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## Palestinian NGO Sector: Development & Major Characteristics

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#### **Abstract**

This article examines the situation of Palestinian NGOs before 2012 through a review over the NGO sector and their regulation, governance and relationship to various stakeholders that the sector is expected to be accountable for. This article sheds light on Palestinian organizations to classify the sector's vulnerability. It also sheds some light on the multiple factors behind the contentious relationship between NGOs and public authorities on the one hand, and between NGOs and the general public on the other hand. The article uses a combination of a quantitative and qualitative methodology and mixed data collection methods from primary and secondary sources for the purposes of clarifying the governance situation of NGOs. The controversy surrounding Palestinian NGOs are because of their motivation, agendas and sources of funds. One of the factors that increases the suspicion is the fact that its board of directors and its director intrude from the Palestinian public and withhold information from them. In the period referred to, the Palestinian Authority closes organizations that support Islamic view and liquidates their resources, while tens of new PA supporter's organizations have created, receives financial support from the PA., and others emerged that were established for personal purposes, maintaining a relationship with the current of power, and the legal framework and governance framework for NGOs remained left on the shelf and used for opponents/ one major finding is that the NGOs sector is able to serve the and helps in fulfulling public needs and strategic national interests if they choose to despite the changes in the national political situations and the pressures imposed from the authorities and donors. The study contributes positively to the understanding of NGOs as a sector. Its clafry the challanages and the weaknesses of the NGO sector and call for more foucs on seving public needs.

Keywords: NGOs, Governance, Regulatory Framework, Palestinian and Funding

## Introduction

NGOs is a controversial topic in the Palestinian territory because of its relations to politics, economy and society as groups and individuals. There is increasing doubt and suspicion of these organizations All joints of life are overshadowed with discussion of its relationship with national issues, foreign financing and societal goals. It is difficult to understand the controversy surrounding the Palestinian NGOs. It also throws some light on the multiple factors behind the contentious relationship between the NGOs and public authorities in one hand, and between the NGOs and the general public on the other.

On one hand, the authoritiesseek greater control over the NGOs because they harbour political and/or private interests; their activities and finances are not properly controlled and their impact questioned because the current law is unable to guarantee the accountabilities of NGOs and their

actions. NGOs are notorious for corruption and weaknesses of their internal governance structures and processes (Clark, 1993; Willetts, 2002). On the other hand, NGOs seek greater independence and lesser control from the authorities and downplay NGOs impact as political, nonstate actors (Clark, 1993; Willetts, 2002).

The general public is wary of the NGOs sector, especially the non-service oriented ones and, the public compares the current organisations to the previous model it had been accustomed prior to the creation of PA. The public views the 'governmental' and the non-governmental sectors as ineffective, donor-dependent, donor driven, self-serving and corrupt in many ways (Clark, 1993; Willetts, 2002).

The article adopts bothqualitative and quantitative methologies and a mixtures of data colelction methods to illustrate the status of NGOs governance. This article shilled the light over palestinian organizations to classify the doubt of the sector and Demonstrate the relationship between organizations and many stakeholders, especially the public, by reviewing its agenda, goals, and actions presented to the public in terms of service work and national goals. The research contains seven sections: the firest section is an overview of Palestinian NGOs in the West Bank with an attempt to clarify the main terms of civil society, governmental organization, charitable organizations, community, voluntary organizations and its usage in the palestinian context. Second section illustrates the Legal & Regulatory Framework for NGOs with development and analysis for the Palestinian Law of Charitable Associations and Community Organisations (Law No. 1 of 2000). Section three disucss the goverence side of the Palestinian law as a Guideline for NGOs followed by clarifying the profile for these organizations. Section five shows the NGOs major socurce of funding followed by explaining the sector programs and activities and therefor their agenda. The last section is the conclons for article to sumlum the disexsion in one paragraph.

