained in the form of lasting networks (explored in Chapter 1). But this capital has been significantly “undermined” (Creed, 2002:66) through the economic changes and changes to the structure of the state - for instance through the loss of workplaces, work, forms of organising, the withdrawal of the state and so on. Dürschmidt et al (2010:10) describe this process with reference to East Germany as,

“a cascading interplay of loss of economic capital [deindustrialisation, changing property laws]..., a loss of cultural capital [loss of status, devaluation of qualifications]...[and] a loss of social capital [loss of work-related networks and through migration]”.

Following Creed, in the context of the elderly, I suggest that the retreat of the state and the deterioration of socialist bases of social functioning and engagement (at a social level and in interacting with the state), has contributed to the apparent disconnect between the state and older people. It has robbed them of a mode of engagement with others and with the state, and it has exacerbated their vulnerability. As the ethics of care expounds, instrumentalising care within the community, as a tool to rebuild the collective, has the potential to restore meaning, a mode of engagement, and provide positive welfare outcomes where the state's role has diminished. This approach does not intend to idealise the Soviet period; rather, it seeks to draw attention to the impact of the withdrawal and retreat of the state upon those whose lives were shaped by a state-centric system.

### **3. Research Methods**

#### *3.1 Case Study Selection*

Cherkassy city has a population of around 300,000; the Cherkassy *oblast* has just less than 1,300,000 inhabitants (Ukraine-In, 2011; Cherkaska Oblasna Derzhavna Administratsiya, 2011). Cherkassy is under-exposed to academic research and the activities of (international) NGOs, who tend to focus upon Ukraine's major centres, such as Kyiv, Lviv, Odessa and Donetsk. Researching vulnerable and hidden groups here, then, potentially illuminates realities of life as it is lived in areas 'under-exposed' to international attention.

Pensioners have been selected as the focus of the study as a potentially vulnerable group. The elderly are amongst the most 'at risk' of poverty in Ukraine - the highest poverty rates in the population are found amongst females<sup>2</sup> over the age of 75; and in 2008, poverty rates for elderly households were estimated at around 20%<sup>3</sup> (Libanova et al, 2009:103). The average pension of these women is just over 800 Ukrainian hryvnia per month (TSN, 2012a), which is less than £65 GBP at the time of writing. Many have to use up to 50% of this to pay their utility bills, and prescriptions for medication can be many times a whole month's pension. Therefore, understanding the needs and lived realities of this group of people is important in tackling poverty in Ukraine.

### *3.2 Primary Material and Interview Design*

Primary materials for this investigation were collected through semi-structured interviews with pensioners in July/August 2011. In total, 30 interviews were conducted with pensioners, 20 of whom receive support from NGOs, and ten of whom had no such support available. Six interviews also took place with representatives of organisations providing services for pensioners.

Interviews with pensioners were designed to be open-ended and semi-structured. With a potentially fragile demographic group, often recounting emotional or sensitive stories, I attempted to create a space in which interviewees felt comfortable to talk, employing active listening, empathy, and verbal mirroring to encourage the interviewee.

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<sup>2</sup> As life expectancy for women outstrips that of men in the former Soviet Union, the majority of elderly pensioners are widowed women (Davis, 2006:422).

<sup>3</sup> Poverty statistics are calculated by the Ukrainian State Committee for Statistics, who use the subsistence wage or SSSM (see Chapter 3) as a tool to evaluate absolute poverty, and "75% of median level of aggregate expenses of adult[s]" to establish relative poverty (Molodikova, 2008:7).

A fieldwork diary was maintained throughout the course of the research. Document analysis based on official publications, NGO records, and local media also support the study, alongside other academic literature.

### *3.3 Snowballing Method*

Where using standard sampling frames was not feasible, given the lack of availability of records, and the sensitivity and difficulty of directly approaching individuals in this context, a snowballing method was used to build the research sample. Firstly, interviews were facilitated through existing contacts and acquaintances. Secondly, interviewees were asked to refer others who might be willing to be interviewed. These methods carried with them an in-built element of trust, with a member of the community vouching for the researcher's character and intentions.

Two obvious problems exist with regards to this methodology. Firstly, the question of selection bias is likely to be raised. However, this method yielded results in finding participants, where this may have proven highly problematic otherwise; indeed, Ledeneva (1998:5) highlights the relevance of this method in the former Soviet context, where traditional approaches can prove less successful. Secondly, this method only gives access to individuals who are "networked" - that is, people who have contacts and acquaintances through which they can be introduced (Ruane, 2005:117). This, of course, is a difficulty inherent in researching vulnerable groups. Nevertheless, many respondents did recount experiences of social isolation, and as such, these interviews can provide insight into the lives of socially isolated pensioners.

### 3.4 Developing an Analytical Framework For The Ukrainian Context

According to Bourdieu, both the *presence* and *content* of social networks<sup>4</sup> is important in exploring social capital (Edwards et al, 2003:2). Following this logic, a two-pronged tool for analysis is developed to explore social capital amongst pensioners.

Firstly, a name-generator (following Salmi, 2006) was developed to capture network and social capital presence. This comprised of a list of eight questions on everyday activities and needs (see Appendix 1) designed to identify key individuals in the interviewee's network. To deepen analysis, a semantic device was deployed in order to capture content and value ascribed to network relationships. Using Gladkova (2012) and Wierzbicka's (1997) work, key words that express relationship and imbue relationships with value in Russian (see Appendix 2) are explored as semantic cues to the presence of social capital. These methods are explored in further detail in Chapter 1.

## 4. Ethics and Related Issues

Ethical considerations were carefully respected throughout the study. Approval was obtained from the University's Research Ethics Committee.

Invitations to participate were provided to potential participants. Information was also provided on the research, its aims, and implications of participation, in accessible language. Information was provided through an intermediary, in order to prevent any feeling of coercion. Informed and unpressured written consent was obtained from those willing to participate, after individuals were offered the opportunity to ask questions. Where interviewees were unable to read the information or sign their written consent, information

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<sup>4</sup> As such, I define social networks as the *location* of social capital.

was read out to the interviewee and discussed verbally, and recorded verbal consent was acquired. Confidentiality and data protection is ensured through the pseudonymisation of data and adherence to the Data Protection Act 1998.

Sensitivity to potentially vulnerable interviewees was paramount. Discussing welfare issues in some cases raised upsetting themes and memories; potential interviewees might have suffered from reduced capacity. Interviewees were assumed to have the capacity to speak for themselves until this was proven otherwise, in which case the interview would be terminated.

Factors relating to the potential social and emotional status of interviewees also meant that a power dimension between the researcher and the interviewee may have developed. The possibility of this was reduced through conducting interviews in a familiar space where interviewees felt comfortable; and by clearly setting out interviewees' capacity to opt out of the research, or break from interviews.

## **5. Chapter Outline**

In Chapter 1, I explore the importance of informal networks for pensioners' welfare, and examine their fragility and paradoxical ability to transform to become inclusive networks of care which meet the changing needs of pensioners in post-socialism. In Chapter 2, I highlight the role of NGOs in enhancing these transformed networks, and providing welfare through rebuilding and re-imagining community based on informal networks. This discussion is based on two models of this phenomena through the work of local NGOs. I underline the necessity for NGOs to develop effective models by investigating the contradiction and discrimination inherent in government policy towards pensioners in Chapter 3. In conclusion, I review some further implications of the findings here,

particularly for debates around civil society and NGO practice. Throughout, I attempt to develop a 'narrative of hope' which enables the projection of a positive future for pensioners in Ukraine.

## CHAPTER 1 - INFORMAL NETWORKS

In the field of gerontology, a growing body of research attests to the significance of social capital networks in enhancing welfare and well-being amongst older people. Experts argue that social relations are a key determinant of subjective well-being (George, 2010:332). Litwin and Shiovitz-Ezra (2010:379) note that older Americans “embedded in network types characterised by greater social capital tended to exhibit better well-being in terms of less loneliness, less anxiety, and greater happiness”. Conversely, networks “with the most limited ties... revealed the poorest mental health, the least physical activity, and the greatest seven-year mortality” (ibid:378). Network size, the maintenance of relationships, frequency of contact, relationship quality and care-giving amongst network members, have all been found to correlate to positive health and welfare outcomes amongst older populations (Litwin, 2009:600).

In light of this, in this chapter, I seek to develop understanding of Ukrainian pensioners’ social capital networks in post-socialism. This sets the scene for the (potential) role of NGOs in enhancing networks and welfare, explored in Chapter 2. In the first half of the chapter, I explore social capital networks that function as an important source of welfare and care, before ‘eroded’ and ‘absent’ networks are examined, highlighting the precarious welfare situation of many pensioners involved in this study. The second half of the chapter explores the paradoxical adaptability of networks. Evidence of transformation in networks, and the mutual care pensioners give to each other enable the development of what I term a ‘narrative of hope’ amongst this demographic, which, discussed in Chapter 2, can be reinforced further through the work of NGOs.

Throughout, Bourdieu's theory of social capital is used to examine the strength of resources found amongst pensioners' day-to-day connections. Before embarking upon the main discussion, however, it is necessary to turn first to the tools developed from this theoretical starting point which will be utilised in analysis.

## **1. Instrumentalising Bourdieu: Developing an Analytical Framework**

As noted in the introduction, Bourdieu is interested in both the *presence* and the *content* of social networks in exploring social capital (Edwards et al, 2003:2). Firstly, "the historical context and social construction of relationships and identities, in relation to the structures that situate them" are important; and secondly, "the meanings that actors place on their social relations" are significant (ibid:13). 'Social networks' are defined here as the *location* of social capital. Investigating the presence and the content of networks reveals where social capital exists and where it does not exist. It reveals the environment that facilitates social capital development, the forms of social capital that are particularly important or meaningful, and the power dynamics at play. Following this logic, a two-pronged tool for analysis is developed here to explore social capital amongst pensioners in Cherkassy: a 'name-generator' method, to capture network and capital presence; and semantic analysis to capture content and value ascribed to relationships.

### *1.1 After Salmi: The Name-Generator Method*

Borrowing from sociological network analysis (Salmi, 2006:67-79), a 'name-generator' was used in interviews to gain insight into the presence, location and characteristics of informal social networks amongst pensioners. Informal networks are notoriously difficult to capture due to their subconscious and fluid nature. The most thorough approach to understanding

informal networks, will, then, only yield a snapshot of an aspect of constructed networks. However, it is necessary to adopt a systematic approach to attempt to map these relationships (ibid:68). As such, I employed the name-generator as an appropriate method given the demographic in question.

The name-generator comprised of a list of eight questions (see Appendix 1) designed to establish the identity of key individuals in the interviewee's informal network, thus capturing a *reflection* of an *aspect* of the participant's network and community (Salmi, 2006:68). Questions inquired about everyday aspects of life, such as who the interviewee might ask for assistance if they needed help at home, or who they might speak to for advice. In each case, the interviewee was asked to talk about named individuals to gain insight into how this network has developed - for instance, how long the individual had been known to the interviewee, and how they had become acquainted. The name-generator was supplemented with questions about relatives and neighbours to attempt to encapsulate a fuller picture of the network.

Of course, such responses only provide information relating to reported networks and interactions, but they do prove useful in identifying the everyday networks in which social capital is located. In theory, the name-generator should identify the people, groups and contexts through which pensioners have generated, and continue to generate, resources (or conversely through which disadvantage is engendered), thus bolstering (or minimising) important aspects of social or physical wellbeing and welfare (Franklin, 2007:2).

### *1.2 After Gladkova and Wierzbicka: Semantic Analysis*

In order to capture content and value ascribed to relationships, a semantic device was employed in analysing interview transcripts. Such analysis follows the logic of the cultural

scripts approach, which posits that key words “can lead us to the centre of a whole complex of cultural values and attitudes expressed, *inter alia*, in common conversational routines” (Wierzbicka, 1997:17). Gladkova (2012) and Wierzbicka’s (1997) work on defining key social categories expressed in the Russian language elaborates that terms describing relationship ascribe certain values and characteristics to that relationship. Whereas an English speaker can use the term ‘friend’ as a catch-all for many types of relationship, either distant or close, the Russian speaker is forced to make a subconscious choice about the nature and value of a relationship given the “wealth of Russian words for different categories of human relationships” (ibid:57). From the semantics of the language, a sliding scale can be produced which ‘weighs’ relationships in terms of their “degree of ‘closeness’” to an individual, or the value encapsulated in that relationship (ibid). The use of these terms by interviewees were used in analysis as semantic cues indicating the presence of social capital. (See Appendix 2 for a detailed breakdown of terms with translation.)

Of course, this is not a precise science, and should not be interpreted as an attempt at ‘quantitative measurement’ of social capital. Nevertheless, this approach does represent “an insiders’ perspective” (Goddard and Wierzbicka, in Gladkova, 2012) in evaluating relationships in the interviewee’s terms, and thus ensures that the cultural context of social capital is kept at the forefront of consideration, as Bourdieu recommends (Bourdieu & Wacquant, in Edwards et al, 2003:6).

## **2. Functioning Social Capital**

In examining the networks that emerged through interviews, it was clear that in a number of cases, social capital was present and functioning within networks. Anna Pavlovna<sup>5</sup> (72 years old) and Igor Vasilyevich Shevchenko (73), her husband, provide a strong example of

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<sup>5</sup> All names are pseudonymised, and Russian naming conventions are used throughout, in which both the first name and the patronymic are used to address older people.

this. The type of functioning networks to which the Shevchenkos belong model the types of networks which the state assumes exist at the micro-level (see discussion in Chapter 3). They each receive a pension (they did not discuss how much), and Anna Pavlovna receives 49 Ukrainian hryvnia (UAH) (less than £4 GBP) per month and a 25% reduction in their utility bills, benefits allocated to her as she was affected by the war as a child (see Chapter 3 for further discussion on benefits). They have a well-populated network that consists of family (two children, three grandchildren, and their respective families), with many relatives living in the city. God-parents, neighbours, former colleagues, and friends and acquaintances also supplement their network. They see their '*blizkij*' former colleagues (that is, people who are 'close', with '*blizkij*' referring to trusted people) every day, and as they have lived in the same flat for 42 years, they know all of the neighbours in their block. They see their neighbours everyday, they "chat, and spend time together... drink tea", and they provide mutual support: "our neighbour here, she's disabled, so when her daughter was studying, I helped her, I went to the shop for her and all that". On the day of the interview another friend had come round and helped Anna Pavlovna to prepare fish she had bought from the market.

The '*samij blizkij*' - the 'closest' people - for the Shevchenkos, though, were their family: Igor Vasilyevich's brother and sister, and their son, daughter, and grandson. It is their family tradition to visit one another at weekends, and more often if the chance arises; their children and grandchildren provide them with "material and moral" support. Igor's brother has land, and regularly gives them home-grown produce. It was family that the Shevchenkos repeatedly talked about as the key people in their network: it is family who help around the home, who they turn to for advice, who they discuss problems with, who they borrow money from, and who help when they are ill. They agree that if they need help, then it is best to receive it from those who are '*svoj*' and '*rodnye*' - relationships that, in Russian, are imbued with mutual trust and obligation - a hallmark of social capital (Gladkova, 2012; Wierzbicka, in *ibid*). These integral relationships of obligation and trust

are all the more important “because we have no hope in the state, or in our *znakomij* either”. The term ‘*znakomij*’ is loosely translated as ‘acquaintance’, although it has a less distant sense in Russian than the English implies - *znakomij* are people who are not friends, but they are more than simply ‘contacts’; they are people who may be socialised with, but not people who can be relied upon for help and support (Nafus, 2003:70-71).

There are a number of points that are important to observe here. Firstly, the Shevchenkos have many neighbours and former colleagues - “loose” social capital ties (Dürschmidt et al, 2010:29) - who they meet socially and can rely on in day-to-day situations. This is clearly a manifestation of social capital, where help is offered and received, and ongoing mutual relations create an everyday source of support. Their network is large - one measure which Bourdieu uses as an indication of social capital (Bourdieu, 1997, in Edwards et al, 2003:6). The Shevchenkos do not give a sense of their status within their network, or the range of capital encapsulated within that network; nevertheless, they say that they are content with their situation.

