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Civil Society, Autonomy and Donors:
International Aid to Palestinian NGOs

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Abstract

This paper offers an alternative approach to civil society by stressing the potential tension that might arise in the case of transnational civil society promotion. It analyses the historical evolution of the category of international donors, their ways of conceiving of civil society promotion in the case of the Palestinian territories and the way aid is given to local NGOs. It demonstrates that donors are far from being a homogenous category and that, despite the increasingly professionalized apparatus behind civil society promotion, donors' visions of civil society might actually be one of the reasons for the difficult democratisation of the Arab countries.

Keywords

I. Introduction: The Failure of Civil Society Promotion?[1]

The frequently described democratic deficit in the Arab worlds in the last 15 years has contributed to the notion that the promotion of democracy by international actors is a necessity for the region. However, it has been widely assumed that international (i.e. mostly 'western') donors are participating homogenously and in an automatically positive manner in 'funding virtue' (Carothers and Ottoway, 2000), and that civil society promotion[2] is a form of panacea in this quest for democracy, with the enhancement of the judicial, legislative and institutional arrangements in a given polity.

However, recent research has proved that things are more complicated, and that a sudden increase in the number of and funding towards (advocacy) NGOs[3] is not sufficient to democratise polities, be they Middle Eastern or not. Some have pointed to the fact that democracy promotion could even turn out to be a mixed blessing for Arab activists since it has prompted Arab states to control even more avenues of participation (Carapico, 2002), while others have argued that there is too much civil society but too little politics in much of the international donors' efforts (Langhor, 2004; Youngs, 2003). A final argument is that the resilience of Arab autocratic regimes is due to the 'robustness' of its coercive apparatus (Bellin, 2004). Let us note that none of these three explanations really question the role of external actors as a source of the problem, and tend to view their role as positive.

This paper does not intend to shed more light on the already well-documented internal democratic deficit of recipient NGOs for their elite tendencies, or to discuss the hackneyed question of whether democratisation might work in the Arab worlds. Instead, it intends to look at how the ways in which international donors conceive of programmes and projects dealing with civil society promotion might also be a source of the failure of the Arab Mediterranean world to become more democratic. Along the lines of Whitehead (2004: 115), it will be argued that to reach a good level of democratisation, democracy should be built *from within* a given polity, thus questioning the imposition and promotion of democracy by *outside* actors. In consequence, one has to question the assumptions underpinning the work of international donors, to understand how donors can indirectly contribute to the partial failure of democratisation by creating a situation of heteronomy whereby local actors (such as NGOs) are not able to define their own priorities but have to follow the conditions and working modalities set up by external donors.

In order to do so, the paper will focus on the case of international support for Palestinian NGOs in their efforts to support civil society organisations as an entry point towards democratisation. Through an analysis of about three dozens international donors,[4] this paper will shed light on the intricacies of funding mechanisms, and on the different ways by which various donors conceive of civil society, theoretically and in the precise and concrete case of the Palestinian Territories. It will thus show that the category 'international donors' should not be considered as a homogenous entity and that some

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2 The paper will assume from the onset that civil society promotion is one of the important features of democracy promotion and/or in cases of democratisation. For a brief discussion on the matter, see Grugel (2002). See the end of this introduction for a re-conceptualised definition of civil society.

3 The second assumption is that NGOs–and in particular NGOs that are cause-oriented (advocacy)–play a necessary (although not sufficient) role in the burgeoning of civil society.

4 Interviews and materials presented here are drawn from the author's research for his doctoral dissertation (Challand, 2005a). Fieldwork was conducted in the two successive winters of 2003 and 2004.

approaches favoured by donors do not always contribute positively to the emergence of a strong *autonomous* local civil society.[5] If donors contribute to this failure, it might be because their own assumptions towards civil society are rather limited and limiting, and because they do not grant enough space for the diversity of civil in the Territories and enough decision room for local partners so that they can instil a real participatory dimension in civil society's life.[6]

The argument will be presented in five phases. First, this paper will discuss briefly what civil society is and will suggest an alternative definition of civil society that takes into account the dimension of international aid for civil society (Section II). Then, few paragraphs will be dedicated to the evolution of the concept of 'donors' and how one should unpack this broad category. A particular focus will be placed on the recent efforts made towards democratisation and civil society promotion (Section III). Third, the paper will look at the evolution of the type of aid and donors involved in the Palestinian Territories and will provide a short description of the donors involved nowadays (Section IV). The article will then proceed with an attempt to differentiate donors' views and conceptions about civil society. This will shed light on the limiting assumptions that define the programmes funded by international donors and implemented in cooperation with local NGOs (Section V). Finally, we will analyse the funding mechanisms and the implications these might have for civil society promotion (Section VI).

II. Civil Society as a Source of Autonomy

The paper suggests a new definition and approach to civil society, because it should allow for a better operationalisation of the study of civil society promotion framed in an international context but implemented in a national (domestic) one.

The vulgate of socio-political sciences frames civil society, within a domestic context, as an intermediary sphere of voluntary association independent of the state and from both the sphere of economic production and reproduction (family). A quick genealogy shows that the concept 'was first proposed to explore the possibility and limits of collective self-determination on the eve of the "democratic revolutions"', namely in the contractualist theories of the 16th and 17th centuries and at the beginning of the 19th century (Terrier and Wagner, 2006). Its re-emergence in the late 20th century also owed to the emergence of new democratic polities after the collapse of the Soviet Empire. But instead of conceiving of civil society through a rather classical state vs. society account (Bobbio, 1995), we suggest to define civil society as a space for voluntary collective actions that can be a source of autonomy.

To approach civil society through the lens of autonomy is a way to link it to the increasingly transnational context in which civil society promotion takes place. Indeed, there must be an '*autonomy from*' external actors (or influences) in order (for civil society, e.g.) to have the '*autonomy to*' define a common political project. It is not thinkable to qualify as autonomous a polity or a social group that does not have these two dimensions of autonomy.

Autonomy here should be understood first in a Rousseauian manner, namely that the ultimate test of human freedom resides in the fact that the group ('*l'état civil*') has the capacity to give and agree on its own laws (Rousseau, 2001). This capacity is nothing else than the concept of *political* autonomy. In this process, the participation of each member of the social contract is the necessary component to this process of legislation. It is precisely this positive feature that determines, for Rousseau, whether there is a social pact, and not, as in Hobbes' view, whether a 'commonwealth' has been established to escape the state of nature in which men are at war with each other.

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5 A final assumption of this paper is that democracy requires not only the existence of a 'vibrant civil society' (to use the usual *topos*), but also an *autonomous* and *independent* civil society, since democracy, as argued before, is mostly a domestic process.

6 See in particular, Section V.

A further elaboration of the concept of autonomy which can promote crucial understanding to the possible link between autonomy and contemporary civil society promotion is provided by Castoriadis. The latter defines autonomy of a society as *its capacity of auto-institution*, and not just in terms of giving its own laws (Castoriadis, 1986: 518). The process of auto-institution implies the capacity for societies to *openly* 'call into question their own institution, their representation of the world, their social imaginary significations' (Castoriadis, 1997: 17). Closure and open-ness are key for Castoriadis's understanding of autonomy (envisaged as a radical project): closure means here the fact that a given society does not have the possibilities to chose the ways and means in which they reflect about themselves. Closure implies therefore a form of heteronomy, that is, the law of others imposed on this society. On the contrary, openness is important not only in terms of choosing its institutional setting but also on an 'informational and cognitive' level (Castoriadis, 1986: 513).[7]

In our study of civil society, such elements become important in order to grasp the fact that a (civil) society not only must have the possibility to choose and define its own laws, but in order to do so, it must also be free to imagine these laws according to its chosen cognitive and ideational means. In other words, promoting political autonomy can only be done if this is done in agreement with the chosen beliefs and institutions of a given society.

In the case of transnational civil society promotion, it is here argued that there can be no autonomy if this translates into the imposition of norms, values, or institutions that do not fit the ways in which a given civil society would like to imagine itself. Language, in particular, is very important in the conception of Castoriadis to reach autonomy.[8] The attention paid therefore to language is not just about a question of 'translation', but also of semantic and how certain concepts are perceived within and by different social realms.[9]

The strong focus on autonomy should not deter us to consider other more classical constitutive elements of civil society. For example, it will still be assumed here that the more active a civil society, the better it is towards the attainment of democratic life; that pluralism (and its respect) is an important element of civil society (and for that matter of autonomy); that it should instil a participatory element in its activities by involving a large number and variegated type of actors.[10]

The application (in Section V) of this definition of civil society will provide more details about and will spell out constitutive elements of autonomy and of what is under scrutiny in civil society promotion. But one first needs to say few words on the category of 'international donors' to have a better picture of who does what in civil society promotion.

