Article

The Politics of Social Structures in the Palestinian Case: From National Resistance to Depoliticization and Liberalization

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Abstract: This article examines the role of Palestinian civil society organizations in resistance struggles against Israeli military occupation in the 1970s and 1980s. The research focuses on the civil society transformation and shift from national resistance in the politically motivated framework of Israeli–Palestinian conflict of the 1970s and 1980s to internal and depoliticized processes in the 1990s. The overall purpose of this study is to provide knowledge about the role of civil society organizations in Gaza and the West Bank in the Palestinian national struggle and promote a deeper understanding of the changing role of Palestinian civil society following the Oslo peace process in the 1990s. The research methods are based on a supportive and integrated combination of theory and field research including interviews with civil society and academic representatives. The main findings and conclusions suggest that the transformation of Palestinian nationalist and secular grassroots organizations and the shift towards depoliticization and liberalization in the 1990s is the result of the Oslo peace process and the subsequent creation of a Palestinian "liberal civil society" in response to the requirements of international donors and their liberalization agenda.

Keywords: Israeli–Palestinian conflict; civil society; national resistance; liberal peace; depoliticization

1. Introduction

This article focuses on civil society and politics within the broader question of peace and conflict issues. In particular, it focuses on the emergence of a liberal version of civil society in the context of the liberal peace project and the implications of this approach for the role of national civil society in politically motivated conflicts and struggles. Taking the Palestinian case as an example, the article's main thesis is that the changing role of Palestinian nationalist grassroots organizations and the shift from resistance to depoliticization and liberalization in the 1990s is a result of two connected processes: the launch of the Oslo peace process and the subsequent construction of a Palestinian "liberal civil society" as conceived within the liberal peace theory and represented by international donors in the Palestinian context. The concept of resistance in this article refers to the participation of civil society activists in national activities aimed at undermining Israeli military occupation in Gaza and the West Bank and supporting Palestinian independence. As will be explained later, these resistance activities included institution-building, political education concerning Palestinian national goals, civil disobedience actions such as national strikes and boycott of Israeli courts, refusal to pay tax, promoting local economic products, delivering food provisions to deprived areas under curfews, demonstrating solidarity with bereaved families and newly released political prisoners, and organizing nonviolent protests.

The conceptualizations of the role of civil society in supporting resistance struggles and liberal approaches are used as a theoretical framework to examine the stated hypothesis and the case study

above. Therefore, the civil society definitions concerning resistance and liberal discourses by Michael Edwards and Antonio Gramsci are particularly explored and used in this conceptual approach. The deeper underpinnings of the liberal peace theory are also illustrated with reference to Roland Paris and his definition of liberal peacebuilding.

1.1. Case Studies

In order to support the research process, three case studies have been identified and selected. These are: the Gaza Community Mental Health Programme (GCMHP), the Palestinian Centre for Human Rights (PCHR), and the Palestinian Centre for Democracy and Conflict Resolution (PCDCR). The GCMHP, the PCHR, and the PCDCR are located in Gaza and have branches in the West Bank. They have been selected because they belong to a secular and nationalist background, and this meets major goal in this research, which is the transformation of secular and nationalist grassroots organizations and the shift from national resistance in the politically motivated framework of Israeli–Palestinian conflict of the 1970s and 1980s to internal and depoliticized processes in the 1990s. In this context, it is important to clarify that this article does not propose to address the role of Islamist social structures in the Palestinian territories. Instead, it focuses on nationalist and secular grassroots groups that played an active role in the Palestinian national resistance and Intifada (uprising) within Gaza and the West Bank in the 1970s and the 1980s and experienced fundamental changes following the launch of the Oslo peace process in the 1990s.

Another important reason for selecting the GCMHP, the PCDCR, and the PCHR as case studies is related to the fact that those organizations have included major local leaders who played an influential role in the Palestinian popular committees and were politically active during the first Palestinian Intifada in the late 1980s. Finally, these organizations are currently established as non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in Gaza and the West Bank and have strong relations with international donors and external funding agencies. This is important because the research also examines the influence of international donors on Palestinian civil society organizations following the Oslo peace process in the 1990s and their role in facilitating the depoliticization of nationalist and secular social structures in Gaza and the West Bank.

1.2. Methodology

The research methods are based on a supportive and integrated combination of theory and field research. Therefore, this study relies on primary and secondary sources. Data collection from the field is achieved by using the research method of interviewing. Available knowledge from the literature about effective techniques of interviewing is explored and put into practice in the field research. In particular, semi-structured interviews are employed for investigation and data collection purposes. Eric Drever offers a useful explanation of the application and the function of this specific methodology:

> The name "semi-structured interviews" means that the interviewer sets up a general structure by deciding in advance what ground is to be covered and what main questions are to be asked. This leaves the detailed structure to be worked out during the interview. The person interviewed can answer at some length in his or her own words, and the interviewer responds using prompts, probes and follow-up questions to get the interviewee to clarify or expand on the answers. (Drever 1995)

Drever goes on to assess the main benefits of conducting semi-structured interviews with participants in research studies: firstly, they "gather factual information about people's circumstances." Second, they "collect statements of their preferences and opinions." Third, they "explore in some depth their experiences, motivations and reasoning" (Drever 1995). It is for this reason of seeking in-depth explorations and clarifications from interviewees that questionnaires and surveys are not part of the research methods in this study. The limitations of the questionnaire and survey methodologies could present potentially challenging issues during research processes. For example, according to Fritz Strack

and Leonard Martin, any ambiguity the respondent is aware of in an interview setting "could be resolved by asking for clarification. In surveys, however, further explanation is typically not available." Hence, it "may even be discouraged for the sake of standardization" (Strack and Leonard 1987).

In this research process, the semi-structured interviews include two categories of interviewees. Staff of the GCMHP, the PCHR, and the PCDCR are interviewed to investigate the role of civil society in political processes and subsequent transformations in the overall context of peace and conflict issues in the Palestinian situation. Further, the research explores an academic perspective on the changing relationship between civil society and politics following the peace process in the 1990s. This is undertaken with the intention of carrying out a thorough analysis of the changing role of secular and nationalist civil society in as a result of the Oslo process and the requirements of international donors. Participants were interviewed by the author during the years of 2011 to 2014 and they agreed to be identified by their names and professions. The total number of interviews conducted during the field research was 14 and the selected number of interviewees from the GCMHP, the PCHR, and the PCDCR depended on staff availability and the duration of the research visits.

