



# **THE FLETCHER SCHOOL OF LAW AND DIPLOMACY**

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## **Professional Success and Political Failure: Environmental NGOs in the Palestinian Authority**

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## Abbreviations

AIES	Arava Institute for Environmental Studies
ARIJ	Applied Research Institute—Jerusalem
CBI	Consensus Building Institute
CPNP	Children for the Protection of Nature in Palestine
CSO	civil society organization
FoEME	Friends of the Earth—Middle East
IPCRI	Israel/Palestine Center for Research and Information
JEMS	Joint Environmental Mediation Service
MADAR	Center for the Development and Study of Palestinian Society
MEnA	Ministry of Environmental Affairs
MDB	multilateral development bank
MONGOA	Ministry of Non-Governmental Organizations Affairs
MOPIC	Ministry of Peace and International Cooperation
NGO	non-governmental organization
PNA/PA	Palestinian (National) Authority, used to designate the executive branch
PASSIA	Palestinian Academic Society for Study of International Affairs
PECDAR	Palestinian Economic Council for Development and Rehabilitation
PHG	Palestinian Hydrology Group
PIES	Palestinian-Israeli Environmental Secretariat
PLC	Palestinian Legislative Council, legislative branch of the PA
PCH	Palestine Council on Health
PLO	Palestine Liberation Organization
PNGO	Palestinian Non-Governmental Organizations Network
PRIME	Peace Research Institute in the Middle East
PVO	private voluntary organization
RCSD	Rural Center for Sustainable Development, Hebron
UNRWA	United Nations Relief and Works Agency
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
WEDO	Water and Environmental Development Organization

## Introduction

This thesis explores the role of Palestinian and Palestinian-Israeli non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in the development of environmental policy and sustainable development priorities in the Palestinian Authority.<sup>1</sup> The thesis focuses on the experiences of environmental NGOs in two related components of state and society building: First, in their contribution to institution-building and policy-making in the environmental sector within the Palestinian Authority; second, in the larger process of expanding civil liberties, developing a functional model of participatory politics, and furthering Palestinian civil society. This paper argues that while environmental NGOs have recorded small but substantive achievements in civic education and capacity-building for environmental protection, they have largely failed in the promotion of participatory policy-making in the Palestinian Authority.

This assessment of professional successes and political failures is based on interviews and site visits within the Palestinian Authority and Israeli-controlled East Jerusalem during summer 2000. Those visits were conducted during a period of relative calm in the Middle East, but widespread disillusionment with the peace process amongst many Palestinians. During this time period, then-Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak met with Palestinian Authority President Yasser Arafat in Camp David, under the auspices of the United States, in an attempt to reach a settlement on the Final Status of Israeli-Palestinian relations. With the failure of these negotiations, the political and security climate deteriorated, with open hostilities breaking out in September 2000 in the so-called *al-Aqsa Intifada*. Since then, the economic and societal conditions for Palestinians, particularly but not exclusively in Gaza, has fallen precipitously, and the PA itself is in grave financial

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<sup>1</sup>The Palestinian (National) Authority, known commonly as the PA or the PNA, was established in 1993 as part of the Declaration of Principles signed between Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization. It held its first executive meetings in May 1994, and now holds full or partial control of most major Palestinian population

difficulty, with severely limited capacity for governance in many sectors.<sup>2</sup> This work is predicated on the assumption that the current political and security hostilities—although severe—are but a temporary backsliding in the general development of a consensus on Israeli and Palestinian states, side by side, sharing some administrative functions but sovereign and independent.

It will be important to elaborate upon the principal concepts that are being discussed in this thesis—NGO, civil society (in Arab and Palestinian contexts), statebuilding and embryonism. This introduction will review some of the analysis addressing these concepts, and examine some of the extant literature on those topics on competing assessments of the Palestinian NGO sector. Following that definition of terms, this introduction will discuss the concept of environmentalism as illustrative of civil society development, and lay out a road map for the remainder of the thesis.

### **Palestinian Non-Governmental Organizations**

Defining NGOs in the Palestinian community is challenging and problematic. As Sheila Carapico writes, non-governmental organizations in the Arab world are a “topic both trendy and controversial.”<sup>3</sup> Prior to the Oslo Accords<sup>4</sup> and the establishment of the Palestinian Authority, it could be argued that Palestinian society had no NGOs at all, in the absence of any Palestinian governing authority. Kahlil Nakhleh wrote in 1991 that the traditional notion of NGOs was inapplicable in the West Bank and Gaza, because NGOs

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centers in the West Bank and Gaza, although under discontinuous and precarious conditions due to the volatility of Israeli-Palestinian relations.

<sup>2</sup> Copans, Laurie. “Palestinian Authority Disintegrating, US Envoy Warns.” Associated Press, 3 March 2001.

<sup>3</sup> Carapico, Sheila. “NGOs, INGOs, GO-NGOs and DO-NGOs: Making Sense of Non-Governmental Organizations.” *Middle East Report* Vol. 30, No. 1, Spring 2000, p. 12.

<sup>4</sup> The Oslo Accords refer to the series of treaties and interim agreements signed between Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization. It was begun in secret negotiations facilitated by the Norwegian Foreign Ministry, under the guidance of Terje Roed-Larsen.

were typically defined in the context of independent states.<sup>5</sup> Instead, analysts writing prior to the PA's creation typically referred to "ahli (community-based)" organizations, or to "mass-based" organizations.<sup>6</sup> These organizations ranged from charitable societies and religious associations formed in the Ottoman and British Mandate eras to activist and resistance groups formed following the 1967 war and the Israeli occupation of the West Bank and Gaza. The Western-styled NGO is a more recent innovation, in the assessment of many analysts of Palestinian associational life.

For the purposes of this paper, the term NGO refers to

"societies or institutions that do not seek to make profit with the aim of distributing them to their members. Each NGO should meet three conditions: it should be independent from the Authority; it should be an institution that serves the public interest; it should be an institution that does not aim at making a profit among its members."<sup>7</sup>

This definition from Mustafa Barghouti is a more conservative definition than other scholars have used. The World Bank assessment of Palestinian NGOs in 1996, drawing on a more expansive definition, concluded that Palestinian NGOs in the West Bank and Gaza numbered roughly 1,200. The World Bank included social groups, sports clubs, trade unions, political parties and other associational bodies in their count.<sup>8</sup> MADAR—the Center for the Development and Study of Palestinian Society — reached a far smaller count, of 393 in the West Bank and 182 in the Gaza Strip. They reached that count using a "narrow definition" of NGOs that excluded sports clubs, unions, cooperatives and international NGOs.<sup>9</sup> The total number of Palestinian NGOs obscures the actual effectiveness and viability of these organizations; numerous observers have commented that the number of

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<sup>5</sup> Nakhleh, Khalil. *Indigenous Organisations in Palestine: Toward a Purposeful Societal Development*. Arab Thought Forum, Jerusalem, 1991.

<sup>6</sup> Taraki, Lisa. "Mass Organizations in the West Bank." In Aruri, Naseer H. (editor) *Occupation: Israel Over Palestine* (Second Edition). Association of Arab-American University Graduates, Belmont, Massachusetts, 1989.

<sup>7</sup> Barghouti, Mustafa. "Palestinian NGOs and their Contribution to Policy Making." In Abdul Hadi, Mahdi (editor), *Dialogue on Palestinian State-Building and Identity*. PASSIA, Jerusalem, 1999.

<sup>8</sup> Claudet, Sophie. *The Changing Role of Palestinian NGOs Since the Establishment of the Palestinian Authority*. Study prepared for the World Bank, July 1996.

genuinely effective NGOs is far smaller. Barghouti skeptically estimates that only 100 are large and effective enough to make substantive contributions to social services.<sup>10</sup>

This thesis follows the narrower definition used by Barghouti and MADAR, while recognizing that civil society and associational life take on many forms in any society. In Palestinian society particularly, other associational arenas include village cafés, mosques and churches, municipal councils and youth groups, and myriad other forms.

Typologies of Palestinian NGOs, like those conducted by the World Bank and MADAR, often make note of the date of formation of particular NGOs. MADAR notes that 54% were founded before 1993, and 46% afterward.<sup>11</sup> The distinction between pre-Oslo and post-Oslo NGOs is a significant one. In the pre-Oslo days, the Palestinian territories had a “strong and pluralistic infrastructure of NGOs,” tied to historical charitable societies, activism by PLO’s mass mobilization strategy, and the various leftist organizations that were not part of the PLO umbrella.<sup>12</sup> According to Manuel Hassassian of Bethlehem University, “PNGOs [Palestinian NGOs] formed before and during the *intifada* have tended to be characterized by a sense of strong ideology and activism. PNGOs established with the signing of the Oslo Accords are perceived to be a function of the new political process. PNGOs with a strong sense of ideology tended to survive better and be more effective than those organizations that were contingent on the peace process.”<sup>13</sup> This assessment of pre-Oslo and post-Oslo era NGOs is not unusual. Those NGOs that existed prior to the Oslo process, especially those that were created during the *intifada* of the late 1980s, used new funding and organizational mechanisms to improve their services while mobilizing

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<sup>9</sup> MADAR—Center for the Development and Study of Palestinian Society. *The Palestinian NGOs: Facts & Figures*. MADAR with support of the Heinrich Böll Foundation—Middle East Office. Ramallah, March 2000.

<sup>10</sup> Barghouti. “Palestinian NGOs and their Contribution to Policy Making.”

<sup>11</sup> MADAR, p. 9.

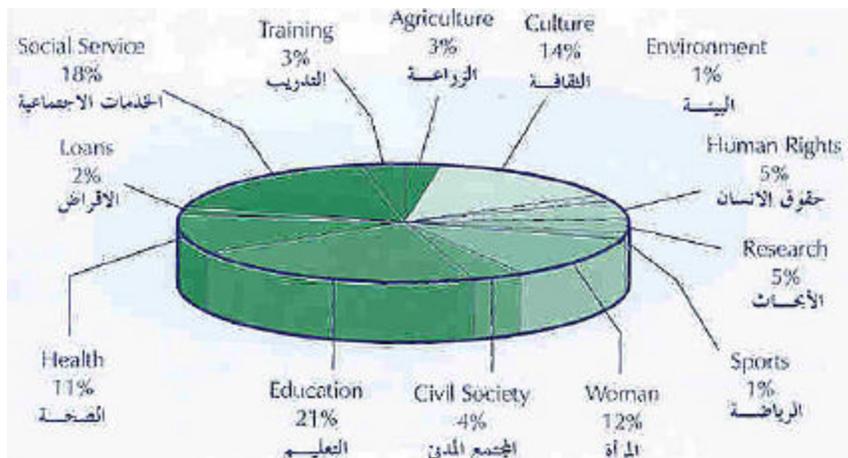
<sup>12</sup> Hammami, Rema. “Palestinian NGOs Since Oslo: From NGO Politics to Social Movements?” *Middle East Report*, Vol. 30, No. 1, Spring 2000.