III. Who are Donors in General?

The idea of international aid as an instrument of socio-political change dates back to the end of World War II. Economic development was then considered the best way to reconstruct a viable international system—Keynesian politics also being applied in domestic welfarist policies at that time (Senisolla, 1999). Aid is intimately linked to the notion of development, and directly to the post-World War II period, with the Marshall Plan as a leading market-driven developmental plan to prevent the further spread of communism (Cooper & al., 1997: 7-8).

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7 I am fully aware that Castoriadis believes that such a process of auto-institution is not possible in what he terms archaic and traditional societies, precisely because they are, in his view, closed (Castoriadis, 1986: 514). However, I believe that, along the lines of Houston (2004), there is too much of determinism in defining a society 'traditional' or 'archaic', and in particular by defining it so because of the heteronomy imposed by religion.

8 See, e.g. his *l'institution et l'imaginaire*, in Castoriadis (1999: 171ff, in particular 174).

9 On the role of language as a source of estrangement, see Ghalioun (2000: 26f).

10 On such a view, see, e.g., Tocqueville (1981).

In a bid to categorise international development organisations according to their activities and functions, de Senisolla argues that they can be organised into five generations (1999: 92-94). The first is the *welfarist* generation, created after 1945, but is mostly made of international institutions set up as a result of the Bretton Woods agreements. The second generation is *developmental* and has its roots around 1960, with the new independent post-colonial states in Africa as the main focus. The third model is that of *partnership* organisations in the South and *protest* in the North, a typical result of the tormented early 1970s. The fourth generation is that of *empowerment* in the South and of *political pressure* in the North, which started around 1982. Obviously, there are overlaps between the first four generations, which are far from being clear-cut categories.

A further contribution of Senisolla's article is to suggest the emergence of a fifth generation of international development organisations. The latter rely increasingly on *public* funds, and tend to be *more specialised* in their action, with a strong focus on advocacy, communication and research (*ibid.*: 99f). This fifth generation was clearly created under *neo-liberal* and *globalising* skies.

This brings us to the fact that donors are not just institutions that make funding available to implementing organisations, but they are also the vehicles of certain conceptions of development and of aid that vary across time. One key feature of the last few decades has been the increased professionalisation and specialisation of donor organisations. In particular, in the field of democracy promotion, there has been marketisation[11] of these interventions, in which NGOs, both northern and southern (Hudock, 1999) have played a vital role.[12]

Data provided by the OECD underlines that there is an unequal distribution (or access) to funding for northern NGOs. In a survey conducted in the late 1990s, the OECD concluded that the largest 20% of NGOs hold 90.5% of the sector's financial resources (Woods, 2000: 31). This goes hand in hand with the conclusions of French sociologist Siméant (2002), who demonstrated how northern NGOs are facing the same market logic as private business to access funds. She also argues that, though formally *non*-governmental, NGOs are at best tied to national logics or at worst close to governments' policies despite their internationalisation and are therefore far from providing a type of socio-political support that is truly independent of state influence.

Similarly, the closeness (not to say the promiscuity, or subordination) of professional think tanks and even academic milieus to policy-making circles and governmental aid agencies already provides food for thought in terms of the shortcomings of the ideas of civil society support and democratisation efforts. A recent study on the links between political science milieus and policy-making circles around the area of Latin America studies has demonstrated how scholars and NGO activists have become, *nolens volens*, the tools of national interests and vassalised to Washington's views and interests (Guilhot, 2005).

What is taking place is thus a form of specialisation, or increased division of labour amongst donors, development agencies, and implementing organisations. There is now a true 'aid industry' (Van Rooy, 1998), characterised by a professionalisation of the work done by these agencies (Pouligny, 2003: 548). Thus, in the last two decades donors have set up special units dedicated to assessment, or to a special field, like that of civil society, such as the UK DfID's 'Civil Society Department' created in 1996[13] (Benthall, 2000: 2).

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11 See for example the unpublished paper of Karam (2000).

12 According to OECD's Development Assistance Committee (DAC), there were only 30 projects directed to the support of civil society in 1991, for a total amount of US $113 million. By 1995, the increase, though sharp in number of projects (440), remains moderate in the amount of funding ($391 million) (Van Rooy, 1998: 58).

   The share of funding to NGOs from OECD countries and NGO aid jumped from nearly 15% by 1988 to more than 20% by the end of the 1990s (Kaldor & al., 2003: 12).

13 See http://www.dfid.gov.uk/aboutdfid/DFIDwork/civilsociety.asp (accessed March 2006).

From this short overview, one can conclude that civil society promotion is performed by donor agencies (be they governmental, multilateral or non-governmental) which benefit from a vast array of information about the work done elsewhere and which are supplied on a daily basis with codes of best practice and lists of potential dangers to deal with while implementing projects. One can also conclude that there is apparently a rather high level of consciousness about the issue of aid impact, and in particular about the notion of civil society promotion. But let us now turn to the specific case of international aid in the Palestinian Territories.

IV. International Donors in Palestine: Changes and Consequences

A. *From regional to international donors*

Western donors have been in the region since the 1948 war, through mainly religious organisations, such as the American Friends Services Committees (Quaker), Catholic Relief Services, and CARE. Their work has been that of supplying relief and help to the hundreds of thousands of refugees forced to leave their homes during the partition war. The UN, through its UNRWA arm, is the main international donor in the region, but has remained mostly an implementing organisation. The massive presence of western donors working in partnership or funding local organisations only dates back to the mid-1980s and in particular from 1987 with the outbreak of the first Intifada (1987-1993).

Before 1987, the main donors of local NGOs were Arab regional actors. Indeed, it took a long time for Palestinian NGOs to receive aid that was *not* tied to some political patronage from a neighbouring country or from the Arab League. The shock of the 1967 Arab defeat had long-lasting consequences for funding made available in the Territories. Once the Arab states acknowledged that the 'new PLO'[14] would be the sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people in 1974, responding strategies slowly emerged from regional actors. Thus, in 1978, at its Baghdad summit, the Arab League announced the creation of the so-called 'Jordanian-Palestinian Joint Committee for the Support of the Steadfastness of the Palestinian People in the Occupied Homeland' (Roy, 2001: 151), in short, called the 'Joint Committee' or 'Steadfastness Committee'. Its aim was to make funding available for 'inside' Palestinians to provide basic infrastructures (water, electricity and the like) and economic support to avoid out-migration from the Occupied territories, and also to indirectly provide some channels of political influence (Sayigh, 1997: 479f). The fund was started in 1979. Although US$100 million were to be distributed annually with the agreement of both the PLO and the Jordanian government,[15] the total amount given between 1979 and 1986 reached only about half of the objective, i.e. about $50 or $60 million a year.[16]

Although coming to less, internal PLO funds also poured into the Occupied Palestinian Territories (OPT). Most notably, the Palestinian National Fund was a mechanism whereby governments of the Gulf countries raised a 5% income tax on the salary of their Palestinian *Gastarbeiter*; the money collected was then handed to the PLO, which then re-distributed it to its various factions (Karamé, 1997: 75). It is estimated that *Fatah* provided about $50 million a year for its internal constituency (Sayigh, 1997: 481). There was certainly also some Soviet funding for the Marxist factions of the PLO, but as in the case of *Fatah*, no exact figures are available. On the contrary, the figures of the aid given by Palestinian philanthropists are better known. According to Hanafi, Palestinian philanthropists channelled multi-million figures to the OPT on a yearly basis. The most prominent example is

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14 By 'new PLO', I mean the post-Shuqeiry PLO, whereby a new generation of activists around *Fatah* and its leader Yaser Arafat took over after the failure of the older generation embodied by Shuqeiry to get rid of the other Arab states' patronage to resolve the 'Palestinian question'. See Sayigh (1997).

15 The Jordanian government initiated another funding scheme in 1987, called 'Jordanian Development Plan'. For a critique, see Barghouthi (1989: 127). See also Nakhleh (1989: 118). All figures expressed in US dollars.

16 Exact figures range from $417 (Nakhleh, 2002: 26) to $463 million (Sayigh, 1997: 612) for the period 1979-86.

represented by the Welfare Association, a club of wealthy Palestinian businessmen who decided to provide an endowment fund after the shock of the 1982 invasion of Lebanon by Israel.[17] The Welfare Association provided a yearly average of $6 million for social organisations inside the Territories (Hanafi, 1998: 64ff). This is the main source of 'Diaspora funding' channelled directly by a single organisation into the OPT.[18]

The final source of Arab institutional funding is that of the Arab/Islamic regional organisations. The latter have disbursed annually, according to Nakhleh (1989 & 2002), between $80 and 120 million from 1977 until 1992.[19] The particularity of this funding is that these organisations are highly sensitive to political susceptibilities amongst Arab countries: the PLO support given to Saddam Hussein in the Gulf War in 1990-1991 proved to be a watershed for this type of funding to the Territories: Gulf countries decided to immediately shut down the funding tap to Palestinian organisations. The parallel decision to expel thousands of Palestinian *Gastarbeiter* also meant the drying up of a substantial portion of remittances sent back to the OPT.[20]

The political significance of these changes in external sources of funding will be discussed later. But to conclude this sub-section, two figures suffice to make the point that the main source of funding was, until the end of the 1980s, a regional matter more than a western/international one. Using figures coming from various sources (Nakhleh, 1989; Hanafi, 1998; Curmi, 2002; Nakhleh, 2004), one can estimate the yearly contribution to the Territories from Arab regional institutions at about $60 to 80 million. Figures from western donors are much lower: USAID, for the period 1975-1987, disbursed nearly $6 million a year. Even if European Consulates (as the main European donors until the end of the 1980s gave financial contributions to NGOs (Curmi, 2002), western funding never matched that of regional origins in quantity.