1.3. Contribution to Literature

This particular article is concerned with providing knowledge about secular and nationalist civil society organizations (CSOs) in Gaza and the West Bank and their role in the Palestinian national struggle and grassroots resistance to Israeli military occupation of Palestinian territories. The article also seeks to contribute to existing literature and promote a deeper understanding of the changing role of Palestinian civil society following the Oslo peace process and the shift from national resistance to depoliticization and liberalization in response to the requirements of international donors and their liberal agendas in the overall context of the Oslo peace process. While some research has previously been carried out on the transformation of Palestinian civil society (Challand 2005), this article presents a unique contribution to knowledge because it seeks to distinguish between civil society as resistance and its role within the liberal peace paradigm and apply this conceptual framework to Palestinian civil society before and after the launch of the Oslo peace process. Furthermore, this article examines the politics of civil society and aid in the context of national struggles and analyzes, and demonstrates through the Palestinian case study, the central role of civil society organizations within the liberal peace model. Finally, this research provides an additional contribution to knowledge in the areas of aid, politics, grassroots resistance to military occupation, social structures, and conflict resolution by presenting key implications resulting from this study.

1.4. Structure of Article

This article examines four related themes, and it is accordingly divided into five sections. The first section introduces the theory of civil society in the context of resistance and liberal discourses including the subsequent emergence of the civil society arena as a key component of the liberal peace project in the Western context. The second section explores the Palestinian case study with a particular focus on civil society resistance in the 1970s and the 1980s. The third section discusses the impact of the Oslo peace process in the 1990s on Palestinian civil society including the resulting conflicts and divisions at the Palestinian level. The fourth section analyzes the civil society transformation and shift from the politics of resistance and nationalism to depoliticization and liberalization in the Palestinian situation during the early 1990s. This section also contextualizes this significant transformation within the Oslo peace process and the liberal peace discourse as represented by international donors and their policies in the Palestinian context. The fifth section analyzes some of the key implications developing from this transformational depoliticization process in the Palestinian case. Finally, the conclusion provides a summary of the main arguments discussed in the article. The section below theorizes civil society in the context of resistance and liberal peace discourses.

2. Theory of Civil Society: Resistance and Liberal Discourses

In the 1960s and 1970s, political struggles for freedom and social justice taking place in South America and Eastern Europe against totalitarian regimes brought the re-emergence of liberation projects and revolutionary interpretations of civil society (Ignatieff 1995). These ideas were similar to Antonio Gramsci's political writings and understandings of the essential role of social activists and intellectuals in national crises and situations of widespread tyranny. The proposed role for intellectuals and social activists is to provide political education for societies as well as challenging the hegemonic state. According to Gramsci, this is achieved through national and political struggles. In other words, in Fascist Italy and Eastern Europe, because of gross human rights violations and political repression, the liberation movement advocated for a socially and politically active engagement by national civil society groups especially in contexts of oppression and a lack of freedom and association. Gramsci was a leading scholar in this school of thought. He did not accept the simple notion that civil society actors and intellectuals should be concerned with civic education and cultural activities. He defined trade unions and other grassroots groups as political actors, leading popular struggles and offering political education for the masses and especially for the oppressed. In his writings in *Prison Notebooks*, he asserts:

> The trade-union movement is nothing but a political movement, the union leaders are nothing but political leaders ... During [national] struggles, strikes, etc., the masses are required to show the following qualities: solidarity, obedience to the mass organization, faith in their leaders, a spirit of resistance and sacrifice. (Gramsci 1978)

Bob Edwards and Michael Foley argue that this civil society approach emphasizes the resistance capacity of grassroots communities and the desire to "enable citizens to mobilize against tyranny and counter state power. In doing so, they rightly emphasize the conflictual nature of civil society" (Foley and Edwards 1996). Furthermore, as David Lewis points out, this grassroots resistance approach suggests that civil society is the arena in which "ideological hegemony" is contested and resisted (Lewis 2004). In this context, critics have suggested that resisting the state is not enough to change radical situations of injustice and abuses of human rights. Activists and intellectuals have to engage and participate during and after the repression or crises have ended and offer lasting alternatives for rebuilding their societies. The critique is that some experiences have shown that civil society representatives and citizen groups succeeded in putting an end to authoritarian regimes, but they failed to sustain their political engagement once the situation had changed. For example, in the case of Latin America, Robert Pinkney argues that civil society extended "greater resistance to authoritarianism but failed to develop a major role for itself once democracy had been restored" (Pinkney 2010). Moreover, David Harris points out that although the Gramscian philosophy of political resistance and mobilization through grassroots struggles influenced many intellectuals and activists in Britain and around the world especially throughout the 1970s and the 1980s, the current weakness lies in its inability to "transform old cultures into new forms and dynamics." Harris also acknowledges the great benefits of the Gramsci's work for the academic and cultural debates, and the politicization of cultures (Harris 1992).

However, alongside the massive economic and globalization processes of the 1990s, liberal understandings of civil society also emerged. The principle of this global movement has been to promote liberal democracy and development worldwide based on the Western experience of political and economic liberalization. In addition, cooperation between the state and civil society is deemed an essential and central component in this liberal approach. Unlike Gramsci and his notion of political and popular struggles against state hegemony, Michael Edwards strongly advocates for partnership processes between the government and social agencies. Edwards maintains that CSOs can adopt a more direct and effective approach by "working with the government" and building a "positive relationship" with state institutions. This is an attempt to achieve change by means of developmental approaches, persuasion and protest from within institutional structures for the benefit of "the poorer

and less powerful," as Edwards points out. In other words, working to address globalization issues and liberal democracy and cooperating with the state is a valid choice for civil society players because, as he argues further, positive interactions between government agencies, the market and voluntary groups need to focus on "common goals such as poverty reduction, human rights and deep democracy, and collective strategies to reach them" (Edwards 2004).

The contrast between the two approaches is interesting and striking. On the one hand, Gramsci believes that countering state power and confronting repression in the context of seeking political change and social justice requires active engagement and politicized struggles by the masses, civil society, and the intellectuals of the society (Gramsci 1978). Challenging the state in national and political crises is key in Gramscian philosophy rather than trying to reform the government from within. This represents the school of civil society resistance. On the other hand, Michael Edwards and liberal groups believe in building a civil society for debate, association and "civil behaviour"; a "good society" that can meet the current realities of market, liberal democracy and also the "facts of life," as he put it (Edwards and Hulme 1992). However, it is important to point out here that the Gramscian concept of popular and political struggles by national civil society groups and intellectuals is not granted recognition in this liberal and co-operational approach with the state.