Secondly, this social capital has developed through key ‘sites of socialism’ - the workplace and the apartment block, and a sense of the (socialist) ‘collective’ in their day-to-day functioning is present. Nafus (2003:71) argues that the collective is not a historical artifact, but rather “a disposition” through which “‘collective individuals’ are collective on the basis that knowledge about the self is built and elicited by one another”. The social capital developed through socialist sites continue to provide the Shevchenkos with a mode of living that makes sense of their present via relationships, lifestyle, and values developed throughout their lives. According to Bourdieu’s (1986:21) analysis, relationships imbued with social capital are “based on indissolubly material and symbolic exchanges, the establishment and maintenance of which presuppose reacknowledgement of proximity, [which] are also partially irreducible to objective relations of proximity in physical (geographical) space or even in economic and social space” (1986:21). These first two points

illustrate the Shevchenkos' embodiment of this principle, given the reciprocal aspect of these relationships, their maintenance through close proximity of living arrangements, and the shared values - which have continuing relevance - on which they are founded.

Thirdly, the close family is evidently the most important site of social capital development and utilisation for the Shevchenkos - their '*svoj*', '*rodnye*' and '*blizkij*' people provide them with "dense ties" (Dürschmidt et al, 2010:29) characterised by mutual obligation and care provision. The utilisation of these semantic devices show the implicit and explicit value that the Shevchenkos ascribe to their familial relations. In particular, using '*svoj*' and '*rodnye*' to define family relations, as noted above, attribute these relationships with trust. '*Rodnye*' are people related by inseparable emotional ties - relationships with '*rodnye*' form part of "one's own life and identity" (Wierzbicka in Gladkova, 2012). As such, social capital wrapped up in these relationships is a permanent and reliable feature of life, providing resources that can always be turned to. This complies with Bourdieu's emphasis on the family as a key source of social capital (Edwards et al, 2003:3), a theme across these interviews, and elsewhere (see Dürschmidt et al, 2010). The Shevchenkos' social capital network is not only well-populated, but it has meaningful content and subjective significance, which, as shown in the examples above, also provides them with material and moral support.

Fourthly, whilst the network is large, incorporating many "loose ties", some "contraction" into the "dense ties" of the family from more peripheral relationships is evident over time, and has been recorded as a 'post-socialist' phenomenon (Dürschmidt et al, 2010:14; Ledeneva, 1998:195). Comparing their situation to life in the Soviet Union, Igor Vasilyevich says, "We don't have any hope in our acquaintances (*znakomij*)... If you try and borrow money, no-one will give it to you... If, during Soviet times, I needed to borrow 10 or 20 rubles, I could turn to colleagues, or neighbours, or *znakomij*, and say, it's just until I get paid", whereas now, "everyone has their own family". Again, this points to the heightened importance of the close family's supporting role. This two-pension household, which

receives food, money and emotional support from close family, and everyday assistance and social interaction through relations developed under socialism, seems well-provided for, they enjoy good health, and do not complain of a lack of anything: their day-to-day survival is secured.

Whilst these functioning networks are doubtless a lifeline to many in this context, where the state is viewed as ineffectual in providing welfare, the drawbacks of this type of family-centred social capital should be mentioned, unlikely as it is “to provide any wider benefits beyond everyday negotiation of disadvantage” (Dürschmidt et al, 2010:20). Even so, pensioners with similar social capital networks are significantly better placed to meet their needs within a community than those pensioners whose networks have eroded over time, as explored in Section 3.

### **3. Social Capital Erosion**

Sadly, the Shevchenkos’ story was not typical of interviewees in this study - many networks did not function in this way, and thus available social capital was limited. In the Ukrainian context of the withdrawal of the state (explored further in Chapter 3), the necessary reliance on informal networks results in an exacerbated vulnerability for those who do not have such networks to fall back on.

The erosion of networks and corresponding social capital over time, acknowledged by Bourdieu as an outcome of insufficient investment and exercise of social capital within relationships (1986:21), has been accelerated in the post-socialist context. Social capital rich networks developed in “sites” of socialism (Stenning, 2005:240) have persisted in some cases, as the Shevchenkos’ situation illustrates: the ‘sites’ remain even where socialism does not. However, a strong theme from the data was of the erosion of these networks and their

social capital, where the collapse of actually-existing socialism dismantled the structures that supported the 'sites' - housing was privatised, leisure time and groups organised by the workplace disappeared, association with trade and workplace lost its ideological importance, neighbourhoods thinned out, and so on (Dürschmidt et al, 2010:11). Furthermore, the demands of ageing and the new challenges brought about by post-socialist realities have piled sometimes insurmountable pressure onto these networks. Ill health, prohibitive costs of communication and transport, financial crisis resulting in relocation, and ultimately death, were in many cases attributed to the breakdown of networks and related social capital. In this context, interviews with pensioners revealed that social capital has been affected via two basic mechanisms, as explored below.

### *3.1 Broken Networks*

Mobility in the Soviet era and post-collapse migration have contributed to the deterioration of social capital. Although the internal passport system was "the main obstacle to free movement of Soviet citizens", other policies existed in the Soviet period relating to labour migration which contributed to the movement of the population (Messina, 1994:623-624). Gibson (1991) outlines how policies of industrialisation, collectivisation, and urbanisation, made the Soviet population "very mobile, or 'migratory'"; indeed, in the 1970s, more than 11 million people (4% of the population) were migrating annually, and by 1985, "43% of all Soviet citizens had migrated at least once in the course of their lives; [and] 1 in 6 had migrated within the preceding ten years" (ibid:154). Post-1991, it is difficult to establish a clear picture, but it is estimated that between 2 and 7 million Ukrainians have emigrated, contributing to a Ukrainian diaspora of an estimated 20 million (where the population of Ukraine stands at almost 46 million) (Kule Ukrainian Canadian Studies Centre, 2012; World Bank, 2010).

This was reflected amongst interviewees within this study. Three women had spent their lives travelling with their husbands, who had served in the Soviet military; seven women were not Ukrainian, but Russian (5 interviewees), Tajik (1) or Chechen (1). In fact, only two interviewees had lived in Cherkassy or the Cherkassy region for their entire lives. 40% of the participants had lived in the region for less than 40 years - and six of those for less than 25 years. Although in themselves these periods are lengthy, relationships from previous stages of life - with childhood friends, university peers, and old neighbours and colleagues - have been severed, as “the social relations [with the wider community] that constitute social capital are broken at each move” (Edwards et al, 2003:5).

Moving within the last 25 years signified a move after retirement for four interviewees, thus breaking a life-time of relationships. Nataliya Pavlovna, 75, provided the most extreme example of this. Born and raised in the Russian far north, where her Ukrainian family had been interned, she studied in Kyiv, and moved around Ukraine with her work. After retirement and the collapse, she emigrated to America to work and save money, before returning to Ukraine in 2005, when she moved to Cherkassy for the first time to care for her sister and nephew, who suffer from depression and alcoholism.

Nataliya Pavlovna’s informal network was one of the sparsest uncovered in interview. Her local network comprised of only four people. Revealingly, during her interview, Nataliya Pavlovna did not once employ any Russian term expressing a close and valued relationship when talking about this network<sup>6</sup>. In responding to the name-generator exercise, Nataliya Pavlovna did not name anyone who helps her. She explicitly stated, “I don’t have any acquaintances (*znakomij*), friends (*druzej*), or relatives here, I can’t ask anyone [for help]”. She has no local family network, usually a key source of social capital (Edwards et al, 2003:3), to turn to: her surviving relatives (aside from her sister and nephew), who used to

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<sup>6</sup> As a member of a local NGO, the Women’s Centre, Nataliya Pavlovna did stress the importance of her interaction with the group of women at the Women’s Centre, describing the NGO as a spiritual outlet and moral support, but she did not name any individuals there as a part of her network, or describe them in terms of meaningful social categories.

provide her with support and help, live in western Ukraine, where she used to work, and the Russian far north, where she grew up.

We can conclude that mobility has contributed to the breakdown of Nataliya Pavlovna's social capital. Neither core or extended family ties, nor dense or loose social ties (Dürschmidt et al, 2010:29) - the axis of social capital development - were being utilised in her case to provide welfare. The lack of any substantial network, and the lack of value attributed to network connections captured in this interview, suggest that, by the definition of social capital explicated here, Nataliya Pavlovna's social capital is extremely impoverished.

Although Nataliya Pavlovna's is perhaps the most extreme example from the data, breakdown of social capital was a recurrent theme. For Evgeniya Tamirovna, aged 82, for example, even moving within the city had caused major upheaval and network breakdown, pointing to a key spatial dimension which fosters "relations of proximity" in the functioning of these networks (Bourdieu, 1986:21). Earlier in the year, Evgeniya Tamirovna had moved with her daughter to a smaller flat, further away from the city centre due to a familial financial crisis. Throughout the interview she returned to the trauma of this:

"As I told you, we've changed our apartment - we'd lived in that flat a long time, I had acquaintances (*znakomij*) there. Even my former colleague lived in that building, who I'd worked with for 50, 60 years or so. And Galya and Sasha were there, neighbours who respected me very much, I had very close relationships with them - they were welcoming, kind, helpful people - but I don't have that anymore".

Although Evgeniya Tamirovna has lived in Cherkassy for 66 years, the core network that was constructed consisted only of her daughter, and her grand-daughter in Israel, who she constantly referred to as her '*rodnye*', her kin, those with inseparable ties to her. In her case,

the network that she had built up during her lifetime - with neighbours and former colleagues - were firmly located and captured within her previous residence. Where Evgeniya Tamirovna's former colleagues and neighbours would previously offer material and social support, now, she says, "there's no break in the clouds... I simply am not in a position to meet my own needs." It is only at Hesed Dorot, the Jewish Community Centre, that she receives support in paying for her medical bills.

These vignettes are illustrative of a number of interviewees' core networks. This suggests that amongst this group of pensioners, social capital has broken down over time and with age, a process exacerbated by the economic and social strains of post-socialism. These social capital networks have "contracted" in on themselves to their core family-centred components, becoming "island-like" in nature (Dürschmidt et al, 2010:14) - and sometimes these core family-based networks did not exist at all. Indeed, 18 of the 30 interviewees noted that they had two or less family members or relatives living in the region; a further five had three or less relatives nearby. 18 respondents lived alone. Given the risk of poverty to pensioners, and the meagre average pension of around 1300 UAH (£105 GBP) for men, and 800 UAH (£65 GBP) for women (TSN, 2012a), a situation is revealed in which pensioners' welfare is precariously balanced, dependent as they are upon a small number of individuals to assist them in their physical and social needs. Given the current climate in Ukraine, family members may well be experiencing financial difficulties of their own. The distance from family and the physical isolation revealed here is a worrying pattern, and one that begins to illuminate the vulnerability and lack of capital of pensioners in Cherkassy.

### 3.2 *Stretched Networks*

The mobility outlined above has also resulted in ‘stretched networks,’ where the “local, national [and] transnational connections between people” (Dúrrschmidt et al, 2010:20) continue to have importance, and where social capital may be either maintained or damaged due to distance. A number of respondents reported that key individuals live in Israel, America, the United Kingdom, Australia, and Russia, or indeed in other areas of Ukraine which were for some, just as inaccessible as London or Chicago.

Larisa Tarasovna’s relationships with relatives have been affected in this way. She says that her relatives, who live elsewhere in Ukraine, are,

“far away... and now... old age has arrived... we only see our relatives when there’s a wedding or... a funeral... we see each other less now, speak to each other less - before we went to parades and demonstrations, and now, where can we go?”

This response epitomises the way in which the loss of socialist forms of organising and leisure activities has exacerbated the weakening of social capital. Socialist modes of association - parades and demonstrations in this case - provided a forum for social capital to be practiced and (re)generated; these were events which could be utilised, consciously or subconsciously, as “investment strategies... establishing or reproducing social relations” (Bourdieu, 1986:22). Larisa Tarasovna clearly states that the absence of these forms of association has resulted in the weakening of kinship ties with her relatives. These ties are stretched geographically, and are now rarely reinforced. This theme was reflected in many other interviewees’ stories, where the “inability to ratify ties” illustrates what Shubin (2007:609) terms “network poverty”.

Nevertheless, for a number of respondents, 'stretched networks' did play an important welfare role. Such relationships provide a link to the outside world (Shubin, 2007:609), and for a number of interviewees, the remittances provided by these network members were a material lifeline, where social capital "converts" to economic and material capital (Bourdieu, 1986:25). For instance, Oksana Oleksandrovna receives money, medication and clothing from her daughter in America; Tamara Igorevna's daughter sends money back from London to her relatives. Tamara Igorevna says that, "For me, everything is taken care of, not thanks to my pension, which of course, at this stage, does not satisfy me, or anyone else, but because I have a daughter who helps out." Both Tamara Igorevna and Oksana Oleksandrovna named their daughters as their '*samij blizkij*' person, the person they were closest to, their most trusted and valued relation. In these cases, then, when '*samij blizkij*' relationships - relationships invested with a high degree of value and social capital - are stretched geographically, social capital has not lost value, and in fact has been converted into much needed material capital. So whilst stretched networks can limit and erode social capital, they can also play key roles in ensuring welfare and well-being, as connectedness to these networks and resources mediates poverty (Shubin, 2007:613).

#### **4. The Adaptability of Social Capital**

In spite of the evidenced erosion of social capital, and isolation experienced by this group of pensioners, the adaptability of social capital was also made apparent through interviewees' stories. This is explored here with reference to what I call 'transformed' and 'virtual' networks.

#### 4.1 Transformed Networks

For six interviewees, socialism's 'sites' have produced networks which have transformed or reconfigured over time to meet the changing needs of these pensioners. The strongest example of this was described by Nina Antonovna, a single 75 year old, living by herself, and with no relatives in the Cherkassy region. When asked who she spent her leisure time with, she said:

“We have a certain ‘collective’ [*kollyektiv*] of people like me, older people, pensioners, well, and we meet together, sometimes we have lunch, or go to a concert; we walk in the forest, we collect flowers.”

This ‘collective’ started out with former work colleagues, and to their number they have added other pensioners they have met - usually friends of friends, many of them single or widowed women, whose families are far away from Cherkassy - and they form a social support for each other. Nina Antonovna introduced me to two other members of her ‘collective’ - a former colleague, Maria Leonidovna (72 years old), and Tamara Igorevna (76 years old), who were half-sisters, also single, living alone, and with no close family networks in Cherkassy. None of the women had contact with NGOs.

But the support they offer each other is also very practical. One member of their ‘collective’, a neighbour of Maria Leonidovna, had died not long before the interview took place. She too lived by herself, and her closest relatives were in Moscow. The ‘collective’ had cared for her whilst she was ill, and had made arrangements for her funeral.

“Just recently, one of our friends (*prijatelnici*) died, she lived here alone too. Her family are in Moscow, she was from Russia. So whilst she was ill, we looked after her, she died, and whilst we waited for her family to arrive, we organised everything.” (Nina Antonovna)

“I go to the cemetery, I look after her grave... we organised everything... Her relatives are in Moscow, they could only come to commemorate 40 days since her passing, and we have done everything... We try to help, and to support each other.” (Maria Leonidovna)

This ‘collective’ was taking on the roles performed by *rodnye* and *svoj* relations, close relatives, in the Shevchenkos’ traditionally functioning network (in Section 2 above). This was clearly illustrated in interview with Maria Leonidovna, who answered all of the name-generator questions with the names of people in her and Nina Antonovna’s collective. It was these people that she referred to as ‘*druzej*’ - very close friends who can always be relied upon for help and support, and ‘*svoj*’ - close relationships based upon mutual obligation and trust which comprise a meaningful community (Nafus, 2003:70; Wierzbicka, 1997:59; Gladkova, 2012). These terms are here deemed to be loaded with social capital, an assumption verified by Maria Leonidovna, who stated that it is these ‘*svoj*’ and ‘*druzej*’ relations who lend money and food, give advice, spend leisure time together, and can be relied on for help when ill.