## Overview of NGOs in the West Bank

Palestinian 'civil society' has been described as very complex and vibrant despite the fact that it emerged without the presence of an established 'state framework' necessary for this civil society to develop an identify for itself as such. The absence of a Palestinian state, national independence and sovereignty over land and citizenship continue to shape the Palestinian 'civil' society. Most studies traced the origin of Palestinian 'civil' society to the early 1920s or earlier when faith-based, women's organisations, charitable societies and youth clubs emerged under the jurisdiction of the Ottoman Law of Association of 1907 that guaranteed the right of association in a limited manner (Costantini et al., 2011). Their expansion over the decades mirrors the development of the national struggle against the powers that successively ruled the oPt, from the Ottomans to until the Israeli occupation. AbdulHadi (2004) believes civil society emerged during the British mandate era.

However, others such as Hilal (2008) argue that 'civil society', by definition, cannot appear without the state's existence. A state is needed in order for any civil society organisation to act as an intermediate between the state and the public. In other words, Hilal's argument is that the Palestinian 'civil' society emerged only after the creation of PA becuase prior to that time, NGOs and 'civil society' were part of the PLO body. While local voluntary organisations emerged under non-Palestinian governmental structures for more than half a century, they survived successive legal systems, from the Ottomans to the Israeli military orders, because they were membership-based mass organizaitons run in the spirit of resistance and struggle for liberation.

By contrast, other arguments percieve the PA as a semi state structure lacking many respects of sovereign statehood but at least has the legislative and the coercive power to exercise over Palestinian associations (Abu Amr, 1995).

For Shawa, the concept 'civil society' is problematic in the Palestinian context. On the one hand, Palestinian NGOs are seen agents of democratization and representation vis-à-vis the PA/semi state in line with the normative Western discourse on the role of 'civil society' vis-à-vis the state. On the other hand, important differences exist between the two becasue the Palestinian civil society often shows a prefernce towards vertical ties and hierarchy in their internal structures rather stemming from abscense of statehood, and the wider Islamic culture and colonial histories in the region (Shawa, 2000).

Until 1948, Palestinian voluntary organisations continued to operate in hostorical Palestine in order to counter effect the development of the Zionist movement through a focus on preservation of its identity. Between 1948 -1967, Palestinian organisations exisited but were restricted by the respective laws in force to service provision (Costantini et al., 2011). Between 1967 and the First *Intifada* in late 1987, PLO promoted the formation of voluntary work committees, youth and women's organisations and health and education organisation (Hamammi, 2000). Many of these organisations had later become NGOs and very influential in their respective sectors with the adoption of a developmental agenda in agriculture, water, environment, and political participation sectors (AbdulHadi, 2004). The era also witnessed the birth of 'Hamas Movement' and the 'popular committees' (Samara, 2002). along with popular committees that sprung and served as neighbourhood watch, educational and health committees during the First*Intifada*. The unparallel level of public participated in popular committees helped fill in the institutional void so that the first 6 months of the First *Intifada* were described as was the golden period for public participation (Hamammi, 2000; Samara, 2002) even though participation occurred outside the frameworks of state and political representation.

Under Israeli occupation, 'civil' society activties revolved mainly around basic services and relief and humanitarian assistance although human rights organisations florished in the early 1990s to document Israeli violations of Palestinians' rights. After the 1994 Oslo Accords, organisations suddenly increased in number, type and focus. NGOs coexisted with a plethora or mass/service delivery organisations already in place; e.g. labor unions, students' unions. A new generation of NGOs emerged after the creation of PA that by 1996 comprised about 40% of organisations (MAS, cited in Costantini et al., 2011). This generation of organisations hasbeen accused of lacking linkages to communities and/or donor-driven mostly due to competition over funding between PA and the NGOs. This excerbated the mutual mistrust and PA effort to control the NGOs culminating in the passing of the Association's law in 2000 (Hammami, 2000). The same year marked the outset of the Second*Intifada* and a return to armed conflict/struggle, and a shift in NGOs focus from development to relief action. In 2004-5, the PA and NGOs received increased funding after Arafat's death and during the second national elections.

The divide between the West Bank and Gaza Strip is the main feature of post 2006 national elections. Two main processes became apparent following the separation: increased pressure on NGOs to either support the respective political authority or face aggression expresed in the form of security forces' inference in NGO affairs, closure or refused registration of NGOs. In 2010, the official registrar showed a total of 2,319 registered organisations. About 103 NGOs were closed down and/or had their board members appointed by the PA (Human Right Watch, 2008).