Edwards represents a liberal civil society movement which has been associated with the wider Western concept and practice of liberal peace, which is essentially based on market economics and Western-style democracy. In this context, Roland Paris explains that the rise of the liberal peace politics on the international stage was motivated by both the triumph of liberal Western democracy in the post-Cold War context and also the perceived threats of state failure and collapse in non-Western countries. According to Paris, this instability represented humanitarian as well as strategic challenges to international security. From a humanitarian point of view, "this violence inflicted appalling losses on civilian non-combatants," and 90 percent of the victims of these armed conflicts were civilians. Furthermore, internal conflicts were the main source of mass refugee movements in the 1990s. Therefore, from a strategic standpoint, "civil unrest represented a threat to regional, and even global, stability. Several internal conflicts spilled over international borders and undermined the security of adjacent states." In particular, he cites the spreading of the Rwandan conflict into Zaire in the mid-1990s triggering a regional war (Paris 2004).

In effect, the task was handed to the United Nations (UN) to manage these rising political and security problems with the active support and guidance of the US government and other powerful European states and organizations. The UN launched its first flurry of peacebuilding operations in war-torn societies including Namibia, El Salvador, Mozambique, Cambodia, Angola, Liberia, Rwanda, Bosnia, Croatia, Guatemala, East Timor, Kosovo, and Sierra Leone. In total, 14 major UN operations for peacebuilding were deployed between 1989 and 1999 to areas and states experiencing internal conflicts. All of the UN peace operations worked towards a shared common task: "transforming war-shattered states into liberal market democracies as quickly as possible" (Paris 2004).

In *At War's End Building Peace After Civil Conflict*, Paris maintains that the essential function of international Western engagement within the overall framework of liberal post-conflict peacebuilding has been exclusively informed by the Western formula of "liberalization" in political and economic terms in order to end violent conflicts and manage failed states. He illustrates further:

> In the political realm, liberalization means democratization, or the promotion of periodic and genuine elections, constitutional limitations on the exercise of governmental power, and respect for basic civil liberties, including freedom of speech, assembly, and conscience. In the economic realm, liberalization means marketization, or movement toward a market-oriented economic model, including measures aimed at minimizing government intrusion in the economy, and maximizing the freedom for private investors, producers, and consumers to pursue their respective economic interests. (Paris 2004)

In seeking to create liberalization in the political and socio-economic spheres as a method of conflict management, civil society organizations have also gained a central role in the liberal peacebuilding project. In the last two decades, the US and some major European powers have been advancing the creation of what David Lewis calls a "virtuous circle" between state and economy, based on the Western experience of the "good governance agenda." The underlying motivation behind this model is that by sustaining multiple but connected systems, a successful and democratic state would be able to balance and reflect important aspects such as good politics, liberal democracy, economic growth and equity. Discussing liberalism in the context of civil society, Hakan Seckinelgin adds that Western advocates of this liberal approach tend to locate civil society and nongovernmental organizations between the state and the market as a third central structure in "modern democratic states" (Seckinelgin 2002). Lewis explains,

> Since the 1990s the 'good governance agenda' has deployed the concept of civil society within the wider initiatives of supporting the emergence of more competitive market economies, building better-managed states with the capacity to provide more responsive services and just laws, and improving democratic institutions and deepening political participation. Support for the emergence and strengthening of non-governmental organizations has formed a central part of this agenda. (Lewis 2001)

Lewis illustrates further that "the dominance of this [neoliberal] ideology obscured the potential value of other understandings of civil society [i.e., the role of civil society in resistance and political struggles as advocated, for example, by Gramsci]" (Lewis 2004). Martin Shaw discusses particularly the negative impact of this liberal culture and practice on the historical civil society forms of resistance and popular struggle. He points out that Western states "created the conditions for massive processes of economic and cultural organization." As a result, the new institutions of civil society are "less formal, less tied to particular social interests and less national" (Shaw 1996).

In *International Statebuilding: The Rise of Post-Liberal Governance*, David Chandler remarks that civil society has been hijacked by neo-liberalism, which also employs civil society to support liberal governance. Therefore, Chandler suggests that practitioners and scholars of peacebuilding should acknowledge that civil society is currently an area of "policy intervention," and it represents another tool of Western colonialism since culture and race are no longer acceptable justifications for Western domination. Within this interventionist politics, he explains, expanding civil society as a balancing model to enhance state-building and contain any related conflicts and destabilizing effects resulting from neoliberal policies at the political and socio-economic level is considered to be vital (Chandler 2010). In short, this neo-liberal discourse does not view civil society as an area of resistance and socio-political struggles. Instead, enhancing social transformation and depoliticization in the service of the liberal peace agenda of marketization and Western-style democracy is the proposed role of civil society organizations as conceived and implemented in many conflict situations at the international level by Western agencies and international donors who possess significant financial resources and political power.

However, in the Palestinian case and the wider Israeli–Palestinian conflict, Palestinian grassroots organizations had been deeply politicized and acted as agents of national resistance against the Israeli State and its military occupation in Gaza and the West Bank throughout the 1970s and the 1980s. With the launch of the Oslo Peace Process in the 1990s, international organizations and donors became actively engaged in the process of transforming the Palestinian social agency and depoliticizing long-standing practices and activities of national resistance based on the liberal peace model and neoliberal functions of civil society as previously discussed above in this article. However, to understand this transformational depoliticization process and the deep changes that Palestinian civil society underwent in the 1990s, it is important that a brief historical overview of Palestinian nationalist grassroots organizations and their role in national resistance struggles in the 1970s and the 1980s is presented. The following section provides this historical overview.

3. Palestinian Civil Society and National Resistance

The Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) represented different nationalist factions, and Fatah became the largest and leading faction within the organization. In the context of liberation and nationalist politics, the PLO-Fatah became the major Palestinian political force in exile from the mid-1960s onward. It also attracted a vast popular support and allegiance from the Palestinian diaspora and refugees inside and outside Palestine.