Through her choice of language, Nina Antonovna distinguished the different types of relations this ‘collective’ comprised. Of course, as has already been established, the idea of ‘collective’ is charged with meaning: a key concept in the Soviet lexicon, the ‘collective’ provided the context for self-realisation in relation to others (Nafus, 2003:71). Within her ‘collective’, Nina Antonovna refers to the wider group as a ‘circle of *znakomij* people’, that is, acquaintances who can play a social role in one’s network (ibid). Crucially, the ‘collective’ includes ‘*podrugij*’ and ‘*blizkij* (close) *podrugij*’. The term ‘*podrugij*’ can be used in Russian only by a female with reference to her female friends - they are friends who have “shared life experiences and whose existential situation is similar”; they are the “much needed and highly valued company” of someone like one’s self (Wierzbicka, 1997:67-68). It is these

*'blizkij podrugij'* who "look out for each other", Nina Antonovna says, when the state does not provide, when family is far away, and when money is not available. The investment of social capital in these relationships is, then, denoted by the social capital rich terminology they use and the relationships they describe. It is evident that this social capital acts as a safety net for Nina Antonovna, and for Maria Leonidovna: when all else fails, when there is nobody else around, it is these relationships that provide for their material and immaterial needs, and protect their welfare.

Likewise, Marina Danilovna, a participant at the Women's Centre, discussed the group of former colleagues that she meets with, who she described as *'rodnye'* people - that is, people related (whether kin or not) by inseparable emotional ties, people who form a part of "one's own life and identity" (Wierzbicka, in Gladkova, 2012). Marina Danilovna meets with her former colleagues regularly: they spend leisure time together, and celebrate holidays and special occasions. Marina Danilovna's former colleagues are also an important source of support:

"We became very good friends, the younger women and the older women together, we ring each other up... and if someone is suffering in some way, we help each other. They ring me - "come round, something's happened to someone, come quickly". So I came across some very good people at work."

Another interviewee, Anya Andreyevna, talks about her 'friendship society', her *'obshchestvo druzhba'*. Derived from the word *'drug'*, roughly translated as 'friend', this term implies a deep relationship which promises unconditional support and help (Nafus, 2003:70; Wierzbicka, 1997:59). The 'friendship society' is a group of eight people who meet together and support each other:

“We meet together, amongst us women - [our group is] for girls only... Their support for me is invaluable. When my youngest son died, this group of friends (*kompaniya*)... they were a very strong support to me... The majority of them are... former colleagues. But not all of them were friends whilst we were teaching - we just came together in this group and stayed together.”

The group meets less often now than it used to, and now mostly meets on birthdays and holidays. Nevertheless, they clearly provide an important source of support (and social capital) to each other. Indeed, the importance in this context of celebrating birthdays and holidays together should be highlighted. Lonkila (2012) notes the special role this plays in Russia as a celebration of social network strength; these celebrations are a central “foci of interaction” which mark out and affirm the network (Feld, in Lonkila, 2011:88). Thus, coming together at key points in the year provides an opportunity for social capital to be regenerated, and for “material and symbolic exchange” to reinforce “obligations and mutual recognition” (Edwards et al, 2003:5-6).

When asked who had provided this kind of support in the past, a common response was that this type of support had never before been necessary: in the past, interviewees had spouses and families, full-time jobs that paid the bills, and better health. Nina Antonovna, Maria Leonidovna, Marina Danilovna and Anya Andreyevna all describe how networks that have developed over years have absorbed new members and transformed in some way to meet the needs of these women as their lives and circumstances change. In the face of these changing circumstances, these new networks, new collectives, are outward looking: they enhance their own social capital by bringing others in to the network, thereby creating a larger pool of capital to share from. Given the concrete examples described above, it is clear that capital functions within these networks to enhance welfare. Thus, ‘transformed networks’ provide an organic model for the welfare potentialities of social capital at the very grassroots of society, and amongst the most vulnerable.

## 4.2 Virtual Networks

A final, briefer, example of the adaptability of social capital networks is observed in ‘virtual networks’. Alisa Sergejevna moved to Cherkassy 14 years ago to be closer to her daughter and grandchildren, after outliving her relatives in Russia. She describes her current situation as one of relative isolation, and of poverty: her pension of 800 UAH is insufficient to provide her with adequate nutrition and the medication that she needs. She was born in China to Russian parents. When she was a young adult, the area was freed from Japanese occupation and she, like other foreign nationals, had to leave the country. Because of this, she says,

“I [now] have many friends (*prijatelij*), in Los Angeles, and a friend (*podrug*a) in Venezuela, we write to each other. And in Poland - we write to each other on the internet, and in Australia, I write to friends there... And even now, you know, all over the Soviet Union, in all the towns, there we are - our people (*naši*) [referring to those who had lived in the same city as her in China]. And to this day, we support our [*naši*] links, and, you know, our [*naša*] culture... Even now, we write to each other.”

The existence of this virtual support network seems particularly important to Alisa Sergejevna. She remembers her years in China as the best of her life, and she repeatedly talks about the happy memories she made there; stories that contrast significantly with the realities of her current situation. Whilst this virtual network does not provide Alisa Sergejevna with any material relief, it does provide her with emotional aid, and a world to retreat to from her day-to-day struggles. Even after 55 years, she speaks of a shared group identity with these people by using the term ‘*naš*’. Literally translated as ‘ours’ (‘our people’), this term denotes a shared and close group-hood and community that is often used to describe family, or shared ethnicity in relation to an ‘other’ (Gladkova, 2012). She talks

about the friends she writes to as '*podrugij*', close female friends with shared experiences and common interests.

Through her virtual support network, Alisa Sergejevna has access to a community that has provided her with a sense of belonging and meaning throughout her life, even when she has moved home, and lost loved ones. Although this may not resemble social capital in a traditional sense, it has existed as a "durable network" based on group membership and symbolic exchange (Bourdieu, 1986:21) over the course of decades. The joy Alisa Sergejevna derives from talking about this group perhaps signifies that her group membership enables her to face her daily isolation with the knowledge that she is part of a greater '*naš*'. Similarly, technology was used by a number of respondents to connect with family and friends, and even to make new friends online, thus reinforcing social capital within stretched networks, or creating new virtual social capital networks which provide emotional support and cushion against isolation.

## **5. Conclusion - Developing a Narrative of Hope**

This chapter has explored three ways in which social capital was found to exist amongst pensioners in the Cherkassy region of Ukraine: in a healthily functioning form which provides security and welfare; in an impeded form due to the breaking down or overstretching of networks - although stretched networks can still facilitate capital flow; and in an adapted form, in which social capital networks have been reconfigured or transformed to meet new needs encountered in old age, or to provide emotional support even from a distance.

Whilst one aim of this research is to draw attention to the hidden stories of the vulnerable, I do not wish to perpetuate a negative picture of this place and people. Instead, through

exploring these transformations it is possible to develop a ‘narrative of hope’ - that is, to find ways to express positive messages about this potentially vulnerable group. Transformed social capital networks demonstrate how social capital networks can be rebuilt and re-imagined to meet changing needs, through the “transformative potentialities” of mutual care (Shubin, 2012:96) in which pensioners become a caring societal resource (Tesauro & Pianelli, 2010:7). Rebuilding the ‘collective’, a meaningful mode of living for this demographic, acknowledges the importance of a “community of memory”, with “shared meanings” and practices, whilst it creates a “vision and hope for the future”, so that communities which developed under socialism can create lasting communities which outlive the site of their development (Stenning, 2005:239; Linkon and Russo, in *ibid*). The socialist-type forms that are “usually viewed as a negative heritage” are imbued with new meaning, and can be redeemed as valuable resources for progress (Creed, 2002:62). Thus, establishing a narrative of hope has the potential to be a powerful exercise in enhancing well-being, and finding routes out of embedded poverty and towards development.

Whilst the discussion above reveals small pockets of care and transformation at the very grassroots of society, within a relative situation of deprivation, isolation and poverty, this discussion highlights the need for intervention at the micro-level, and points to the great potential role of NGOs in assisting this process of transformation on a community scale. It is to the role of NGOs that we now turn in Chapter 2.

## CHAPTER 2 - RE-IMAGINING THE COLLECTIVE: NGOS AND PENSIONERS'

### WELFARE

So far, preceding discussion has identified the manifestation of social capital - whether it be functioning, inhibited, or transformed - amongst pensioners in this study. The gap between the needs and realities of pensioners points to a potential role for NGOs, where, sadly, the state fails to meet those needs (see Chapter 3). This chapter, then, highlights the work of two NGOs who have successfully taken on this role: firstly through creating new social capital networks; and secondly through preserving existing social capital networks, by replicating kinship or collective-type networks rich in social capital. As we shall see, both of these approaches prioritise the collective values important to pensioners. A shorter look will be taken at the exclusionary “downsides” of social capital (Portes and Landolt, in Walker, 2010:664), and pensioners’ perceptions of need in order to highlight the utility of an approach based in inclusive community values. First, however, it is necessary to contextualise this discussion by underlining the general paucity of effective, well-funded and stable NGOs in Ukraine - a situation which accentuates the need for the development of positive, context-sensitive models.

### 1. NGOs - The Ukrainian Context

#### *1.1 NGOs in Ukraine*

Mapping the landscape of NGOs in Ukraine is difficult as few resources are available to assist in this endeavour. One report shows that as of 2010, 63,000 NGOs were registered in Ukraine (Creative Counterpart Centre, 2010:18). However, as many NGOs cease to

function each year without deregistering, it is estimated that only 3-4,000 of these organisations are active (ibid). Furthermore, most NGOs in Ukraine are severely financially constrained, and as such their operations are impeded. Statistics show that as of 2003, 25% of NGOs in Ukraine recorded an annual income of up to US\$500, whilst 20% had an annual budget of up to US\$5000 (Civicus Report, 2006:36). Naniwska (2001:8) notes that the majority of NGO activity is based within “regions with either highly developed infrastructures, like Kyiv, Dnipropetrovsk and Donetsk, or areas with cultural and intellectual potential, such as Lviv and the Autonomous Republic of Crimea”. NGO penetration into the rest of Ukraine is, then, limited.

Government reports for Cherkassy show that 230 local NGOs and civil society organisations were registered in 2006 (Miskoi Rada, 2006), although it is likely that less than half of these are active. These organisations cover the whole spectrum of civil society activities. Only approximately 25 of these organisations were focused on social welfare issues (ibid). It is not clear how many of these organisations function today. In this climate, the NGOs discussed below are exceptional, a fact that underlines the urgency of promoting effective, replicable models.

### *1.2 The Image of NGOs*

Not only are effective NGOs scarce in Cherkassy, but the perception of NGOs amongst pensioners in this study was marked by negativity and confusion. For instance, the majority of interviewees mistook NGOs for state-sponsored organisations, resulting in the attachment of negative connotations to the idea of NGOs (see Chapter 3 for perceptions of the state amongst pensioners). Most interviewees belonging to NGOs did not seem to realise that they were in fact receiving support from an NGO. The lack of familiarity

amongst interviewees regarding this concept was very clear: even banks were named by one respondent as an example of an NGO.

It may well be the case that this confusion is rooted in the historical Soviet organisation of society. “The state plays a key role in establishing social norms and providing society with a common cultural framework” (Petro, 2001:241), and the Soviet state was no exception to this. Activities and organisations that would, in non-socialist states, generally take place within the domain of ‘civil society’ (between the public and private spheres), were dominated by the state in Soviet Ukraine (Dürschmidt et al, 2010:11; Ledeneva, 1998:51). Youth, political, and professional organisations were all linked to the state; there was no such thing as ‘non-governmental’. Conceiving of such a concept at a late stage in life is perhaps a difficult leap to make.

In addition, all of these ‘social’ organisations were wiped out or severely impaired at collapse - they became redundant; and thus, organisations perceived as similar in post-socialism may likewise be identified as redundant. Correspondingly, evidence from the data illustrated a hostility towards all types of organisation - whether governmental or otherwise. Lyubov Ivanovna’s response was typical of many interviewees’ when she stated that non-governmental organisations could not support her because, “I don’t appeal to anybody; I look after myself.” Respondents without interactions with NGOs could not even imagine what this support might look like. Nina Antonovna stated that, “I don’t know, if they’re non-governmental, *how* they can offer support ...”

Clearly, there is wide-spread confusion and misconception regarding the work of NGOs amongst this demographic. In light of this, the instrumentalisation of meaningful traditions of mutual care gain a new importance.

Two organisations are prominent in analysis here: ‘The Cherkassy Women’s Centre’ and ‘Hesed Dorot’ Cherkassy Regional Charitable Jewish Foundation. Both organisations illustrate through their work how, despite the confusion and misconceptions, NGOs can provide a vital context for enhancing pensioners’ well-being. The backgrounds and main activities of these organisations are described below.

### *1.3 The Cherkassy Women’s Centre<sup>7</sup>*

The Cherkassy Women’s Centre is a regional community women’s organisation, which started its work in 1995, and was officially registered as an NGO in 1997. Working with women from high-school age and upwards, the Women’s Centre works to address a number of gender-related issues, such as domestic violence, support for women in business, self-esteem and health issues, and personal development.

Work with older women includes a club meeting every Thursday which provides a space for the women to socialise and explore interests. Between February and June 2011, a project specifically for older women was implemented, entitled ‘We Can Do It, When We Are Together’. The project was financed by the Ukrainian’s Women’s Fund, an international charitable organization founded in 2000 as a part of the American Open Society Institute (Ukrainian Women’s Fund, 2011).

The project’s objective was to challenge existing stereotypes attached to older people in the city, and to promote active lifestyles amongst participants. Activities were planned to help the women engage with their communities; to develop skills in areas such as technology and computing; to provide education about health and physical welfare; and to receive psychological and legal consultations if necessary. Leisure activities such as the celebration

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<sup>7</sup> Information provided through e-mail exchange with the Director of the Women’s Centre.

of holidays and birthdays, creative workshops, and excursions played a key role in the project. The Women's Centre used this opportunity to raise issues relating to elderly welfare in the local media and at public meetings with local authorities.

#### *1.4 Hesed Dorot<sup>8</sup>*

The 1990s saw the establishment of the 'Hesed' network of Jewish community centres to provide for the needs of elderly and disabled Jews throughout the former Soviet Union (Iecovich et al, 2004:308). As part of this movement, Hesed Dorot (meaning 'Love and Care of the Generations') was founded in 1997 as an outgrowth of the Cherkassy Local United Jewish Community and the Association of Jewish Communities of Ukrainian Shtetls. Financial support is provided by the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee (Hesed Dorot, 2011). Hesed Dorot has approximately 1300 elderly clients that it assists with material, social and spiritual support. The Hesed network has a particular aim to assist older people in adapting to the "profound changes" brought about by the collapse of communism, and as such seeks to help them to "build new social networks and support systems that will replace those that no longer exist" (Iecovich et al, 2004:313).

The programme for the elderly at Hesed is exhaustive, and all services are provided free of charge. Material support is allocated according to means and need. This includes medical consultation, supplies, and medication, as well as the services of 45 health visitors. Medical supplies and food packages are delivered to clients' homes throughout the region. Alterations and repairs are made to homes; new items such as carpets, refrigerators and stoves are fitted; and homes are 'winter-proofed'. Doctors, lawyers, electricians, tailors and hairdressers provide services free-of-charge. A voucher scheme allows members to obtain food products from a local supermarket. Members of the community who are physically-challenged are provided with home-helpers, and are transported from their homes to the 'day

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<sup>8</sup> Information provided through interview with the Director of Hesed Dorot CRCJF.

centre'. Ten groups of ten to twelve members visit Hesed's day centre twice a month. There, they engage in leisure activities, including crafts and karaoke, and they are provided with meals.