Many civil society activists have also been detained by the PA and *Hamas* de facto authority which tightly controls the civil society activities in the Gaza Strip.

# Legal & Regulatory Framework for NGOs

The aforementioned development trajectory of Palestinian civil society can be helpful in understanding their complexity and the size of NGO challenges least of which brought about by the PA legislation and other ones still in force in the oPt. As depicted in Table 2.1 below, many laws NGOs were regulated by legislations of various origions until the the PLC passed the Palestinian Law of Charitable Associations and Community Organisations (Law No. 1 of 2000) that repealed all relevent laws previously in force in the oPt.

Table 2.1: NGOs Regulatory Frameworks (1920-2012)

CSOs	Era	Regulatory Framework	Examples of Organisations	
Pre-Oslo generation	1920-1948:	Ottoman law of 1907 and British	Red Crescent Society,	
	Ottoman &	Mandate law. Licensing required,	Alnahda Women's Association	
	British Mandate	engagement in political or national		
		issues prohibited		
	1948 – 1967	Jordanian administration of West	Dar Al-Tifel Al-Arabi	
		Bank: NGOs governed by the 1996	El-Bir Charitable Society	
		Jordanian law on charitable societies from 1967- 2000	Dar Al Arab Orphan Charity	
Ŏ	1967 – 1990	Israel enforced Ottoman and	Beita Charitable Society	
re		Jordanian laws in addition to new	Alhaq – Law in service of man	
		1200 Israeli military orders issued	Medical Relief Committees	
		Israeli registration required for	Health Work Committees,	
		Ierusalem based organisations	Land Research Centre.	
Post Oslo -pre- Intifada 2 Generation	1991 – 1995	Previous laws still applicable.	Palestinian Youth Union	
	(Oslo Accords	The PLO had yet no laws to enforce	Al-Dameer, and Teacher	
	signed in 1993-4)	on NGOs but used political support &	Creativity Centere, Arij	
		funding to influence them		
)slc	1995-2000	Previous laws revoked in 2000	Lod Chartiable Society, Civic	
it C la 2	(post PA	Registration is obligatory by PA after	forum Institute Miftah, Centre for	
Pos	creation)	2000 (West bank & Gaza)	Rehabilitation of Victims of	
lnti		Registration is obligatory by Israeli	Torture, and Ramallah Centre for	
		authorities (Jerusalem)	Human Rights Studies,	
	2001-2006	Palestinian Law No (1) of 2000 was	Taawon for Conflict Resolution,	
Post-Intidada II Generation	(The Second	issued after a long battle with CSOs	Juhoud for Rural Development,	
	Intifada)	NGOs registration become obligatory	Beita Women Development	
	2007 2010	as per the PA new law	Society	
- G	2007- 2010 PA- <i>Hamas</i>	Emergency law \ since June 2007 Presidential decree No. 16 of 2007	Rawafid for Community	
	internal divide	was issued.	development Dalia for Micro-finance	
da	internal divide	-Ministerial and Cabinet decisions	Al-nayzak scientifc forum	
ida		authorized intervention by security	Sharek Youth Forum	
[nti		agencies	Network of Youth organizations	
st-]		Bylaws under preparation for Law No	Network of Found organizations  Network of environmental	
Po		(1) of (2000)	organisations	
		Forced dissolution of many NGOs	organisations	
	l	1 oreca dissoration of many 1400s		

Sources: (Al-Moaqat, 2007; Human Right Watch, 2008; ICHR Report, 2002; Palestinian Chartiable Orgnizations and Community Law No. 1 for 2000).

Article (1) of the Palestinian law affirms the right of Palestinian citizens to practice, in all freedom, "all social, cultural, professional and scientific activities", and the right to "establish and run charitable societies and community organisations". Article (2) goes further to define these organisations as any charitable society or community organisation with an independent judicial personality, established upon an agreement concluded among no less than seven persons to achieve legitimate objectives of public concern, without aiming at attaining financial profits to be shared among the members or achieving any personal benefits (Article No. 2 of Law No. 1, 2000)

According to the law, a community activity is defined as any social, economic, cultural, community, developmental or other service or activity, undertaken voluntarily, that would lead to the improvement of the social, health, professional, material, spiritual, artistic, sports, cultural or educational conditions in society. On this ground, Article (41) of the law provides organisations with some guarantees of independence, freedom and protection against the illegal possession of resources, closure or search of any of its offices, premises or branches without an order issued by a competent judicial body.