<sup>13</sup> Hassassian, Manuel. Speech given June 29, 1999. In Adwan, Sami and Bar-On, Dan (editors). *The Role of Non-Governmental Organizations in Peace-Building Between Palestinians and Israelis*. PRIME, Beit Jala, January 2000, p. 28.

Palestinian communities and forming consensus positions on major issues.<sup>14</sup> Their long-term chances of political legitimacy are viewed as more favorable than those Palestinian and binational NGOs whose fates are contingent on continued momentum in the peace process.

Further assessments of Palestinian NGOs have assessed the sectoral distribution of those NGOs active in policy-making, advocacy, rights and social services. MADAR's narrower analysis of Palestinian NGOs divides 575 NGOs into the following sectors:

**Table 1 Sectoral Types of Palestinian NGOs<sup>15</sup>**



As this chart makes clear, most NGOs are engaged in the provision of social services (education, health, charity, poverty alleviation), while others deal with personal and collective rights and others with research and advocacy. Breaking down NGOs along different criteria, Barghouti depicted five functional categories for Palestinian NGOs: a) charitable societies, b) grassroots societies and mobilizing groups, c) development or socioeconomic organizations, d) research centers, e) rights organizations.<sup>16</sup> Environmental protection and advocacy is not a major focus of Palestinian NGO activity, but as further sections will make clear, the environment has attracted the attention of multinational agencies, foreign governments, international and indigenous NGOs, and binational Israeli-Palestinian entities.

<sup>14</sup> Abdul Hadi, Mahdi. "NGO Action and the Question of Palestine." In Abdul Hadi, *Dialogue on Palestinian State-Building and Identity*. PASSIA, Jerusalem, January 1999, p. 68.

<sup>15</sup> MADAR, p. 17.

## Civil Society in the Arab-Muslim and Palestinian Contexts

The concept of “civil society” has a storied past in Western social and philosophical inquiry. It is not the purpose of this paper to investigate the concept deeply except in the context of Palestinian societal development, but numerous texts have addressed the historiography of the terminology, and its possible contemporary relevance.<sup>17</sup> In the Western understanding rooted in the writing of Friedrich Hegel, civil society is defined as those “mediating institutions between the family and the state,” whose vibrance and vitality are viewed as having strong implications for democratization, participatory politics, peaceful development and social inclusion.<sup>18</sup> Particularly, civil society analysis re-entered the mainstream of political science, anthropology and philosophy when examining the movements in Eastern Europe in the 1970s and 1980s that led to the largely-peaceful overthrow of Communism. Their associated institutions, ranging from churches to savings associations to literary ventures, have received much of this modern analysis. But Czechoslovakia’s Charter 77 and Poland’s Solidarity, whose peaceful movements resulted in the eventual elections of their respective leaders as heads of state, offer few evident points of comparison for other contexts. The Euro-American tradition of the conceptual understanding of the term “civil society” makes its use in other societal contexts potentially problematic,<sup>19</sup> although some scholars see norms of civil society “cascading” through the international system to states at other levels of socioeconomic and political development.<sup>20</sup>

This has not prevented innumerable scholars from applying various interpretations of civil society—from Hegel to Toqueville to Gramsci—to societies far removed from the

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<sup>16</sup> Barghouti. “Palestinian NGOs and their Contribution to Policy Making,” p. 63.

<sup>17</sup> One solid reference is Seligman, Adam. *The Idea of Civil Society*. The Free Press, New York, 1992.

<sup>18</sup> Wapner, Paul. *Environmental Activism and World Civic Politics*. State University of New York Press, Albany, 1996, p. 5. Citing Hegel, Wapner adds his contention that civil society exists at levels between the *individual* and the state, based on feminist writings that view the household as a social and political space.

<sup>19</sup> Hann, Chris and Dunn, Elizabeth. *Civil Society: Challenging Western Models*. Routledge Press, London, 1996. Introduction.

<sup>20</sup> Risse, Thomas, Ropp, Stephen C. and Sikkink, Kathryn (editors). *The Power of Human Rights: International Norms and Domestic Change*. Cambridge University Press 1999, pp. 21-23.

European experience. The possible applicability of the Western model of civil society to Arab-Muslim contexts has been the source of a broad and contentious literature, including several anthologies of political and sociological research.<sup>21</sup>

Saad Edin Ibrahim, a political scientist frequently criticized in his home nation of Egypt for promoting non-governmental organizations, once wrote that,

“While there are a variety of ways of defining the concept [of civil society], they all revolve around maximizing volitional organized collective participation in the public space between individuals and the state. In its institutional form, civil society is composed of nonstate actors or non-governmental organizations (NGOs) – e.g. political parties, trade unions, professional associations, community development associations, and other interest groups. Normatively, civil society implies values and behavioral codes of tolerating, if not accepting, the different ‘others’ and a tacit or explicit commitment to the peaceful management of differences among individuals and collectivities sharing the same public space – i.e., the polity.”<sup>22</sup>

On this basis, Ibrahim observes that Arab societies are developing along similar lines as seen in other democratizing societies, based on the interplay of socioeconomic, state, nonstate and external variables.

A conference organized by the Arab Thought Forum in Amman in 1997 offered comparative explanations of “The Role of NGOs in the Development of Civil Society: Europe and the Arab Countries.” Some scholars expressed concern that the European understanding of civil society was being ‘imposed’ carelessly on the Arab world, which lacks a comparable history of institutional development. Kettani argues that importing the European model requires fundamental compromises for Arab-Muslim systems of social organization, compromises that would exacerbate social divisions. The Western model of civil society rests on concepts of equality and freedom, while Eastern models are based on

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<sup>21</sup> Some selections include Norton, Richard Augustus (editor). *Civil Society in the Middle East*, Volumes 1 and 2. E.J. Brill, Leiden, 1995-1996; Schwedler, Jillian (editor). *Towards Civil Society in the Middle East? A Primer*. Lynne Rienner Publishers, Boulder, 1995; Özdalga, Elisabeth and Persson, Sune (editors). *Civil Society, Democracy and the Muslim World* (Transactions Vol. 7). Papers Read at a Conference Held at the Swedish Research Institute in Istanbul, October 28-30, 1996. Swedish Research Institute, Istanbul, 1997; Arab Thought Forum/Bruno Kreisky Forum for International Dialogue. *The Role of NGOs in the Development of Civil Society: Europe and the Arab Countries*. Proceedings of a seminar held in Amman, Jordan, on December 6-7, 1997. Arab Thought Forum, Amman 1997.

<sup>22</sup> Ibrahim, Saad Edin. “Civil Society and the Prospects of Democratization in the Arab World.” In Norton, Vol. 1, pp. 27-8.

social justice, equality on the basis of different backgrounds, and a collective responsibility for righting wrongs. That basis for Arab-Muslim civil society, which includes provisions for consensus-building and consultation, is strongly held and should be upheld and further developed, rather than subverted with foreign models.<sup>23</sup> Rami Khouri notes that Arab intellectuals, who have been absorbing ideas from Europe for more than 200 years,

“... are slightly suspicious, though respectful, of Western civil society... We have seen a whole range of values—free market economies, human rights, environmental protection, civil society—which are now bundled together as a package that we should basically adopt if we are not only to become developmentally advanced, but also to be validated as human beings, as societies, as nation-states.”<sup>24</sup>

These concerns of cultural appropriateness, development, and validation in the international community must be borne in mind when assessing civil society in the Arab world. The term for “civil society,” just like terms for “NGO,” is not native to the Middle East. Helmich and Lemmers note a distinction between *al mujtama’ al ahli* and *al mujtama’ al madani*. The former, whence we derive the term ‘*ahli* (community) organizations,’ refers to all elements of civil society, including tribal, religious and traditional motifs. The latter refers specifically to modern, secular, or legal understandings of “civic society.”<sup>25</sup> The NGOs that are studied in this thesis embody the second, Western-derived conception of Palestinian civil society.

In the Palestinian context, Muhammad Muslih noted the difficulty of determining whether traditional Palestinian associational life qualifies as “civil society” in this Western understanding. Like Nakhleh, Muslih questioned whether Palestinian civil society organizations (CSOs) are comparable to the Western model of civil society, in the absence of an independent Palestinian government and under a succession of foreign occupations. He determined that Palestinian civil society development must be placed in the context of the

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<sup>23</sup> Kettani, Ali. “Commentary.” In Arab Thought Forum, *The Role of NGOs in the Development of Civil Society: Europe and the Arab Countries*, pp. 25-26.

<sup>24</sup> Khouri, Rami. “Discussion.” In Arab Thought Forum, p. 59.

<sup>25</sup> Henny Helmich and Lemmers, Jos. “Analysis of the History and Status of the Concept of Civil Society: The Arab Perception of Civil Society.” In Arab Thought Forum, pp. 19-20.

Palestine Liberation Organization and the Palestinian Authority as ‘state-surrogates’ with parastatal institutional and organizational structures.<sup>26</sup>

Muslih discusses the evolution of Palestinian civil society in the 20<sup>th</sup> century in three stages, beginning during the British Mandate. This outline of civil society organizations and arenas is not exclusive, but representative. Muslih notes that Islamic civil society has always offered parallel, alternative sources of fellowship, support, and personal expression, with their own publications, clubs, and professional organizations. This table is based on his monograph on “Palestinian Civil Society,” in *Civil Society in the Middle East*, Volume 1.

**Table 2 Palestinian Civil Society Over Time (based on Muslih, pp. 245-258)**

1917-1948	1949-1967	1967 onward
Religious groups, voluntary associations, town cafés, unions, women’s associations	Exile-based civil society networks. Student associations in foreign Arab universities, professional groups	“Political shops” and patronage links, trade unions, economic cooperatives, first Palestinian universities, social work groups under General Union of Charitable Societies

Analyzing civil society in the Gaza Strip, Sara Roy observed differences between West Bank and Gazan civil development. She notes that under the Jordanian occupation between 1948-1967, West Bank Palestinians were incorporated into municipal and administrative life, and benefited from greater economic and cultural ties with Israel and the larger Arab world. The West Bank experienced greater prosperity and political sophistication than Gaza, where Egyptian occupiers suppressed political activity. While most West Bank Palestinians were native or from nearby villages, most Palestinian residents of Gaza were non-native refugees of the 1948 war, packed into refugee camps with little opportunity for societal development. “Unlike the West Bank ... Gaza is a society that has had painfully little experience with institutional development.”<sup>27</sup>

<sup>26</sup> Muslih, Muhammad. “Palestinian Civil Society.” In Norton, Volume 1, pp. 243-245.