The centre runs a library, and 18 different clubs to cater for leisure activities, including a women's club, a choir, a Hebrew club, and a reading club. Religious instruction is provided through Hesed's 'Jewish Revival Programme'. The elderly are assisted in using Skype to communicate with their family abroad at the centre's computer club. Hesed even produces and delivers its own newspaper to its members. All of this takes place at a purpose-built centre in Cherkassy.

Such extensive support is truly exceptional in Ukraine, and is due to the historical and cultural context of Jewish giving and philanthropy. Borne out of the scriptural mandate of 'tzedakah', the pursuit of justice for the poor (Moses, 2011), charitable giving and concern for the poor are "crucial for Jewish institutional life" (Jewish Foundations, 2003:12); throughout the twentieth century this has had a particular focus on caring for oppressed Jewish communities throughout the world (Kosmin, 1995:42).

## **2. The Role of NGOs in Rebuilding the Collective**

### *2.1 The Importance of the Collective*

The ideological and actually existing constructs of 'sites of socialism' and the 'collective' have already been explored as important foundations for community amongst pensioners, both under socialism, and afterwards. We now explore a little further the importance of community as expressed by interviewees. The importance of community and the communal was in fact a theme that arose organically from interviews; this was not a topic

that was explicitly addressed in questions, and thus its pervasiveness is even more striking in revealing the values of this demographic.

Etzioni's (in Rose, 1999:476) understanding of community as "a space of emotional relationships through which individual identities are constructed through their bonds to micro-cultures of meaning and value" seems to mirror interviewees' emphasis on the importance of community. For instance, Oksana Oleksandrovna says that, "for Slavic women, moral support is very important. To speak with someone, to talk about problems... we need to talk about these things, so that others would sympathise with you". Oksana Oleksandrovna equates community life with her Slavic identity; it is a part of who she is, and how she tackles the problems she faces. Similarly, Taisiya Aleksandrovna states that, "that's when you feel comfortable: when you're with your collective (*kollyektiv*), when you're not alone. That's very important for a person." So for Taisiya Aleksandrovna, the community environment provides her with a sense of well-being, comfort and support. Finally, with reference to the community at the Women's Centre, Lyubov Ivanovna says, "I come here and receive moral *udovlyetvoryeniye* [a sense of satisfaction and fulfillment] from the community". Again, the community is a forum for self-realisation and for self-fulfillment. Such sentiments were repeated throughout the interviews.

Equally, the feeling of being needed and included as a key part of the community in old age is important in contributing to well-being, and giving a sense of hope and purpose. Dzhirikova-Ustinova (2011) observes that inclusion in a community with planned activities is important for older people to project an active and positive future for themselves. Conradson (2003:516) describes this sense of future, and ability to reflect positively on what it might hold, as "expanded subjectivity; that is, a way of being and relating to others that extend beyond [one's] previous domain of being and affect".

As Shubin (2012:89) notes, engaged care must not “overlook what matters to poor people”. The value of community seems to be a natural starting point, then, for developing effective community-based programmes for pensioners such as these, as the communal can be instrumentalised as a natural environment for ensuring welfare and flourishing.

## *2.2 Building New Communities*

At the Women’s Centre and Hesed Dorot, the community was indeed the foundation of engagement with pensioners; as noted above, the Hesed network explicitly seeks to rebuild and recreate community where social capital networks have been eroded, or disappeared entirely (Iecovich et al, 2004:313). Correspondingly, interviewees’ responses to the Women’s Centre and Hesed Dorot were almost entirely and overwhelmingly positive. A similar language was used to describe both organisations: these NGOs provided an ‘*otdushyna*’, an ‘escape’, or ‘outlet’.

At the Women’s Centre, many spoke enthusiastically about the activities that they have been involved in. Alisa Sergeyovna said,

“I go every Thursday feeling as though I’m going to a party... We have very interesting meetings... recently we went to the Motronovskiy monastery, it was very interesting... We went to the museum in Kanev... we drew from nature, we’ve painted, and done tapestries, and made dolls... I come here with much joy.”

The Women’s Centre also provides the ladies with space to relax and escape depression and loneliness. Marina Danilovna stressed the importance of the Women’s Centre to her: “If someone asks me, “how are you, how are things at home?” I say, well, I have the Women’s Centre.” This is a sentiment echoed by Vera Borisovna:

*Interviewer:* How did you find out about the Women's Centre?

*Vera Borisovna:* ... I said [to an acquaintance], 'You know, Lida, sometimes I feel so depressed. You sit at home alone between four walls, the children are at work - well, by now they're pensioners, but nevertheless they have their own worries.' And she said, 'You should go to the Women's Centre.' And I said, 'Which centre? Give me the address!' ... I've not been coming here long, not even for a year yet... [But] it's like balm for my soul!"

Interviewees spoke about the mutual support and shared experiences that exist at the Centre. Skills and interests are shared:

"I suggested that I could teach everyone how to sew... straight away, everyone was interested... Then [the director of the Women's Centre] sent me some dense black cloth from Canada - she gave it all to me as a gift. Well, I embroidered something for everyone from it." (Vera Borisovna)

The women celebrate birthdays together, give gifts to each other, which, as we have seen, acts as a celebration of social networks (Lonkila, 2012). The community members share stories and interests at their meetings: one of the ladies at the centre "writes poetry so beautifully - I cry when she reads her poetry to us" (Vera Borisovna); they bake and bring cakes for the women to share (Alisa Sergeevna, Lyubov Ivanovna). Interestingly, these activities reflect the type of activities that take place in the informal 'grassroots' social capital networks explored in Chapter 1: they demonstrate material and symbolic exchange, and the open sharing of resources - skills, knowledge, and food, for example.

The social capital developed at the Women's Centre also spills out into day-to-day lives. It is true that the women's social capital networks outside of the Women's Centre varied considerably: from Taisiya Aleksandrovna, who said that "I have a feeling that all the

connections in this city run through me, and that without me, nothing would happen here!” - so connected is she to many organisations across the city; to Nataliya Pavlovna, whose social isolation has been described in Chapter 1. Regardless of these differences, NGO engagement enhanced social capital almost across the board. Of respondents who participated in NGO activities (20), the name-generator exercise recorded that the networks of 16 interviewees were supplemented through the interactions created and developed through their participation in these groups - and in some cases, substantially so.

For instance, Taisiya Aleksandrovna stated that she talks to people from the Women’s Centre for advice, and when she needs to talk over problems. She trusts that people from the Women’s Centre will help her when she is ill. Oksana Danilovna says that,

“we do everything amongst ourselves at the Women’s Centre. We do everything with a spirit of volunteering: I help someone with something, she brings me some apricots... or someone helps me to grow cucumbers [and pickles them for me].”

She also relates how friends from the Women’s Centre visited her house-bound mother to keep her entertained, and brought gifts for her; similarly they visited Oksana Oleksandrovna at hospital after her heart-attack.

In addition, a number of the women talked about meeting their ‘best’ or ‘closest friend’ (*samij blizkij*) at the Women’s Centre. Lilya Romanovna moved to Cherkassy 15 years ago to be close to her son, and as such her network is small, but she met her ‘closest friend’ (she used the term *prijatelnica* qualified by *samaya bolshaya* - roughly: ‘best’, ‘closest’) - a lady who had also relatively recently moved to Cherkassy - at the Women’s Centre. Perhaps more interesting, however, is that when the women talk about the Women’s Centre, they discuss it in terms of the community or collective. The Women’s Centre is a

“circle of friends” (*krug obsheniye* - literally, a community circle), it is a group of “*blizkij lyudij*” (‘close people, who are trusted and valued), it is “*naš*” (‘ours’, a group with shared values, the boundaries of which are flexible), or quite simply it is referred to as the Women’s Centre (“the Women’s Centre came and helped” in this or that way). The semantics indicate that the Women’s Centre is truly cemented as a new ‘collective’ in the minds of its members. This language reveals that the Women’s Centre has provided a new ‘site’ for social capital development and community formation, which still engages with values and behaviours meaningful to its demographic. This supports Begum’s prognosis that “community organisations [can] facilitate social connections and cooperation, and by virtue of repeated interactions, engender trust, friendship and mutual aid among members” (2003:16).

### *2.3 Preserving Old Communities*

A similar experience was recorded at Hesed Dorot. As Hesed Dorot grew out of the existing Jewish community in Cherkassy, and, as many of their pensioners are very elderly (the average (mean) age of interviewees at Hesed was 80.5), many have been members since its establishment in 1997. Director Dmitry Spivakovsky recognised the importance of community and continuity for these pensioners. At the day centre, pensioners from the same vicinity, or those who “worked together, studied together, know each other, or are acquainted amongst themselves” are kept together in the same group. This allows for the perpetuation of social capital networks as, for Bourdieu, “social capital has to be continuously worked at, rather than merely being constituted” in networks (Edwards et al, 2003:6). In this way, the community at Hesed Dorot preserves communities that formed organically, but have become vulnerable through older age, and reduced health or means, through actively bringing existing networks together. In social capital terms, institutionalised networks have been reinforced, allowing the continuation of exchange and recognition (Bourdieu, 1986:21).

This was clearly important to a number of interviewees. For instance, Anya Andreyevna's sister attends the day centre with her; and it was important to Olga Vladimirovna, a military spouse, that other military families also attend the day centre. Lesya Adamovna settled in Cherkassy with her late-husband once he had retired from the military, and they both became an active part of the Jewish community in Cherkassy, and in life at Hesed. It is important to Lesya Adamovna that she is amongst people who remember her husband; they did not have children, and have no family in Ukraine, and so Hesed is vitally important for her care - Hesed is a "miracle" for her. She also has two old friends who come to Hesed:

"I have friends from childhood (*podrugij detstva*) who come here: that's one sitting in the corner in the other room, Alla, she used to be a doctor, we were friends even before the war... Unfortunately, now we can't often visit each other, because she can't walk, so it's only now on birthdays that she takes a taxi and visits... And I have another old friend (*podrug*) [who comes here], Darya... She's a very good woman and ... she always visits me on birthdays and special occasions."

The practical support of Hesed - in providing lifts to the day centre, and a space for people to spend time together - thus allows community members to maintain networks that otherwise would likely have broken down completely. Networks developed through old 'sites' are protected through this new 'site' of community; the new site uses its material resources to ensure the protection and replication of organic kinship and friendship social capital networks. It provides a new "point of reference, an external structure" (Conradson, 2003:519) in which historically-valued modes of association can continue to have meaning.

Evidence that social capital is protected, replicated and extended to other members of the community at Hesed is evident in Lesya Adamovna's comments above. The closeness of the

relationships she has maintained through Hesed is evident in the language she chooses to describe them with: these women are '*podrugij*', close female friends who share life experiences and similar existential situations (Wierzbicka, 1997:67-68). Additionally, the celebration of birthdays together shows how ties have been maintained, as in this context, celebrating birthdays is "an important constituent of friendship and, in particular, a major affirmation of it" (Salmi, 2000:33). "Birthday celebrations render visible the significance of the role of the personal network" through the intertwining of sociability and mutual help (for instance, in buying and preparing food and gifts) (Lonkila, 2011:91; Salmi, in *ibid*:90).

This sociability and mutual help are clearly signs of functioning social capital, much like that which Olga Vladimirovna discusses. She says that "when we're not here [at Hesed], we call each other up, and everyone shares their own thoughts and concerns." Like the Women's Centre, Hesed was also referred to by interviewees almost exclusively in terms of the collective, the '*obsheniye*' or community. Again, semantically, this confirms the successful role of Hesed in rebuilding the collective.

Membership to the community at Hesed, achieved through the cultural capital of Jewish heritage, breeds not only social capital but material capital too: all interviewees gave details of how Hesed has helped practically, whether through the provision of medical care and prescriptions, home repairs, and so on. As such, social capital is maintained and protected, whilst capital breeds capital: social capital is "convertible" (Bourdieu, 1986:16) and takes on an expanded meaning "relative to other forms of capital and community resources at large" (Begum, 2003:11). In this way, community members are furnished with their physical needs, whilst social and emotional aspects of welfare are secured in a context of community that pensioners relate to.

In the context of the ethics of care, the Women's Centre and Hesed Dorot demonstrate environments in which care is practiced by NGOs, but also *mutually* by members of the

community. Interviewees' responses indicate that these NGOs provide a context for "personal growth, and the building of ties, commitment and community, and in which every community member is deemed capable of giving as well as receiving care" (Sevenhuijsen, 2003:183). In this way, the Women's Centre and Hesed provide a formalised setting in which the caring relations developed in informal settings can be rebuilt, recreated and replicated.

Not only do the Women's Centre and Hesed Dorot act as new 'sites' for community development, but through the practices of mutual support described above, they also become "spaces of care" (Conradson, 2003:508), in which community members are not clients, service users or recipients of care, but in which they actively partake in providing care to others. Kay (2011:51) observes a similar process in rural Russia, in which social groups and recreational-type activities "provide spaces for the development of semi-formal or informal caring communities". This points to the "transformative potentialities of care... [which] bring people together in unexpected ways in everyday spaces and encourages unexpected actors to respond in a caring way which can facilitate positive change" (Shubin, 2012:96). Thus, through these spaces of care, pensioners are engaging in the relationality and interdependence of the collective which has given context to their lives. Not only this, but pensioners also become active agents in addressing their own poverty and isolation. This model of care helps us to develop a 'narrative of hope' for the elderly, as set out in Chapter 1.

The importance of this narrative of hope and the potentialities of mutual care are highlighted when the positive responses of community members are contrasted with responses of those without contact with NGOs. Svetlana Ivanovna states that, "In general, no-one needs us. [They say], 'die, old people, nobody needs you'. And your children don't need you... Who knows how things will be..." Yaroslava Romanovna expresses similar thoughts. When asked how she feels that elderly care is viewed in Ukraine, she says, "I don't

know. Who pays attention to us? Nobody ever pays attention to pensioners - on how they live, or why they live.” Such responses typified a hopeless narrative of ageing that was emphasised most strongly amongst those who were not members of NGO communities. This narrative equated old age with sorrow, pain, tiredness and suffering.

Such responses illustrate the very opposite of Conradson’s (2003:516) “expanded subjectivity” that allows the elderly to project a positive future for themselves. Instead, this is a wounded and defensive subjectivity, a self-fulfilling prophecy that narrows the horizons of these pensioners. Whilst community membership was certainly not a panacea for such feelings and views, it did seem to mitigate them: hopeful expressions for the future, and feelings of satisfaction with current situations were conveyed exclusively by interviewees who considered themselves part of a strong community (whether that be through an NGO or other communities, such as those based upon kinship, friendship or neighbourhood).

### **3. The Benefits of Being Networked and the Downside of Social Capital**

As we have seen, a number of the respondents interviewed through NGOs were, outside of their NGO association, socially isolated, and dependent upon very small networks to supplement their welfare and care. This highlights the importance of caring communities in mitigating against the marginalisation experienced by many pensioners (Kay, 2011:52). However, through conversations, it became clear that respondents had joined these more ‘institutionalised’ communities of care at NGOs through a friend or acquaintance: that is, they had been able to join the community because they were ‘networked’, and had some degree of social capital which provided them with knowledge and information.

In this way, social capital within informal networks has played an important role in giving these individuals access to communities where their capital might be expanded and

supplemented by the social or material capital of that group. Thus, social contexts are significant in the *generation* of resources (Franklin et al, 2007:2), and social capital breeds capital - a core concept within Bourdieu's theorisation (Castiglione et al, 2008:3).

There was also some evidence that membership of these communities increased knowledge of other services offered to the elderly in the area, although such services are few. Seven respondents with connections to a community group knew of another organisation or group which served the elderly, whereas only two interviewees with no connections to NGOs could name such organisations. Bourdieu's estimation that "the forms of capital which are or can become efficient, like aces in a game of cards... in the struggle (or competition) for the appropriation of scarce goods" (in Calhoun, 1993:89) resonates here, where even amongst the most vulnerable populations, a small degree of capital can act as an "ace" in acquiring limited resources.