At the internal Palestinian level, the relationship between the national leadership of the PLO and Palestinian local grassroots organizations evolved in significant terms following the Arab-Israeli War of 1967 and subsequent Israeli military occupation of Gaza and the West Bank. Since the re-emergence of the national movement in the early 1960s, the Palestinian nationalists sought to achieve the total liberation of Palestine through Arab power and nationalism, and the establishment of a democratic secular state in all of Palestine. However, the 1967 War and the military victory of Israel over the Egyptian, Syrian and Jordanian joint forces, and Israeli occupation of the remainder of Palestine (i.e., Gaza and the West Bank including East Jerusalem), caused the Palestinians to lose confidence in the ability of the neighboring Arab countries to deliver liberation. As Mazin Qumsiyeh points out, the 1967 War transformed the political and geographical landscape in both negative and positive terms. It forced the Palestinian people and their national leadership to realize that "Arab leaders were impotent to bring about change" and also that the time had come for the Palestinian leadership to make their own strategy and begin to build their own independent institutions (Qumsiyeh 2011).

By the early 1970s, this strategic change slowly materialized in Palestinian politics. The goal was no longer concerned with the achievement of the total liberation of Palestine through Arab nationalism and the creation of a secular democratic state in all of Palestine. Instead, the national movement, led by the PLO, was willing now to create a national authority and autonomous Palestinian entity on any part of Palestine that Israel might withdraw from. The occupied territories of Gaza and the West Bank represented the overall base and foundation for the possibility of creating a Palestinian self-rule government on the homeland soil as an initial step on the way of gradual and complete independence. The overall objective was to build a Palestinian independent state alongside the State of Israel (Sayigh 1997). This constituted the emerging and new political framework from the early 1970s onwards, which influenced the social structures in the occupied territories. As a result, most of these existing and newly formed local organizations inside the territories adopted the PLO nationalist and secular agendas for the Palestinian project of state-building in Gaza and the West Bank. Examining further the relationship between this nationalist thinking and, in his own words, the emerging "statist framework" and how it had contributed to the growth of associational life in Gaza and the West Bank in the 1970s, Yezid Sayigh argues:

> It was within this context [of the PLO-statehood project] that all the guerrilla groups sought allies and constituencies [within the civil society arena] in the occupied territories, determinedly retaining political and operational control in their own hands all the while. (Sayigh 1997)

Israeli military control, the banning of political parties inside Gaza and the West Bank, and the existence of the PLO in exile, was another major factor in the penetration of the nationalist political groups into the civil society sphere in the territories in order to use it as a platform for political expression. In this regard, Andrew Rigby points out that because of their inability to organize openly, various political factions had employed the trade unions, social and professional organizations, student unions, and other grassroots organizations as "arenas for political competition." In particular, Fatah demonstrated a sustained and strong interest in students, workers and women's organizations as "prime groups for mobilization and recruitment" (Rigby 2010). Therefore, grassroots groups provided social services to the local population in the occupied territories and represented a means of political mobilization and national resistance (Roy 1996).

In practical terms, while working within the nationalist agenda facilitated greater popularity and financial possibilities, it certainly meant that social organizations had to meet two expectations. The first was to sustain the culture of service provision in Gaza and the West Bank and, the second, to extend resistance and mobilization to directly challenge Israeli military rule in the occupied territories, which manifested itself during the Intifada of 1987. It is in this broader and more complex political context that the grassroots movement gained a stronger position and acquired more importance in both Palestinian society and the national movement throughout the 1970s and the 1980s. Describing this era, UdaOlabarria Walker points out:

> Due to the lack of a Palestinian governing authority in the West Bank and Gaza and Israel's blatant disregard for the socio-economic needs of the occupied population, Palestinian grassroots organizations were forced to work independently for the development of the Palestinian community. (Walker 2005)

Building social and economic infrastructures in the occupied territories was not a priority from the perspective of the Israeli authorities and their colonial policies. The development of political structures and national institutions could lead to Palestinian independence and hence this should be prevented by military means. The Israeli defense minister stated in 1985 that "there will be no development in the occupied territories initiated by the Israeli government," and he went on to declare, "no permits will be given for expanding agriculture or industry there, which may compete with the State of Israel" (Sayigh 1997). Control and military occupation, and not political independence or economic reconstruction, was the message from the Israeli government to the Palestinians in Gaza and the West Bank.

Nonetheless, Palestinian grassroots and nationalist organizations were determined to fill this organizational and institutional gap that the Israeli government had ironically created in the occupied territories. Therefore, not only did the social and popular movement with its national resistance component become coherent and legitimate, but throughout the 1970s and the 1980s it also transformed into an effective representative for a Palestinian alternative social and political infrastructure outside of Israeli domination. However, with the outbreak of the popular Intifada in 1987, these powerful grassroots organizations embarked on a direct resistance role in support of the broader Palestinian struggle for national independence. The Intifada in the occupied territories also provided a much-needed support to the external and isolated Palestinian national leadership in exile, which was clearly deteriorating following the Israeli invasion of Beirut and the departure of the PLO from Lebanon in 1982. Furthermore, Because of the external presence of the PLO and the existence of the Israeli armed forces inside Palestinian areas, civil society groups and activists became an important part of the national leadership which worked to protect the Palestinian population and maintain the Intifada.

Considering the changing tasks and challenges ahead, a stronger and combined structure of local civil society and nationalist movement, therefore, emerged during the uprising. This consisted mainly of what was called the "popular committees." The committees were initially suggested and supported by the National Unified Command (NUC) which was made up of factions' representatives and civil society nationalists of the Intifada. As the popular committees came into existence and functioned, grassroots leaders along with political activists in Palestinian society became the leading forces of this resistance initiative and its activities throughout the occupied territories. This internal civil society-political alliance formed a significant part of the ongoing process of attaining national independence and enhancing the legitimacy of the Palestinian leadership developing inside Gaza and the West Bank.

The committees included the following structures: Strike Forces; Women's Committees; Guard Committees; Popular Education Committees; Food and Supply Committees; Medical Committees; Committees for Self-sufficiency; Social Reform Committees; Committees to Confront the Tax; Merchants' Committeesand Information Committees (Rigby 1991). These civil society committees were responsible

for supporting the Intifada struggle and maintaining the evolving infrastructure for Palestinian independence. Discussing these crucial challenges and subsequent outcomes, Uda Olabarria Walker points out that "from 1987–1990, the grassroots organizations served as the driving and organizing force behind the popular committees of the Intifada while continuing to provide services for the Palestinian community" (Walker 2005).

