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Last edition of BTL featured a roundtable discussion of prominent Palestinian Non-Governmental Organization [NGO] leaders and representatives of international donor agencies conducting a critical self-evaluation of their role influence and efficacy within the overall Palestinian national movement. (See BTL August 2002, Vol II #17). This roundtable discussion was initiated after the findings of a study entitled "Donors, international organizations and Palestinian NGOs: Agenda-setting and Networking" were presented by its co-authors Linda Tabar and Dr. Sari Hanafi, who have researched the subject for the past two years. The research attempted to study and delineate the nature of the relationships between donors, international NGOs (INGOs), and Palestinian NGOs (PNGOs), and the process of agenda-setting resulting from the interaction between these organizations, in order to understand how external actors influence the policies of development and democratization conducted by the Palestinian NGOs, as well as to understand how Palestinian NGOs play a role in the elaboration of global agendas through different forms of institutions including transnational social movement organizations. Featured below are excerpts from the conclusion of this study, which specifically relate to their research on elite formation and the performance of Palestinian NGOs during the second Intifada, generously provided by the research's authors. The research was commissioned and will soon be published in Arabic by Muwatin: the Palestinian Institute for the Study of Democracy; an English version is due out later on.

Introduction

Both the increased role of NGOs in local development and the activation of transnational NGO advocacy networks have opened up new research areas, including around the issues of agenda setting and networking, between NGOs, INGOs and donors. Drawing on fieldwork and surveys conducted in the Palestinian context and with a focus on three sectors of health, gender and development, and human rights and democracy, the research has made timely theoretical and empirical contributions by unmasking the process of decision-making that underlies the structured interaction between donors and Palestinian NGOs.

Influenced by the model of 'good governance', development policy and aid transfers have, since the end of the Cold War, come to be dominated by what Mark Robinson (1994) calls a 'New Policy Agenda'. The agenda is not monolithic and varies in its specifics from one official aid agency to another, but in most cases it is driven by beliefs revolving around the twin poles of neo-liberal economics and liberal democratic theory (Moore 1993). This New Policy Agenda has ushered in a new development paradigm for local NGO's organizational models, reorienting internal NGO operations according to donor funding criteria and in line with their own organizational models. What some have called the 'mainstream development approach' envisions development as a predictable outcome; projects becoming the work of 'inputs' and 'outputs' abstracted from the context (Biggs and Neame, 1996). This has implications for NGO actors' own external activities and how they view themselves as actors within their own context. If NGOs are the agents that 'fix' the development problems, then this implies that they objectify themselves as outside of the context of their society.

Hulme and Edwards (1997: 14) note that the New Policy Agenda raises NGOs to a new level of

prominence making NGOs new influential actors, yet they ask what prevents the NGO from being co-opted to the aims of the new policy agenda: what happens to NGO values, mission and their links to the population? They argue that what is needed is mechanisms of accountability and strategic vision and planning. While they are correct in ascribing these measures, our analysis shows that in fact the structural changes in the development field have deep-rooted implications that affect NGO internal organizational practices, and therefore their external mode of action, in a manner, which is not easily addressed.

Emerging Globalized Elite

There is an emerging Palestinian globalized elite, loosely defined as a local social formation which is informed by and/or closely aligned with global debates and agendas. This takes place within a broader process of a structuring of knowledge, practices and elite formation among Palestinian NGOs in relation to their increased entry into development cooperation.

With the increased availability of development assistance to Palestinian NGOs and the decreased availability of Arab and other forms of funding, not only has there been a new hierarchy established among organizations, according to donor funding criteria, but there is also a new heightened state of competition. Amidst this competition, the new NGO elite has overturned the old elite (including the voluntary charitable societies or in some cases, the elite in the rural areas) through a process of competition and in vying for organizational continuance. In the Palestinian context, the new NGO 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 order. Before characterizing this elite a few observations are in order.