This reality gradually changed over the years of the first *Intifada* (1987-1993). European donors increased their presence by giving more funding to local NGOs. This was the beginning of more massive and systematic western support to Palestinian NGOs. Western support came first from Consulates (none of the western governments were allowed to have an official representation in the Territories) and then from western NGOs. According to Karamé (1997: 76), western involvement with NGO support became more professionalized, with a cohort of experts doing dozens of assessment reports. From 1987 onwards, it was also a time when European NGOs started to coordinate among themselves, fostering a model of coordination amongst international donors (*ibid*.: 76).

By the time the Declaration of Principles was signed in Washington on September 13, 1993, there was an estimated 200 international NGOs active (either physically or through funding mechanisms) in the Territories (Curmi, 2002). The increase of western promises for funding peaked with the signing of the Oslo Accords and in the subsequent donor-pledging conference in Washington (Le More, 2004). Obviously, the larger share of funding (roughly an average of $500 million a year) was directed to the establishment of the PNA and to state-building measures (Brynen, 2000). It is usually accepted in the literature that the amount of funding earmarked for NGOs dropped from about $170 around 1990 to $100

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17 For a description of the circumstances of the foundation of the Welfare Association and a list of its members, see (Nakhleh, 2004).

18 Smaller amounts of remittances are still sent by individuals or solidarity groups as interviews with local NGOs demonstrated. This is particularly true for service-providing NGOs. Other similar types of funding come from solidarity groups based in the USA that send financial supports to the Territories. These include the United Palestinian Appeal (est. 1985 in New York (Nakhleh, 1989:121), the United Holy Land Fund, and the Arab Palestinian Fund (est. 1985) (Hanafi, 1998: 67) and the Jerusalem Fund (Nakhleh, 1989).

19 Nakhleh (2002).

20 According to Sayigh, the 'flow of funds to the OPT plummeted from $120 million in 1990 to $45 million in 1992 (US reports) or from $360 million to $84 million according to the secretary of the Intifada committee' (quoted from *Al-Quds al-Arabi* 23 8 1993) (Sayigh, 1997: 657).

in 1994[21] and subsequently to $60 million in 1996 (Sullivan, 1998: 95). Hanafi (2002: 12) estimates the flow of international aid to NGOs at around $63 million for the year 1998. In comparison, the flow of regional Islamic institutions to sister organisations in the Territories is evaluated at around $35 million for 1999 (ICG, 2003: 14).[22]

The number of western donors in the 1990s varies according to authors. For Curmi, there were about 200, according to Hanafi, 130 (Hanafi, 2002: 126) while for the World Bank, there were 150 international donors (quoted in Rabe, 2000). Often the presence of smaller international NGOs was substituted by *governmental* representation offices in the Territories with a specialised office for questions of development. Governmental sources mentioned that they used to finance projects in the Territories already during the 1980s but money was channelled through smaller NGOs. The task was reversed with Oslo and the establishment of representative offices to the PNA: smaller NGOs retreated to an advisory role in their home country and let their government office deal directly with implementation in Palestine.[23]

B. Changes and their meaning

It is now clear that most of the money disbursed for local NGOs has been coming since the Oslo peace process from western donors and not from regional Arab sources anymore. Another phenomenon related to changes in the composition of the donor community is the emergence of larger non-governmental funding organisations and/or specialised bodies. This is particularly true for the North American NGOs. By the time the first Intifada broke out, there were only five American USAID grantees (Save the Children, CRS, ANERA, AMIDEAST, and Holy Land Christian Mission) (Nakhleh, 1989: 117), whereas there were almost 20 US grantees from USAID funds in 2004.[24] Out of the 37 international funding bodies interviewed for this research (governmental, multilateral and non-governmental alike), nine had an annual budget of less than $1 million. Out of the 28 having an annual budget of more than one million, 12 were NGOs, while 16 were governmental or multilateral donors. The four NGOs spending more than $5 million a year are all from the USA.

USAID money has also sparked off the creation of sub-contractors managing programmes on behalf of the governmental aid agency. For example, Tamkeen, Maram and Rafeed are all new entities created in the last five years which manage annual budgets of $5 to $10 million on behalf of USAID. However, a large chunk of this sum remains in the USA through US-based implementing partners. Noteworthy is the new institutional culture that has been introduced with such large entities. Much of work done around civil society promotion now takes the form and content of managerial consulting.

Two points are worth stressing here. One is that these implementing organisations set up *their own affiliate institutions* on the ground, providing relays and important networks. For example, Chemonics International's West Bank affiliate is Massar, which is also a consulting body for Tamkeen. A list of Tamkeen and Massar clients[25] show that there are strong inter-connections between the two. The second point is that, although the work of NGOs tends to be specialised, the innovative element of such implementing organisations is that they specialise not in a topic, or a field of intervention, but rather in the pure management of the projects. The end result is that an organisation like ARD

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21 Figures here differ. For Sullivan (1998: 95), funding in 1990 reached between $150 to $200 million, and according to Hammami, dropped from $170 to $240 million in 1990 to ca $100 million in 1994 (Hammami, 1995: 59).

22 It is very difficult to get exact figures on Hamas' funding for example. Some estimations speak of $100 million yearly for the whole of Hamas structure, with a good 75% going to its charitable social network (see Finkelstein quoted in ICG, 2003).

23 Interview with Representative Offices, East Jerusalem, 18 February 2003 & 24 February 2003. This is especially the case for North European organisations.

24 Source: author's database on international donors active in the Territories.

25 See http://www.massar.com/clist.htm (accessed March 2006).

('Associates in Rural Development'), based in Washington DC, managed a programme assisting the 'Palestinian Judicial System (Rule of Law)' funded by USAID[26] between 1996 and 2004. At first glance, this may sound strange, but further research demonstrates that ARD is actually an associate in this project of a Californian firm called DPK Consulting, which is itself an associate of the Massar & Associates,[27] the same organisation working with Tamkeen and Chemonics. Not only do they work in close network (or close circuits) and select only few local NGOs as partners, but they also contribute to the spreading of a rather procedural approach to aid which has to be *managed* more than *built* in partnership with a variety of local organisations. This might, eventually, become detrimental to the setting of priorities responding to local needs. In any case, the specialisation and increased division of labour implied by these large US consultancy entities confirm the trends in the change of aid disbursement witnessed over the last decade.

Various studies highlight the fact that funding, despite its apparently technical and specialised outlook, is never truly neutral, and that behind the noble objectives of 'development' lie much more straightforward political (and in some cases economic) interests.[28] So if regional funding was, in the first place, a form a rent and a way to create patronage from and for Palestinian factions, the emerging international aid served the political purpose of creating and favouring support for various externally-sponsored peace initiatives. There are many examples of this. First when the Camp David agreements were signed between Egypt and Israel in 1978, many Palestinians feared that funding would be tied to accepting the plan of autonomy for the Palestinian. Similarly, when Jordan promoted its Jordanian Development Plan, there was a strong sense amongst Palestinians that:

> US assistance [was] tied to nurturing Palestinian acceptance of a US 'negotiated solution', and that the improvement of the Palestinian quality of life under occupation is nothing more than an acceptable camouflage for the imposition of US-initiated solutions' (Nakhleh, 1989: 119).

Many observers have expressed similar comments about the massive aid given after 1994 to buttress the acceptance by Palestinians of the Oslo agreements, despite the many problems on the road to the promised peace (Hanafi and Tabar, 2002; LeMore, 2004; Lasensky, 2004). Similarly, the Road Map and post-Arafat talks seem to include the same carrot-and-stick approach to aid (Nabulsi, 2004).

In short, an analysis of the implication of donors within the Palestinian context stresses that there has been:

− A specialisation and/or professionalisation in the types of organisations involved (fewer and fewer solidarity groups, but more thematically-oriented donors);

− A tendency towards a significant increase in terms of the size and volume of funding given by donors, which also constrains local organisations to scramble for funding (and increases the marketisation of aid through the survival of predominantly larger NGOs);

− A governmentalisation of the sources of funding (with all that this means in terms of power of governments to influence the political negotiations of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict).

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26 See http://www.ardinc.com/projects/detail_region.php?id=20 (accessed March 2006).

27 See http://www.dpkconsulting.com/p_wbg.htm (accessed December 2005)

28 For an example, see Arvin & al. (2001). For the economic dimension, see the previous example of the sub-contracting and association policies of large development organisations. For a critique of the economic interests of doing philanthropic work, see Guilhot (2004).