The popular committees, however, experienced critical issues which threatened cohesion and unity including coordination and internal politics (Rigby 1991). The Israeli military response to the 1987 Intifada and to political and civil society developments in Palestinian areas resulted in further intimidation and repressive measures including deportations and long prison sentences without trial for many members of the popular committees and grassroots organizations (Al-Haq 1988). The main concern for Israel was that the Intifada had been gaining momentum in general and the popular committees had been receiving more support and strength in Palestinian society in particular. This was because the committees succeeded in transforming the role of ordinary Palestinians into active participants in the struggle for political independence. The Israeli authorities, therefore, responded by outlawing the popular committees and their activities. By banning these local organizations and deliberately subjecting their leaders to arrests, the Israeli government wanted to maintain the policy of military control and prevent the emergence of a Palestinian national leadership in the occupied territories (Al-Haq 1988).

In fact, the involvement of Palestinian intellectuals and social activists in the national struggle in the 1970 and the 1980s conformed to the Gramscian version of civil society resistance. For instance, Palestinian grassroots groups engaged in the development of the Palestinian society and provided political education and crucial social services to local communities living under Israeli occupation. This strategy aimed at undermining the Israeli state system of military rule in the occupied territories and resisting its domination over society by means of institutional resistance and alternative national structures. Also, in the 1980s, the Intifada produced a process of politicization in which local organizations played a significant direct role in resisting the military policies of the Israeli government in Gaza and the West Bank. As a result, measures and actions such as the formation of the popular committees as civil society and political structures and the creation of more advanced and professional civil society institutions were taken to contest the existing order of military control and end oppression by the Israeli State in the occupied territories. These measures sought also to assert the political independence of the Palestinian people through active civil society resistance and mobilization, and institution-building. In this context, local and social organizations extended strong resistance to state power and hegemony in the Palestinian struggle. Hence, the role and the engagement of Palestinian nationalist and secular civil society in the specific period should be read and interpreted within the Gramscian framework of civil society resistance and intense politicization.

However, with the signing of the Oslo Accords between Palestinian and Israeli leaders in 1993, the period of the 1990s saw a reversal process of depoliticization and the separation of nationalist civil society organizations from the Palestinian national movement. The section below analyzes the impact of the Oslo peace process on nationalist and secular social structures in the Palestinian case. This will be followed by an examination of civil society transformations and the role of international donors within the overall context of the Oslo process.

4. Civil Society and Oslo Process: Power Struggles and Divisions

The Oslo accords consisted of the Declaration of Principles (DOP) and the recognition letters, focused on administrative and largely security issues in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The Palestinians were allowed to establish the Palestinian Authority (PA) and a self-rule government under Yaser Arafat and the Fatah/PLO leadership. According to the provisions of the Agreement, the PA would also set up a representative political and legal council (Palestinian Legislative Council, PLC) in the occupied territories. The DOP recognized that the jurisdiction of the Council would cover the West Bank and Gaza Strip and possess the power to legislate (BBC 2001). Furthermore, the Oslo Accords called

for making "arrangements for a smooth and peaceful transfer of authority from the Israeli military government and its Civil Administration to the Palestinian representatives" (BBC 2001).

Israel also permitted the PA to establish a strong security force made up of 30,000 personnel in order to maintain the internal security in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank. However, Israel would have the ultimate military and security power over the Palestinian territories and Jewish settlements there. In his speech before the Knesset after signing the accords, Yitzhak Rabin, the Israeli prime minister at the time, said: "let me re-emphasize, the security of the settlements and Israelis, both, is in our hands" (Usher 1997). According to the Oslo terms, the occupied Palestinian territories were also divided into small units (A, B, and C). Areas A are under the security and political control of the PA, areas B are joint Palestinian and Israeli administration, and areas C (where large Israeli settlements are built) fall under complete Israeli military rule. Areas C consisted of 60 percent of the West Bank (Corbin 1994).

Through significant Western political and financial support, the Fatah-controlled PA started to build government institutions and a solid cabinet to represent the peace process leadership and evolving political realities. In relation to CSOs and NGOs, the PA had argued that like any new state, civil society should be regulated. CSOs in the Palestinian territories did not initially oppose embarking on a meaningful transformation that would reflect changing contexts and responsibilities. Anticipating the changes ahead in civil society, the social and political activist during the Intifada, Mustafa Barghouti, and current leader of the Palestinian National Initiative (*Al-Mubadra*) states:

> It is inevitable that there will be some polarization and differentiations in this broad-based sector [of civil society], especially in that some of the activists in this [local] movement perceive their role as temporary and are waiting for the establishment of a Palestinian authority ... Consequently, a proportion of what are considered NGOs today will be transformed into government organizations or will become part of the authority's structure. (Sullivan 1996)

However, evidence suggests that suspicion, not partnership or solidarity, dominated the relations between the PA and civil society organizations during the peace process and throughout the 1990s. The PA perceived the secular and politicized sector of civil society as a strong social force that enjoyed deeper connections with local communities and a shining history of success in challenging Israeli military rule in the occupied territories. For the PA, this could potentially weaken the power of the young government of the Palestinian Authority. The PA politics at that time seemed more connected to holding the reins of power and ensuring that influential social organizations were not challenging the management of the Palestinian political situation and the developing policies in Gaza and the West Bank (Sullivan 1996).

In 1995, the PA made some attempts to formalize the situation by making draft laws prior to the establishment of the PLC. Although they never published the contents, the proposed laws were leaked to the public. The proposed provisions included requiring CSOs to register with the Ministry of Social Welfare and obtaining a separate license from the appropriate department in accordance with their field (e.g., Ministry of Justice for legal organizations, Ministry of Education for education groups, etc.). Furthermore, it was proposed that official permission would be needed from the Minister of Social Welfare before CSOs could receive foreign or local donations. Civil society activists would also not be permitted to participate in more than one organization. In addition, restrictions on cooperation with organizations based outside the Palestinian jurisdiction and preventing NGOs from holding bank deposits in excess of one month's expenses were suggested (Sullivan 1996).