<sup>27</sup> Roy, Sara. “Civil Society in the Gaza Strip: Obstacles to Social Reconstruction.” In Norton, Vol. 2, pp. 225.

Numerous observers have pointed out the essentially local orientation of Palestinian society. Salim Tamari observed a “localized consciousness” dating from Ottoman days, that shared little in the way of experiences or knowledge with other neighboring Arab societies.<sup>28</sup> Frisch, examining the West Bank particularly, marvels that, “Few places so relatively prosperous and populated are at the same time so local.” He uses the example of the local bus lines that shuttle Palestinians from town to town for purposes of work, education or family visits. The bus companies typically own just one or two buses, and it has been impossible to develop bus lines linking regional centers with more than one or two cities.<sup>29</sup> An inability to overcome the sense of village isolation and a fragmented national consciousness has plagued Palestinian advocates and analysts for decades.

Finally, it should be recognized that civil society in itself is not an unadulterated good. Sheri Berman argues vigorously against the simple equating of a strong civil society with democratic governance in the case of Weimar Germany, where she claims that the vitality of associational life turned Germans away from the weak and moribund political institutions of the day. Indeed, the activists and associational “joiners” who devoted their time to civil society organization rather than political institutions were recruited by the nascent National Socialist Party and lured to the right. The result was the undermining of the Weimar Republic, a disenchantment with democratic experimentation, and the rise of Nazism. This vivid counterexample to civil society’s enthusiasts should remain a cautionary tale in the back of our minds, especially when we acknowledge the weakness of state institutions throughout the Arab-Muslim world. She notes in conclusion, “the fact that a militant Islamist movement [...] provides its supporters with religious classes, professional associations, and medical services tells us little about what might happen should the

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<sup>28</sup> Tamari, Salim. “Government and Civil Society in Palestine.” In Abdul Hadi, *Dialogue on Palestinian State-Building and Identity*, p. 30

<sup>29</sup> Frisch, Hillel. *Countdown to Statehood: Palestinian State Formation in the West Bank and Gaza*. State University of New York Press, Albany, 1998, p. 31.

movement ever gain power; it tells us much more about the political failure and gloomy prospects of the nation's existing regime.”<sup>30</sup>

### **Statebuilding and “Embryonism”**

A recurring challenge to Palestinian political development has been the division between those Palestinians who fled occupation and built a diaspora national movement, and those who remained under Israeli rule after the wars of 1948 and 1967. In the words of Frisch, the experience of Palestinians in making a transition from occupation to a foreign diaspora national movement to functional autonomy to presumed statehood bears “striking similarity” to the Zionist experience in constructing a Jewish state. He finds common challenges facing two of the major diaspora national movements of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, “the Palestinian movement of the last three decades and Zionism, its earlier and closest parallel.”<sup>31</sup> This explicit comparison between Zionism and the Palestinian movement in statebuilding was made by no less a figure than the late Yitzhak Rabin. As Prime Minister, Rabin was fond of drawing parallels between the relations of the Palestine Liberation Organization in Tunis with indigenous Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza, and the World Zionist Organization in Switzerland with the Jews living in the *Yishuv* under British mandatory rule. Rabin's implication was that the fate of Palestinian autonomy lay with those activists on the inside, rather than those agitating from outside the homeland.

The inside-outside tension of Palestinian statebuilding has persisted for more than thirty years. When the PLO was formed as a diaspora-based nationalist movement in the 1960s, it was led and managed from the exterior, from proxy headquarters in Jordan, Beirut and Tunisia. While the movement activists in the diaspora led military, political and diplomatic campaigns for Palestinian rights and self-rule, those Palestinians living under Israeli occupation emphasized a stoic approach known as *sumud*—steadfastness. Abdul Hadi

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<sup>30</sup> Berman, Sheri. “Civil Society and the Collapse of the Weimar Republic.” *World Politics*, Vol. 49 No. 3, April 1997, pp. 401-429.

<sup>31</sup> Frisch, pp. xi-2.

contends that the “inside” Palestinian leadership accepted “outside” preeminence in the military struggle, but demanded rights of leadership in administration and governance.<sup>32</sup> With the 1980s and the intifada, these indigenous Palestinians developed a strategy of “embryonism,” by which alternative organs of power— universities, newspapers, municipal councils, banking cooperatives, plus social service agencies—would be developed to further Palestinian identity and meet collective social needs. These nascent organizations were then seen in the light of civil society development, following the contemporary intellectual trend among Western scholars. In the ideal, Palestinian scholars and activists envisioned that, “When the historical moment comes, these ‘embryonic’ institutions [would] act as the nascent alternative state in the making. Any future Palestinian state [would] have to establish its power base on foundations of these nascent organs.” To this, Salim Tamari remarks derisively, “This strategy proved to be completely mistaken.”<sup>33</sup>

Instead of incorporating inside leadership and institutions in the burgeoning governance institutions of the Palestinian Authority, the triumphal returnees of Yasser Arafat’s PLO, and its dominant political party, Fateh, kept their existing power base and marginalized the institutions of those Palestinians who had remained under Israeli occupation. This negative assessment of the indigenous Palestinian institution-building movement and the strategy of ‘embryonism’ is widely shared, and expressed with some bitterness by Palestinian leaders who had stayed ‘inside’. The institutions of power of the Palestinian Authority are now largely maintained in the hands of Fateh activists who served in the PLO in Jordan, Beirut and Tunis. In the meantime, the statebuilding efforts of those ‘inside’ Palestinians from 1967-1993 have been discounted.

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<sup>32</sup> Abdul Hadi, Mahdi. “Identity, Pluralism and the Palestinian Experience.” In Abdul Hadi, *Dialogue on Palestinian State-Building and Identity*, p. 23.

<sup>33</sup> Tamari, p. 34.

## Environmentalism as Civil Society

As the scholarly literature about civil society has grown in the past two decades, a number of scholars have pondered the relationship between environmentalism and civil society development. Most of these analyses have been in the context of what is called, variously, “transnational civil society,” “global civil society,” or “world civic politics.”

“The idea of world civic politics signifies that embedded in the activities of transnational environmental groups is an understanding that states do not hold a monopoly over the instruments that govern human affairs, but rather than nonstate forms of governance exist and can be used to effect widespread change.”<sup>34</sup>

Paul Wapner’s analysis of environmental activism in the world sphere claims that a “civil dimension of world collective life” is arising on the transnational level, alongside or overlapping with the state-actor model of international relations. He analogizes between activists that work within a state and those activist networks that work at the international level to affect the positions of states and international organizations. In his own estimation, there are 100,000 NGOs engaged in environmental activities worldwide, whose scope and areas of expertise and competence continue to grow.<sup>35</sup> On a related is Keck and Sikkink’s analysis of “transnational advocacy networks.” Keck and Sikkink disagree with the notion of a global civil society, claiming that there is too much fragmentation and discontent to support such a theory. Instead, they see the issues of agency and political opportunism within a fragmented international system, rather than mere diffusionism, as essential for the development of advocacy networks.<sup>36</sup>

Like Keck and Sikkink’s advocacy networks, the “epistemic communities” defined by Peter Haas in his analysis of Mediterranean environmental protection are delineated by shared beliefs and values, as well as common strategies for action. These communities are comprised of like-minded individuals from a myriad of countries and political systems, who

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<sup>34</sup> Wapner, p. 7.

<sup>35</sup> Wapner, p. 2.

<sup>36</sup> Keck, Margaret E. and Sikkink, Kathryn. *Activists Beyond Borders: Advocacy Networks in International Politics*. Cornell University Press, Ithaca, 1998, p. 33.

form channels for the distribution of ideas between societies, and share values, ideals and tactics to accomplish change. The membership of these epistemic communities—scientists, policymakers, advocates and negotiators dealing with common environmental problems—facilitates the entry of new ideas into institutional structures like governments.<sup>37</sup> At the Euro-Mediterranean Conference in Barcelona (1995), European states and the states of the Mediterranean, many of them Arab or Muslim, began featuring the discussion of civil society in the context of aid and human development. Particularly, the Euro-Med Conference addressed definitional questions of social development and sustainable economic and environmental development.<sup>38</sup>

The extension of civil society theory to the study of environmental movements has a sound philosophical base. If a vibrant civil society “implies ... a tacit or explicit commitment to the peaceful management of differences among individuals and collectivities sharing the same public space,” as Ibrahim has said, then the management and protection of the environment offers a useful case study. Sound environmental protection and management entails the distribution of resources throughout society over distance and over periods of time, the mediation and minimization of damages caused by individual actors, and the consensual management of the collective priorities of myriad actors.

For those reasons, implicit within sound environmental management is a model of participatory politics and open access to decision-making institutions. Within the transnational context, actors can take the shape of states, development banks, transnational NGOs with a global reach, multinational corporations and the like. For environmental policy-making and management within a society, major actors might include government ministries, trade unions, corporations, municipalities, and domestic NGOs and research institutions operating with or without international networks. Those nonstate arenas, in

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<sup>37</sup> Haas, Peter. *Saving the Mediterranean: The Politics of International Environmental Cooperation*. Columbia University Press, New York, 1990. Also, “Do Regimes Matter: Epistemic Communities and Mediterranean Pollution Control,” *International Organization*, Summer 1989, Vol. 43, pp. 377-403.

which individuals participate in the setting of collective priorities and the crafting of policies, are frequently seen as the avatars of civil society development. Of course, even domestic politics on the environment are often “nested” within international regime structures. This is particularly true in the Palestinian context, in a governing authority without true sovereign statehood, financed by international agencies and foreign governments and engaged in a protracted struggle for peace, independence and security alongside Israel.

Much as scholars frequently engage in NGO-counting as a proxy for measuring civil society development, environmentalism has frequently been assessed as indicative of the development of a transnational civil society. There are compelling reasons to study environmental movements and nonstate actors within a political entity as indicative of similar develops in the domestic context. This paper aims to accomplish that goal, by examining some of the environmental challenges facing the Palestinian Authority, and the successes and failures of NGOs addressing those challenges. Following are the hypotheses that this study intends to address:

- First, if a vibrant civil society were developing in the Palestinian Authority, one could expect to see inclusive, open, participatory models of environmental policy-making that acknowledge the interests of many stakeholders, and try to take those interests into account.
- Secondly, one could expect a governing authority that is opposed to a participatory civil society to exclude nonstate organizations from arenas of decision-making, and engage in top-down policy development on issues of environmental protection and development.

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<sup>38</sup> Helmich and Lemmers, p. 15.

- Finally, one could imagine a more nuanced reality, in which NGOs have success in some societal or political arenas on environmental issues, but are shut out of access to authority in other realms.