C. Overview of interviewed donors

Let us now look more closely at details of the profile of the 37 donors organisations interviewed for this paper. The following table[29] gives a short overview of who they are and since when they have been working in Palestine.

Table 1: Type of donors, years of work in the OPT and average budget

Type of Funding Organisation	Number	Established in …(average)	Funding in Palestine since (avr.)	Office open in Palestine since (avr.)	Number of staff (avr.)	Avrg budget for local NGOs[30]
Solidarity	6	1962	1979	1989	10	$1'875'000
Faith-Based	4	1966	1980	1984	26	$3'625'000
Development	7	1972	1985	1987	28	$4'242'857
Governmental	11	1964	1989	1995	30	$4'775'000
Political	5	1971	1991	1995	4	$210'000
Multilateral	2	1979	1989	1989	105	$8'750'000
QUANGO or GINGO	2	2000	2000	2000	43	$7'000'000

It shows that solidarity and faith-based[31] organisations have longer experience in funding with Palestinian NGOs since the two categories have been active since 1979 and 1980 on average. At the opposite end of the scale, governmental and political donor organisations[32] became formally involved in the Territories only with the establishment of the PNA and the Oslo negotiations.[33]

In terms of spending, besides the much larger contribution of the two quasi-NGOs ('QUANGOs') or 'GINGOS' for Governmental NGOs set up by USAID, namely Maram and Tamkeen) and of the multilateral donors (UNDP and EU's contribution through ECHO), governmental donor agencies give to local NGOs an average of $4.7 million, an amount that comes very close to that of the large professional development organisations. In this latter category, the increase of CARE International's budget over the last six years is very impressive: from $800,000 in 1998 of aid dedicated to Palestinian NGOs, its 2000 budget rose to $1.4 million, to $4 million in 2001, $6 million in 2002, finally skyrocketing towards an incredible $15.5 million[34] in 2003. This single contribution made by CARE for 2003 is much larger than most individual bilateral governmental contributions to NGOs.

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29 All information comes from the author's database.

30 The sum is calculated on the basis of the information collected during fieldwork. These sums are indicative. The amount is an average of different fiscal years, with some indication from 2002 and for other organisations from the year 2003. Nevertheless, it should give a sense of the proportion of each donor's contribution. All contributions in US$.

The sums range between $0.5 million and $3m for solidarity organisations, between $2m and $5.2m for faith-based donors, between $0.5m and $15.5m for development orgs., between $1m and $10m for governmental donors, between $0.1m and $0.3m for political donors and between $6m and $8m for QUANGOs.

31 Included under 'solidarity' organisations, are those that have either from their way of working, or through the types of programmes they run in Palestine, a very important *grass roots* dimension *and* often *declared political* objectives or preferences. Their efforts aim at defending a very specific cause, but whose motivations are neither intrinsically religious nor political (i.e. that are not formally affiliated with a religious or political institution).

32 These are the associations that are directly linked to political parties in their home countries.

33 Israel gave a lot of trouble to countries establishing a representative office to the Palestinian Authority in East Jerusalem. Many were operating before the Declaration of Principles through their Israeli embassy.

34 Interview in Beit Hanina, 17 February 2003. The number of its staff has increased by 35 units because of the current *Intifada* and 75% of the 2003 budget was dedicated to emergency, the rest being development funding.

Faith-based organisations do not lag very far behind in terms of annual contributions, with an average of $3.6 million, followed by solidarity donors ($1.9 million a year). Political organisations make a modest contribution (around $0.2 million a year), but it must be stated that they fund different types of organisations and projects, mostly smaller NGOs and specific research projects, thus requiring less funding than for large service-providing activities.

The previous table gives only a short overview of what donors give and since when. Obviously the work of other NGOs such as CARE (active since 1948), Oxfam GB (1950) and Catholic Relief Services (1961) have also evolved tremendously over the decades, and it is only recently, with more funding available to northern NGOs of this type, that they are doing more 'professional developmentalist' work.[35]

The 37 international donor organisations interviewed probably belong to the most active ones in the field of advocacy and health support. Data collection took place in the early months of 2003 and 2004, at a time of deep humanitarian crisis throughout the Territories. This might explain why, according to information gathered, there has been a spectacular re-increase of funding to Palestinian NGOs. It is realistic to estimate that $100 million went annually for Palestinian NGOs active in the field of health and advocacy (which represent about 20% of all Palestinian NGOs in the Territories) during the time of the second *intifada*. Other vital sectors such as agriculture, education and women's support are also likely to have attracted many millions of dollars of aid over the last three or four years. By extrapolating from the previous figures, the total amount of external aid to Palestinian NGOs might have reached an amount ranging between $300 to $500 million a year. This actually represents the *overall* yearly average of international aid to Palestine for the Oslo years (a sum that includes not only NGO aid, but also multilateral aid and PNA support alike).[36] It is thus certainly correct to state that Palestinian NGOs have again become major and very important actors in providing vital resources, knowledge, and services to their constituency. Similarly, the role of donors in such a situation can only increase due to the massive budget allocated to Palestinian NGOs. In other words, there is no doubt that the role and influence of external donors has significantly increased over the last five years. Let us now explore how this variety of donors actually conceives of civil society in their daily work and how this might enhance or impede local organisations in defining programmes aiming at enhancing democratic practices inside the Territories.

V. Donors' Approaches to Civil Society Promotion

This section will offer a typology of the donors' view on civil society in general, and analyse how they conceive civil society promotion in the Palestinian setting. The typology is defined through certain key elements of the 37 donors interviews recoded so as to offer a spatially differentiated table on donors' views of civil society and Palestinian NGOs.

The idea behind the creation of such typologies is based upon the definition of civil society as a source of autonomy (Section II). It also results from the advocated necessity[37] to unpack both the theoretical content of civil society in its historical western liberal context as well as in the precise Arab context, away from the simplifications implied by much of the (neo-)Orientalist literature (Sadowski, 1993).

Such an approach would allow taking the variety of cultural approaches and a common re-definition of a substantial content of civil society into consideration. One would thus avoid putting aside too easily communal, parochial and/or 'traditional' forms of organisations as 'non-modern' and therefore not belonging to a too strict definition of civil society that is usually assumed in the vulgate of civil society. Communalism in various cultural contexts, as in the Arab cases, can be a means to

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35 This is also why the categories we suggested before are not fixed but rather fluid and changing with time.

36 For an analysis of aid commitment and disbursement between 1993 and 2000, see Brynen (2000).

37 See my doctoral dissertation (Challand, 2005a).

obtain political legitimacy (Harik, 2003: 30) and that should be considered even more if it is a basis for the definition of an *autonomous* political project.[38] Similarly, concepts such as individualism, secularism and egalitarianism[39] have *not always been* part of western societies and it would be wrong to assume that they must pre-exist in order to have a civil society.

In other words, to avoid the forms of immobilisms that many of (neo-)Orientalist[40] discourses imply, one has to question not only the Arab-Muslim particularities that inhabit local civil society, but also what are usually portrayed, *nolens volens*, as 'western' values (such as civil society, *e.g.*). Concretely, this means unpacking the assumptions behind civil society, both in general ('here', or in the 'west') and in the Arab context ('there').

A closer look at the texts of two Arab sociologists (the Egyptian Sa'ad ed-Din Ibrahim and Syrian Burhan Ghalioun) shows us that there *is* an Arab-Muslim civil society, even if the two authors disagree on whether one should include inherited affiliation (*irthiyah*) groups such as tribal and family associations, together with religious groups in the sphere of civil society.[41] Whatever the stance taken on these types of organisations, such views hint at the *diversity* of forms of civil society associations hosted in the Arab worlds. From there, one can conclude that civil society promotion in the modern western liberal polities will be different from that taking place in the Arab Mediterranean, just as one can argue that western civil society in 19th century was different from that of the late 20th century (Bermeo and Nord, 2000).

The point is that it is only by questioning the diverse assumptions in the literature on civil society in general and in the Arab worlds that can one pursue a thorough study about civil society promotion activities in the Arab Mediterranean.

Relying on the alternative definition of civil society discussed in Section II, it is the backbone argument of this paper that for concrete civil society promotion to have a positive effect towards the creation of spaces of democratic participation and the definition of collective autonomy, it needs:

- To insist on the varieties of forms and contents of civil society (rather than mere numbers of specialised advocacy NGOs);

- To instil a real participatory element in the activities promoted as much as possible. The more 'bottom up', the better;

- To take the evolution of the forms and contents of civil society into consideration;

- To discuss and realise the potential risks of civil society promotion.

The following attempt at creating typologies is also an application of the idea suggested here that the unpacking of 'civil society' ought to be done through the materialisation of two axes of differentiations:

- The first axis, horizontal, serves to unpack the constitutive elements and qualities of civil society in general (and of the place and role of NGOs in this general approach) and

- The second, vertical, to unpack some of the Palestinian civil society specificities, contexts and difficulties in the work of NGOs and local civil society.