However, the law assigns the Ministry of Interior (MoI) as the competent authority in all NGOs affairs, except with licencing and technical oversight of services. NGO registration fall under the MoI legal mandate conditional on the satisfaction of certain requirements. The MoI must issue a decision within a period of two months from the date of submission of the application. If the two-month period expires without a decision being made, the organisation is considered legally registered. In case of rejection, the MoI must specify the reasons for the rejection and the applicants have the right to contest this decision before the competent court.

On the other hand, any registered organisation is legally obliged to:

- 1. Keep records on their operations and finances (Article 11);
- 2. Inform the MoI in writing of any changes to the whereabouts of its headquarters, by-laws, objectives and purposes, board of directors (Article 12);
- 3. Submit to the ministry a yearly report on the organisation's activities and an audited financial report including statement on tax and custom exemptions, transferable and non-transferable funds necessary carrying out its functions (Article 36).

Article (37) grants the organisation's general assembly and/or the MoI the power to dissolve an organisation in case of (a) failure to commence actual operations within the first year from its date of registration or license or (b) a substantive violation of its by-laws that has not been rectified them within 3 months from the date of MoI notification.

However, Jerusalem-based Palestinian NGOs fall under the Israeli Association Law of 1980 although many have PA registration. The Israeli law requires the approval of non-profit firms and cooperatives by the Registrar of Associations at the Ministry of Justice. Dissolution can be made at the members' will, by a court order, upon request of the Registrar or the Attorney General in case of fraud or administrative irregularities. However, Israeli measures against Palestinian NGOs usually refer to the 1948 military 'Prevention of Terrorism Ordinance' and the 'Law on the Prohibition of Terror Funding' of 2005.

However, the timing of such measures against Palestinian organisations by both Israel and PA indicates that they were more likely to be politically motivated or justified by national security reasons. The PA closed many NGOs and forced others to change their elected Boards of Directors or imposed interim administrative committees until the election of new boards without recourse to due judicial procedure mandated by the law. Most of these actions were based on ministerial or cabinet decisions lacking legal justification. For example, the MoI's decision No. 20 of 2007ordered organisation to submit their applications to security agencies. Shortly after, the Presidential Decree No 16, dated 20 June 2007, forced NGOs to apply for re-registration within a period of one week and authorized the MoI to undertake suitable actions against organisations in the event of non-compliance. Such measures have come under fire from many human rights organisations because they violate the right to freedom of association guaranteed by the Palestinian Basic Law and the international human rights instruments.

#### Palestinian Law as a Guideline for NGOs Governance

All Palestinian laws promulgated by the PA stem from the 1988 Declaration of Independent Palestinian State issued by the PLO National Council in Algeria. The declaration is sensitive to democracy, equity, minority rights, human rights, including women and children, and the rights of all Palestinian refugees. It constitutes the main law that NGOs invoke when addressing challenges pertaining to collective rights and good governance. These rights are reiterated in the Palestinian Basic Law of 2003 issued 15 years after the Declaration of Independence.

The Palestinian Law No (1) of (2000) lays down the formal guidelines for NGO governance but focuses on corporate governance (i.e. internal structure, internal process, documentations, and PA oversight NGOs). Other than the prohibition of NGOs receipt of conditional funding, the law does not address NGOs relationship with stakeholders in terms of their involvement in decisionmaking or public access to information. Articles 10 to 13 extensively addressed the NGO relationship with PA through record keeping, documentation, and reporting on change to Board of Directors (BoD), and annual narrative and financial audit reporting to competent ministry (El-Moaqat, 2007). In terms of internal structure and processes, the Law triestoeliminate conflict of interests involving first and second degree relatives of BoD members (Article 16) and personal gain through prohibiting BoD members from receiving payment or other compensation for voluntary involvement (Article 20). Article 17 grants the management responsibility with the BoD with a detailed list of tasks and duties in Article 18. However, it is noticeable that the law does not assign any responsibility for the NGO management and staff including the General Manager, although hiring personnel is allowed unlike Article 19 which specifies substantive powers invested in BoD. Articles 21 and 23 provide the requirements and instructions for convening BoD and GA meetings, respectively (El-Moaqat, 2007). Finally, NGOs financial issues and records are the topics of Articles 30 and 31 with an emphasis on financial audit and statements to be submitted on annual basis.

