

كسر القوالب Breaking the mold

#Breaking_The_Mold

Arab Civil Society Actors and their Quest to Influence Policy-Making

Country: **Palestine**

General Introduction to Research Papers Focusing on The Palestinian Context Palestinian Civil Society: Components, Emergence and Evolution

Palestinian civil society consists of two groups of institutions: First, traditional social institutions include clans, Al-Hamayel clans, families, urban, rural, familial and sectarian relations, and religious institutions. Secondly, modernist formations include Palestinian political movements and parties, charitable organizations, trade unions (workers and professionals), student and youth unions, women's organizations, developmental non-governmental organizations, media, voluntary, human rights organizations and other service institutions (Birzeit University, 2005).

Palestinian civil society came into existence during exceptional circumstances that differ from how civil societies in other countries appeared. It originated from a liberation movement in which the Palestinian groups and levels were organized to form a single mass movement, political leadership, people, unions, parties, and associations to confront the occupying forces that succeeded the occupation of the Palestinian Territory (Abrash, 2001). In the aftermath of the First World War and the defeat of the Ottoman Empire that ruled the Arab countries, including Palestine, for nearly four centuries, Palestine fell under the control of the British Mandate until 1948, the date of the establishment of the state of "Israel" on more than 75% of Palestine's historical land, and the expulsion and displacement of two-thirds of the Palestinians, which led to the dispersal of Palestinian society since the war in 1948 between those who remained in their land and lived in it, those who sought refuge in the West Bank and Gaza Strip that were under the Jordanian and Egyptian rulings until 1967 when they fell under the Israeli occupation, and Palestinian refugee communities in the different diaspora and emigrant countries (Hilal, 2006).

Considered as a crucial and vital part of the Palestinian civil society, some developmental civil organizations came into existence in response to society's needs and to address life problems caused by the Israeli occupation in 1967. However, their orientations were different from those of the charitable organizations. They were intertwined in their activities with some official organizations to save the Palestinian social pattern, particularly in health, education, culture and social care fields (Birzeit University, 2005, p. 86).

The Palestinian civil society was established in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. It also developed and practiced its activity in the absence of the structure or authority of the national state, as it suffered from the inability to distinguish between forms of the national liberation struggle and the pursuit of establishing the national state, and the processes and forms of self-organization associated with the activities and characteristics of civil society organizations (Abu Omar, 1995, pp. 26-29). The number of Palestinian civil institutions and organizations increased after 1967, as they played a significant role in rationalizing modernization and development processes and pushing them forward (Birzeit University, 2005).

Hammami (1995) indicates three phases of NGO development. In the mid-seventies of the last century, the first nucleus was formed by political parties. Then, the inter-factional committees managing the development and popular organizations emerged in the eighties before these organizations were managed in the nineties by teams who consider themselves as development workers seeking their society's development (pp. 54-55). Abrash (2001) believes that the Palestinian civil society has witnessed four stages of development, the last of which is the current stage, known as the post-"Oslo Agreement" of 1994, which partially ended the war

with the occupying power and resulted in the function of political and civil institutions during the revolution and the emergence of differentiation between the civil and political societies and the transformation of the Palestine Liberation Organization into political authority.

At this point, international donor aid provided high salaries and other economic benefits to many civil society organizations. Leaders of non-governmental organizations were able to interact with local and international politicians, foreign diplomats, Members of the Parliament, United Nations officials and international agencies. They participated in many international events and conferences and were featured on local and international media as influential activists. These benefits helped sort out two types of elites: The first one includes former leaders and activists who generally belong to the middle class, some of whom are politically affiliated with left-wing factions and built their reputation and professional capabilities through their previous political activities. The second type of elites includes a younger generation of career-oriented professionals, most of whom acquired their knowledge and skills from Western universities or professional experience abroad, and this elite is constantly updated with the latest developments in the dynamics of the aid industry and has extensive networks of external contacts (Daana, 2013).

Furthermore, reliance on external funding is itself an indicator of the vulnerability of many civil society organizations. Certainly, some of these institutions deviated from the goals for which they were established due to their desire to keep pace with funders' agendas and harmonize their goals with the financing institutions' agenda. One of the prominent examples is the institutions subjected to the American funding terms by signing the anti-terrorism memorandum that considers the Palestinian resistance to be terrorism, and classifies the Palestinians in updated lists of their criteria for terrorism. Therefore, many of these institutions are forced under pressure due to the need for funding to deal with these conditions, indicating weak governance and self-financing. According to Ziada (2014), non-governmental organizations, an integral part of the Palestinian civil society components, left the culture of volunteer struggle and resistance in the pre-Oslo period to adopt a culture of coexistence at present and became a source for creating jobs with salaries higher than the local average wage. However, international control, oversight and accountability increased on the mechanism of these measures. They turned from organizations depending on released funds and programs from the pre-Oslo period into organizations relying on projects. Consequently, the Palestinians became divided according to the sources of funding.



PALESTINIAN CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANIZATIONS: FIELDS OF WORK AND ACTIVITY

Civil activity arose in response to meeting societal needs of a civil nature that are not related to the local authorities' concerns by working to improve the conditions of marginalized or underprivileged groups, and contributing to the process of social change by making an impact on legislation and public policies through a broad awareness and educational process (Abd al-Hadi et al., 2002).