The environmental and developmental problems facing the Palestinian Authority and the larger Middle East, as discussed in Appendix One, are too diffuse, too complex, and too difficult for any one sector of society to address independently. It is clear that capacity must be developed within the private sector, government and non-governmental organizations to manage these issues, and mitigate potential harm to public health and the ecosystem. The numerous actors in environment and development, detailed in Appendix Two, all have compelling reason to develop such capacity, which genuinely requires freedom of association, access to public arenas of policy making, and a free press. While NGOs have worked to develop those political attributes alongside their professional areas of expertise in environmental protection, they have experienced far greater difficulties in their political goals.

Yet environmentalism, like civil society and associational life itself, cannot be seen as coterminous with values of tolerance and participatory politics. In the contemporary Western understanding of liberal Green parties, it frequently is, but discussion of resource management and pollution can frequently be overlaid with nationalism and xenophobia. Returning to Germany for a counterexample, we remember that the Nazi Party was deeply influenced by environmental and ecological thought, from the aboriginal mythology of the German forest to the pseudo-science of genetic purity.<sup>39</sup> The French, Italian and Russian far-right both have intermingled nationalism with environmentalism, and in Middle Eastern

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<sup>39</sup> Bratton, Susan Power. "Luc Ferry's Critique of Deep Ecology, Nazi Nature Protection Laws, and Environmental Anti-Semitism." *Ethics and the Environment*, Vol. 4 No. 1, pp. 3-22, 1999.

domestic politics, arguments over land and water scarcity are inextricably linked to security and nationalism, with the tendency toward authoritarianism which frequently ensues.<sup>40</sup>

## **Conclusion and a Road Map**

This introduction has set out the principal questions in this thesis, and reviewed the existing literature on such key concepts as Palestinian non-governmental organizations, civil society in the Palestinian and Arab contexts, statebuilding and “embryonism,” and environmentalism as indicative of civil society development. The following chapters will present various types of Palestinian NGOs, detailing particularly their professional and political efforts to shape public debate and policies on the environment and sustainable development. The NGOs are divided into three categories: research institutes and think tanks, environmental education and awareness organizations, and NGOs with shared Israeli-Palestinian membership in the environmental sector. This typology is based on the major division within Palestinian environmental NGOs—research and outreach, most of them founded prior to the Oslo process—and the binational environmental initiatives that sprung up following the Declaration of Principles. While other institutes and advocacy organizations exist, this thesis presents a representative sample.

Chapter One addresses the research institutes and think tanks whose scholarly and analytical efforts have shaped much of the debate on environmental priorities and civil society, focusing on the Palestinian Non-Governmental Organizations Network (PNGO) and the long-standing argument over NGO registration laws in the PA. This state-society relationship can be characterized as contested in this political realm. The first chapter also examines the *al-Aqsa Intifada* and the tendency of policy NGOs to adopt nationalist

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<sup>40</sup> It was observed that in Israel in the mid-1990s, there were two parties which demonstrated strong interest in environmental and resource issues. One was the secular, leftist, pro-peace Meretz, whose constituents are mostly urban liberals. The other was the (now defunct) Tzomet, a nationalist, conservative party representing agricultural interests that allied with the anti-Oslo bloc.

positions, and the potential role of information technology in disseminating and sharing viewpoints, insights and concerns between NGOs and other sectors.

Chapter Two examines NGOs working in the fields of environmental education and awareness, particularly in terms of the relations between the Ministry of Environmental Affairs and the non-governmental sector in public outreach. For the large part, this relationship can be defined as cooperative or complementary.

Chapter Three discusses binational or multinational environmental NGOs that have both Israeli and Palestinian leadership and audience. In that chapter, the difficulties of developing successful models for Israeli-Palestinian cooperation on the environment are discussed, especially in terms of the hazards of conflating environmental protection with the peace process. The defining adjective for the relationship between such NGOs and the Palestinian Authority is conflictual.

In the Conclusion, we evaluate scenarios and preconditions for successful outcomes for Palestinian and Israeli-Palestinian NGOs in the environment and sustainable development fields, taking a critical look at donors and development agencies in particular. This document ends with a personal note on engagement within the environmental field in the Palestinian Authority, and a reflection of my perceptions during research in summer 2000 and afterward, during the crisis in the peace process and the *al-Aqsa Intifada*.

## **Contested Relations: Research Organizations and Policy Centers**

Chapter One discusses the role of Palestinian policy and scientific research organizations dealing with the environment, emphasizing particularly their relationship with the Palestinian Authority government. In some ways, the work of such organizations is relatively easy to study, because they publish policy reports and their leadership is cited in journals and conference proceedings. They have also dealt more forcefully with the PA leadership in matters of contended policy, namely the NGO Draft Legislation of 1995 onwards. In other ways, however, the work of these research institutes is harder to evaluate, because they operate in a policy sphere that is above and separate from the everyday reality of Palestinian life, and their primary audience is a community of policymakers, donors and intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations, rather than the bulk of the local population.

The significance of NGOs working in research and policy studies comes in the development of indigenous capacity to address complicated environmental and developmental dilemmas. The development of such policy analysis and research capability is particularly vital, as it enables institutions outside government to assess the impacts of decisions on the environment and society. The NGOs discussed here are developing technical capacity in environmental management systems, geographic information systems and remote sensing, hydrology, and related fields. Their policy areas include economic and political analysis, civil society studies, and public opinion and demographics. Indigenous capacity in all these fields are essential for sound non-governmental assessment and advocacy of environmental policies.

However, in the literature on Palestinian public policy NGOs, one of the persistent criticisms is that they are frequently mere political advocacy “shops” that put out information and opinion in English to reach an audience of potential donors, rather than

addressing the needs of a local constituency or developing local expertise.<sup>41</sup> Sara Roy noted her concern that these policy NGOs are “one-person operations that work in relative isolation. They depend on one individual, and as is often the case, on that individual’s political party.”<sup>42</sup> This criticism ties together concerns about NGO isolationism from community needs with the concern about neo-patrimonialism in Palestinian politics, a familiar complaint. Sheila Carapico writes that there are three P’s that typify Arab civil societies: Parochialism, Patrimonialism, and Patriarchy. We have already seen Frisch’s analysis of Palestinian parochialism, and Roy’s comments address the hazards of patrimonialism— patriarchy is the proper subject of another paper.

The policy organizations and think tanks discussed in this chapter are larger than mere one-person political shops, but they do face some of the concerns represented in the three P’s. In their relationships with the Palestinian Authority, allegations of patrimonialism may become a concern, insofar as success or failure may depend on personal access to political decision-makers. The ability or inability of NGOs to coordinate activities and policy goals as part of larger movements reflects the issue of parochialism: Are NGOs capable of coordinating outside their own narrow sectors of expertise or influence, or outside their own region? There are four policy and research NGOs discussed here: the Applied Research Institute—Jerusalem (ARIJ), the Water and Environmental Development Organization (WEDO), the Palestinian Hydrology Group (PHG), and the Palestinian Academic Society for the Study of International Affairs (PASSIA). All are based in the West Bank and operate professionally much as policy research groups and think tanks operate elsewhere in the world. They publish documents and analyze policy, take positions on issues of public concern, conduct public outreach and political lobbying, maintain websites and publicize their analysts’ appearances at conferences and in academic journals.

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<sup>41</sup> Parker, Christopher. *Resignation or Revolt? Socio-political Development and the Challenges of Peace in Palestine*. I.B. Tauris Publishers, London, 1999, p. 54.

In the contested political sphere, Palestinian research and policy institutes have played a prominent role in the discussion of civil society and in the construction of the Palestinian Non-Governmental Organizations Network (PNGO), especially in opposition to restrictive NGO draft laws. This survey discusses the PNGO Network and the draft law debate, the policy NGOs' fields of research, and their relations with relevant Palestinian ministries. It also touches on the response of policy NGOs to the current *al-Aqsa Intifada*, and role of information technology in NGO operations, and concludes with observations of the current and potential role of policy research NGOs in the environmental field.

### **The Palestinian Non-Governmental Organizations Network (PNGO)**

By way of introduction, it is important to discuss in brief the Palestinian Non-Governmental Organizations Network. PNGO is not a policy research or advocacy NGO in its own right. Instead, it is an umbrella group dedicated to creating common positions on a range of civil society issues and shared concerns. PNGO was created in response to a myriad of concerns that arose at the time of the Declaration of Principles between the PLO and the State of Israel. According to its website, "A group of concerned Palestinian NGOs saw the necessity to reconsider the role and activities of the NGO sector in the context of the political changes in the area," and began to conduct a dialogue on a coherent NGO position for future Palestinian state-NGO relations. PNGO has a general assembly of more than 70 member organizations in the West Bank and Gaza, and stresses that it does not intend to substitute for existing non-governmental organizations, merely to provide a mechanism for coordination and advocacy on matters of common concern.

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<sup>42</sup> Roy, Sara. "U.S. Aid to the West Bank and Gaza Strip: The Politics of Peace." *Middle East Policy* Vol. IV, No. 4 (October 1996), cited in Parker, p. 57.

“Coordination, however, is not an end to itself; it is a network of relations which seeks to maximize the effectiveness, viability, visibility and sustainability of Palestinian NGOs at this critical stage in their development, and at this critical stage in the development of Palestinian civil society. The PNGO Network, by definition, is a mechanism sustained by a number of Palestinian NGOs which comprise its membership and which share a similar position in terms of the pressing and urgent need for a healthy civil society in Palestine, democratically organized and governed, which respects principles of human rights and social justice.”<sup>43</sup>

The PNGO Network is funded by the Centre d'études arabes for le developpement, a Canadian NGO, and the Ford Foundation. It has published a journal in English and Arabic on Palestinian NGO activities, coordinated a boycott of products produced in Israeli settlements in the West Bank and Gaza, and expressed interest in capacity building activities, but its primary emphasis has remained civil society development, in keeping with the priorities in its initial position paper released after the signing of the Declaration of Principles in 1993. These include freedom of association and organization, the rule of law, promotion of human rights, participatory politics and defense of the rights and interests of deprived groups.<sup>44</sup> Its publications and website, including the Palestine Monitor at <http://www.palestinemonitor.org>, emphasize these priorities as well as the publicization of Israeli activities in the West Bank and Gaza. PNGO publishes a newspaper supplement in the prominent Jerusalem newspaper *al-Ayyam* six times per year on “Community Work” that has discussions of civil society and NGO activities, in an attempt to reach an audience that does not follow its policy newsletters in English or Arabic.

PNGO Network has been led in large part by NGOs active in policy research and advocacy, in a range of sectors from international relations to healthcare to development. The PNGO leadership has been strongly engaged in NGO-Authority relations since its foundation, and its rear-guard action against a restrictive NGO registration law forms the most illustrative example of the ongoing evolution in relations between the PA and Palestinian civil society.