The inverse of this, however, is that the "continual transmission and accumulation [of social capital]... perpetuates inequality" (Edwards et al, 2003:5), in what Portes and Landolt (in Walker, 2010:664) term the "downside" of social capital. This is what Nataliya Pavlovna describes as her feeling of being a '*čužoj*' person - an alien, a foreigner (Gladkova, 2010:280) - in her place of residence. Since 2005, she has lived in an apartment building that was cooperative housing for the local meat factory - one of our 'sites' of socialism; thus her neighbours worked together, know each other well, socialise together and support each other: in short, they have accumulated social capital within this work/neighbourhood-based network. As a newcomer, however, Nataliya Pavlovna is excluded from this network, and from this informal community of care: the term '*čužoj*' is entirely devoid of social capital, implying as it does a sense of outsider and 'other'.

Fortunately, through her sister, Nataliya Pavlovna has been networked in to the Women's Centre community. Her story, though, begs the question of what happens to those who are

not 'networked' at all. Undoubtedly, there are pensioners in Ukraine who are amongst the losers of the "struggle" for capital (Mahar et al, 1990:9-10).

In the village of Blahodat in the Cherkassy region, for example, I was told the story of Sofia Gregorovna, a lady that I had met a few years earlier. Recently deceased, Sofia Gregorovna had suffered from severe mental health issues, and lived in squalor in a small hut with no heating, electricity or water supply. She was unable to grow food, and lived on whatever food she could acquire through begging. As far as the state was concerned, she did not exist - she did not receive a pension, or any care or benefits. Sofia's story serves as a stark reminder that people like her - those who are not 'networked' in the towns and cities - are likely suffering from abject poverty, with no capital to draw on to mediate its affects.

Again, the importance of caring communities that replace or reconstitute lost informal social capital networks is highlighted. Such communities have the ability to avoid the pitfalls of social capital's downsides by advertising the work of their organisation, and by ensuring that new 'sites' of community generation foster inclusiveness. Indeed, the concept of 'naš' is a flexible one, it is not set within the constructs of family or kin. Instead, it can act as a basis for inclusion, "transform[ing] potentially dangerous foreign elements and persons into a locally situated and known social and economic network" (Caldwell, 2004:202). Social capital does not "exist in a vacuum": as we have seen, its formation, generation and reproduction is influenced heavily by states, policies and institutions (Jochum, 2003:10). In this way, NGOs can be seen as new institutions in social capital formation and community development where existing or traditional institutions cannot, or do not, meet the needs of the most vulnerable.

#### 4. The Importance of Material Versus Emotional Support

At Hesed, the provision of material aid alongside community, emotional and spiritual elements represents a holistic understanding of care and welfare. The whole gamut of needs are met - from medical aid to clothes-mending, from reading circles to legal consultation. In this way, Hesed do not just act as care providers, but they ascribe respect and esteem to their clients as individuals who are important community members.

Interviewees attached importance to both material and emotional aspects of Hesed's work. Olga Vladimirovna says that when she first came to Hesed,

“they received me very well, they treated me with kind-heartedness, with respect. It was a very hard time, the time straight after the collapse of the Soviet Union, I lived alone, and I could afford [very little food]... Hesed gave me a basket of food once a month.”

Evgeniya Tamirovna goes to the day centre and the clubs at Hesed, and receives medication for free, but most importantly, she said “it is an escape, an outlet for me. It's a community.” Ekaterina Ivanovna, who attends Hesed with her husband, says that,

“we're very grateful to Hesed, not only because of the amount of material help, but also because of the care we receive. When you come here, you feel cared for, you feel that you are paid attention to, and that for us is invaluable... for us the moral support we receive exceeds the material... We feel needed when we are here, and that is highly-prized.”

Again, the importance of community to this demographic is reinforced. There is no doubt that the material support Hesed provides to its community - particularly in terms of free

medical care and prescriptions - is indispensable to recipients. Nevertheless, respondents stressed the importance of community and the moral support experienced therein. Sometimes, as Ekaterina Ivanovna's comments illustrate, this was emphasised above and beyond the extensive material assistance offered at Hesed. Such an analysis supports the assertion that the community or the collective creates an important environment for self-realisation and self-fulfillment, where the community is an important "space of emotional relationships through which individual identities are constructed through their bonds... of meaning and value" (Etzioni, in Rose, 1999:476).

If this is the case, the premise on which material aid is provided by other organisations in the region must be questioned. International Aid<sup>9</sup>, for example, is an international charity which focuses on health and welfare issues. Provisions to the elderly through the Cherkassy branch are entirely material, and include home visits by health visitors, the provision of food parcels, and help around the home. Social ties are not fostered, and community values are not considered in this approach. As such, dependency on International Aid's services rather than the possibility of mutual support is created, conflicting with the "intrinsically relational" aspects of welfare advocated by the ethics of care (Jordan, 2008:654). It is perhaps no coincidence that respondents who discussed International Aid spoke in overwhelmingly negative terms: they were perceived as limited in what they could offer; some believed it was a state organisation or a paid-for-service, and therefore inappropriate to their circumstances.

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<sup>9</sup> Information provided through interview with the Director of the Cherkassy branch. The name of the director and the organisation have been changed according to the wishes of the director to remain anonymous.

## 5. Conclusion

Throughout this chapter, I have sought to demonstrate that NGOs engaging with older people in Ukraine's post-socialist context work effectively when they replicate kinship or collective networks. Using analytical tools based in Bourdieu's theory alongside the ethics of care literature, the importance of the communal/collective setting has been established. The work of the Women's Centre and Hesed Dorot in Cherkassy provide excellent models for the reconstruction and preservation of social capital networks amongst pensioners. These models are particularly important where social capital as it exists amongst informal networks can be exclusive and can marginalise the most vulnerable, and where misconceptions regarding the role of NGOs might act as a barrier to inclusion.

These models acknowledge, in accordance with current understandings of welfare (see Sen, 1999; Fahey & Smyth, 2004; Abbott & Sapsford, 2006; Greve, 2008), that "relationships are a core component of well-being" (Jordan, 2008:653). In the same way, poverty can be understood to be relational: it is a concept that cannot be "categorised simply on the basis of income... but it is constructed within complex webs of relationships" (Shubin, 2007:594), just as social capital can exclude and embed individuals in poor communities (Walker, 2010:651-664). Conversely, relationships can provide a basis for alleviating the symptoms of poverty, reducing isolation, and for enhancing welfare, as the work of the Women's Centre and Hesed Dorot shows. Grasping the value of 'rebuilding the collective' is of central importance in developing strategies that are relevant to the lives of pensioners in post-Soviet Ukraine; it is equally important to realise the potential of instrumentalising social capital in communities where human and financial capital cannot be drawn upon so easily (Begum, 2003:4). Although quantifying the impact on welfare in real terms is difficult, the testimonies of interviewees here demonstrate that the thoughtful and considered models established by the Women's Centre and Hesed Dorot - whether or not that includes material assistance - have contributed in no small way to their welfare and care. Strikingly, though,

the context of the Women's Centre and Hesed Dorot incorporate all of the main components outlined in gerontological studies (highlighted in Chapter 1) deemed important in positive health and welfare outcomes amongst the elderly: they enhance network size, enable relationships to be maintained, ensure frequent contact, and encourage care-giving amongst network members (Litwin, 2009:600). The urgency and importance of the role of NGOs in enhancing welfare and well-being is underlined further in the next chapter, which explores the inadequacy of the state's role in caring for the elderly.

## CHAPTER 3 - THE STATE AND THE ELDERLY

We now move to examine the relationship between the state and pensioners in Ukraine and the caring role of the state, drawing in part from ethnographic material collected in the Cherkassy region. In exploring this, I develop the argument that the state in Ukraine has forfeited its responsibility to provide welfare for pensioners, and passes this caring role on to families, communities and third sector organisations. Here, the definition outlined in the introduction pertaining to the nature of post-socialism in Ukraine comes to the fore - that is, the confusion created by the juxtaposition of remnants of the old socialist system with new influences, and a sense of loss. This contradictory picture shapes the relationship between the state and pensioners in this context, and ultimately results in discrimination against large numbers of pensioners on the basis of Soviet ideals and models of citizenship. These notions will be developed throughout the chapter by exploring three simultaneous processes: the way contradiction and discrimination are embodied in state provisions for the elderly; the 'disconnect' between the state and the people; and the contradictory values that are expressed amongst pensioners themselves.

### **1. Contextualising the Disconnect**

#### *1.1 The State and Social Capital*

First, however, we must link this discussion to the preceding chapters, and the over-arching themes of social capital and post-socialism. I argue that a 'disconnect' - through a lack of communication, understanding, or concern towards the elderly citizen - is a feature of 'post-socialism' as defined here. This is rooted in the relationship between the state and the

citizen in the Soviet period. Under socialism, according to Creed (2002:66), it was the “system itself that created social capital by forcing citizens together” in the “sites” of socialism (Stenning, 2005b:240) that have already been discussed. Bourdieu posits that social capital is captured in “more or less institutionalised relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition” (1986:21). In the Soviet period, then, these sites of socialism acted as the institutional form for social capital development. It was the state which placed ideological importance upon these collectives, sanctioned approved forms of collective activity (and suppressed other ‘unsanctioned’ forms of collectiveness) (Ashwin, 1998:193-5), and created fora for collective action, such as the Komsomol, and youth and professional organisations. Of course, this organisation was driven by a desire to monitor and control daily life, and viewed as an opportunity for Soviet authorities to “instill socialist values in the population” (Caldwell, 2004:10). Nevertheless, connectivity was a side-effect of this collectivity; communities sanctioned by the authorities became key sites of meaningful network development (Lonkila, 2010).

A remnant of the social capital formed through the communal connections developed in these environments has remained in the form of lasting links, and the ‘transformed’ collectives explored in Chapter 1. But this capital has been significantly “undermined” (Creed, 2002:66) through economic changes and changes to the structure of the state - for instance through the loss of workplace, work, forms of organising, the withdrawal of the state and so on: that is, the introduction of new economic and political models and the subsequent loss of sites of collectivism. Creed uses this idea to explore democratisation in post-socialism, postulating that “the post-socialist diminution of the prior bases of social relations and engagement” has impoverished civil society (ibid). Expanding this idea, in the context of pensioners, I argue that the retreat of the state and the socialist diminution of the bases of social functioning and engagement, at a social level and in interacting with the state, has contributed towards a disconnect between the state and pensioners. Collapse “complicated the relationship between state and citizen in terms

of the nature of the welfare state and its responsibilities” to citizens (Caldwell, 2004:10). It has robbed those whose livelihoods, views and behaviours were shaped by socialism of a mode of engagement with others and with the state. This idea was expressed by interviewees as being “forgotten” by the state, indicating that a past relationship has been eroded. In this way, pensioners in Ukraine could be said to be suffering from a metaphorical internal displacement from their past.

This approach should not be mistaken as an idealisation of the Soviet period, or a denial of the horrors many suffered. Instead, it simply seeks to acknowledge the impact of the disintegration of certainty, and the ideology, values and *modus operandi* of a lifetime (Round, 2005:425) as a result of the withdrawal and retreat of the state, and the renouncement of its role as welfare-provider.

### *1.2 Ukraine Since Independence*

What has the Ukrainian state’s retreat looked like? Torbakov (2000:461), in accordance with common consensus on Ukraine’s transition (see Gorobets, 2008; Riabchuk, 2008; Romaniuk, 2009; Kuzio, 2000, 2011, for example), has described the move away from communism and towards liberal democracy since 1991 as a “sad failure”. The collapse of the Soviet Union, preempted by the Ukrainian Communist elites, led not to the birth of a new era but a continuation of the old under the banner of independence. Leonid Kravchuk and Leonid Kuchma, the first two presidents of independent Ukraine, had both been card-carrying communists: the former had been a member of the Ukrainian Politburo and Chairman of the *Verkhovna Rada* (Parliament) - in effect, the most powerful politician in the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic. Acting as Kravchuk’s Prime Minister and then becoming President in 1994, Kuchma’s long reign, characterised by extreme corruption, ended only in 2005.

As elsewhere in the former Soviet Union, the 1990s were marked by economic crisis, declining gross domestic income (GDI), hyperinflation and cuts in state welfare spending; social policy was of negligible priority, with existing social services and social spending significantly reduced (Whitefield, 2002:72). The Soviet welfare system remained essentially unreformed: supposed reforms<sup>10</sup> were either insufficiently funded, ill-advised, or simply empty gestures (Palley & Romanenkova, 2004; Romaniuk, 2009:4-5). The Orange Revolution of winter 2004-2005 responded to mass electoral fraud committed by Kuchma and his chosen successor Viktor Yanukovych, and saw the lauded arrival of Viktor Yushchenko into office.

But Yushchenko was no revolutionary (Kuzio, 2011:91). Whilst his electoral campaign promised to bring much-needed reform to the welfare system, his presidency was marked by the collapse of the Orange coalition, elite power struggles, and a failure to find investment or revenue to stabilise the economy and fund welfare reform (Romaniuk, 2009:8-12). The aforementioned Viktor Yanukovych's victory in the 2010 presidential election sounded the death knell for Orange ideals. The re-instatement of a power vertical, the filling of legal positions with political allies, and the reversion of the constitution of Ukraine from the reformed 2005 version to that of 1996<sup>11</sup> (Kuzio, 2011), added to deeply-rooted corruption, betray the process of state-capture materialising under Yanukovych, and the unlikelihood of the occurrence of people-oriented reform.

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<sup>10</sup> For example, Kuchma's 1997 'Health for Elderly People' programme, emphasised development of community-based services in 1999; in 2000 a new poverty line was established and some Soviet privileges were curtailed.

<sup>11</sup> This move allows parliamentary coalitions to be formed by individuals rather than only by factions, or factions and individuals, in contradiction to Ukraine's proportional system which elects only parties and blocs, thus promoting corruption through the buying of individuals in coalition-forming (Kuzio, 2011:93-94).

## 2. The State Vis-À-Vis the Elderly

Having established some of the basics of the situation in Ukraine, we now turn to the main focus of this chapter - to examine how the environment of post-socialism has produced a contradictory state of affairs for the elderly, which is embodied in the state's provision of welfare. These provisions, however, are contextualised by the state's own perception of its responsibility to the elderly. Article 51 of the Ukrainian Constitution states that adult children over the age of 18 are "obliged to care for their parents who are unable to work, incapacitated, or disabled" (Constitution of Ukraine, 1996). This obligation is reinforced in the legal documentation of the 'Family Code'. Articles 202-206 (Family Code of Ukraine, 2007) state that adult children must take on the role of primary carer, and provide material or financial support, should the need arise. Relatives may even be taken to court to ensure that this obligation is met. Adult children may only be freed from this responsibility if it can be proven that parents reneged on their parental responsibility of care to their children, or if adult children provide certification from medical professionals to prove that they are physically incapable of fulfilling this responsibility.

This astonishing constitutionally-enshrined responsibility vividly portrays the manner in which the state has abandoned its responsibility to its people. The state assumes the existence of functioning familial networks of care, such as the Shevchenko's in Chapter 1; it does not consider that these networks may be broken down, eroded, or unable or unwilling to provide support. This is a theme that will be returned to below; for now however, it is important to note that the relinquishment of responsibility of welfare provision frames the state's position to the elderly and the low priority status they are given in policy.

## *2.1 Pensions and Benefits*

The pension system in Ukraine is beset by crisis. This crisis in part derives from demographic problems related to the ageing of the population of Ukraine: in 1959, 11% of the Ukrainian population was over 60; by 2001 this had increased to 21%, and the forecast for 2050 is that 32% of the population will be over 60 (Ministry of Labour and Social Policy of Ukraine, 2008:24). These changes in ageing create new challenges for society that thus far remain unaddressed. Instead, antiquated systems continue to function based on outmoded perceptions of the population. Thus, based on Soviet retirement ages of 55 for women and 60 for men, in 2008, almost 13 million people in Ukraine were in receipt of a pension (ibid: 16) - almost 30% of the country's population. As a result, in 2010, the Ukrainian government spent 18% of its GDP on pensions - the highest share of pension spending in GDP in the world. In 2010, the pension fund "ran a broad deficit of almost 7% of GDP" (World Bank, 2011a). This is an unsustainable situation given the wider financial climate: current public debt in Ukraine is at around 40% of GDP (World Bank, 2011b:3).