A comparison of PNGOs' [Palestinian NGO's], discourse and practices is quite revealing. Analyzing their discourse a kind of dogma or profession of faith can be observed, including in Palestinian NGO leaders' own discourse. This 'profession of faith' is usually framed in dichotomous terms, black versus white, more importantly 'global' versus 'local'. These dichotomies do not reflect NGO actors' own beliefs per se, rather the actors move within these categorizations and manipulate them according to the context. For instance, PNGO actors often speak of a 'national agenda' which guides their developmental approach, yet they rarely address who can speak in the name of national interests nor do they look at this agenda in a pluralistic manner. More revealing, in local discourses many NGOs have demonized one donor in particular, suggesting that they select donors according to the interests of the national agenda. Our interlocutors often portrayed USAID as Satan and as the enemy of the Palestinian people. Why did they choose USAID for condemnation? Most probably they associate USAID with the US government, which often takes a position supporting Israel. However, we were surprised to find that contrary to their own declarations, five of these actors had actually applied for fund from USAID. Some of them received grants and others did not. Finally, at times Palestinian NGOs talk about the local agenda, when in fact they are much closer to the global agenda, especially concerning the importance of some issues like using awareness in gender policies, training in capacity building, using the participatory approach, integrated projects, and community-based projects - all topics extensively promoted by the global agenda.

All of this is meant to indicate that the globalized elite is not simply an easily identified group: sometimes concepts like 'global' and 'local' become markers used by the actors interchangeably depending on the context.

Characterizing the Palestinian Globalized Elite

Turning to the features of this emerging globalized elite, four major characteristics can be drawn.

Firstly, globalized elite refers to actors that are informed by global agendas and may be closely aligned with internationally endorsed development paradigms. They move within the space occupied by donors and INGOs, attending global conferences and forming their own relations with international organizations. Thus globalized elite does not mean global elite but its characteristics refer to ties to global actors, mainly actors of international NGOs and donors.

The second feature is particular to the Palestinian context; this elite is distinguished by its position on the peace process. The elite supports the peace process or at least believes in the importance of giving this process and the PNA sufficient time without exercising violence against the Israeli occupation. In this regard, this elite is different from the National-Islamist one.

Third, the focus of donor funding has been in Jerusalem and the large Palestinian cities. This has led to the creation of an urban elite.

Finally, it is a professionalized elite: Palestinian NGO actors are no longer the pure activists of the first Intifada. They are either former activists with a technical bend or they are technocrats who do not have connections with the national movement. The absorption of donor ideas and norms has had implications not only for methods but also for personnel. In this respect, it is clear that there is a predominance of English-speaking graduates, and financial skills are becoming increasingly important. There is nothing wrong with such people and the skills they bring, but there is often a downside as vernacular-speaking field management specialists, and their own importance in the organization is waning. Some PNGOs ask for English as a mother tongue when soliciting applications for positions such as fundraiser or proposal writer. This not only privileges non-Palestinians, but also sheds light on the fundraising process. This process is no longer about local individuals in local organizations interacting with partner INGOs, but a relationship between professional bodies. Here professional skills refer to the capacity of the NGO applicants to meet the reporting needs of the international partner.

Without making a judgment against this elite, nonetheless it is clear that the emergence of a new elite within the context of national liberalization and a certain middle class urban cultural milieu creates some paradoxes that these actors should be conscious of.

To begin one can ask, is this elite necessarily democratic? This question has two aspects, the first concerning donor, civil society and democracy building programs. Browsing development agencies' and international NGOs' literature, it is clear that civil society and democracy have often been confused. Theoretically, civil society is analogous to Habermas' public sphere: it is a context in which a plurality of trends and different social and political actors debate their ideas. In this sense, while civil society is an indispensable tool for democracy, it is not democracy itself. So the question is not related to a distortion or a projection of a 'Western' concept into the Third World, but is related to the confusing, or equating, civil society building with democracy building, when in fact these two objectives are not exactly coterminous. Democracy building extends beyond civil society and requires broader structures and some sort of redistribution of power among social actors. The confusion between these two goals has an impact on NGO projects and activities and also on the character of the new elite, giving the impression that funding non-governmental actors versus State actors is sufficient for restoring democracy.