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<sup>43</sup> PNGO website, <http://www.pngo.net/about.htm>

<sup>44</sup> PNGO. “The Position of Non-Governmental Organizations of the Occupied Territories in the Light of the Palestinian- Israeli Declaration of Principles,” 1993. <http://www.pngo.net/position.htm>

## The Palestinian NGO Draft Law and Policy NGO Responses

PNGO's position on NGO rights and freedoms quickly brought it and its membership into a seemingly perpetual debate on the Palestinian Authority draft law on the registration of NGOs. The registration law controversy began in 1994 at the founding of the PA, and has flared up repeatedly since. The story of this legislation, and the responses from policy NGOs and the Palestinian NGO Network, is striking not only for its own sake, but in the context of a contemporaneous region-wide crackdown on NGOs. Reportedly, governments in the Middle East held a secret committee meeting of the League of Arab States in Tunis, aimed at blunting the impact of independent NGOs, especially in the field of human rights. According to reports from ministers and activists, the effort to undermine and discredit NGOs took the shape of forming quasi-NGOs staffed by members of intelligence forces, writing restrictive laws on NGO funding, and forcing new elections of NGO boards of directors to include staff from government security or intelligence agencies. Among the NGO activists who were subject to accusation and arrest were Egypt's Saad Edin Ibrahim, the scholar of civil society in the Arab world, whose works are quoted in the Introduction.<sup>45</sup>

Within the Palestinian Authority, according to Denis Sullivan, there was never any doubt—either among PA legislators or the NGOs themselves—that Palestinian NGOs would be registered and regulated in some way.<sup>46</sup> The question that was so fiercely debated was how, and in what form. There was immense murkiness and lack of transparency in a draft bill making its way through the Palestinian National Authority in 1994 and 1995, and rumors about the proposed legislation caused immense consternation among the NGO community. Representatives of various NGOs were visited by officers of the general intelligence services (*al-mukhabarata al-'aama*) with questionnaires that asked invasive

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<sup>45</sup> Pitner, Julia. "NGOs' Dilemmas." *Middle East Report*, Vol. 214, Spring 2000.

<sup>46</sup> Sullivan, Denis J. *Non-Governmental Organisations and Freedom of Association: Palestine & Egypt—A Comparative Analysis*. Palestinian Academic Society for the Study of International Affairs (PASSIA), Jerusalem, December 1995, p. 20.

questions about the political ties, family and friends and personal histories of NGO staff.<sup>47</sup> In the meantime, the first draft of the NGO law was written, reportedly by three individuals in scattered ministries, but never made public.<sup>48</sup> Rumors circulated that the Palestinian law was based on the universally reviled Egyptian Law 32 of 1964, which severely limited NGO autonomy in funding and activities, barred gatherings above certain sizes, and has resulted in a confrontational and counterproductive NGO-state relationship. Feeling that the Palestinian NGO law would set a precedent for the relationship between state and society, NGOs unleashed a “chorus of rejection” at news of the proposed law, promulgated by returning members of the exile community, rather than the ‘inside’ activists and academics who had worked in development and advocacy since 1967.<sup>49</sup>

In May 1995, the PNGO Network began to hold workshops to coordinate policies and positions. These events preceded the formation of a Legislative Council, and the process of legislating was still highly uncertain. PNGO held meetings throughout summer-fall 1995 with the Ministry of Justice, Ministry of Social Affairs, and the Palestinian Economic Council for Development and Rehabilitation (PECDAR), but as the exact nature of the draft law remained secretive, PNGO was forced to take its campaign for transparency to the public. The Network posted ads in the major Arabic newspaper in Jerusalem, met with international donors, and spoke to PA ministers, who responded with the creation of an interministerial steering committee to coordinate NGO activities and regulations. PNGO efforts broadened in late 1995 and 1996, putting pressure on international donors and development agencies, many of which made disingenuous claims of their unwillingness to delve into matters of domestic Palestinian politics. The PNGO released a devastating assessment of the rumored law.

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<sup>47</sup> Sullivan, p. 17-18.

<sup>48</sup> Dajani, Muhammad. “Government and Civil Society—Relations and Roles,” in Abdul Hadi, *Dialogue on Palestinian State-Building and Society*, p. 83. “To be precise, it was written and proposed by one man who shall remain nameless.” (i.e. Yasser Arafat himself).

<sup>49</sup> Sullivan, p. 16.

“Out of its absolute concern for the national unity and the interests of the Palestinian people, and out of its loyalty to the values of freedom, democracy and civil society, the Palestinian NGO Network calls on the Palestinian Authority to totally discard this proposed draft law, which is full of defects and dangers, and to open a serious and responsible dialogue with the Network, charitable societies on an individual bases, and NGOs, on regulating the relations between them and the PA.”<sup>50</sup>

It should be emphasized that the oppressive intent of the initial draft law was not shared by all members of the PA, or even all the relevant ministries. According to Sullivan, PECRAR “came out forcefully with a working paper discussing principles that would indeed *govern*— i.e., regulate but not control—the NGO community in Palestine.”<sup>51</sup> But the process of the draft law’s creation so poisoned relations between Palestinian NGOs and the PA that further promises to hold open dialogues were met with grave skepticism.

The second draft of the NGO was publicized sometime later, but removed from consideration in the ongoing political storm, especially as international donors began to grow concerned. PNGO took its case to the World Bank NGO donor group in charge of a \$15 million development assistance purse. Donors and the PNGO Network criticized the draft for its exclusiveness in defining non-governmental organizations, which would have excluded many kinds of civil society organizations that were not classic charitable societies. The draft would have restricted NGO independence in ideology, financing, and management. Additionally, NGOs were concerned over the term “licensing,” instead of “registering,” which would imply that ministries themselves could dissolve the NGOs. The draft laws were also explicit in a demand for “accountability” that allowed little freedom in NGO decision-making. In short, it seemed that NGO service providers would be restricted to serving as subsidiary branches of development ministries operating with foreign donor

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<sup>50</sup> Palestinian NGO Network Position on the Draft Law Concerning Charitable Societies, Social Bodies and Private Institutions, September 1995. Reprinted in Sullivan, Appendix 2.

<sup>51</sup> Sullivan, p. 21.

support. Finally, requirements for registration, renewal, and funding would have been immensely onerous and certainly vulnerable to political manipulation.<sup>52</sup>

Palestinian Authority personnel have labored to portray the original intentions of the NGO Law as nothing to fear. According to a Deputy Minister in the Ministry of Environmental Affairs, the sole intent of the law was to ensure that both the PA and donor communities could be sure that funds given to NGOs were spent wisely and on legitimate purposes. The goal to ensure that government and NGOs operated “in harmony” as part of a coordinated national enterprise. “Never in history was the law a threat to anyone” who adhered to basic standards of accountability and transparency.<sup>53</sup> Yet NGOs perceived the draft legislation as a grave threat to their operational freedom, and were scarcely mollified.

After the unmourned demise of the first two drafts of the NGO law, the Ministry of Planning and International Cooperation (MOPIC) convened a committee on future drafts of the law, consisting of numerous Palestinian NGO umbrella organizations, academics, and other ministries. The committee reportedly met 45 times before hosting open workshops in November 1996. These workshops set the groundwork for discussions between the Palestinian Authority and nonstate institutions including NGOs, universities, charitable societies and religious groups. The Palestinian Legislative Council, formed in 1996, expressed its wishes that all parties could take part in the legislative process through a public hearings and submission of recommendations. PNGO enthusiastically took up this offer.

On December 16, 1998, the revised NGO Law, crafted with the support and participation of NGOs, passed its third reading in the PLC. This law stressed both governmental and non-governmental accountability and transparency, and was designed to ensure “an open, symbiotic relationship between the country’s governmental and non-

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<sup>52</sup> For this brief summation, I am grateful to Lina Barouch’s discussion of the NGO Law in her M.Phil. thesis on Palestinian healthcare NGOs.

<sup>53</sup> Interview with Mohammed Said al-H’maidi, al-Bireh, August 3, 2000.

governmental sectors.”<sup>54</sup> The PNGO and the leading activist NGOs, which had cheered the revised law during its first and second readings, had been prepared to face retrenchment from the PA, but were encouraged that the bill passed three readings.<sup>55</sup>

However, three months after the successful third reading of the bill, the Palestinian Executive Authority headed by Yasser Arafat substituted an amendment transferring the site of NGO registration from the Ministry of Justice to the Ministry of Interior—the ministry responsible for intelligence and security services. Backed by the NGOs, the PLC rejected the amendment by a vote of 38-12 in May 1999, but campaigns against NGOs in the Executive branch continued. These campaigns were directed especially against human rights NGOs, and took the form of public verbal attacks and legal attacks on the votes that had seemed to ratify the PNGO-approved bill. This back-and-forth ended with the ruling in August 1999 that “the amendment made by President Arafat on the content of the law governing NGOs is procedurally correct.”<sup>56</sup> With that ambivalent ending, the Palestinian NGO Network achieved some goals, but failed to ensure that the registration of NGOs would take place under the Ministry of Justice. Palestinian Authority President Arafat signed the NGO Law in January 2000, with the registration under the Ministry of Interior. The fact that the law was signed into being at all is noteworthy, because Arafat has consistently refused to sign into law major legislation of any kind.

PNGO responded by observing that

“...Although the place of NGO registration remains with the Ministry of Interior instead of the Ministry of Justice, an alteration that is incompatible with the Palestinian Legislative Council’s procedures, we welcome this event as a major achievement for Palestinian civil society and its numerous NGOs and community organizations.

With the official signature, this NGO Law becomes, in most of its articles, the most progressive law of its kind in the Middle East. The current challenge is to ensure that the rule of this new law will prevail in guiding future government and NGO relations.”<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> Union of Palestinian Medical Relief Committees. “Palestinian Rule of Law Threatened: NGO Law Changes Made Despite PLC Vote.” UPMRC Newsletter No. 31, p. 5, October 1999.

<sup>55</sup> Union of Palestinian Medical Relief Committees. “Law Clears First Hurdle as NGOs Push for Democracy.” UPMRC Newsletter No. 29, p. 6, June 1998.

<sup>56</sup> Palestinian Legislative Council, August 12, 1999, cited in Claudet, Sophie. “West Bank and Gaza.” *INJL Journal*, Volume 2, November 1999.

<sup>57</sup> PNGO website, <http://www.pngo.net>.