To deal with this conflict, many CSOs in Gaza and the West Bank, who wanted to remain independent and active in society had aggressively protested nationally and internationally against these draft laws and mobilized partner organizations abroad. Thus, in late 1995, and after the release of the draft legislations, the Donor Conference in Paris criticized the PA proposals concerning the regulation of CSOs. This prompted the officials of the PA to declare that they had no plans to endorse

the draft legislations and they would postpone the deliberations and consult with CSOs once the elections of the PLC were concluded (Sullivan 1996).

Some critical implications emerged out of these conflicting relations. The dividing politics of the Oslo peace process sowed the seeds for not only divisions between CSOs and the PA, but also among civil society groups themselves. Hence, some organizations aligned with the PA out of fear or for private gain while others continued to oppose its policies (Jamal 2009). According to the Palestinian academic Khalil Shakaki, this particular phase of Oslo years also bore witness to coercion against wider sections of civil society including media agencies. For example, opposition newspapers were banned and on some occasions were allowed to reopen under certain conditions and implement a change in their editorial direction. Furthermore, individual activists and civil society leaders who expressed a strong criticism of the PA and the Oslo project were either intimidated or sent to prison by the PA security forces. As a result, concerned social groups and media representatives began to exercise "self-censorship" (Shakaki 1996). Furthermore, civil liberties and democratic practices "have been seriously undermined by PA polices aimed at strengthening central control, "protecting" the peace, and asserting national agendas" (Shakaki 1996).

In short, the Oslo process in the 1990s impacted significantly on Palestinian national politics and social formations in the occupied territories. Not only did the Oslo period of the 1990s introduce a changing framework of conflicting social and political relations but it also marked a significant departure from the close alliance and joint active role of social and political forces that existed during the Intifada period and sustained the Palestinian national struggle in the previous decades. In this context, Palestinian Professor of Political Science, Ibrahim Ibrash, stated during an interview that the Oslo process led to deep divisions and changing priorities on the part of social structures and it has also "de-stabilized the Palestinian national struggle and undermined its historical [social and political] foundations" (Ibrash 2013).

The second important issue to examine in this context is the changing role of Palestinian nationalist and secular social structures and the subsequent transformations and depoliticization in response to the requirements of international donors and their liberalization agenda within the overall framework of the Oslo peace process. This is examined in the next section.

5. Civil Society Transformation: From National Resistance to Depoliticization and Liberalization

As the priorities of the international community changed during the Oslo years of the 1990s and its focus was directed toward building a Palestinian authority that could negotiate with Israel and deliver on the security and political terms of the Oslo Agreement, an evolving relationship was emerging around the same time between nationalist CSOs and international donors. Integrating Palestinian civil society into the global strategies of marketization and liberal democracy, promoting the "good governance agenda" of the 1990s, and creating what David Lewis calls the "virtuous circle" of state, civil society, and market as discussed previously in this article played a central role in the changing strategy of the Western donors towards Palestinian civil society organizations. Analyzing the transformation in the civil society framework with active support from external donors in the 1990s, Benoit Challand describes these crucial developments in the Palestinian nationalist sector of civil society as a phenomenon of "professionalization of politics", whereby

> [Palestinian] NGOs gradually shifted from popular self-organization into a form of elite work funded by foreign donors. Put differently, many of these popular grass-roots committees that were so essential to political factionalism [during the Intifada and before] turned into professional client-oriented and elitist development institutions during the Oslo years, thus drifting away from playing a more direct political role. (Challand 2005)

Furthermore, MufidQassoum points out that Western efforts and external donors worked towards the "restructuring" of nationalist grassroots organizations in a direction harmonious and consistent with the emerging global economy. The new shift came to "put an end to mass social

movements, dismantle the triad affinity between the intellectual, the masses and the progressive and revolutionary ideas." In the international arena, this meant that "de-mobilization, de-radicalization and de-politicization" were necessary components to maintain the emergence of the world neo-liberal order in civil and political spheres (Qassoum 2003). Evidence from the Palestinian situation supports this interpretation and shows an anxious and active donors' movement towards denationalizing and depoliticizing Palestinian secular and nationalist civil society forces and aligning them with the emerging liberal peace discourse of the 1990s. In this context, a Palestinian social activist stated at that time,

> Life is about politics. The separation of politics from other forms of action [i.e., popular and grassroots engagement] is not right. [International] donors try to encourage the separation of the political from the organization. (Hanafi and Tabar 2005)

Beyond the separation of social and political activities what some international governments and their powerful funding agencies required under the cover of the Oslo peace process was the emergence of a Palestinian social movement which could replace the nationalist civil society discourse in Gaza and the West Bank and exclusively focus on other issues of liberal democracy promotion and good governance agenda according to the liberal peace version of civil society including its role in supporting liberalization and marketization policies as discussed earlier in this article. Edward Said points out, for example, that one of the intended effects of Oslo is the "substitution of a short-range nationalism for a longer-range social movement." This is, he observes, to "de-politicize Palestinian society and set it squarely within the main current American style of globalization, where the market is king, everything else irrelevant or marginal" (Said 2000).

Examining Palestinian NGO politics during the Oslo period, Challand remarks further that as a result of this changing framework between external donors and nationalist civil society, the relationship between major social players and local populations dramatically transformed. Professional and elite civil society organizations began to view grassroots constituencies more as clients and, in some cases, as a "political reservoir" rather than active participants in a political and mass struggle. Hence, many Palestinian organizations are still currently guided by the global "market principles" than by voluntary contributions and engagement in their activities (Challand 2005).

In this evolving social and political context and the support of international donors for a new civil society framework in the Palestinian territories, a new group of influential individuals emerged in the Palestinian secular and nationalist sector of civil society. Palestinian researchers Sari Hanafi and Linda Tabar discuss the formation of this civil society "globalized elite." The globalized elite "reflects the broader process out of which it has emerged, including the overarching national context of the peace process and the foreign assistance provided to support the transition to a post-conflict [liberal] order." Their shared characteristics, according to Hanafi and Tabar, have pointed to a continued opposition to the revival of civil society resistance in the Intifada and that their attitudes and approaches are informed by international interests and donors rather than a localized agenda (Hanafi and Tabar 2005).