High spending on pensions does not, however, convert to well looked-after pensioners. The pension system in Ukraine is infamously corrupt - not just through underreporting of wages which reduces revenues into the system (World Bank, 2011a), but through the siphoning off of funds. Stories abound in the media of obscene pensions allocated to officials: for example, according to data from opposition parties in Ukraine, the former head of the National Bank receives a pension of 130,000 UAH (£10,325 GBP) per month (TSN, 2012b).

The very structure of the pension system in Ukraine has, with the exception of last year's reforms<sup>12</sup>, retained the essential features of the Soviet pension system. As well as low retirement ages, these included relaxed eligibility criteria for early retirement, and the ability to continue working whilst being in receipt of a state pension (Ribaud & Chu, 1997:4).

Principally, five pension types exist - the old age pension, the survivor pension (payable to spouses), the years of service pension, the social pension (for those not in receipt of any other pension type), and the disability pension - which is divided into three sub-types (Ministry of Labour and Social Policy of Ukraine, 2008:16). The categorisation of disability pensions are in themselves a Soviet relic, introduced under Stalin in 1932, with disabilities classed "primarily on a calculation of one's [prior] degree of ability to work" (Madison, 1989, in Phillips, 2009). Furthermore, in-kind benefits of the Soviet system have not been cashed out. Benefits such as free transportation and subsidies on utility bills are widespread, and were received by many interviewees in this study.

The most comprehensive pension and benefits package is allocated to disabled war veterans of the 'first group' category - those whose injuries left them unable to serve or work. They live rent-free, their utility bills are paid by the state, they travel for free locally and nationally, and sometimes even internationally, between the countries of the former Soviet Union. They receive the highest value pension and a cash benefit on Victory Day of around 1000 UAH (£80 GBP)<sup>13</sup>. As of 2008, the number of military retirees in the Cherkassy oblast was almost 16,000 and their average pension was calculated as 1224.57 UAH. In 2008, the total number of disabled war veterans in Ukraine equated to 4.75% of all pensioners

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<sup>12</sup> The main changes to the pension system introduced by the law "On the Measures on Legislative Enactment of Pension System Reform" in September 2011 are that: the pension age of women will increase gradually over a four year period, from 55 to 60 years of age; men working in the service of the state will have an increased pension age of 62 (from 60); the minimum work experience to be eligible for the full pension will be increased to 30 and 35 years for women and men respectively (increased from 20 and 25 years under the previous system); the minimum work experience to be eligible for receipt of the social old age pension will increase from 5 to 15 years (Pension Fund of Ukraine, 2011; Novaya Pensiya, 2011; Riboud & Chu, 1997:3).

<sup>13</sup> Data from interview with a member of staff at a veterans' group.

registered that year (Ministry of Labour and Social Policy of Ukraine, 2008:12). These are certainly the best protected pensioners in the country, and the extent of these provisions maintains the Soviet respect for veterans and war heroes (Phillips, 2010:56).

## *2.2 Exclusive Social Citizenship: Privilege and Discrimination*

Whilst this Soviet style-reverence for war veterans is maintained, another set of benefits are made available to other privileged groups, such as Chernobyl survivors, former militia officers and firemen, and other individuals who served in 'high-status' Soviet occupations (World Bank, 2000:36). As such, the benefits system is highly complex (Whitefield, 2002:76). Furthermore, the 'Consumption of Benefits' survey conducted by Socis/Gallop across households in Ukraine in 1998 revealed that "a great many benefits were taken up by a very small proportion of households" with "the majority of the benefits available - 14 - [being] taken up by fewer than 1% [of households], and only five benefits or subsidies were taken up by more than 5% of households" (ibid). This concentration of benefits within a very small percentage of the population coincides with the account above of the privileging of certain groups according to the imperatives of Soviet ideology - based on defence of the motherland, work, and motherhood. As Caldwell (2004:130-131) asserts, the Soviet social engineering project assigned citizens with "a set of identities according to their occupational and military experiences, family, relationships, biology, and physiology. Each characteristic was then ranked within the hierarchy of privileges and benefits through which resources were allocated". The state possessed its citizens "through categories" (Humphrey, in ibid:131). But, as illustrated above, these "techniques of bureaucratic Othering" (ibid:133), now obsolete, still inform "the content of citizenship and social rights" (Anttonen, 1997:24).

This amounts to a discrimination against certain groups based on historical prejudice. One elderly citizen - the war hero - is ascribed with esteem, respect and privilege; these pensioners are well-looked after by the state. But 'ordinary' elderly citizens are marginalised and excluded from privilege. Thus a form of 'exclusive social citizenship' is created (cf Anttonen, 1997; Gordon & Kauppinen, 1997). We need only to compare the average pensioner with the war veteran to grasp this discrimination. Given disparities in life expectancy, and loss of male life through war and Soviet repressions (Davis, 2006:422), the average pensioner is a widow, with an average pension of around 800 UAH (£65 GBP). She is likely to receive one or two benefits with a very small monetary value, and free passage on her city's antiquated trolleybuses.

Here, too, another form of discrimination comes into play based on Soviet gender constructs. The average pension for women is 500 UAH less than the average men's pension. Despite the rhetoric of equality, gender discrimination was imbedded in the Soviet system, as women were generally employed in 'unproductive' or 'low priority' sectors (medicine, teaching, and so on), where pay, and therefore pensions, were much lower than in male-dominated industries (Davis, 2006:428). Juxtaposing the war veteran and the widow, we see a contradictory picture emerge concerning pensioners in Ukraine today.

### *2.3 Services for the Elderly*

This contradictory picture is also encapsulated within service provision for pensioners in Ukraine. Veterans' groups, run throughout the country, are one example of this. Organised by the state, these groups provide a distinctly Soviet system of support and advice for veterans. In Cherkassy, a central office provides support to small grassroots veterans' groups which are located in factories, organisations, and apartment buildings. Veterans meet together and can communicate their needs to the central office, who in turn provide advice,

referrals and consultation on matters regarding their welfare, pensions and so on - although there are little funds available to provide assistance<sup>14</sup>.

Another set of services, provided by 'territorial centres', differs greatly from the services for veterans. Territorial centres were introduced in 1999 with the aim of assisting the elderly in need of care - according to their legislation, those who are "alone, unprotected, and unable to work" (Cherkassy Territorial Centre, 2009). 530 territorial centres were set up in order to deliver this objective, which provide services for 500,000 people nationally (Palley & Romanenkova, 2004:76). The centres provide home care and day centres which offer leisure and exercise facilities, treatment by masseurs and psychologists, and other activities.

Theoretically speaking, this is a much-needed service. However, in an interview, the former director of the Cherkassy Territorial Centre explained that each potential beneficiary is assessed by the centre to ensure that they are without 'responsible relatives': that is, eligibility is based upon Article 51 of the Constitution as set out above, so that any elderly person with relatives who are legally obliged to provide care are ineligible to receive free services from the centre. People suffering from AIDS, oncological diseases, drug or alcohol addiction, and psychological disorders - that is, some of the most vulnerable and marginalised in society - are also ineligible to receive services (Cherkassy Territorial Centre, 2009). Moreover, whilst Territorial Centres provide free care in principle, in practice this happens very rarely and only if clients undertake an exhaustive application process. In this way, the very individuals the system is designed to support are priced out of the service.

The manner in which the territorial centres function, then, is highly problematic, and reveals troubling assumptions made by the state vis-à-vis the elderly. The eligibility criteria are perhaps one way of targeting the service towards the most vulnerable. However, the assumption is made that where 'responsible relatives' are present, they are able, and willing,

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<sup>14</sup> Data from interview with the Director of a veteran's association.

to provide care for their elderly relatives. They do not account for the possibility that family relations may have broken down; or families may themselves be in economic dire straits. Through making relatives ‘responsible’, the state cedes its responsibility to some of its most vulnerable and needy citizens.

Also problematic is the fact that, in practice, the elderly are charged to use the Centre’s facilities. The former director detailed that,

“the Ministry has developed a tariff system, a price-list [for our services]... It’s expensive, not everyone can afford to pay out of their own pocket - even if a person is very needy, they’re not always permitted to access our services. [Part of the problem is that] to receive a subsidy, the person must come and hand his documents over to the management, present his case, collect papers, fill out forms... And maybe a subsidy will be awarded, and maybe it won’t be... So now it’s very hard, people practically can’t access the services there... because they can’t afford to pay.”

To my knowledge, the Territorial Centre is the only welfare-oriented service provided by the state for the elderly in Cherkassy, with the exception of rudimentary social services. Yet through the imposition of charges, this too becomes out of reach for the people who could benefit most from the Centre’s services. In 2008, the Territorial Centre provided services to just 0.2% of the retirees registered in the *oblast*<sup>15</sup>.

Worryingly, pensioners with ‘responsible relatives’ can receive support through the Territorial Centre only if they are willing to give over 5% of their pension to the Centre (Cherkassy Territorial Centre, 2009). In addition, the Territorial Centre will provide daily home visits, medical care and home-help only to those who will hand over the deeds of their *home* to the Centre. These practices raise a number of grave concerns regarding the

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

ethical practice of care, and power dynamics between the state and vulnerable people without financial resources or local networks of care. These people may feel pressured into giving up their home or a significant sum of their paltry pensions as the only way to secure care.

The nature and structure of the veterans' groups and the Territorial Centre clearly follow very different guiding principles and priorities. The veterans' groups are deeply embedded in the community. Consultation is at the heart of its work, giving a voice to veterans' concerns across the city; it is a model rooted in Soviet practices which continues into 'post-socialism'. Meanwhile, the Territorial Centre clearly rejects such a model, and does not engage with the needs of its target group. Instead it proffers individualistic service provision, which can be acquired only by consumers, and thus increases the marginalisation of poor pensioners. Reflecting the definition of 'post-socialism' employed here, the territorial centres represent the introduction of new frameworks, and for pensioners, the absence of systems instilled with familiar, relevant values.

Concomitantly, both services contribute to inequity amongst pensioners based on Soviet priorities and models of citizenship, as highlighted in the previous section. Obviously, only veterans have access to the veterans' society. Only pensioners with access to economic capital - either through networks or through high pensions, viz., the Soviet heroes or old - are able to afford the services provided by the Territorial Centre. In this way, both models reinforce discrimination and marginalise 'ordinary' people based on historical notions of citizenship.

## 2.4 The SSSM

The state's relinquishment of responsibility towards pensioners, and the disconnect between the state and its people, is further evidenced through examination of the subsistence minimum that is set by the state as a poverty line, and a means to calculate pensions. The SSSM (state-set subsistence minimum) theoretically sets out the basic needs of citizens, and the allocation of goods necessary to meet those needs. Article 21 of the Law of the Verkhovna Rada 'On the State Budget of Ukraine, 2011' establishes the SSSM for 2011 for those unable to work at 750 UAH as of January 1st; by December 1st it had increased to 800 UAH (Verkhovna Rada, 2010). This calculation gives rise to the minimum pension allocation. Table 1 below details the updated SSSM for January 2012 for "those without the ability to work", including pensioners, based on prices in December 2011.

Service	Amount allocated (Ukrainian hryvnia)
Food products	463.08
Non-food products	172.24
Utility bills:	
Housing payments	32.13
Heating	46.77
Water	13.19
Sanitation	9.40
Electricity	12.16
Gas	57.10
Other services:	
Transport	-
Everyday services	31.00
Telecommunications	9.48
Cultural services	8.58
<b>Total</b>	<b>855.43 (≈ £65 GBP)</b>

Table 1: Monthly Ukrainian SSSM for the elderly (Ukrainian Federation of Trade Unions, 2012)

As Round and Kosterina (2005) demonstrate in their study based on Russia, the notion of the SSSM is deeply problematic. Setting the minimum pension at the SSSM conceals the poverty experienced at this level of income. In the Russian case, Round and Kosterina note

that the SSSM provides only for a rudimentary diet and some clothing, and does not take into account the deterioration of household goods and items (2005:411-412).

The Ukrainian case is similar. Calculated according to legislation, the state asserts that for basic needs to be met, the female pensioner requires the possession of: one winter coat, which should last ten years; one pair of winter boots, which should last six years; two blouses, which should last six years; and five undergarments, which should last three years (Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine, 2000). Calculations for domestic appliances are based upon assertions, for example, that a refrigerator will function for 15 years, and a desk lamp for 25 (ibid).

Pensioners are not allocated costs for transport, ignoring the reality for many pensioners that important network members live outside of Cherkassy (as explored in Chapter 1). The 172 UAH (approximately £13.00 GBP) assigned to the vague category of “non-food products” assumedly must cover medical costs and prescriptions, cleaning products and personal hygiene, general repairs and the like. This amount falls disturbingly short of older people’s needs. The SSSM, then, is absurdly unrealistic, and illustrates the low esteem in which pensioners are held by their own government. This is another demonstration of the prevalence of Soviet-style bureaucracy in post-socialism. In this case, the bureaucracy remains but the context has changed completely. Here, pensioners are not treated as consumers within a new system of markets and choice; they somehow, in the eyes of the government, continue to exist within a shortage economy time warp. And yet, paradoxically, when it comes to care, they are forced to act as consumers, as we have seen in the case of the territorial centres. Again, contradictions around citizenship are captured in policy relating to pensioners.

It is unfeasible that the Ukrainian government truly believes that pensioners can live well, secure welfare, and avoid poverty by living on the SSSM alone. Again, it seems that the state

assumes that the family will fulfil the welfare needs of elderly citizens. Unfortunately, as we have seen, these structures do not always exist, there are few NGOs and community groups that have taken on this role, and those that have may be limited financially. In this way, the state contributes to the vulnerability of pensioners through ceding its responsibility of care to kinship/informal networks, which, where they are absent, creates a two-fold vulnerability for pensioners: through lack of state support, and lack of familial or network-based support.

So far, we have seen that poor, female, pensioners with low social capital stock are exposed to real vulnerability, poverty and exclusion, both socially (as we have noted in the previous chapters) as well as in policy terms. Through the preceding analysis, it seems reasonable to surmise that the government does little to address this situation. Although the government would argue that this is due to a lack of funds, this is simply symptomatic of the ‘disconnect’ between the state and its people, and of the state’s lack of concern towards its elderly citizens.

### **3. Perceptions**

#### *3.1 Disconnect Through Perceptions*

The ‘disconnect’ between the state and pensioners is not just a notion perceived through examining policy relevant to this group, but it is also acknowledged by the pensioners in this study. One refrain repeated almost verbatim by seven interviewees was that the government is “waiting for us to die”; another, expressed by eleven respondents, was that “the government doesn’t care about us at all”. The overwhelming response was that the government viewed pensioners and elderly care in an entirely negative light. Other respondents expressed sentiments that pensioners are looked down upon (Marina Danilovna), that the government is against pensioners (Ekaterina Ivanovna), and that how

pensioners survive is not important to the state (Tamara Igorevna). Interestingly, two interviewees at Hesed, from whom they received substantial medical support and other care, and who received higher than average pensions, proved to be exceptions: Olga Vladimirovna, aged 86, said that she receives a decent pension (this is on account of her status as a military spouse), that she has no material needs, and that she has no reason to complain about the government. Oleg Semeynovich, aged 82, also had no complaints about his pension, and said that the services they provided him with were adequate. But these sentiments were very much the exception to the narrative of being forgotten, overlooked, and even scorned by the state, which epitomised responses. There is a sense that the discrimination outlined above is truly felt and experienced by these people.