Governance and the rule of law are currently among the sectors in which Palestinian civil society organizations have extensive experience, especially in terms of human rights protection, good management, transparency, accountability, fighting corruption, citizen participation in local governance, gender, women's rights and personal status. Palestinian civil society is also active in the justice and security sector. It performs four functions: 1) Increasing the knowledge, capabilities, and responsivity of the judicial authorities and security forces in each human rights and social dynamics field. 2) Informing and empowering citizens to be able to access rights related to justice and security. 3) Monitoring processes and providing information to public authorities. 4) Providing services to increase access to justice and ensure the security of citizens. Most Palestinian civil society organizations are well established and have strong strategic technical capabilities (Costantini, Salama, and Issa, 2015, p. 96).

THE REALITY OF FREEDOMS IN PALESTINE

Freedoms in Palestine have been affected by the political division in the Palestinian territories since 2007 (15/6/2007), following the bloody events in the Gaza Strip that injured more than 550 and killed more than 116 Palestinian security personnel and members of Fatah movement by Hamas, according to Red Cross estimates (ICRC, 2007). In fact, the struggle over power and political decision negatively affected the reality of freedoms and the size of the social, cultural and political gap between social groups. It negatively reflected on belonging to the homeland and its official and civil institutions as civil society institutions, which led to a lack of community confidence in civil society institutions, factions and parties, thus retreating youth and their distancing from political and social life. Reports issued by human rights centers in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank, such as the Independent Palestinian



Commission for Human Rights (the Board of Grievances), the Palestinian Center for Human Rights and the Al-Haq Center, indicate the deterioration of public rights and freedoms in Palestine since 2007 (Miftah 2018).

Palestinian law guarantees the right to peaceful assembly. According to Article 3 of the Public Gatherings Law of 1998, the peaceful assembly needs only written notification from the governor or police director in the relevant governorate. Studies indicate that violating these rights has become one of the features distinguishing the Gaza Strip from the West Bank. Al-Mezan Center for Human Rights issued a fact sheet on violations of the right to peaceful assembly, freedom of opinion and expression and the right not to be subjected to arbitrary arrest in the Gaza Strip between 2018 and 2019. Whereas, the center stated that arbitrary

detention related to freedom of opinion and expression, political affiliation, and peaceful assembly constituted one of the most prominent violations, as the security services in the Gaza Strip summoned 742 people for exercising the freedoms as mentioned above, and arrested 588 of them, including 119 people who were repeatedly arrested more than once. 448 people were arrested due to political affiliation, and 110 people were repeatedly arrested. The sheet also mentioned 11 cases of violation of the right to peaceful assembly in the Gaza Strip, which resulted in the injury of about 13 participants, including 5 women, in addition to the arrest of 36 citizens (Dunia Al-Watan, 2019). In the West Bank, the violation of this right emerges when the advisor to the Palestinian president for governorate affairs issued a special circular prohibiting the licensing of demonstrations during Eid (Palestinian Center for Human Rights, 2018).



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BREAKING THE MOLD PROJECT

In mid-2018, the "Civil Society Actors and Policymaking in the Arab World" program at IFI, with the support of Open Society Foundations, launched the second round of its extended research project "Arab Civil Society Actors and their Quest to Influence Policy-Making". This project mapped and analyzed the attempts of Arab civil society, in all its orientations, structures, and differences, to influence public policy across a variety of domains. This research produced 92 case studies outlining the role of civil society in impacting political, social, economic, gender, educational, health-related, and environmental policies in ten Arab countries: Lebanon, Syria, Palestine, Jordan, Egypt, Morocco, Tunisia, Yemen, and the Arab Gulf.

Over two dozen researchers and research groups from the above countries participated in this project, which was conducted over a year and a half. The results were reviewed by an advisory committee for methodology to ensure alignment with the project's goals, and were presented by the researchers in various themed sessions over the course of the two days.

THE CIVIL SOCIETY ACTORS AND POLICY-MAKING PROGRAM

at the Issam Fares Institute for Public Policy and International Affairs at AUB, examines the role that civil society actors play in shaping and making policy. Specifically, the program focuses on the following aspects: how civil society actors organize themselves into advocacy coalitions; how policy networks are formed to influence policy processes and outcomes; and how policy research institutes contribute their research into policy. The program also explores the media's expanding role, which some claim has catalyzed the Uprisings throughout the region.

THE ISSAM FARES INSTITUTE FOR PUBLIC POLICY AND INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS AT THE AMERICAN UNIVERSITY OF BEIRUT

The Issam Fares Institute for Public Policy and International Affairs at the American University of Beirut (AUB Policy Institute) is an independent, research-based, policy-oriented institute. Inaugurated in 2006, the Institute aims to harness, develop, and initiate policy relevant research in the Arab region. We are committed to expanding and deepening policy-relevant knowledge production in and about the Arab region; and to creating a space for the interdisciplinary exchange of ideas among researchers, civil society and policy-makers.

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