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38 See some examples of this argument in Levine and Salvatore (2005).

39 I am indebted to the text of (Harik, 2003: 11) for this selection of 'dominant ideological principles in western cultures'.

40 For a discussion on the difference between Orientalism and neo-Orientalism see Sadowski (1993).

41 For a presentation of Ghalioun's view, see (Ghalioun & al., 1993), and also (Abu Amr, 1995: 9). On Ibrahim, see (Ibrahim, 1997: 43), and (Ibrahim, 1995: 34).

Obviously I invite the reader to consider the following models more as heuristic tools to 'visualise' very abstract notions and to start making sense out of individual cases, by positioning donors' views in relation to one another.

The graphs produced below are a combination of quantitative methods (by scoring and aggregating various items) and qualitative methods (based on semi-structured interviews and discourse analysis). A variety of items (see also Appendix) were chosen to distinguish amongst donors how they conceive civil society in general (horizontal axis) and Palestinian NGOs in particular (vertical axis). Scores were then added together in two indexes to produce one single result on the (X) axis and the same was done for the vertical (Y) ordinate.[42]

The figure should be read as follows:

- Each dot (which represents a single international donor) expresses the relative position of the donor's view on civil society. The horizontal location symbolically expresses the donors' differentiation on civil society in general, and the vertical location, its capacity to differentiate NGO support within the Palestinian civil society environment.

- The *right* end of the horizontal axis indicates a *lack of differentiation* within the concept of civil society in general (symbolised by the minus mark '-'), while the *left* end of this same axis implies a *more elaborate and differentiated* approach to civil society in general (marked with a plus mark '+').

- The vertical axis differentiates the way donors approach aid to NGOs by taking various elements of differentiation of the local setting of civil society into consideration. The *top* end of the axis means that *little consideration will be paid to local specificities* and potential hurdles on the way to NGO work in Palestine (symbolised by the minus mark '-'). The bottom end of the vertical axis means, on the contrary, that more attention is paid to local aspects of NGO support general (marked with a plus mark '+').

**Figure 1: Spatial differentiation of donors' views on (Palestinian) civil society**
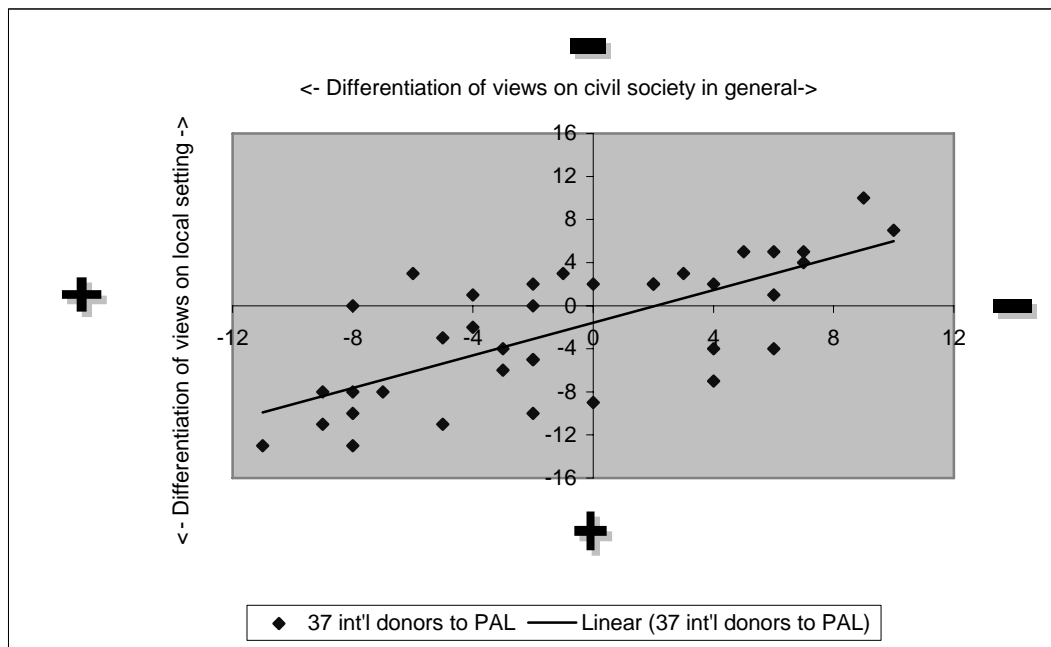
We can see, in the first general graph, that donors are widely spread across the space, but that they are mostly in two quadrants. The 'south-western' one is that of the donors that adopt a differentiated view of both civil society in general and of the work and roles of local NGOs in the Palestinian context. The second most populated quadrant is the 'north-eastern' one, characterised by a lack of differentiation in relation to both civil society and the local setting. It is quite logical to have such a distribution since differentiation in one paradigm should also imply some effects on the other dimension. Inversely, it is not surprising that a lack of differentiation on one of the two elements will lead to a lack of reflection in relation to the second aspect. A trend line was added to visualise the overall patter of distribution.

In an attempt to put forward explanatory variables, donors were split into two groups. The first one is composed of the larger donors (whose annual funding dedicated to local NGOs reaches $2 million or more, and which are represented by a triangle), and a second group of smaller donors (less than $2m a year, symbolised by a shadowed square). Moreover, two trend lines were added, in order to make the comparison between the two groups easier.

Figure 2: Large vs. small donors and their views on (Palestinian) civil society
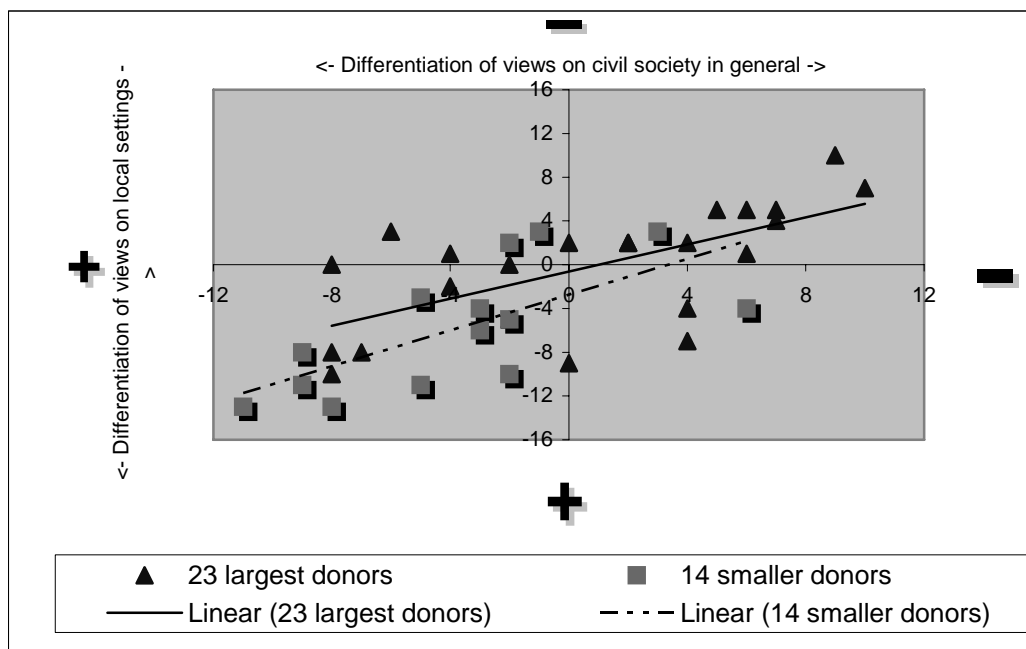

In the first place, despite some overlaps between the two groups, larger donors are mostly in the top half of the quadrant, when not in the north-eastern quadrant. Most of the smaller donors are instead located in the bottom-left corner, which seems to indicate that smaller donors tend to have a more refined approach to civil society support in general, but that they are also more conscious of the local settings and possible difficulties that might arise in the work of local NGOs. One possible conclusion regarding this 'sensitivity' about local hurdles would probably be that the programmes implemented have a better chance of succeeding since they are better tailored to local needs and specificities. The assumption is that this type of approach would give civil society promotion activities a better chance of succeeding and having a positive impact in the long run.

The two trend lines also confirm the differences between the two subgroups. For the largest donors, the intercept is almost at the centre of gravity and the slope is not steep, whereas for the smaller donors, the trend line has a much steeper slope. Its intercept also points to a more differentiated approach to civil society, reinforcing the potential validity of the size of donors as an explaining variable in this model.

A final distinction, regarding the donors' view, was based this time on the geographical origin of donors. The first group is composed of 14 non-European organisations (and represented by a diamond), made up of American, Canadian, Australian and multilateral donors. The second group (symbolised by a dash in the graph) is made up of 23 European donors. Each group has its own trend line.