Noting that the law does not obligate NGOs to carry out social audits or evaluation of their operations, El-Moaqat (2007) argues that the Law required the bare minimum of governance practices from the NGOs. As a solution, she recommended that the creation of an independent national agency to oversee NGOs affairs, other than the MoI, the publication of financial and administrative report and the addition of an explicit article to the relevant law(s)addressing the public's right to access NGO records.

#### **NGOs Profile**

Palestinian NGOs is a sizable sector. Estimates put the total number of registered West Bank organisations to 2,319 (MoI Data, 2010) and close to 890 organisations in the Gaza Strip (MoI Gaza cited in Maan News Website, 2011). Moreover, the sector is said to have employed 31,735 persons in both areas from PCBS (Hamdan, 2010). About 60.3% were created after 1994, 33.7% were founded between 1994-2000 while 26.6% emerged between 2000-2007 (Hilal, 2008, p. 27). In terms of geographical distribution, there is a pronounced preference for organisations to base their operation in urban area (49.7%) than in rural areas or refugee camps (42.6% and 17.7% respectively) (Hilal, 2008, p. 27).

In terms of district distribution, 64% operate in the central districts such as Ramallah (30.25%) followed by the northern districts (31%). Southern areas host 25% of NGOs despite the comparatively larger population and areas of southern districts. The least number of NGOs is found in Tubas and Jericho, with a combined percentage of less than 2%.

WB Region	District(s)	Percentage
Northern	Jenin	8.71%
	Tubas	0.09%
	Nablus	10.54%
	Tulkarem, Qalqilia & Salfeet	11.46%
Central	Ramallah	30.25%
	Jerusalem	13.74%
	Jericho	2.06%
Southern	Bethlehem	13.20%
	Hebron	9.95%
	Total	100%

Table 2 Distribution of NGOs in the West Bank Districts

Source: (Ministry of Interior Data, 2010)

In terms of sector distribution, researchers divide NGOs into three major types or subsectors (Hilal, 2008). First, the charitable or social welfare subsector (51.5%) comprises relief organisations and providers of social service such as nurseries, kindergartens, and elderly care. Second, 'development' organisations (27.3%) are those involved in human rights, democracy promotion; research; policy development, think tanks, advocacy and culture. The third and final type include sport clubs and associations (19.2%).

## **NGOs Funding**

There is an consensus that it is quite hefty, at least because of the INGOs large size although there is no accurate, verifiable figure on foreign funding received from European, American, UN and Arab countries and organisations. Table 2.3 show that European funding consitute about two thirds of total foreign aid to Palestinian NGOs, while Arab Countries provide 10% compared to a mere 4.3% from the USA (DeVoir & Tartir, 2009). About 75% from foreign aid comes from INGOs as opposed to 25% from governental agncies. Foregin funding is usually channelled through NGO grants for implementation of pre-approved, highly-conditional projects or as programmatic support to sustain NGOs programs and services (DeVoir & Tartir, 2009)

Table 3: Estimated Forign Aid to NGOs in the oPT

Year	Amount in US\$ Millions	Source of foreign aid for major donors in 2008		Source of foreign aid for major donors in 2008	
1999	48	European countries	67.8%	Government	25%
2000	55	including the EU and		INGO	75%
2001	93	non-EU members			
2002	103				
2003	65				
2004	57	USA	4.3%		
2005	218	Arab countries	10%		
2006	196				
2007	213				
2008	258				
Total	1305				

Source: A compliation by Devoir & Tartir (2009) of foreign aid estimates to Palestinian NGOs between 1999-2008

In 2008, NGOs depended on external sources (78.3%) or self financed (12.4%) though income generation and service fees while (5.3%) survived on local support (DeVoir & Tartir, 2009). Local funding is occassionally available through 'in-kind' donations, Zakat money, private sector sponsorship or activities, reveues, and service fees but they remain negligible compared to the NGOs operational budgets. In terms of governmental funding, the PA occasionally provides monthly instalement financial to NGOs, especially Fateh-affiliated ones, to cover salaries, rent and other running cost.