More importantly, the second aspect of forging a democratic elite concerns the internal practices of the NGO actors. Broader power structures in the Palestinian society are reflected in the NGO sector. Further to this, donors do not pay sufficient attention to local NGOs' internal governance. Often they are satisfied with a certified audit. There is not enough attention paid to the function of the board, or the general functioning of the NGOs. Moreover, little consideration is given to the personalization of NGOs, many of whom are referred to and known by the name of their directors

more than by the organization's own name. If there is a change in the director of an NGO, one can speak of a sort of coup d'etat. Therefore, in this respect, the donors do not promote a democratic elite.

Finally, one can ask, if an NGO is too close to the donors does this mean that it will be removed from the constituency? The idea of a globalized elite does not necessarily logically entail that the local organization will undergo a process of separation from the grassroots. If the donors require local NGOs to be accountable to them through different reporting mechanism, this does not lead in a cause-effect manner to these NGOs becoming less accountable to their constituency and to the grassroots. There are many complex factors, which impact the relationship between the NGO and the community. Beyond any external influences, it is evident in the Palestinian case that there is a trend among many Palestinian NGOs towards elitism, which seems to be related to factors within the local context more than to the donors. For instance, local NGOs often pay insufficient attention to what types of linkages bind them with the public, and many disseminate information that is sometimes only in English.

These paradoxes lead into another important issue: the role of interests in explaining the formation of the globalized elite. The interests that underlie the actions of the globalized elite can take various forms and various examples attest to the interests that impel actions taken by this new elite. For instance, there is the motivation of the leaders of the women's 'movement' to pursue women's social agenda, which fell in line with internationally, endorsed agenda's for women's empowerment. Or there are personal interests involved: some prominent NGO political activists marginalize the political party and use the NGO as a platform to enter the social and political arena. Finally, the market like competition that has taken over the NGO sector also induces other interests among NGO actors, especially the interest to secure organizational sustainability. All of this suggests that the concept of globalized elite is not a constant category; subsumed within are localized, fluid interests.

Donors and Palestinian NGOs during National Transition: The Case of the Second Intifada

The current Intifada represents a unique moment to observe the role of PNGOs, especially given that during the peace process these organizations withdrew from the national-political question, including the reality of the occupation. Today, both the national movement and the broader goal of national liberation have been re-animated. Within this context, three observations can be made about the role of PNGOs:

First, NGOs have not moved beyond professionalized action. On the one hand, this is not necessarily bad, especially as effective forms of transnational networking and advocacy work to convey Palestinian rights internationally, requires highly capable organizations, endowed with the resources and skills to communicate, network and lobby across borders. Yet, Palestinian NGOs face the problem of dependency on few specialized people if professionalized activities are not supplemented with local grassroots networking and strategies for action. In the context of the renewed national struggle, the Palestinian NGOs have not developed a synergy with the population or other political and social organizations.

Second, many PNGOs have reverted into the familiar pattern of short-term relief work. This in turn reflects the absence of a long-term vision or strategy on how the NGOs and social organizations can contribute to change in the context of national transition.

The third observation concerns the incapability of NGOs to articulate the civic with politics or to separate the 'politics' from the 'national'. Their actions betray a lack of awareness of the fact that they are in an occupied land. NGO leaders are from the urban middle class; this Intifada is taking

place in the refugee camps, the remote cities in the North and South of the West Bank, and in the South of Gaza, more than in the urban centers like Ramallah. At the same time, this Intifada is not simply political, but social and economic and is propelled by people who did not gain from the peace process. Moreover, the ongoing Intifada expresses cumulative popular anger at both the violence of the Israeli occupation and meager achievement of the PNA in the peace process and its bad management to the public affairs.