The battle of NGO-PA relations has not ended. The creation of the Ministry of NGO Affairs (MONGOA) in July 1999 continued the debate. Few governments have ever established a ministry explicitly to deal with NGO affairs, but Article One of the Presidential Decree creating the ministry calls for “coordinating and organizing work between all Palestinian NGOs and foreign NGOs and other various governmental Parties. This stems from the principles of complementar[ity], participation and transparency in planning and execution in order to achieve the comprehensive national plan for the service of the Palestinian community.”<sup>58</sup> Hammami claims that the creation of the new ministry, headed by Arafat loyalist Hasan Asfour, was a tactical maneuver designed to reassert direct control of NGOs.<sup>59</sup> Tactical or not, its mandate calls into question many of the gains made in the tortuous process of passing a satisfactory NGO registration law. As of summer 2000, the ministry was too small, inexperienced and underfunded to have delved into many pragmatic affairs, but its representatives have attended conferences and workshops on civil society and cooperation between foreign and domestic NGOs and the PA governmental sectors. It intends to develop offices of Voluntary Activities, Institutional Cooperation and Coordination, Media and Public Relations, Planning and International Relations, Democracy and Human Rights, and Law.<sup>60</sup>

Clearly, Palestinian NGO attempts to resolve the draft registration law to their satisfaction resulted in a partial success achieved only at great cost, over a period of years. The struggle is indicative of the relative unwillingness of the Palestinian Authority, particularly the executive branch, to surrender oversight powers on independent institutions not tied to the PLO or the Authority. The Palestinian Legislative Council, whose ineffectuality has been increasingly obvious since its formation, has been more accepting of

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<sup>58</sup> Palestinian Authority Presidential Decree No. 4, Concerning designation of competencies of the Ministry of NGO Affairs.

<sup>59</sup> Hammami, Rema. “Palestinian NGOs since Oslo: From NGO Politics to Social Movements?,” p. 19.

decentralized institutions of power, but in confrontations with the Executive branch it typically backs down. The result is a situation in which nonstate institutions are forced to fight to retain autonomy over budgets, policy space and legitimacy against a government jealous of its control over public spaces and institutions. As a test of civil society in the Palestinian Authority, the registration laws and the new Ministry of NGO Affairs demonstrate the fragility of the position of non-governmental organizations, and are the clearest demonstrations of a persistent antagonism within the executive branch toward independent non-state institutions.

The following depictions of particular policy and research NGOs discuss their professional spheres of activities, as well as the political relationships between NGOs and relevant ministries. Particular attention during the interviewing process was paid to perceptions of NGO freedom in determining budget and management priorities, and in relations with donors and other relevant partners. In addition to perceptions and insights gathered during the interview process in summer 2000, these profiles incorporate information from publications and websites in succeeding periods, during the *intifada*. Whenever quotations are used, they represent verbatim remarks of the relevant NGO or ministry leadership, while other comments are paraphrased or summarized.

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<sup>60</sup> Ministry of NGO Affairs website, <http://www.mongoa.gov.ps/about.html>

## **Applied Research Institute—Jerusalem**

ARIJ is a “research institute, not civil society!” emphasized the staff of the Applied Research Institute—Jerusalem. The institute, housed on the main road between Jerusalem and Bethlehem is the foremost Palestinian environmental science and research center in terms of its sophisticated scientific capabilities, especially remote sensing and geographic information systems. Among other prominent publications, ARIJ has produced an *Atlas of Palestine*, environmental profiles of the West Bank, and various studies of land and water use in cooperation with, and under contract to, the Palestinian Ministry of Environmental Affairs.

ARIJ was founded in 1990, making it one of the more senior Palestinian research institutes working in a range of environmental fields. Its initial orientation was toward agriculture, but ARIJ expanded to include a water research unit, environmental research unit, and GIS and land-use unit, as well as resource and data analysis center.<sup>61</sup> In its staffing, ARIJ pursues scientists and analysts with advanced degrees and quantitative research skills. Its director, Dr. Jad Isaac, is a widely published policy analyst in water and environmental policy, whose work with Dr. Hillel Shuval of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem was the first joint Israeli-Palestinian study of water scarcity and future equitable distribution schemes.<sup>62</sup> As of summer 2000, ARIJ was staffed by 30 employees with supplementary volunteers. According to Dr. Isaac, ARIJ’s primary target audience consists of “policymakers and those with access to power.”<sup>63</sup> Isaac strongly expressed his opinion that the sustainability of the Israeli-Palestinian peace process was contingent on the sustainability of scarce resources; if a future Palestinian state lacks the resources to be viable, the situation will be one of perpetual conflict. ARIJ’s focus on transportation, land use, settlements,

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<sup>61</sup> ARIJ website, <http://www.arij.org>

<sup>62</sup> Isaac, Jad and Shuval, Hillel (editors). *Water and Peace in the Middle East*. Elsevier Publishing, Amsterdam, 1994.

<sup>63</sup> Interview with Dr. Jad Isaac, Bethlehem, July 19, 2000.

environmental assessment, and environmental human rights gives it an unusual breadth in the PA, where institutes tend to have more limited areas of competence.

ARIJ has benefited from what Isaac calls an “exceptional” relationship with the Ministry of Environmental Affairs and the Ministry of Agriculture on major research and scientific monitoring projects, including publishing of major documents and joint management of research. As of mid-2000, ARIJ had four contracts with these ministries, both as consultancies and partnerships on publishing. MEnA’s major English- and Arabic-language publications on environmental assessment and environmental priorities both make extensive use of ARIJ’s research. According to Isaac, the key selling points of ARIJ as a partner are its strategy experience and its expertise in remote sensing and environmental monitoring. One notable recent addition to ARIJ’s portfolio is an environmental human rights consultancy for MEnA, as part of a PA five-year human rights action plan. This contract will involve the specification and judgment of which environmental rights should qualify as basic human rights under Palestinian law, including the right of access to clean water, land, sustainable development and a “right to know” about environmental dangers.

Isaac expressed satisfaction with the complementarity of ARIJ’s role with the environmental and agricultural ministries, and pressed ARIJ’s support for a memorandum of understanding on NGO transparency in funding. ARIJ would desire a role for NGOs and research institutions like that of civil society in a “modern state,” in which academics, activists and government cooperate on contracts and research, as well as public outreach and civic education, while the governing authority is responsible for legislation and enforcement and compliance. ARIJ takes a position in favor of a participatory role in policy decisions, and favors a stakeholder-participation model like that of the US Environmental Protection Agency, in which businesses, labor groups, municipalities and NGOs take part in decisions on policies and the siting of potential environmental hazards. In general, ARIJ’s stated

preferences on policy openness and civil society echo those of the PNGO network, but the current political climate has resulted in a reassessment of priorities and stated emphases.

Since the outbreak of the recent conflict in September 2000, ARIJ has released a number of reports documenting damage to the Palestinian environment, agricultural sector and public health as a result of Israeli policies.<sup>64</sup> ARIJ's website has ongoing reports of Israeli settlement activities, including economic and ecological destruction on the part of settlers and the Israeli military, at <http://www.poica.org>, a website entitled "Monitoring Israeli Colonizing Activities in the Palestinian West Bank and Gaza." This website is jointly operated by ARIJ and the Land Research Center, an institution which describes its main activities as monitoring land confiscation, "colonizing Israeli activities," and Israeli actions affecting Palestinian agriculture, "issuing statistical-based information and studies on all violations mentioned above," and "offering services to Palestinian farmers."<sup>65</sup> The European Union is one of the funders of the site, although all documents specify that "views expressed herein are those of the beneficiary and therefore in no way reflect the official opinion of the Commission of European Communities."<sup>66</sup> The nationalist element in ARIJ's activities in response to the *al-Aqsa Intifada* is fitting in the light of its original mandate in 1990, to "promot[e] sustainable development in the occupied Palestinian territories and the self-reliance of the Palestinian people through greater control over their natural resources."<sup>67</sup> ARIJ's strong nationalist emphasis, which has been redoubled during the current crisis, is also reflected in a rejection of cooperative ties with Israeli environmental groups in recent years. While ARIJ participated in joint research and publication in the middle 1990s, these ties have since been severed.

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<sup>64</sup> Ghanayem, Mohmed; Qattosh, Nizar and Filkin, Beatrice. "Israel's Double Standard Toward Environmental Protection is Highlighted by the Current Situation," 2001. <http://www.poica.org/casestudies/environmental-protection/>

<sup>65</sup> Land Research Center website, <http://www.lrcj.org>

<sup>66</sup> ARIJ. "The Myth of Natural Growth: Who Are They Kidding?," April 2001. <http://www.poica.org/casestudies/natural-growth/>

<sup>67</sup> ARIJ website, <http://www.arij.org/back.htm>

## **Water and Environmental Development Organization**

The Bethlehem-based Water and Environmental Development Organization (WEDO), founded in 1987 by Nader al-Khateeb, has both a policy and environmental education orientation. According to its founder, WEDO has ten full-time employees plus advisory experts on a consultancy basis, and various interns and youth groups which conduct some activities.<sup>68</sup> WEDO works in the fields of water and environmental development generally, not only in water rights but in environmental health and environmental education. Among its most prominent projects was a cooperative venture with the Israel Ornithological Center on the protection of the lesser kestrel, an endangered migratory bird, for which WEDO won a TIME Magazine “Environmental Heroes” award.<sup>69</sup> Other projects include the installation of sewers in Palestinian towns with poor wastewater management systems and training programs for solid waste management.

According to al-Khateeb, WEDO’s principal clients are foreign firms and donors in the field of environmental impact assessment, including the US Agency for International Development and the World Bank, as well as the Palestinian Ministry of Environmental Affairs. Other clients include private-sector organizations, like a stonecutter’s association. WEDO is a registered Palestinian NGO with extensive ties within Palestinian Ministries, including the ministries of Health, Local Government Affairs, and Industry, as well as the Water Authority. al-Khateeb stressed that WEDO’s coordination with MEnA was productive and cooperative, and that WEDO took part in all major MEnA events and programs.

In WEDO’s relations with the Palestinian Authority, al-Khateeb was largely satisfied. The registration of NGOs with the Ministry of Interior as specified in the final NGO law, he said, was designed to ensure that an NGO’s objectives, targets and finances

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<sup>68</sup> Interview with Nader al-Khateeb, Bethlehem, July 30, 2000.

<sup>69</sup> Silver, Eric. “Heroes for the Planet: A Flight for Peace Begins in a Birdhouse.” *TIME*, April 26, 1999. <http://www.time.com/time/reports/environment/heroes/heroessgallery/>

were legitimate. “As long as they don’t interfere with internal policies, it’s not a problem.” In his opinion, the best rationale for the registration procedure was to make the ministries familiar with an organizations’ practices and funding. According to al-Khateeb, the new Palestinian Ministry of NGO Affairs, created in the aftermath of the conflict over the NGO draft law, had little to do with environment and thus was not yet a major factor in WEDO’s areas of work. This fact has been confirmed by representatives of the Ministry of NGO Affairs.<sup>70</sup> al-Khateeb stressed that WEDO’s concern in NGO-PA relations was in the promotion of transparency on both sides. He respected the rights of the government to know the structure and funding of non-governmental organizations, but observed that decision-making within Palestinian ministries was too opaque, and that process by which the registration law was created was problematic.