The director of the Women's Centre, reflected on this too, stating that,

“the government is still not concerned enough about the quality of life of older people in all respects, not only with respect to material support. It is not surprising that many older people often experience a feeling of resentment - ‘all my life I worked, I was needed, and now...’ - they see themselves as a burden for their families and communities, and isolate themselves from life and from activity”.

Not only can we surmise that the state is not viewed as an agent of welfare by the vast majority of pensioners in this study, but that the perception of how the government and society in general views the elderly is internalised and in itself impacts negatively upon their outlook. This is particularly worrying if this internalisation leads to a withdrawal from communal, neighbourhood or family life, given the important context of well-being and care this can provide, as we have seen in earlier chapters.

### 3.2 Entitlement and Expectation

This sense of discrimination is perhaps all the more galling given the notions of entitlement and expectation expressed by some interviewees. The metaphor of the elderly's displacement from their past, noted above, may be useful in exploring the contradictory values held amongst pensioners themselves, personifying the confusing juxtaposition of values that have been imposed upon them in post-socialism. Many interviewees seemed to have absorbed the assumed perceptions of the state, adopting what I term a 'hopeless narrative of ageing'. Varying and contradictory views were expressed regarding the role of the state versus the role of the family or 'collective', and the idea of entitlement versus their own expectations.

A sense of entitlement was undeniably evident in some interviews. Ekaterina Ivanovna, who lost all her savings through an investment fund scam in the early 1990s, particularly exhibits this sense of entitlement, perhaps because her material loss has been so great. She says,

“I ask that the state would give me the opportunity to *survive*, because I earned that... We worked for the state, we paid our taxes, our parents and us, we built, we lifted up this country, so I think that the government *must* support us - who else will do it?”

Six interviewees talked about a sense of injustice regarding the corrupted nature of the pension system, and unfulfilled promises made by president after president to pensioners. “No-one used to think about pensions, they were guaranteed” (Taisiya Aleksandrovna); “we've earned the right to be provided for and to live a normal life” (Maria Leonidovna) and “to be looked after with dignity” (Tamara Igorevna). Dürschmidt et al (2010:24) note similar expressions of entitlement in the former German Democratic Republic. Through

such expressions, individuals are “articulating their right to a different life [through which] they affiliate to experiences of the former GDR, when the state provided jobs, education and enough money for basic consumption”. This seems an apt articulation of the process taking place in this instance, where pensioners articulate their right to a different life.

Again, this relates to the idea of what it is to be a citizen, and the rights associated with citizenship. As workers in the Soviet Union, today’s pensioners were accustomed to a certain social contract with the state: “citizens provided the necessary labour to support the state, [and] the state would provide the necessary resources to sustain and reward people’s efforts” (Caldwell, 2004:9). With the dissolution of the Soviet Union, this contract was terminated, but the *expectations* it created have remained. At a more basic level, these pensioners are right to feel indignation towards the state. Their pensions are not a form of welfare, they are the result of a life of work, in service of the state. The state does not provide that which pensioners are owed, let alone that which might enhance their welfare. Some interviewees felt this keenly, with the idea that “we are not receiving that to which we are entitled” being expressed by four women. Larisa Tarasovna, a former nurse, laughs when she recounts that the head doctor at her former workplace only received 2 UAH more than her when they both retired. She says, “it doesn’t matter here what you did: everyone’s pensions are low”. Vera Borisovna, who worked for 44 years, also complains that her pension is not much more than that of those who worked for 20 years. All interviewees (with the exception of the two noted above) stated that their pensions are too low to meet their needs, and that the prices rise much quicker than their pensions. So throughout, it was clear that interviewees felt at the most basic level that they were owed by the state the entitlements created through a life of work.

In order to understand something of respondents expectations regarding welfare, interviewees were asked from whom it was best to receive help or support - whether from the state, family, friends, NGOs, or other groups or organisations. This question produced a

wide variety of answers: including family and close relatives (the *svoj* relations explored earlier); the necessity to look after oneself; and the sentiment repeated many times that it would be best to receive support from the state - *but*: “we support each other instead” (Oksana Oleksandrovna), “they won’t give any support” (Svetlana Ivanovna): this support should not be anticipated. Only two interviewees responded that NGOs are a preferred source of welfare support. Many felt that the state should or could play a supportive role in welfare provision in their estimation, yet a distinct number of respondents emphasised the necessity to look after oneself or to find support in the family, with friends, or amongst the community, given the inadequacy of state support.

The range of answers provided here and the dissonance between expectations (for instance, of state support) and reality (the necessity to look elsewhere for support) reflected the confusion I use to define post-socialism experienced by pensioners in Ukraine. In this context, marked by a loss of meaningful values and the introduction of new influences, there is evidence of “the juxtaposition and internalisation of competing value systems, a negotiation by different actors... used in people’s interpretations of present conditions” (Hörschelmann & Stenning, 2008:346). Kay (2011) describes this as a confused lens of dominant “moral discourses”, in which competing ideas of “Soviet ideologies of entitlement through work and positive contribution to the collective, long standing [...] realities of collective self-sufficiency, and newer, ‘neoliberal’, calls for a reduction in state ‘paternalism’ and increased personal responsibility” (ibid:50) are entangled.

### *3.3 Hope and Hopelessness*

The dissonance between expectations and reality was made evident again when respondents talked about their futures and their expectations of old age. These sentiments were captured in response to questions on how the state might ideally support or provide welfare, or how

the situation of pensioners in Ukraine might be improved. Some answers were provided to this question, with interviewees believing their situations would be improved through an increase in pension (13), free or improved medical care (6), through the ability to have a holiday, or to be relieved through respite care (3).

However, almost two-thirds of the respondents (18) could not provide an answer to one of these questions - it was beyond them to imagine the possibility that their situations might be improved at all. Responses included: "I don't know how to answer that question... my situation can't be improved at all" (Nina Antonovna); "life won't get any better, I'm old now" (Marina Danilovna); "I haven't even thought how the state might support me ideally" (Raisa Bogdanovna); and "we're not waiting for any help, especially from the government. It would be better to go straight down to the cemetery and put on your laying-out clothes" (Igor Vasilyevich). This was accompanied by a 'hopeless narrative of ageing' which constituted comments such as "I just hope to God that things don't get worse" (Nataliya Pavlovna), "to be old is to be sorrowful" (Yaroslava Romanovna), and "old age is a scary and fearful thing" (Svetlana Olegovna).

Ideas from the literature around the deconstruction of the post-socialist working class (for example, Kideckel, 2002; Stenning, 2005a, 2005b; Ashwin, 1998) might well be applied to the elderly in this case: the value ascribed to old age in the Soviet period, or at least the value that was perceived through the services and benefits offered to the elderly in the Soviet period, are seen to have diminished over the last two decades; respect and esteem have been replaced by indifference or at worst animosity, and these (perceived) messages seem to be absorbed and reflected by these pensioners themselves. Not only, then, does the state renege on responsibilities to provide for the material welfare of the elderly, but it also seems to create a robust barrier to "expanded subjectivity" (Conradson, 2003:516), discussed in the previous chapter, in which a sense of positivity and hope for the future are developed.

In light of this, developing a ‘narrative of hope’ in terms elaborated in previous chapters seems difficult. But some positive reflections did emanate from interviews. Olga Vladimirovna, at Hased, reflected:

“Yes, I feel happy... I’m happy, I lived a very beautiful life, a family life... I don’t need for anything; no-one will return my husband to me, and I don’t need anything else... I rejoice that I have such... a wonderful family... I don’t need anything to be improved.”

Elizaveta Gregorovna said that, “I’m happy with my family, that I’m 70 and I have work... I wish that others would have lived such a life as I have”. Others expressed that their faith and families brought them happiness, whilst Alisa Sergeevna stated that, “I don’t give up, I don’t surrender. I’m an optimist”. Although elsewhere, hope might have been expressed in a negative or limited sense, nevertheless the notion of hope seemed imperative to many interviewees<sup>16</sup>, a linguistic refrain that seemed indigenous (questions were not framed in terms of this language). Respondents said that, “you can hope only in yourself, those close to you, your relatives and friends” (Taisiya Aleksandrovna); “I only hope in my family for support - I’ve never hoped in anyone else” (Raisa Bogdanovna); and “we have this saying, ‘hope dies last’ - so we live only through hoping, that somehow things might get better” (Evgeniya Tamirovna). It seems important, then, in developing welfare through expanded subjectivity, to expand a narrative of hope through academia and through policy, that ascribes esteem to the elderly and the needy.

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<sup>16</sup> More than 50% of interviewees used this language of hope or lack of hope.

#### **4. Conclusion**

Through exploring discrimination, contradiction, expectation, and hope, in the context of the very limited welfare state in Ukraine, this chapter serves to underline the necessity of intervention at the grassroots through NGOs, as well as efforts to shore up informal networks of care, in order to attempt to secure welfare and well-being for pensioners and the elderly. Although the state's veterans' societies offer the foundations of a model that can do just that, it seems unlikely that the state is ready to innovate, or to remove barriers of discrimination. Instead, following the Women's Centre and Hesed Dorot's models seems to provide the most appropriate format for the re-building of social capital amongst the vulnerable in Ukraine. Nevertheless, it is important that the government and international agencies with interests in welfare hear the voice of the vulnerable and understand their needs and daily lives; developing research in this vein is perhaps a first step towards bridging the disconnect between the state and pensioners that contributes in subtle ways to exacerbated marginalisation.

## **CONCLUSION: WIDER IMPLICATIONS**

Throughout the course of this thesis, I have sought to highlight the cause of pensioners in Cherkassy, Ukraine, and in doing so, to augment understanding of their interactions with the state, NGOs, and their own informal networks, and how these impact upon welfare in light of the post-socialist context. This discussion has drawn attention to the inadequacies of state welfare based on discriminatory historical notions of citizenship; vulnerability to poverty amongst pensioners and the role of social capital embedded in collective-type networks in mediating this; and the potential for NGOs to rebuild or re-imagine the collective as a tool to enhance welfare and protect against vulnerability and loneliness.

Further significant questions are raised, however, through this discussion. In this final section, I seek to address two of these questions, relating to civil society, and NGO practice and policy in post-socialist countries, before recommendations on expanding and extending this research are outlined.

### **1. Implications for Understanding Civil Society in Post-Socialism**

The social capital and civil society debates are closely inter-related. Thus, thinking about notions of civil society is a logical extension to the idea of social capital that has been drawn on in this thesis.

Mirroring the social capital debate, common perceptions amongst influential commentators on civil society have been quick to conclude that civil society is practically non-existent in the post-socialist world (see Howard, 2003, Stepanenko, 2006, and Stewart,

2009 on civil society; and Putnam, 1993b on social capital). This prognosis is based on various assumptions. One common assumption is based on Putnam's work, which stipulates that as social capital is negligible in these regions, they are therefore "un-civic", with populations demonstrating levels of participation and civil society so low that they are "alarming" (Putnam, 1993b:2,6; Raiser et al, 2001; Colton, 1995; Nichols, 1996). A second common assumption often gives rise to the first: it invokes the 'totalitarian nightmare' of socialism in which communist parties utilised terror, repression and hierarchy, to destroy "the boundaries between state and society and [eliminate] any autonomous social institutions and processes" (Stark & Nee, in Junghans, 2001:395). Rose's (1995:35) well-known "hour-glass" analogy is derived from this approach. His hour-glass society comprises strong informal grassroots networks of friends and relatives at its base. At the top, elite networks preside over the state. However, there are very few links between the top and bottom of the hourglass: this "narrow mid-point insulates individuals from the influence of the [undemocratic and oppressive] state". As such, civil society development was choked under socialism, and has not emerged in post-socialism: society has retracted into itself at the bottom, and at the top.

Both of these conceptions of post-socialist society conclude along polarised lines that where socialism was marked by the oppression of civil society, the *flourishing* of civil society must therefore be present in democracy. Indeed, civil society became seen as a "crucial ideological signifier of democracy" (Hemment, 2004:219), and as a result of this teleological thinking, civil society development has been heralded as the magic bullet solution to democratisation. In transition, fostering civil society became a "project" (ibid:221) contributing to the development of markets and political institutions. Relatedly, civil society promotion and presence became a factor in "means-testing for entitlements in the New World Order" (Junghans, 2001:397), acting as eligibility criteria for attracting foreign aid. In the aftermath of communism's demise in Europe, these beliefs were fortified by the perception that civil society organisations (such as 'Solidarity' in Poland) had played a key

role in bringing socialism to an end (Glenn, 2001:24). As such, the proliferation of civil society would contribute to the neutralisation of the “negative cultural traits” left by the “debilitating” legacy of socialism (Stepanenko, 2006:577; Junghans, 2001:390), such as a deep mistrust of collective organisation, apathy and nepotistic informal networks (Howard, 2003:16; Hemment, 2004:228). Given this legacy, it has been necessary to construct civil society “from scratch” (Mandel, 2002:282), rejecting everything associated with socialism, and building fledgling societies and polities with newly-instilled democratic values.

This civil society paradigm has been consistently refuted by anthropologists and some political scientists. Charges brought against it include that the normative basis of this conceptualisation results in the “exportation of civil society as a species of Occidentalism” (Junghans, 2001:391; Stepanenko, 2006:582); its lack of consideration for local cultural conditions and permutations (Hann, 1996); and its “teleological and ethnocentric baggage” (Creed, 2011:108).

Despite this sustained opposition, Creed (2011) notes that these efforts have repudiated very little. He notes that the “persistence and attachment to the concept... demands continued interrogation”; however, the impact of the concept, “where the extent of civil society becomes a measure of successful democratisation, aid/credit worthiness, and even readiness for membership in international institutions such as the EU” means that “it is imperative to show that civil society is more common in Eastern Europe than observers have often allowed” (ibid:108).

It is at this juncture that the discussion I have advanced becomes relevant to the civil society debate, and has implications outside of the small group of pensioners I met in summer 2011. Just as Creed suggests that traditional ritual practices of *‘kukeri’* and mumming comprise a culturally specific element of civil society in Bulgaria, I suggest that the grassroots ‘networks of care’ recounted in Chapter 1 could be considered a specifically

Ukrainian form of civil society, at least amongst the older generation. The interactions at the micro-level that I have recounted, particularly those in which transformed social capital networks respond to the welfare needs of vulnerable pensioners, may amount to building blocks of Ukrainian civil society.

Whether or not such a line of argument is accepted depends, in part, on how civil society is defined, but even this basic premise reveals a fundamental issue in the civil society debate. This is because civil society is another ambiguous term (Junghans, 2001:387), much like social capital, that has taken on multifarious meanings, applied in diverse ways, to justify myriad approaches. Foley and Edwards (1996) demonstrate this by articulating two basic definitions which are found in the debate. The first, based on de Tocqueville's work, and later taken on by Putnam, "puts special emphasis on the ability of associational life in general and the habits of association in particular to foster patterns of civility in the actions of citizens in a democratic polity" (ibid:39). The second, developed by the Polish resistance movement in the 1980s and then developed by the 're-democratisers' "lays special emphasis on civil society as a sphere of action that is independent of the state and that is capable - precisely for this reason - of energizing resistance to a tyrannical regime" (ibid). These broad schools are intrinsically contradictory in positioning civil society either as compatible with or in opposition to the governing regime (ibid:40).

So, the definition and political implications of civil society are contested. In its basic form, however, and freed of theoretical connotation, the term 'civil society' is often accepted to mean "the collection of voluntary organisations between the household and the state" (Creed, 2011:110). In terms of this definition, it is feasible to suggest that the networks of care I have characterised are *informal* organisations or institutions, created voluntarily at the grassroots, that exist beyond the household - in that nebulous space between the public and private spheres.