Describing this dramatic transformation in the civil society sector and associated changes, the Programmes Manager of the PCDCR which operates in Gaza and the West Bank, Abed-Elmanem Altahrawy pointed out during an interview:

> [In the 1987 Intifada] CSOs had a clear mandate which focused on achieving two tasks: providing relief and essential services, and second maintaining the Palestinian identity and supporting the national project of independence. This was the role that civil society played prior to Oslo. In post Oslo phase, we have come to face a very problematic situation that is: do we as CSOs work on civil rights and social issues within Palestine or do we keep our main focus on the Israeli occupation? . . . The culture of Oslo was based on the state-building project and nonviolence so, in this case, the attention of [secular and nationalist] CSOs turned to institution-building, civil work and also to, as understood in international jargons, good governance. (Altahrawy 2013)

Available evidence from the research also suggests that this transformation has facilitated changes at the policy and practical level in the area of civil society in response to the requirements of international donors in the context of the Oslo process. The Palestinian organizations who participated in this research have reflected these policy changes. For example, the PCHR was established in the 1990s and it includes today secular and leftist activists who were politically active during the first Intifada and spent time in Israeli prisons because of their engagement in the national resistance struggle against the Israeli occupation of Palestinian land (PCHR 2018). The PCHR has been committed to promoting human rights and democratisation in Palestinian society since the Oslo peace process in the 1990s. This commitment saw the creation of a 'Democracy Promotion Unit' within the structures of the PCHR in Gaza and the West Bank and this Unit works to support election processes and good governance in the Palestinian political and social systems.

Asked during an interview if liberal democracy promotion can be seen as contradictory to the concept of national resistance in the context of Israeli occupation and liberation struggles such as the Palestinian situation, the Coordinator of the Democracy Promotion Unit at the PCHR, Hamdi Shaqora, stated that democracy is a "strength to the Palestinian people and a prerequisite to complete the liberation process" (Shaqora 2011). This has represented a significant point of departure from the 1970s and 1980s discourses when national resistance, combined with political and civil society mobilization, was seen as a key and necessary component to achieving Palestinian national independence and, then, building a democratic state. Reflecting these policy changes further, another key function for the PCHR is "the preparation of research articles relevant to such issues as the human rights situation and the rule of law" within the Palestinian context (PCHR 2018). In other words, documenting Palestinian violations of human rights through research and promoting democratic governance in the official institutions of the PA has become a key concern for civil society engagement following the Oslo Agreement.

Similarly, since the 1990s, the PCDCR has been committed to facilitating projects and workshops among Palestinian communities in Gaza and the West Bank which aim at promoting "social awareness about the importance of conflict resolution and spreading social awareness about the concepts of democracy." More importantly, one of the central aims for this NGO is to "build partnership and reciprocity relations with informal and formal decision-making bodies" (PCDCR 2018). This particular goal is similar to Michael Edwards' proposal of achieving liberal democracy through cooperation and partnership between the state (the PA government in this case) and social agencies in society as discussed previously in this article. It also shows the influence of international donors on those organizations and their stated goals.

Further examples of these policy changes within the Palestinian social sector in response to the liberalization requirements of international donors include the GCMHP and their changing focus on peace education. The organization was founded in the 1990s to deliver community and psychological services through therapeutic approaches including counselling and psychological care (GCMHP 2018). Peace education initiatives are materialized through the "School Mediation Programmes" which involve various Palestinian schools. The participants are male and female students from the age of 16 to 18. These programmes involve teaching conflict resolution methods to senior and junior students (16 to 18 years old).

As stated during an interview, the essence of peace education, according to Rawyea Hamam who is a co-organizer and facilitator of the School Mediation Programmes at the GCMHP, is to emphasize the importance of peace and dialogue and to stress these values at an early stage in life so they can be maintained by these young participants as they become adults. According to Hamam, the significance of this initiative lies in its ability "to promote the idea of using nonviolent means to resolve conflicts and disagreements" (Hamam 2011).Therefore, promoting liberal democracy, good governance, research projects, dialogue workshops, training courses, conflict resolution and peace education at the Palestinian level are all specific examples of this civil society shift from the politically

motivated framework of Israeli-Palestinian conflict to internal and depoliticized processes within the Palestinian context.

Today, similar to many NGOs working in the Palestinian case, the PCHR, the PCDCR and the GCMHP depend largely on funding and budgetary assistance from Western sources and international donors. Hanan Aldalou from the PCDCR, who also works as the Assistant Director for International Relations and Funding within the organization, states that many external Western donors have made it clear since the Oslo process that "they are interested in funding activities that only deal with [internal] social and civil issues [mentioned in the examples above], and are not interested in Israeli-Palestinian political issues [concerning national resistance and Israeli military occupation]." She views this situation as irreconcilable. The idea of separation between social and political areas in Palestine is "not realistic because they both are part of a wider and complex conflict situation and politicized reality" (Aldalou 2013).

In this context of changing practices and policies, influential Western donors with their liberalization and depoliticization agenda came to represent a dominant force within the Palestinian sphere of social structures in the post-Oslo era. International donors with their powerful resources and dominate policies became the main center of attention for global relations and financial support in the Palestinian case. Professor Ibrash pointed out that this has critically weakened civil society groups and connected their fate and survival with the receipt of funding from external donors and continued engagement with their agendas. He stated further during an interview,

> [Civil society organizations] are dependent on external funding and this makes them hostage to the interests of those donors. As a result, most NGOs are concerned with their own existence and interests more than, for example, defending the Palestinian national struggle; fearing the cessation of funding or the closure of their organizations. (Ibrash 2013)

Joesph Massad observes further that those internationally-oriented civil society activists and intellectuals have continued to "import IMF [International Monetary Fund] ideas, World Bank plans, international invitations, USAID-sponsored training, Western funding for their local institutions, and Western public and media accolades." Massad goes on to explain that pragmatism in the Palestinian social and political arena in the post-Oslo period has come to represent "accommodationist policies toward the Israelis" and the development of a "liberal-democratic culture." These changes became the defining characteristics of this new liberal order and transformations in the Palestinian territories in the 1990s (Massad 2006).

Not only did this liberal paradigm produce depoliticization and liberalization at the organizational and grassroots level in the Palestinian context, but it has also promoted a new concept of development and aid, which accepted the Israeli military control of Palestinian land and resources. Therefore, negotiating development in Palestinian society under occupation became an integral and normalized part of this changing reality within the overall framework of maintaining the (failed) peace process between Israel and the Palestinians. The end result has been contradictory to conflict resolution and self-determination prospects. For example, international aid for development projects in the occupied Palestinian territories requires in many cases Israeli approval. As a result, those "approved" projects have facilitated the reinforcement and legitimization of Israeli colonization of Palestinian land and resources instead of resisting or challenging this colonization process (Hijab 2012).