NGOs have been absent from the demonstrations taking place in the Palestinian streets, especially in the first year of the Intifada, and at the same time they continue to insist on their independence from the political parties and other political bodies. The only big demonstration where the NGOs played a major role in mobilizing the population in the first year of the Intifada was when the Israeli occupation authorities closed the road leading to Birzeit University. The Ramallah elites, NGOs or not, suddenly found themselves very concerned with the consequences of the Intifada. Many organizations used their email lists and took out advertisements in the local newspapers to mobilize people for a demonstration from Ramallah to the new checkpoint imposed on the road to Birzeit. In light of their successful mobilization effort, one NGO leader declared to the French Newspaper, *La Croix*, that they should henceforth impose their position to the National and Islamic High Committee of the Intifada: "our activities are independent from that of Marwan Barghouti [a leader of this committee]. It is our pressure which made him take into account civil society (...) However he does not consider us as an entire part of his committee. We signed the press communiqués. However we did not take position on the political aspect like the call for Sharon to resign. Inside of the committee our voice is well heard" (emphasize by us) (Larzilliere, 2001). It is very curious to observe such an a-political discourse inside a war-like context and one is surprised by the superior disposition in which the globalized elite looks at itself as above the committee, which manages the Intifada on a daily basis.

Furthermore, it is evident that NGO leaders confuse between the 'political' and the 'national' and refuse to commit to the national under the pretense of refusing to conduct political activities, although many NGOs show more and more of an internal politicization in terms of alliance building. For instance, many communiqués released during the first year of the Intifada were circulated among NGOs and political party leaders for signature, but they asked for personal signatures and not the endorsement of organizations. This shows that these leaders do not see NGOs as taking on a leadership role in national issues.

Consider the following example, at the beginning of the Intifada, during a PNGOs Network meeting held after the head of USAID in Tel Aviv announced the intention to make further aid conditional on positive political developments. Some members in this network refused to call for a boycott of USAID funding under the pretext that "200 families live off USAID salaries". This is not just a case of short-term funding supplanting long-term vision, but there seems to be a tension between vested group interests and the overriding national political imperative.

At the same time, while the NGOs are searching for a role and place in the society, they lack the willingness and legitimacy to take on such a role. George Giacaman director of Muwatin and a professor of philosophy in Birzeit University, reported that in the second month of the Intifada, a meeting was held in Ramallah for representatives of municipalities, unions, federations, the PLC and NGOs in order to fill the leadership vacuum within civilian affairs. During this meeting, most of the time was taken up with conflicts over the leadership role and structure. Giacaman points out that part of the reason why this initiative did not succeed was because of the "instability in the legitimacy (of the NGOs' role) and the absence of the legal and administrative structure for insuring this legitimacy" (2001).

For Hammami and Tamari, the fact that NGOs' lack a mass base and focus on development and

governance issues makes them structurally incapable of organizing on the popular level (2001). However the Union of Palestinian Medical Relief Committees, was able to mobilize in its anniversary 10,000 supporters from its beneficiaries and the numerous dispensaries, which belong to this organization in the few months before the Intifada: why were these same people not able to be organized thereafter?

NGOs lack the potential for national mobilization, but do play a pivotal role as professional bodies. During this Intifada, there are numerous examples in professional works which illustrate the contributions they have made, ranging from timely release of information on human rights violations, to efforts to confront the image of the Intifada in the Western media. Overall, PNGOs have fulfilled an important function, acting as highly professional and competent intermediaries between their society and the international public, by disseminating information, making alternative forms of knowledge available, training first aid teams and receiving foreign delegations in Palestine. This role in part enables the population to carry on in the Intifada. On a similar note, many reports produced by international NGOs shows before the Israeli invasion to West Bank in March 2002 that contrary to other conflict areas in the world, the Palestinians have been able to maintain good quality services in health, education, nutrition, despite the closure and bantustanization of the Palestinian territories.

This notwithstanding, it is also clear that despite the useful and effective professional actions taken by PNGOs, little synergy has developed with the mass population. The human rights organizations showed from their first meeting an incapability to coordinate their work in order to conduct joint activities. At the same time, little was done by other organizations in terms of mobilizing people, encouraging voluntarism, or directing the public by providing a leadership role. Muwatin was a pioneer in initiating debates on the Intifada. It sponsored a large conference attended by about 600 people, with representatives from the PNA present. However, this and similar public forums have yet to channel social energies in any particular direction. In terms of the next step and how to go beyond the conference mode of action, to raise issues in tangible manner in the society, little follow up has been taken.

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