WEDO’s emphasis is on integrated environmental protection and development, and al-Khateeb saw cause for optimism in the Palestinian inclusion of environmental legislation even in the early stages of autonomy. Regulations on environmental impact assessments for new infrastructure projects already exist, which puts the PA ahead of many other governments at similar stages of development. In al-Khateeb’s opinion, the environmental problems facing the Palestinians have accumulated over decades of occupation and poverty, but the Palestinian Authority response to such problems is impressive in context.

### **Palestinian Hydrology Group**

Like WEDO, the Palestinian Hydrology Group was founded during the original *intifada* in 1987, when it operated as a two-person office in the Palestinian Agricultural Relief Committee. This period saw the establishment of numerous NGOs that developed national policy responses to the crisis, in various professional fields such as healthcare, infrastructure, agriculture and the environment. According to its mission statement, “The

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<sup>70</sup> Phone interview with Yasser Abu Khader, Legal Advisor, Ministry of NGO Affairs, August 2, 2000.

Palestinian Hydrology Group is a non-profit, non-government organization that protects and develops the water resources of Palestine. We strive, through community participation, to achieve justice in the service, allocation, and protection of the water resources of Palestine, since the sustainability of this resource is vital for the protection of the Palestinian nation, the protection of future generation, and the protection of the planet.”<sup>71</sup>

PHG has more than 20 employees, mostly engineers, and approximately a dozen volunteers. It claims expertise in water management training, environmental awareness, spring and aquifer testing, and sanitation and environment. PHG’s first major contracts in the late 1980s were in studying the condition of springs and aquifers in the West Bank with Oxfam UK. It branched off as an independent NGO in 1989. PHG has links and professional networks with development officials in the European Union and researchers at Newcastle University in the United Kingdom, and was a founding member of the Eco-Med Forum, the Barcelona-Palestinian NGO network, and the Ecopeace [later, Friends of the Earth—Middle East] Environmental NGO Forum. All are professional NGO associations of environment and development organizations, tying Palestinian and European researchers together on sustainable development concerns.

According to its publications, in its relations with the Palestinian Water Authority PHG attempts to achieve coordination and ensure no duplication of services between organizations. PHG has contracts to provide PWA with information on hydrological conditions, hydrogeology, and environmental hazards to the water supply. The Palestinian Hydrology Group is implementing, in cooperation with an American firm, a USAID-funded water resources program for PWA. PHG has responded to the current *al-Aqsa Intifada* by refocusing its efforts on an emergency water action program “in order to handle [the] Israeli Zionist measures imposed on locals and their water resources,” which include the closing of

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<sup>71</sup> PHG website, <http://www.phg.org>

waste sites, the cutting off of water and electrical flows, and restrictions on agriculture.<sup>72</sup>

PHG calls for the installation of cisterns and water preservation measures to preserve water security in response to the military crackdown.

### **Palestinian Academic Society for the Study of International Affairs**

The Palestinian Academic Society for the Study of International Affairs, or PASSIA, differs from the other organizations discussed in this chapter in that its primary area of interest is not the environment. In this discussion, PASSIA is of interest because of its multifaceted body of published work on civil society development and democratization of Palestinian political culture. Other areas of PASSIA publication, much of it under the name of its chairman, Dr. Mahdi Abdul Hadi, encompass democracy education, Palestinian governance, Christian-Muslim understanding, and business relations within the Middle East.<sup>73</sup> PASSIA is the leading research body in a number of these fields, and has active ties with other public policy and international affairs research groups in Europe and the Arab World.

PASSIA was founded in March 1987, prior to the first *intifada*, and was a well-established body by the time of the founding of the PA. It describes itself as an “Arab non-profit institution ... with a financially and legally independent status. It is not affiliated with any government, political party or organization.”<sup>74</sup> Its staff is predominantly comprised of academics, businesspeople and trained administrators and managers. PASSIA’s conferences and publications are funded by a variety of North American and European foundations, foreign governments and political parties, and United Nations and European Union institutions. It also has raised funds through the sale of publications and an acclaimed directory of Palestinian academic and research contacts.

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<sup>72</sup> PHG website, [http://www.phg.org/report\\_02.html](http://www.phg.org/report_02.html)

<sup>73</sup> PASSIA website, <http://www.passia.org>.

<sup>74</sup> PASSIA website, [http://www.passia.org/about\\_us/about\\_passia.htm](http://www.passia.org/about_us/about_passia.htm)

PASSIA's publication emphasis has always featured a strong component on civil society and NGO relations, and in its practice PASSIA has dwelt particularly on intra-NGO cooperation and networking. Among the networks in which PASSIA participates are the Palestinian Non-Governmental Organizations Network (PNGO), the Euro-Mediterranean Study Commission, the Association of Palestinian Policy and Research Institutions, and the Arab Social Science Research Network. PASSIA also has international project partners at universities and research institutes in the UK and the Netherlands. This commitment to the development and maintenance of international networks has distinguished PASSIA in the context of Palestinian policy groups criticized for their parochial scope.

Among the numerous PASSIA publications on civil society-state relations and NGO affairs are a two-volume series of conference proceedings on civil society empowerment and a compendium of opinions and articles from the PASSIA *Dialogue on Palestinian State-Building and Identity*. In a number of these opinions, Abdul Hadi, speaking for himself rather than PASSIA as an organization, noted his concerns on the NGO draft law, and praised the appropriateness of the response of various NGOs, women's unions, and social service providers in the formation of the Palestinian NGO Network. He argued that such NGOs have common aims in responding to community needs, strengthening democracy and civil society, and working toward participatory constitutional government. As part of those goals, PASSIA convened a conference in 1998 and published the proceedings as *Civil Society Empowerment: Strategic Planning*, with the goal of assisting NGOs in strategic planning and non-profit management and in promoting responsiveness and priority-setting. NGOs, academic institutions, and members of the PA participated in this event.

More recently, PASSIA has dedicated more of its attention to Israeli abuses of Palestinian communities, and towards the *intifada* and security issues rather than intra-Palestinian political development. Like the other policy and research NGOs in the environmental sectors discussed in this chapter, PASSIA has emphasized a common

Palestinian consensus position on the injustice of the occupation and the need for Palestinian unity. This response says a great deal about the condition of civil society and the perceived need to downplay internal differences in support of common national positions, as the next section details.

### **The *al-Aqsa Intifada* and the Reversion to Nationalism**

The refocusing of efforts on a nationalist response to Palestinian-Israeli conflict is not uncommon among Palestinian NGOs. Many of them were formed during the original *intifada*, and nationalism and an assertion of Palestinian rights were at the core of their initial work. During the years of the Oslo process, however, PHG, ARIJ and other water and environmental research groups de-emphasized their ideological formations in pursuit of joint partnerships, international funding, and normalcy. PASSIA published papers by Israeli scholars and debated issues of religious tolerance and peaceful coexistence. Many NGOs published jointly with Israeli NGOs and academics and appeared together at international conferences. While they never forsook their roots as part of the Palestinian national struggle, this emphasis was downplayed. In times of direct conflict and economic closure between Israel and the Palestinian Authority, however, there has been a tendency for NGOs to reclaim their original mantle as Palestinian activists on an intellectual battlefield.

We have already seen Hassassian's distinction between NGOs formed in the first *intifada* and those that arose as part of the peace process. The former, he says, are more strongly ideological and activist in orientation, and tend to survive political crises that might threaten NGOs formed in the post-Oslo era. This cannot be verified in the case of the four NGOs discussed here, but those with strong ideological orientations have clearly reemphasized them in pursuit of a common Palestinian consensus in the context of the *al-Aqsa Intifada*. This is not an option for the binational Palestinian-Israeli NGOs discussed in

Chapter Three, and is difficult even for solely Palestinian NGOs formed more recently, some of which are discussed in the section on environmental education and outreach.

### **Information Technology and Information Sharing**

In addition to the conflicts between the Palestinian Authority and NGOs on registration status, and the challenges of retaining legitimacy and relevance during the *intifada*, another test of civil society comes in the ability to publish and disseminate information. While the legislative process, as represented in the NGO Law, has posed grave challenges for Palestinian research NGOs, greater success has come in the use of information technology to reach target audiences. For ARIJ, one example is its study of land use and environmental risk in its eight-volume *Environmental Profile of the West Bank*, available on its comprehensive website. The success of ARIJ in the field of information technology is a striking example of the ability of Palestinian academics and researchers to publish and share information on the Internet, even when conflict and travel restrictions prevent them from meeting in person. According to the webmaster of Bir Zeit University, many researchers denied permission to travel abroad have “found academic freedom in cyberspace.”<sup>75</sup> Most of the NGOs operating in cyberspace via websites and electronic mail distribution lists are human rights and political advocacy NGOs, which more frequently find their freedom of movement constrained by Israeli and Palestinian authorities, but environmental and water NGOs have developed similar mechanisms.

Nigel Parry recommends that Palestinian policy NGOs establish websites as well as accompanying e-mail lists that inform readers about matters of pressing urgency and facilitate discussion about newly published material. Palestinian policy and research NGOs, he argues, are fortunate in that their major target audiences (donors, academics, and policy

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<sup>75</sup> Parry, Nigel. “The Past and Future of Information Technology in Palestine: An introduction for the Palestinian NGO community.” A paper for the International NGO Meeting/European NGO Symposium on the Question of Palestine at the United Nations, August 25-28, 1997.

advocates worldwide) are accessible via the Internet. The low cost and ease of entry into the Internet make web publishing far more cost-effective and timely than print-only publishing. However, he criticizes Palestinian NGOs, including PASSIA, which “prefer not to put full publications on the Web, choosing instead to offer abstracts, as they feel that people will not then purchase them.” This results in a website that offers no incentive for readers to return, closing off possible funding and networking benefits.<sup>76</sup>

The successful management of information technology is a growing challenge for Palestinian policy groups, especially because so much of their funding relies on an English-speaking, technically-sophisticated international donor pool. The generally poor use of English in many Palestinian sites, and the relatively small number of international users who read Arabic web pages, is an obstacle. However, Parry says the situation under the Palestinian Authority offers vast improvements over Israeli occupation, when access to high-speed lease lines needed for dedicated Internet access was forbidden, and all telecommunications nodes were under strict Israeli security control, as part of what he describes as security controls of “Kafkaesque proportions.” Most of the policy NGOs discussed in this chapter have well-developed websites, most of which are frequently updated and contain substantive writings and information. ARIJ, PASSIA and PHG have particularly strong Internet presences, although WEDO is a relative laggard.