Figure 3: European vs. non-European donors and their views on (Palestinian) civil society
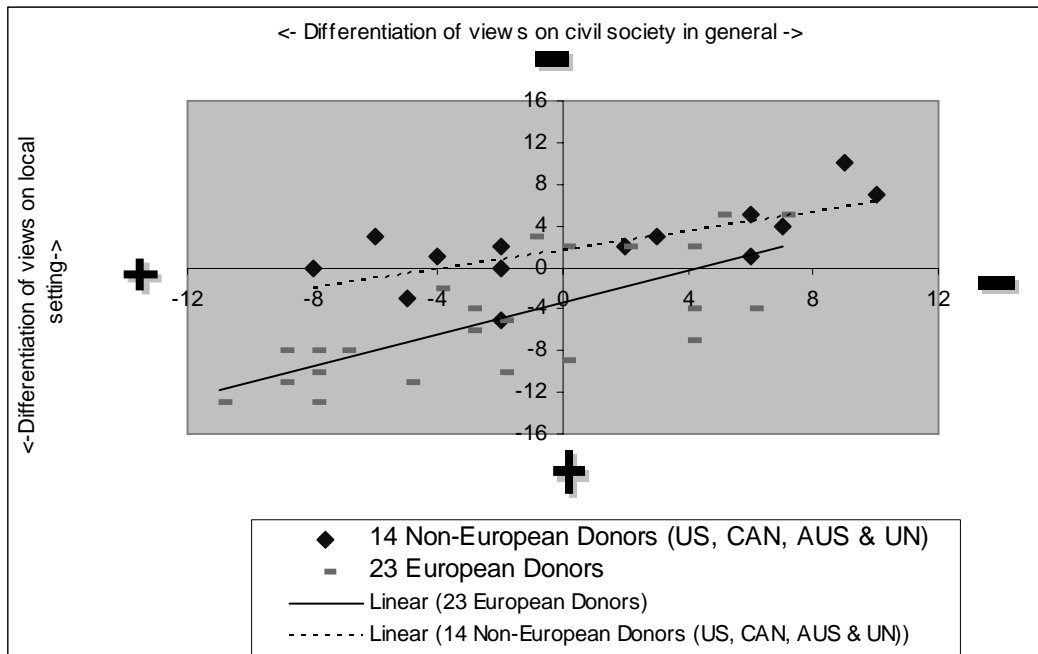
Again, we can clearly see that the two groups are differently located, with European donors much more evident in the bottom half, whereas non-European donors (US, Canadian, Australian and multilateral organisations) are mostly located in the northern half, indicating a lack of consideration towards local specificities, even though they display a good level of diversity in terms of the conception of civil society in general. The difference in the trend line is here more pronounced, with a steeper slope and much lower intercept point in the case of European donors.

So what is it that internally distinguishes donors in their views? Let us first reflect on the general elements of civil society (horizontal axis).

First of all, there is a tendency for some donors to conceive of civil society as a rather homogenous layer of organisations with clear and simple functions. They do not grant space to smaller organisations that would address only very local, not to say parochial issues. Second, and related to this, some donors tend to conceive of civil society as having a driving logic close to that of the private sector, where NGOs 'sell programmes' and are here to 'do business'.[43] This view holds that civil society also serves a privatisation end where NGOs take over some of the roles of the state. Third, there are donors who want a multiplication of the type of NGOs, while others expect plurality in mere *numbers* of organisations, despite the risk of duplication of activities generated by such an approach.

As for the stumbling points of the local context (vertical axis), there are three main types of differentiations amongst donors.

First, while some donors acknowledge the socio-economic differences within the Palestinian Territories and therefore adapt their programmes accordingly, others do not and consider Palestine as a

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43 All phrases in quotation marks are actually taken from my interviews.

homogenous block. In this latter view, there is no reason to distinguish between the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, between central zone(s) and periphery(ies), between urban and rural regions and amongst refugee or non-refugee population. A sub-element is the aspect of the historical evolution and changes that took and take place within the field of NGO activism in the Territories.

The second aspect deals with issues of partnership. Based on the assumption that it is eventually the Palestinian population which will have to work for a more democratic polity, donors were differentiated according to the level of real partnership they developed with their local partners. In this light, some donors grant greater space of decision to local NGOs in the design and implementation of programmes, whereas other donors tend to decide most of the planning and actually 'outsource' only to their local partners for the implementation.

Finally, some of the technicalities of funding (studied below in Section VI) also contribute to distinguish donors in terms of how much to understand and try to respond to real Palestinian needs. Tied funding, the existence of only short-term funding and the imposition of activities that do not receive popular support (as in the case of the controversial 'people-to-people' activities[44]) are all elements that make each donor unique in this approach to civil society promotion within the particular case of Palestine.

For all these reasons, donors are spread in the various scatter plots. We would certainly multiply and explore further explaining variables (year of establishment, governmental vs. non-governmental funding, etc.). But the main point was stressed that donors do actually have very different approaches both to civil society in general and to the context in which Palestinian NGOs evolve and work. Moreover by adopting a definition of civil society as one potential source of autonomy, these graphs highlighted the limited and limiting views that some of the international donors have when working with local NGOs.

VI. Working and Funding Mechanisms

We finally need to look at how these international donors work and how they go about with such large amount of money. The focus on these details aims at understanding the funding mechanisms that preside over the distribution of such large amounts of money, and to assess in particular the capacity that local actors have (or not) in being part of the decision and designing process.

A. Implementing or partnership?

For most organisations 'giving aid' by sending international experts and expatriates who then do most of the work belongs to the past. Instead, along with the creation of a dogma of 'sustainable development', a larger share of participation has been granted to southern NGOs (as stressed in the third and fourth types of NGOs presented above). There are now many cases of real partnership between northern donors and local NGOs. There is even an interesting case where partnership is reversed, since it is a Palestinian advocacy NGO that provides the training (the jargon would say 'capacity building') to northern NGOs.[45] But this is a notable exception rather than the norm.

Most of the northern NGOs working in Palestine work in partnership with local ones, and foreign governments rely either on local or northern NGOs to implement their projects. The humanitarian and emergency sector is probably the only one where the notion of partnership seems not to have been

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44 These are joint Israeli-Palestinian activities bringing simple citizens or adolescents together. The programmes were boycotted in the late 1990s by most of the Palestinian organisations because the latter perceived such activities as promoting the false notion that there was a real equality and normalisation between the two sides.

45 This is the case of the MATTIN group, specialised in international humanitarian law and monitoring of, a.o., Israeli violations of trade regulations with the EU.

totally internalised: most of the international actors implement their own project themselves, at least in a first phase. Similarly, ECHO (EU's humanitarian aid) still requires projects to be submitted and implemented by northern NGOs, in partnership with Palestinian institutions or not: Palestinian NGOs cannot therefore apply on their own to ECHO projects. This sometimes leads to clashes about the agenda while implementing projects in tandem, or it can lead to a mere token presence of Palestinian NGO.[46] As stressed by some local NGO activists, this way of doing things is often perceived locally as a form of non-trust towards locals. Palestinians therefore express doubts as to what kind of sustainable development this model can lead to.

In conclusion, despite the fact that 'partnership' is on the lips of everybody (and more importantly provides a sesame for accessing funding), it does not mean that it automatically occurs. It is safe to say that at this point most of the implementation is carried out by Palestinian actors, but the decision process (and strategy planning) still belongs largely to external donors.

B. Project and programme funding?

Another financial means to assess whether donors tend to leave more or less space for local civil society actors to decide upon their priorities is to contrast project with programme funding. Most of the funding is provided through project funding. This means that money is not used for the general administrative costs of the NGO, but will go towards financing the activity suggested and paying some staff to directly (and in theory uniquely) implement the activity proposed in agreement between the two parties. One key feature of the project is the short-term scope of funding. Most of the projects are usually one year long, which is the time frame set by the constraints of fiscal budgeting. Some projects are even shorter than that, with projects of 6 or 9 months in the case of ECHO.

It is not rare to hear complaints from local NGOs that credit lines *must* be spent within the time frame of the project, although not all of the money has been used according to the planed budget. If many NGOs end up with strong and bad consumerist habits (new furniture and Xerox machines, computers and in some cases vehicles), it is partly due to such budgetary constraints where money must be spent before the end of the project.

Only in the case of *programmes* can local NGOs develop a longer-term approach. Programmes usually run over two or three years and allow for a more systematic development of the NGOs' activities. Some international donors are now considering offering longer-term funding (up to five years). This obviously necessitates a different planning of activities, but would give NGOs a better chance to achieve their stated goals, especially in a sector like health and advocacy where it would be naïve to expect changes in terms of better health planning and larger popular participation to take place overnight.