According to Creed (2011:113), however, the international “civilising project” of civil society is exposed in the attitude generally adopted towards informal arrangements such as these. Ironically, where informality was celebrated by the west during socialism as a form of resistance and creativity on the part of society, in post-socialism, informality is “often redefined as ‘corruption’” and ‘premodern’; they are uniformly described in terms of ‘*blat*’, a subversion of the system through relationships (Ledeneva, 1998). Now, a sanctioned version civil society should be pursued instead as the “enlightened alternative”; after all, informality does not comply with the standard western model of civil society. In this way, Creed suggests that civil society is a “form of silencing”, even where it is intended to empower, and ignores “promising or potential cultural venues for collective representation” (ibid:129, 30; see also Hemment, 2004:215).

Whilst the concept of civil society is problematic if applied uncritically, as has been noted, it is also powerful and persistent; it has been taken firmly to the hearts of international funders, organisations, and governments. Therefore, as Creed advises, it is necessary to find a way to redeem the concept, and relate it to the post-socialist context if its power is to be harnessed in a productive way. Hefner (1998:17) notes that the concept “must be given firmer sociological and cross-cultural moorings” if its potential is to be realised. Micro-level, socio-anthropological-type studies such as this one provide crucial empirical evidence to help negotiate this process.

Reconceptualising the concept also proves useful. To this end, Domrin (2003:203) proposes that Vaclav Havel’s definition of civil society as “a social space that fosters the feeling of solidarity between people and love for one’s community” is particularly appropriate to the Russian context, where the term ‘civil society’ is translated as ‘*grazhdanskoe obshchestvo*’ - literally, ‘civil *community*’. Carrying this over to our Ukrainian context, where the same terminology is in use, creates parallels in the organic networks documented here, and is consistent in respecting the value of community and the collective described in Chapter 1.

This definition seems fitting where the community provides an effective basis for the work of the NGOs examined in Chapter 2, and where the feeling of solidarity and the love of community are culturally relevant, and demonstrable vehicles for enhanced welfare and sense of well-being.

In this way, the ideas of community/collective and civil society can be used side-by-side - in fact, doing so has the potential to redeem both concepts from some of the negative associations attached to them. For in the same way as civil society is problematic as a concept, the idea of 'community/collective' in post-socialism has also been attacked by some quarters. The desire of older people in post-socialism to relate to the world through the lens of collective has often been dismissed as nostalgia, a retreat into the past, a way to "reinvent" socialism (Caldwell, 2004:203). As I have hoped to illustrate throughout this thesis, the value of the community/collective is not about retreat into the past, or denial of the present; instead it is a useful tool by which vulnerable pensioners can make sense of the present and project hope into the future. As such, the centrality of community might be understood rather as a "phenomenon made possible only through the [contemporary] ideals of participatory democracy and civic empowerment" (ibid). That is, the community is in fact a constituent integral to the latest theories of civil society. Theorising the collective in this way reinstates the value of community and marries it with current thinking and vernacular. Space is created for ideas of collective and the community expressed by respondents in this research to contribute to the associational or (caring) action of civil society. Overlooking networks of mutual care at the grassroots leads to an impoverished understanding of the functioning of society in Ukraine and other post-socialist countries. Conversely, taking them into account, studying and scrutinising them, and probing the assumptions of the civil society paradigm, promotes a richer understanding of a '*rodnye*', or 'native' conception of civil society in Ukraine. All of this requires the reexamination of the verdict that civil society is missing and presumed dead in this part of the world.

## 2. NGOs

This has implications for the policy and practice of NGOs in Ukraine, and their funders too. Very recently, new laws were passed in Ukraine regarding conditions for NGOs and the promotion of civil society. In an uncharacteristic moment of frankness, the Presidential Decree of March 2012 describes some of the problems faced by 'civil society' in Ukraine. These included the "tendency to opacity, secrecy and bureaucracy in the activities of executive bodies and local authorities preventing effective dialogue with society;... inadequate legislation which creates artificial barriers to the formation and activities of civil society; ... [and the] tax burden resulting in limited support for domestic charities" (Ukaz Presidenta Ukrainiy, 2012). Inevitably, however, the ostensible emphasis of the decree is to mobilise civil society for its role in democracy promotion, in order to meet "international standards in this area, including Council of Europe recommendations concerning the legal status of NGOs in Europe, and the best European practices" (ibid), cynically complying with Creed's analysis (2011:108).

Following the western blueprint, this latest documentation will only serve to further embed alien notions of civil society development and NGO functioning. There are real practical dangers to such an approach. Where NGOs are financed based on their contribution towards good governance in fledgling democracies, their legitimacy is weakened as independent, grassroots actors (Edwards & Hulme, 1996:962). A distorting effect may be produced where accountability moves away from the local community towards external agencies, with the emphasis on "short term, quantitative outputs" in an endless pursuit of funding (ibid). In Ukraine, this has resulted in the Ukrainian government's creation of "pseudo-NGOs": the idea of civil society is manipulated to privilege state-sponsored organisations, who become "grant-eaters" at the expense of community groups (Stepanenko, 2004). Edwards and Hulme (1996:965) describe similar organisations as

“opportunistic NGOs” with weak societal roots and no independent support base. In this way, the civil society project creates its own industry, a feature of the “transition industry” (Swain, 2006): agencies, actors, even its own language are generated, apeing western models and expectations, a process described by Mandel (2002) in Central Asia, and Sampson (1996, 2002) in Albania. The problem is that this industry exists entirely in parallel to, and in isolation from, the cultural context and needs of the societies they seek to ‘civilise’. Here, we see another influence, another intrusion, in ‘post-socialism’, adding to the bewildering miscellany of influences upon society and politics in Ukraine.

According to the director of the Women’s Centre, these assumptions have a very negative impact on their work: they understand that “working with elderly people is not a priority area for international funders, or for our [Ukrainian governmental] structures”. The support received from the Ukrainian Women’s Fund to work with elderly women was, she said, “a rarity”. Their work does not match the criteria of international funders, such as the Soros Foundation or the National Endowment (Swain, 2006:212), who fund organisations that “strengthen democratic processes”, build and maintain “the infrastructure and institutions necessary for an open society” and “promote civic education and activism” in Ukraine (Open Society Foundations, 2012a, 2012b; National Endowment for Democracy, 2012). As such, organisations like the Women’s Centre, who provide a compelling model for building a ‘Ukrainian civil society’, and provide for the needs of citizens as they themselves articulate them, find it incredibly difficult to find funding. Their work is undermined by the priorities of the state, who have, at least rhetorically, submitted to the western vision of civil society, and added momentum to the exclusive ‘civil society project’ in Ukraine.

Indeed, the NGOs featured in this discussion situation themselves as obscure in relation to the state, where they have experienced no real attempt to join up efforts, to share knowledge, or even to encourage their work. Dmitry Spivakovsky, the director of Hesed Dorot, states that,

“The fact is that the town and regional authorities are not very interested in our work, because we’re a Jewish organisation... I’ve spoken with each consecutive town mayor... I’ve repeatedly invited them to visit [and discuss our work] - we’re not asking for money or for help, we just want to show them what we do here... but no-one comes. We actually perform a large volume of the work that the state says it does... But we exist almost on different planets - we’re separate from them, and they’re separate from us”.

Meanwhile, the Women’s Centre has been able to discuss issues of elderly care with the local authorities. The director noted that,

“working with elderly people is not a priority area, as we understand, for international funders, or for our domestic structures... It is clear that at the moment, governmental means are very limited, and that for older people, without the help of their children, family, or relatives, there’s simply not enough... In the process of discussing these problems with the city council and the mayor, we found that they would be glad to give over care of elderly people to community and civil society organisations, but our experience shows that this is a long process, there are no mechanisms available for this, and there is no stability in these civil society organisations - the majority of them often wrap up after the conclusion of a project that was supported by international funds.”

A lack of collaborative working, or even dialogue between organisations within this environment of inadequate funding and services to the elderly indicates their low priority status, and ignores the potentialities of “the effectiveness of mutually reinforcing state-society ties” (Evans, 1996:1035). Developing dialogue between regional authorities and communities and NGOs is one strategy that could be employed to bridge the divide

between state and citizen explored in Chapter 3, through the creation of networks that span this divide and blur boundaries (Tendler, 1995, in *ibid*). For the meantime, however, there seems to be very little space or consideration for NGOs which do not match the Euro-American configuration advocated nationally and internationally, even as the state apparently acknowledges the benefit of these organisations.

It is important to note that in disregarding Ukrainian society as it actually exists, the government introduces another implicit conceptualisation of citizenship. In Chapter 3, I outlined how older citizens of Ukraine are marginalised based on discriminatory Soviet models of citizenship. The civil society paradigm presents the possibility of new marginalisation through redefining citizenship as a concept that excludes the elderly. The ceaseless drive to attain civic activism, media awareness, increase accountability, and so on envisages a citizen who is politically engaged, vocal, knowledgeable about local and national affairs, a critical thinker, 'enlightened'. It is this type of citizen, established within "the democratic model of citizenship through civil society" (Tereshchenko, 2010:605), that can build a democratic future for Ukraine free from corruption and the ills of the communist legacy. In practice, this equates to a focus on youth and political movements, media and research campaigns, universities and training centres: that is, a focus on young people inculcating new thinking and ideas. There does not seem to be a place for the old in this new formula for citizenship; instead the old are assigned to the scrapheap of history, to an unfortunate communist past which must be razed if regeneration and democratisation are to occur. Pensioners in this study reflected on this in their own way, as they spoke about the proliferation of activities for young people, whilst older people are "forgotten". Again, it is clear that the jumble of the old and the new, and the sense of displacement experienced by pensioners in Ukraine's brand of post-socialism constantly creates possibilities of marginalisation and exclusion from society. Thinking carefully about civil society and citizenship is necessary in order to avoid leaving the most vulnerable behind and implicitly accentuating their vulnerability.

In this context, this thesis acts as an endorsement of the work of small grassroots organisations who even with little funding are able to achieve a great deal in building and protecting social capital and enhancing welfare. I seek to highlight the work of the Women's Centre and Hesed Dorot as effective and relevant models for other NGOs, community groups, and religious organisations to replicate and develop. As Pichler and Wallace (2007:425) note, there is huge potential and impetus for such grass-roots level work: "where there is a lack of state support, social capital in the form of voluntary organisations might provide an alternative form of welfare"; they also play an important role in supporting "informal structures of sociability, especially for mothers, elders, carers, neighbours in need, and so on" (Begum, 2003:4). In the Ukrainian context, as emphasised in Chapter 3, there is a pressing need for local communities to take on this role, and to carve out "micro-spaces" of care, welfare and citizenship (Tereshchenko, 2010:598) that are appropriate to the needs, values, and norms of community members.

### **3. Recommendations for Further Research**

There are a number of ways in which this research could be developed in order to further explore the key ideas, hypotheses and implications discussed throughout this thesis. These ideas, grounded in inductive analysis, have touched upon a wide range of issues that require further attention. Indeed, in general there is a paucity of socio-anthropological study focusing on Ukraine and vulnerable populations.

The 'big questions' addressed by this research include topics such as: analysis of post-socialism; the nature of vulnerability in post-socialism; the interactions of vulnerable people with the state, NGOs and informal networks; and understandings of civil society and NGO practice and policy in the region. The replication of this study with other

potentially vulnerable groups in Ukraine, such as disabled people, the unemployed, single parent households, and vulnerable young people, would make considerable contributions to understanding. Likewise, research across different age groups would help to answer questions around the nature of post-socialism in Ukraine: for instance, whether middle-aged or younger adults also demonstrate commitment to 'socialist-type' values of community exhibited by the elderly, or whether there has been a move away from, or rejection, of this. Researching where the important sites of social capital development are located for each of these groups could provide insight into micro-level responses to vulnerability, and the influences upon them. Urban/rural groups are likely to differ substantially in respect to these questions, and comparison along these lines could again prove useful; in addition, changing the geographical site of research - from the big cities of Kyiv, Lviv, Donetsk and Odessa, to villages located near former collective farms, to struggling former industrial towns and cities - would also be a valuable exercise.

Comparative studies investigating social capital and networks are in their early stages. In this respect, the semantic analytical tool developed here presents the possibility of comparison across the former communist region where Slavic languages, with encoded relational characteristics and values, are spoken. Expanding upon this and developing this tool would provide an exciting opportunity for comparison based upon a larger sample.

Throughout this thesis, I have aimed to give voice to vulnerable pensioners in Ukraine, and to draw attention to their suffering, but at the same time I have sought to develop a narrative of hope that leaves space for a positive future for these people. Social capital building in the community provides a platform for this, even when at the governmental level, the outlook seems unpromising at best. Developing research in this vein may be instrumental in advocating hopeful outcomes and providing NGOs with effective tools in this endeavour. In the case of pensioners, through re-imagining the collective, this

approach can ascribe esteem and well-being to the elderly, and provide the pensioners of today and tomorrow with the strength to re-imagine their futures.

## APPENDIX 1: NAME-GENERATOR

Eight questions were adapted from Salmi's name-generator (2006:67-79) to suit this demographic, and comprised of the following:

- 1) Do you spend leisure time together with others? Who do you spend that time with?
- 2) If you were to need help at home with activities such as repairing domestic appliances, or carrying heavy items and so on, who would you ask to assist you?
- 3) If you needed to borrow some food products, who would you turn to?
- 4) Do you have someone that you turn to for advice when you have a decision to make?
- 5) Do you have someone with whom you talk about problems or matters that are troubling you?
- 6) If you were feeling unwell, who might help you?
- 7) Supposing you needed to borrow some money, who would you ask for a loan?
- 8) Are there other people who are important to you that you have not mentioned yet?

## APPENDIX 2: SEMANTIC ANALYSIS

Social categories codified in Russian language, and used in analysis of social capital existence and strength, adapted primarily from Gladkova (2012), and other sources as referenced below.

Term:	Translation:	Relationship characteristics:	Degree of "closeness"
<i>svoj</i>	Roughly, 'one's own.'	A <i>svoj</i> relationship indicates that individuals know each other well, are part of some sort of community, and have common interests. Their relationship is founded on mutual trust and obligation; they have a 'frank' and 'open' mode of communication.	<p>higher</p>  <p>lower</p>
<i>naš</i>	'our', i.e. 'our people'	<i>Naš</i> is used for family members, group members, and to denote shared ethnicity, particular in comparison to an 'other'. At the same time, <i>naš</i> is a flexible concept; someone can become ' <i>naš</i> ', and so this concept has a notion of inclusion embedded within it (Caldwell, 2004:10).	
<i>rodnye</i>	kin, dear	<i>Rodnye</i> are people related by inseparable emotional ties and form a part of one's own life and identity. These people may or may not be biologically related - the boundary between kin and non-kin is blurred here (Wierzbicka, in Gladkova, 2012).	
<i>blizkij</i>	close	A <i>blizkij</i> person is a trusted and valued friend, who may or may not be a biological relation.	
<i>drug, druzej</i>	friend(s)	<i>Druzhba</i> , friendship, accepts the fault of others, and implies a deeper relationship than when it is used in English- a <i>drug</i> is someone extremely close, someone who can always be relied on for help and support (Nafus, 2003:70; Wierzbicka, 1997:59).	
<i>podruga</i>	a female friend	<i>Podrugij</i> are "female friends who have for a long time shared life experiences and whose existential situation is similar". They are a woman's "much needed and highly valued company of 'someone like herself'" (Wierzbicka, 1997:67,68).	
<i>prijatel, prijateljica</i>	friend (male and female)	A more distant friend than a <i>drug</i> or <i>podruga</i> , but a closer relationship than <i>znakomij</i> (Wierzbicka, 1997:58).	
<i>znakomij</i>	acquaintance	A <i>znakomij</i> is someone with whom an individual is acquainted, but is not a friend. Nevertheless, a <i>znakomij</i> is more than just a contact (Nafus, 2003:71).	
<i>postoronnij</i>	outsider	<i>Postoronnij</i> can refer to "he/she who remains outside" - a person with whom no bond is shared (Peterson, 2000; Gladkova, 2010:275).	
<i>čužoj</i>	alien, foreigner	<i>Čužoj</i> people are those one does not know and does not regard as 'someone like me' (Gladkova, 2010:280).	



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