Due to the significane of their socio-economic role, particulately towards the most vulnerable and marginalized groups, NGOs delivered 60% of all social services provided by early 1990s thorugh reciept of USD 120-180 million of foreign funding annually in addition to USD 30 million provided by local communities and fundraising abroad targeting the Palestinians in Diaspora. Most funding filtered to primary health care; hospitals, rehabilitation, housing, agriculture and social welfare in the oPt (Abdelkarim, 2002).

After the Oslo Accords, foreign donors prioritized the nascent PA and cut NGOs funding by 50% in the second half of 1990s. By 1995, only US\$ 50 million were channeled through NGOs primarily for health services. By 2000, funding increased to USD 80-110 million due to the increase in Arab and Islamic aid to mitigate the impact of the the Second Intifada (Abdelkarim, 2002). However, NGOs recieved in one decade (1999 – 2008), a total of USD 13.4 billion (DeVoir & Tartir, 2009) although it is unclear if this figure also accounts for aid delivered through international agencies (e.g. UNRWA, UN agencies , and INGOs) or its distribution between the West Bank and Gaza Strip regions, although it is expected that the Gaza Strip recieived a smaller share due to the larger population in the West Bank.

Funding favoured urban-based CSOs even though 31% of the Palestinian population resided then in urban areas. About 69.6% of foreign aid went to organisations with main offices in the central districts of Ramallah, Jerusalem, and Bethlehem (DeVoir & Tartir, 2009). The funding increase to urban CSOs (from 25% to 40%) in the 1990s was also aimed at rural areas but studies show that NGOs dedicated less than 40% of their resources to rural areas. Due to the scale of UNRWA operations, NGOs are less functional in the refugee camps (DeVoir & Tartir, 2009). In terms of

sectoral distribution, NGOs engage in rights-based sector received about 30% of donor funding followed by social services and welfare (26%). NGOs involved in economic development, education and humanitarian assistance/relief received 22%, 14% and 9% of aid funds, respectively (DeVoir & Tartir, 2009).

However, this inflow of foeign aid is not necessarily of a blessing for any civil society which has grown extremely dependent on external funds. NGOs financial unsustainability is clearly a major issue because 75% of funds originate from external sources thus creating a preference for "donor-oriented sustainability" (Abdelkarim, 2002). For an enhanced sustainability potential, NGOs can prioritize local sources and self-sufficiency strategies locally thorugh income generating activities, private sector contributions, and PA support in form of a certain tax percentage to be dedicated to civil society (Abdelkarim, 2002).

## NGOs' Roles and Agenda(s)

Under occupation, Palestinian NGOs had two major roles: provision of essential public services ususally provided by the state. However, in the absence of national Palestinian state NGOs were committed to supporting the palestinian people in the struggle for liberation. Thus, NGO gained popularity with the PLO and Palestinian public (Shawa, 2000) until the early 1990s when a new role emerged requiring NGOs to support the Palestinian negotiators in Madrid (Jad, 2000). In the post-Oslo era, the emergence of PA automatically created a Palestinian public authority responsible for public service delivery. The NGOs faced another challenge to define new identity and roles under the PA (Shawa, 2000; Hamammi, 2000). Neverthless, given the limited capacities of the nascent PA, NGOs have since continued their service delivery and releif roles especially in emergencies and times of armed conflict. The weaker the public authority, the quicker the NGO interventions to fill in the gap. Thus it can be said that both Intifadas were the NGOs golden eras because they saw the heights of Israeli suppression and disintegration of Palestinian public authorities (Jarrar, 2005).