While all 37 interviewed donors declared that they offer project funding, only 18 of them give programme funding. Some Palestinian NGOs lamented an indirect and perverse effect of project funding, that of fashions in projects at the expense of long-term needs. A small local NGO complained that project funding usually offered by donors are 'too short-lived' and that this leads to the mentality of 'the flavour of the year', whereby one donor might 'decide now to focus on that aspect' and then change its priorities the year after.[47]

It must be clearly stated that donors also feel the dangers of project funding. One small international donor actually condemned the attitude of Palestinian NGOs as more prone to surf on the waves of fashionable topics, the latest trend being the rule of law:

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46 The other way is also possible. In one case, a European NGO regretted that the project could not be totally implemented by their local partner. Interview in East Jerusalem, February 2004.

47 Interview in East Jerusalem, 21 February 04

> Every day there is a new NGO wanting to work on the rule of law. Rule of Law is one of our main topics, many NGOs on that, but there is no concept behind. It is only project here, or project there. That is why I prefer to work with the Palestinian Legislative Council and work with the committees directly.[48]

But a counter-example taken from a Palestinian NGO, which felt that donors have in recent years tried to steer the work of advocacy NGOs away from certain hot political issues, brings us back to the vexing question of what provokes what in the first place: who triggers whose reaction? In this case, a Palestinian NGO activist felt that donors were reluctant to fund certain types of advocacy campaigns. He wondered (very cynically) whether it would not be easier for his NGO:

> to get around that [problem] by creating some silly programmes to feed the serious programmes [that donors do not want to fund].

> *Like what?*

> Well like having something about… hmm… non-sense workshops here and there, you know, through that, maybe you can sustain other programmes by providing enough funding. It will be easier for you to get support for silly programmes.

> I know so many publications [done by advocacy NGOs] that pollute this environment without being discussed or even read by [anybody]. It is easier to get fund on that, to close the project circles. All these nice workshops in hotels, here and there, […]. When we start the week, we have so many invitations. If we'd go [to all of them], we would not be working, but just going to workshops![49]

This quote illustrates the strange situation that some local NGOs face: a voluntary goal displacement must take place to ensure the sustainability of a local NGO, because of the indirect limits set up by donors. One can easily imagine that such practices might contribute to give a negative image of the organisation to its local constituency.[50]

C. Core funding?

If project funding can symbolise one end of a continuum and programme funding a middle point, core funding would be at the other end. Core funding implies that funding can be used freely for any type of legitimate expenses of the NGOs. This means that part of (or all of) the core funding can be used to pay for electricity bills, furniture, and staff salaries, as well as for its programme activities. Project funding limits the space of allocation of funding, while core funding gives a free reign over financial resources.

From the interviews, it comes out that 11 international donors (out of 37) declared that they give core funding to their local partners, while 7 others would give small amounts for core funding on an infrequent basis. The rest (19) offer only project or programme funding.

Some Palestinian NGOs seem reluctant to accept core funding, fearing that it would in the long-term bind their activities to the will of the donor.[51] Interestingly, more northern European countries are now introducing core-funding elements in their budget line, while others have already done so for many years.

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48 Interview in Ramallah, 21 February 03.

49 Interview in Ramallah, 14 February 04.

50 This would reinforce the widespread critiques in the Palestinian streets against NGOs which are often labelled *dakakeen*, or 'boutiques', to mock their business-like approaches.

51 Interview in Ramallah, 25 February 04.

D. Grants, contracts, or loans?

Different types of legal binding agreements exist between donors and local NGOs. The most common is a grant, whereby a memorandum of understanding is signed between the two parts describing projects to be implemented and the time-frame in which money will be disbursed (by the donor) and spent by the NGO. Money does not have to be paid back by the NGO. In the case of loans, it is made temporarily available to a NGO which will have to pay back for (part or) the total amount. One problem arising with the grant is its limited time frame which implies a lack of flexibility and the capacity to foresee in advance what the financial needs ahead will be.

If *grants* are at one end of the spectrum of types of agreement between donors and NGOs, the other end consists of *contracts*. Contracts are very restrictive for implementing NGOs. Everything is carefully defined in a contract and the NGO has no freedom to change parts of the implementation (or the people implementing it). For a grant, what matters is the programme with its overall objectives. The way that the NGO implements the latter is of less importance for the donor. In-between, there is the *cooperative agreement*. This three-way distinction is mostly applied to USAID beneficiaries. The description given by the USAID civil society director is eloquent in terms of the space of freedom left to local actors:

> We have three mechanisms: One are the contracts (which are highly restrictive). We define the service and we make sure the service is provided. Second, there is the grant where we tell the NGO: *"This is the programme, just let me know when you do it and how."* Finally, the cooperative agreement is somehow in-between. We buy the organisation's programme but we don't tell them "We want you to do this and this!"' At the same time, we have substantial involvement. Substantial involvement means clearance on the key personal, reporting requirements, certain aspects of their programmes, etc.[52]

The reason behind these very restrictive conditions is linked, to a large extent,[53] to the question of support to armed groups in the Territories. To make sure that no US tax payers' money goes to what the State Department has defined as terrorist organisations, Palestinian NGOs must sign a waiver stating that funding will not go to support terrorist infrastructures and that their services will not benefit 'terrorist individuals or organisations'.[54] Thus, all projects submitted to USAID funding are controlled and vetted by US officials. Project details include not only the type and location of activities, but also details of all the personnel involved. USAID can then vet the whole organisation or the participation of certain Palestinian individuals.

Therefore, the various types of contracts provide an escape for not signing the waiver. By having a contract, this gives more legal guarantees to USAID that money will not be misused. This is a purely American technical question (so far). The interview with another American quasi-governmental organisation also stressed this legal technique to avoid signing the waiver. As its director put it bluntly:

> Our way to deal with the anti-terrorism waiver required by USAID is to split between grants and contracts. In our cases, we have an approximate 50-50 percentage of both. To put it simply: the advantage of the contract is that they do what *we* want. In grants, they do what *they* want.[55]

This can be interpreted simply as a way to bypass the very difficult question of signing or not USAID's waiver about terrorism. But, from the point of view of donors about whether they feel that

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52 Interview in East Jerusalem, 11 February 2003.

53 There are other reasons behind donor's inclination to supervise where their funding goes. The fact that the PNA set its own NGOs to get parts of funding for civil society also forced donors to more controls. Other technical difficulties justifying strict control by donors arise from the legal ambiguities around the definition of what is a 'NGO' (British Mandatory, Jordanian, Egyptian, Israeli and Palestinian legislations partly overlap for that matter).

54 The formulation about what consisted 'terrorism' and who should not benefit from services was so loose and ambiguous that Palestinian NGOs refused to sign the waiver. At least in the first months.

55 Interview in al-Bireh, 25 February 2004.

they can chose whatever programmes and partners suit them, it gives a sense of the potential lack of autonomy left to Palestinian civil society partners. Were the US money a tiny and scant proportion of international aid, the issue would not be that important. But USAID is by far one of the largest single donors in the region with regard to civil society projects[56] and dozens of local and international NGOs depend on its funds, therefore rendering its way to 'do development' very influential for many years to come. This, again, gives a sense of how little space for manoeuvre the local NGOs have.

E. Tied funding?

A similar problem arises in the cases of so-called 'tied funding' which demonstrates that though funding is earmarked for Palestine, part of it will actually remain either in the hands of or under the control of a given donor. There are a few cases of direct and openly tied funding to one specific national origin. Two main examples might reveal the reasons for such practices.

The first case is that of USAID funding and large amounts of aid to NGOs. For example, the Tamkeen Project ('Empowerment of Civil Society') was originally endowed with $33 million for a five-year period. However, only half ($16 million) will be given directly in the form of grants to local NGOs; another $8 million is earmarked for 'Capacity Building' and 'Institutional Strengthening'. The final $9 million will go to the 'machinery', as this was described by USAID Civil Society Director, namely, administrative costs for Chemonics International (based in Washington) and for Tamkeen's own administrative costs (25 staff). Though the head of USAID Civil Society excuses the large amount of money remaining in US hands, she is keen to stress that most of Tamkeen's staff are Palestinians. However, she omits to say that most of the computers, vehicles, furniture paid for by the grants must be of American origin. At the end of the day, probably much more than $9 million will remain in the USA.

The second case of tied funding is the Italian contribution to the PNGO Project (a large multilateral programme for local NGOs initiated by the World Bank and managed by the Welfare Consortium). In order to apply successfully to the project, the local NGO wanting to get Italian funding must apply in partnership with an Italian NGO. This is most probably due to the fact that direct funding to Italian NGOs through their central government is scarce. Thus, the Italian government makes sure that its money will benefit their national NGOs.[57] The problem, in the end, is that there are not so many Italian NGOs active in the field and peripheral smaller NGOs lack the direct contact and access to these capable of securing funding from the PNGO Project. This was stressed by a village-based charitable NGO in the Hebron District. The board member interviewed was keen to underline this unequal access to international NGOs. When asked if they applied to the PNGO Project, he replied:

> Yes, of course, it is a dream for us [to get such funding]. But all [international] associations are in Ramallah! It is easier for them to be all in Jerusalem, to circulate. It is easier and more open in Jerusalem and Ramallah. […]

> You can apply to *Ta'awoun* [Welfare Consortium that manages the grant] but under one condition: to bring in a partnership. But you have only two [Italian partnership] organisations here in the district. So they can't supervise all these activities. All submitted a proposal but you need a partnership. They have the money, the funds, but there are difficulties for us in finding the partners.[58]

Therefore the problem of tied funding is twofold: on the one hand, it gives the wrong impression that large amounts of funding are made available for Palestinian development whereas, in fact, this

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56 The EU is the largest donor for all the money disbursed in the Territories. With regard to civil society activities only, USAID is more important than the EU because the latter funnels its funding for civil society activities through smaller international NGOs. See also Section IV.B .