In their thorough study of foreign aid and international donors in the Palestinian context, Jeremy Wildeman and AlaaTartir point out that the deeper aims and "normative values" behind this liberal development model under occupation have been concerned with "open markets, economic integration with Israel, regional economic integration, financial liberalization, 'good governance' and support for 'democracy.'" Therefore, the authors go on to conclude that the relationship between aid and development within the current framework is extremely problematic in the Palestinian situation since aid and liberal approaches have failed to "stimulate the peace process" (Wildeman and Tartir 2014). Instead of facilitating Palestinian independence and national rights, Palestinian dependency on foreign

assistance has increased under this problematic and ineffective development framework. This has also been coupled with the increasing power of foreign donors in the civil society arena and the deterioration of the socio-economic and political conditions of Palestinians in Gaza and the West Bank. The depoliticization of civil society and the failure of both the peace process and its liberalization and development model under occupation have been defining characteristics of the post-Oslo era. The next section analyzes the main implications resulting from this transformational process in the Palestinian context.

Key Implications

The main findings of this article suggest that the transformation of Palestinian nationalist and secular grassroots organizations and the shift towards depoliticization in the 1990s is the result of the Oslo peace process and the subsequent creation of a Palestinian 'liberal civil society' in response to the requirements of international donors and their liberalization agenda. These findings present a number of key implications in the areas of international aid, conflict resolution, civil society and politics. These implications are outlined below.

Firstly, international aid has become complicit in the continuation of Israeli occupation of Palestinian territories. The focus of international donors on economic, civil society and political liberalization under occupation in the Palestinian arena ignores the root causes of the Palestinian issue including dispossession and the lack of national rights. Furthermore, international aid in its current form has enabled Israel to continue with the policies of military occupation and territorial expansions without consequences. As Israeli Professor Menachem Klein also pointed out, donor assistance has allowed Israel to "avoid making hard political decisions regarding its legal, moral and political responsibilities toward the Palestinians" (Sheizaf 2014).

Although the aid agenda developed as a result of the Oslo peace process has been ineffective in the Palestinian case, effective processes of aid assistance should create the necessary conditions for a just political settlement based on ending the occupation and supporting self-determination. Aid policies which legitimize or endorse Israeli military control of Palestinian land and natural resources should be challenged and changed. In this context, Palestinian civil society organizations should also prioritize national engagement and campaign for a political resolution to the Israeli-Palestinian issue as a precondition for achieving sustainable development and democratic change. Not only did the liberal model of peace and development under occupation fail in the Palestinian case but it has also demonstrated the urgent need for these critical reforms.

Second, one of the key resulting implications of the depoliticization process is the changing relationship between the social and political forces before and after the 1990s in the Palestinian context. During the 1970s and the 1980s, the leadership of the PLO saw the social agencies and actors as key allies in the national struggle and the building of statehood in Gaza and the West Bank. In this context, social structures received strong political and financial support from the PLO. However, as discussed previously, the establishment of the PA and creation of an autonomous government under the PLO-Fatah leadership saw internal divisions and a changing relationship in this historical socio-political alliance. During the 1990s and following the return of the PLO leadership to the occupied territories in the Oslo period, the context of social and political relations has radically transformed from one of alliance in supporting resistance struggles and achieving statehood to the containment of the social sphere by the PA.

Therefore, the period of the 1990s introduced a changing framework of internal social and political relations in the occupied territories and also marked a significant departure from the close cooperation between social and political forces which existed during the Intifada period and the previous decades. In this context, a dialogue process between social and political representatives is critically needed to restore national partnership and promote a common strategy aimed at ending the occupation and achieving a political solution for the key issues of land, refugees, national rights and self-determination.

Third, in conceptual and empirical terms, this article has clearly established the important distinction between civil society as resistance and its role within the liberal peace paradigm and applied this framework to Palestinian civil society before and after the launch of the Oslo peace process. In particular, this distinction was useful in evaluating the concept and the respective use of civil society in the resistance and liberal discourses. In addition, the application of this important distinction to the Palestinian case study has also shown the capacity of grassroots organizations to engage in politically motivated processes and confront military occupation, and their subsequent central role within the depoliticization and liberalization process. Finally, this article has demonstrated the failure of the liberal peace agenda in facilitating credible conflict resolution processes that would address the fundamental issues of national rights and self-determination.

6. Conclusions

This article focused on civil society and politics within the context of peace and conflict issues. It particularly sought to contribute to existing literature and promote a deeper understanding of Palestinian civil society and relevant complex processes including the role of grassroots organizations in national resistance struggles, the Oslo peace project, the creation of a Palestinian authority in the occupied territories, international aid, and the role of international donors and civil society transformation including depoliticization and liberalization. The article examined the conceptual framework of civil society resistance as proposed by Antonio Gramsci and liberal civil society approaches as suggested by Michael Edwards, Roland Paris and David Lewis within the liberal peace theory. Supported by field interviews with Palestinian representatives from academic and civil society backgrounds, this theoretical framework was utilized in the study of Palestinian nationalist and secular civil society organizations and their role as leading agents of national resistance during the 1970s and the 1980s, which conformed to the Gramscian theory of grassroots resistance. In particular, the article discussed the impact of the Oslo process on Palestinian civil society and politics including internal power struggles and conflicting relations with the PA in the 1990s.

The discussions have also focused on examining the Palestinian civil society transformation from national resistance in the 1970s and the 1980s to depoliticization and liberalization in the 1990. The article also sought to contextualize this transformational process in theoretical and empirical terms. Examples of the transformation in Palestinian NGO policy and civil society practices in response to the requirements of international donors have included a specific focus on the concepts of good governance, democratization, rule of law, peace education, conflict resolution, and development under occupation. As previously discussed, the civil society shift from national resistance to depoliticization and liberalization has emerged under the double discourses of the failed Oslo peace process and its internationally-backed models of liberal civil society and peace under occupation.

The resulting implications have included the complicity of aid in the continuation of Israeli military occupation and the need for critical reforms at the policy and institutional level, the disintegration of civil society–political alliances that had successfully sustained the Palestinian national struggle for self-determination in the previous decades, and the centrality of civil society structures within the resistance and liberal peace discourses.

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