In the Post Oslo era, donors shifted interests to NGOs non-service activities in new fields such as human rights, gender equity and mainstreaming, democracy promotion, civic education, peace building, advocacy, public participation in policy and decision making. Hamammi (2000) argues that the funding shift obscures the fact that community needs remain largely unmet, particularly in education, health, jobs creation, and poverty reduction. the new funding priorities reflect donors view of the oPt as 'a post-conflict zone' rather than a natural development in the country's socio-economic situation. Six years after Oslo accords, the Second Intifada in late 2000 quickly proved that the region is still a conflict zone (Hanafi& Tabar, 2005). NGOs returned their focus on relief and services delivery. The role continues to date although some NGOs engage in public policy dialogue and promotion of democracy, peace and reconciliation (Costantini et al., 2011). Others, especially researchers conducting studies for donor agencies, argue that NGOs should prioritize good governance, public policy, and citizen empowerment over services delivery (Costantini et al., 2011).

The literature gives another interpretation for NGOs/donors agenda shift after PA formation. The agendas has become increasingly neo-liberal either because of globalization and triumph of capitalism (Jad, 2007; Qassoum, 2004; Samara, 2002) and/or because of priority changes brought about by political changes. NGOs agenda shifted from supporting 'public resistance' to the so-called 'peace building'. In other words, NGOs moved away from the national movement and more towards institutional building, good governance, and anti-corruption. Some would

argue that corruption in PA institutions (Hamamai, 2000; Shawa, 2000) and political parties' weakness constitute major factors for NGOs pursuance of new missions (Abu Ramadan, 2007; Muhsin, 2006). As the leftist political parties failed to project an alternative to Fateh and Hamas, NGOs too, have moved away from public and national interests particularily the urban-based organisations.

Globalization and internal political factors aside, there are attempts to re-classify the Palestinian NGOs community after PA emergence along criteria such as: NGOs'

- 1. Sector or thematic focus (e.g health, youth, human rights, etc.) (Hilal, 2008),
- 2. Motivation (e.g personal, business, familial, political),
- 3. Organisational type (e.g. professional, developmental or traditional) (Hamammi, 2000; Abdal Hadi, 2004),
- 4. Agendas (e.g. donor-driven or committed to local and/or national interests) (Hanfi & Tabar, 2005).

Obviously, NGOs roles and agendas are influenced by subjective perspectives. NGOs can be percieved as agents for the promotion of liberalism, privatization and free market (Hamdan, 2010; Kamat, 2004; Nakhleh, 2011; Qassoum, 2004; Samara, 2002) or as local entities hindering developing countries from opposing Western interests. In the midst of such environment, some Palestinian NGOs are confused about their agendas and identities (Edwards et al., 1999) and open the door to scepticism about their agenda. Hanafi (1999) concluded that the obscurity or lack of NGOs agendas requires more research to explore intrests and motivations rather rthan accusing PA official, other activists and groups of donor-driveness and/or donor-dependency (Songco et al., 2006). Similarily, NGOs are inability so far to achieve community development, maitain their grassroots connections, or influence PA policy making, should be studied in order to see how they can contribute to the actualization of immeidate and strategic natinal interests (Songco et al., 2006).

### **Conclusion**

Almost two decades after peace accords, the PA have neither been successful in negotiating a final solution to the Palestinian -Israeli conflict on the basis of two-state solution or developing into a Palestinian state because of two major problems: the power imbalance between the Palestinians and Israel and the inability of PA to reach a unified national vision and strategy for liberation of occupation agreed upon by all Palestinians. Unable to assume control of their own resource under ongoing occupation, Palestinians turn to NGOs for some relief from poverty, unemployment and service shortages. It is expected from the NGOs to stay loyal to their roots by fulfilling public needs rather than chasing fickle, political-motivated donor funding aimed at obscuring the ongoing conflict and portray the oPt as a post conflict zone. However, it is true that the NGO sector suffers from the legacy of a complex legal system from bygone eras, but even the Palestinian law of 2000 demands NGOs to work for the public good, regardless of the limitations of this law, or the aggressive policies enforced by Hamas and PA. The NGOs sector has the experience, human and financial resources, geographical presence and sectoral distribution to seriously contribute to the achievement of immediate public needs and strategic national interests if they choose to despite the changes in the national political situations and the pressures imposed from the authorities and donors.

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