57 *Per se* there is nothing reprehensible to such a practice: it is just a matter so far of how the lines of credits are put forward by the Foreign Ministry back in Rome.

58 Interview in Tarqumiya, 10 February 2004.

funding remains in western capitals; on the other hand, it limits the flexibility for funding to reach each single part of the Territories (which, incidentally, has led to a serious problem of aid in the Territories, which now suffers from over-centralisation around Ramallah and Jerusalem[59]). In both cases, the result is a biased formed of international aid, and in particular in the first instance, it means that strategic decision-taking is not taken in accordance with local decision processes.[60] According to Nakhleh, the problem does not only lie with the amount of tied funding but with the type of projects put forward by certain donors, and – in particular – some forms of political conditionality that limit the freedom of local organisations (Nakhleh, 1989: 118). So tied funding could thus become a form of conditionality linked to the support of certain preferred approaches to the peace negotiations.

To conclude on these varieties of funding mechanisms, it is important to stress that the way aid is given can also limit the space of decision and influence for local civil society actors.

VII. Conclusions

The paper has argued that many changes took place under the label of 'donors' and 'aid' (increased professionalisation and specialisation; less solidarity funding but more governmental funding; imposition of strict rules of funding mechanisms; privileged short-term funding through projects, rather than long-term programmes and core funding; limits of tied funding, etc). These changes can be seen as a source for the gradually limited space of manoeuvring of local NGOs, whereby priorities are defined through technocratic means, in particular through the donors' apparatus that contribute to a form of division of labour that eventually limits the capacity of local NGOs to give any decisive impetus towards defining priorities for their communities.

The paper has argued, in particular, that the ways in which some of the international donors conceive of democracy promotion (through the concrete example of civil society promotion thanks to local NGOs) can be read as one of the possible reasons for the negative results and for the failure of civil society to flourish in the Arab worlds. It is therefore not only due to some form of cultural resistance (read Islam, or an 'Arab mind'), or to the resilience of autocratic regimes, but also the result of a rather narrow conception of civil society that some international donors make concrete through their activities (Challand, 2005b), and that funding mechanisms potentially increase.

The interesting but indirect conclusion of this point is that the ways in which theoretical discussions about the lack of democratisation in the Arab Middle East are conducted will end up influencing the content of the programmes and projects implemented. In other words, the over-concentration of much of the literature on criticising 'what went wrong' by spotting the absence of some local prerequisites[61] further contributes to the impoverishment of the theoretical content of civil society in the region.

It is therefore important to refer to better-informed empirical research stressing the *variety* of Arab civil society or the relative richness of a Muslim public sphere to conduct a thorough revision of what an Arab civil society might look like before embarking on civil society promotion, or other democratisation efforts, based on the reducing vision that there is no civil society in the Arab worlds.

Therefore, the pervasiveness of (neo-)Orientalist themes within the broader literature on the Arab Middle East has a *real* (even if indirect) influence on donors' conception of civil society and democracy. This may translate, in practical terms, into programmes funded by donors which conceive of local recipients as void of any forms of democracy, and therefore reinforce the idea that certain

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59 On this problem see e.g. Kassis (2001).

60 A similar remark is done about international aid to the PNA for being a 'very top-down and donor driven process' (Le More, 2004).

61 For an interesting discussion of this, see Bellin (2004).

values have to be 'exported'. But at the end of the day, it might not be a difference of *cultural* values that reinforces the notion that western views on civil society are different to Arab ones; rather, the study points out that it is a mere difference in conceptualising civil society in its day-to-day consequences, that end up clashing. And since the dominant views on (and funding for) civil society stem from the western shores of the Atlantic, this translates into rather managerial and procedural visions of civil society/democracy at the expense of more substantial programmes that would take local variety and richness into consideration and that would allow civil society to be a source of autonomy. This would thus indicate that the need to export civil society does not stem from *cultural differences* between the 'west' (which, anyway, is far from being homogenous, as pointed by the previous typologies) and the Arab worlds, but is rather due to the need to promote institutional isomorphism around a specific and limited view of civil society.

This last consideration takes me, in turn, to invite the reader to reflect on a much broader theoretical framework, namely the very theoretical foundations of democracy. To understand how international efforts towards democracy promotion might have a better chance of succeeding, two important steps will have to be undertaken: on the one hand, the limits of a too procedural conception of democracy needs to be rethought with regards to some of its substance (to avoid the limits or a managerial or procedural approach). On the other, scholars of the Arab worlds would do well to find inspirations in studies of the local particularities that critically distance themselves from an a-historical hypostatisation on cultures or religion, in order to better develop the reflections on democracy with new substantial inputs, and to reorient the production of knowledge (professionally-oriented or academic) about such issues towards a more positive stance on the Arab worlds.

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APPENDIX: Methodology used for the graphs in Section V

Donors were asked questions related to civil society in general and then to the problem of civil society promotion in the case of Palestine.

The first set of questions served to define the Horizontal axis of the graphs. The following six variables (formulated as a continuum) were used to distinguish donors' views about civil society in general.

Item #	Description	Coding Possibilities
1	Civil society is rather homogenous or is it instead multilayered?	[+ 2, 1, 0, -1, -2]
2	Civil society is characterized by a plurality in numbers of organisations or instead in types (or quality) of organisations?	[+ 2, 1, 0, -1, -2]
3	Civil society is rather characterized by top-down decisions or instead by bottom-up forms of participation?	[+ 2, 1, 0, -1, -2]
4	Civil society is rather static in its form and composition or is it instead evolving and changing with time?	Yes /No [+1, -1]
5	Civil society is expressed through a vocabulary denoting a managerial approach or instead by themes denoting a subtle quality work?	[+ 2, 1, 0, -1, -2]
6	Civil society is automatically benevolent or can it also be problematic?	[+ 2, 1, 0, -1, -2]

Various elements of interviews were used to code the donors' answers. When one of the given issues was not sufficiently dealt with during the interviews, elements of coding were taken out of the donor's presentation material and/or web presentation on their activities.

For each of the six previous variables (representing the horizontal dimension of the graph), points were given ranging according to the possibilities described above. For example, if a donor considered civil society to be homogenous a +2 was given. If it believed it was rather homogenous, then a +1 was attributed, a 0 in case of mixed answers, a –1 for the case where the donor believed civil society to be rather multilayered, and a –2 if s/he thought it is really multilayered. In the case of Yes/No possibility, only two coding possibilities were given (+1 or –1).

The result for the six horizontal items were added to give an X value, used to situate the donor on the graphs.

As regards working with Palestinian NGOs and with civil society promotion in the Palestinian setting (Vertical axis), the variables used were found in the following questions.

Item #	Description	Coding Possibilities
I	Do donors consider the socio-economic conditions to be equal across the Territories or do their programmes have to be adapted to various zones?	Yes /No [+1, -1]
II	Do donors tend to impose the themes of the programmes or do they leave space for local partners to shape their own programmes?	[+ 2, 1, 0, -1, -2]
III	Do donors realize rather standard programmes (done in other countries) or do they accept local modalities and/or adaptation to given programmes?	[+ 2, 1, 0, -1, -2]
IV	Do donors tend to impose their ways of working or do they work in a spirit of true partnership with local NGO?	[+ 2, 1, 0, -1, -2]
V	Do donors provide mostly short-term funding or do they allow for long-term funding?	[+ 2, 1, 0, -1, -2]

VI	Do donors provide only large funding schemes or do they provide mostly small grants?	[+ 2, 1, 0, -1, -2]
VII	Do donors have tied funding or is it untied funding?	Yes /No [+1, -1]
VIII	Do donors tend to impose normalization[62] programmes independently of the circumstances or not?	[+ 2, 1, 0, -1, -2]
IX	Do donors apply strict funding procedures or do they allow flexibility for local partners to re-direct some funding according to new emerging needs?	Yes /No [+1, -1]
X	Do donors come up with ready-made emergency programmes or do they define them with local partners or according to local needs?	Yes-NA-No [+1,0; -1][63]

The same remarks about coding and aggregation (as in the first set of variables) apply for this vertical dimension of the graph.

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62 Such as People-to-People programmes or initiatives aiming at solving the refugee questions without taking the historical roots into consideration.

63 Since not all donors realize emergency programmes, a '0' was added in the possible coding.

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