## **Conclusion**

The Palestinian research NGOs discussed in this chapter have developed niche competencies and professional specialties, as indicated in their projects and publications. While their areas of expertise and relationship with relevant PA ministries vary, they share a number of similarities in their formation and structure. All were formed in the late 1980s and early 1990s, during the first *intifada* and prior to the Oslo process and the founding of

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<sup>76</sup> Parry. “Information Technology in Palestine.”

the Palestinian Authority. All the environmental research NGOs have emphasized technical and scientific responses to environmental issues, with only secondary emphasis on social responses. They also have developed productive ties in the form of contracts and complementary roles on development projects, usually with funding from European and North American sources. They all make extensive use of information technology and the World Wide Web in releasing documents and publicizing matters of concern. Most claim to have satisfactory relationships with the PA offices that are most relevant to their work, including the Ministry of Environmental Affairs and the Palestinian Water Authority. Thus, it can be concluded that in the professional spheres in which these NGOs operate, the relationship with the Palestinian Authority is a generally successful one so far.

However, NGO success cannot be measured solely on professional grounds. As we have seen in the introductory chapter, NGO development is also linked to a productive state-civil society relationship, in which ideals of freedom of association, participatory politics, transparency and democracy are disseminated and developed. When looking at the work of the Palestinian NGO Network and the five-year struggle over the NGO Law, it is clear that policy and research organizations have had a much rougher time in the Palestinian Authority. The murky process by which the law was originally drafted and brought to the Palestinian Legislative Council, and the intimidation and campaigns directed against NGO leaders, bodes poorly for the long term development of civil society. The Executive branch, in particular, has put forth proposals that would sharply limit freedom of association and policy and budgetary autonomy for research NGOs, and fought to overturn the bill passed by the PLC with the approval of the NGO community. While the final NGO Law, as passed, is a vast improvement over the initial drafts, PNGO's concerns about the actual implementation of the law remain valid. Despite their willingness to work with ministries and the Palestinian Legislative Council, NGOs have not been able to prevent further centralization of governmental authority in the Executive branch. The "Arafatization" of

Palestinian political life, as Hammami calls it, poses a continual challenge for democratization and the development of alternative centers of political and social movements.

## **Cooperative Relations: Environmental Education and Awareness NGOs**

While Chapter One dealt with NGOs whose principal influence is in policy and scientific research or advocacy, this chapter addresses organizations whose principal audience is the general public, through civic and environmental education. They work to shape public opinion and knowledge about environmental issues through workshops, classes, outdoor education, and media campaigns. They often work as partners with MENA in these campaigns, which are funded by donors from outside the Palestinian Authority.

This chapter discusses the activities of three NGOs working in the fields of environmental education and public awareness, and MENA-NGO relations in these sectors. Environmental education and public awareness are activities undertaken by non-governmental groups in much of the world, including the developed world, where traditional pedagogy fails to incorporate environmental sustainability. Additionally, they conduct public outreach efforts directed at adults who may not be aware of environmental hazards and public health concerns within their communities. The three NGOs discussed in this chapter have different areas of emphasis. Children for the Protection of Nature in Palestine (CPNP) is a youth group that does outdoor education with a strong environmental component. The Rural Center for Sustainable Development (RCSD) is an NGO in the Hebron area concerned with preserving indigenous rural Palestinian cultures and agricultural practices. WEDO, the Water and Environmental Development Organization discussed in Chapter One, has integrated environmental education into all its water engineering and research projects. This breadth of interest areas offers a useful cross-section into Palestinian environmental education and outreach efforts, especially as they relate to an evolving pattern of cooperation with the Ministry of Environmental Affairs.

## **MEnA-NGO Relations in the Field of Environmental Education**

MEnA acknowledges that NGOs conduct the only public awareness programs on the environment in the West Bank and Gaza, as well as the bulk of environmental monitoring. As early as 1994, a representative of the Ministry of Planning and International Cooperation stated that the newly-formed PA recognized the importance of environmental awareness, although it was preoccupied with a “national cause which sometimes delays things in terms of priorities.” “Most of the people working in the environment are NGOs ... We are determined to give great support to the NGO movement [but] this is the first time we have [had] an authority. We would like to see more coordination on a central level so that information can be used by all relevant ministries and institutions.”<sup>77</sup>

The attitude of the Palestinian Authority toward environmental education NGOs has not changed significantly in the years since these remarks. PA ministries praise NGO efforts in civic education and research, while recognizing the PA’s own limitations in funding, expertise and authoritativeness on environmental issues. Palestinian ministries and offices frequently call for greater coordination and centralization of NGO environmental efforts along a common platform of priorities, which the PA itself hopes to set. The Palestinian Environmental Strategy document of December 1999 explicitly says that, “The role of NGOs, women and private sector should be promoted in environmental management, awareness and scientific research.” In an interview, acting Deputy Minister of the Ministry of Environmental Affairs Mohammad Said al-H’maidi described NGOs participating in environmental activities “from A to Zed,” specifically addressing public awareness, training, research, and environmental education. He said that he expects NGOs to be the main actors in public awareness campaigns.<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>77</sup> Al-Qaq, Anis. “The PNA and Environmental Management,” in Twite and Menczel, *Our Shared Environment*, Volume One, p. 156.

<sup>78</sup> Interview with Mohammad Said al-H’maidi, al-Bireh, August 3, 2000.

According to al-H'maidi, MEnA plans to contract with NGOs as well as universities for public awareness and environmental education because they work at the community level, and have greater credibility in some sectors. Also, NGOs have field research capabilities which the Ministry has not yet developed. As of August 2000, MEnA had conducted work only with local, registered NGOs, but he saw no specific conditions under which NGOs could or could not participate. According to the Palestinian Environmental Strategy, there is a matrix of the different spheres of authority for the Ministry of Environmental Affairs, for other ministries, for municipal governments, NGOs, universities and the private sector. In action plans for solid waste or sewage treatment, for example, there are proposed allocations of tasks and divisions of labor between these different sectors.<sup>79</sup> al-H'maidi made specific note of the fact that the basic Palestinian laws on the environment specify implementation “in cooperation with” other institutions. Stakeholder participation in public awareness is one of the MEnA areas in which NGOs play a major role. When MEnA held an awareness program on solid waste issues, 23 local NGOs participated. But al-H'maidi acknowledged that the number of stakeholders were “limited [in] those whom you can invite” to policy and planning sessions. MEnA invited representatives of those NGOs which it knew had interest in the environment, but also put public announcements in newspapers. “Public participation is a must,” said al-H'maidi, before getting approval for a project.

Concluding his discussion on NGO-MEnA relations, al-H'maidi offered his opinion that while NGOs can contribute in drafting policy, he saw their main functions in terms of research, analysis, training and environmental awareness. Additionally, he saw a large role in implementation of MEnA programs as contractors and consultants. One example he gave was the clean-up of Wadi Gaza, in which responsibilities and funding were divided between universities, NGOs and ministries.

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<sup>79</sup> Palestinian Environmental Strategy, pp. 24-26, Table 3.1 “Ministry of Environmental Affairs—

The following discussions of environmental education and outreach NGOs address some of the efforts made to increase environmental awareness among schoolchildren and communities. They also reveal the cooperative and coordinated vision for future MeNA-NGO relations that is shared by both the ministry and the relevant non-governmental organizations. This relationship is quite distinct from the contested state-society relationship found in the political realm among policy and research NGOs, and thus poses another possible model for future state-society relations for the Palestinians.

### **Rural Center for Sustainable Development**

The Rural Center for Sustainable Development in the Hebron governorate in the southern Palestinian Authority is a local environmental and cultural NGO founded by two young graduates of Bir Zeit University and the Arava Institute for Environmental Studies (see Chapter Three). With just two full-time staff members and an estimated annual budget of just \$34,000, RCSD is a very small organization by the standards of environmental NGOs in the Palestinian Authority.<sup>80</sup> It was formed in May 1999 and received status as a registered non-profit in mid-2000. According to director Tariq Talahmeh, RCSD began life as the Cultural Future Center, an NGO in Hebron that attempted to promote and preserve the local rural culture of small farmers and Bedouin. That region is the least developed, driest and least educated governorate in the PA, and the only governorate with a significant Bedouin population. Its populations lack access to the institutions available in Ramallah, Bethlehem or other areas of the West Bank.

Talahmeh says that the Cultural Future Center did two years of small voluntary projects on behalf of the local people, based on surveys of regional concerns amongst the diverse local populations. They chose participants from a variety of backgrounds, communities, villages, and socioeconomic levels. All of this, he said, “reflects the

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Responsibility and Task Distribution Matrix.”

biodiversity” of the local rural populace, with their different accents and ways of life.<sup>81</sup> As the Center’s areas of interest expanded, it developed conflicts with the Ministry of Interior over its registration and mandate. Talahmeh said that these misunderstandings had come about on the basis of different interpretations of the NGO’s charter, and that the Ministry had grown concerned since Palestinian NGOs were receiving so much donor money at the time. Interior didn’t want NGOs to pursue political issues, and was concerned that the Center was getting involved in local politics despite its original stated areas of cultural preservation. Talahmeh agreed, and the Ministry suggested a new NGO with more clear, accurate description of goals—in the field of sustainable development.

Talahmeh sees many NGOs as ineffectual and wasteful, damaging the popular interest and making political leaders suspicious of all NGOs regardless of their legitimacy and degree of accountability. He blames that perception of NGO profligacy for the increasing restrictiveness of Palestinian laws, especially as applied to newly-formed NGOs. RCSD had numerous legal, tactical, and political hurdles to overcome in the registration process. After he finished the application forms, there were five days of minute line-by-line discussions and debate on the charter for the new sustainable development NGO. Approval was finally given by the Ministry of Interior. Following these earlier experiences, said Talahmeh, RCSD has avoided past mistakes and “became professionals” in dealing with the Palestinian Authority. Talahmeh believes that the PA does have a right to monitor the activities of NGOs, “but in a fair way.” He says that, “Money is coming in the name of the Palestinian people,” and it’s necessary to ensure that those funds are not being wasted or stolen. In RCSD’s experience, the Ministry has been helpful and not too intrusive. He does observe that relations between his NGO and the relevant ministries are on the basis of personal relationships rather than a formalized institutional arrangement—“It’s the Middle

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<sup>80</sup> Rural Center for Sustainable Development profile, internal documentation.

<sup>81</sup> Interview with Tariq Talahmeh, Bethlehem, July 30, 2000.

East, after all.” There is a risk that a personal relationship will turn sour, and the NGO’s access to political institutions with it.

RCSD chose its English name due to its association with the Arabic word *ras’ad*, indicating places or things over which Allah has placed a moral imperative to protect and preserve. To Talahmeh, this demonstrates RCSD’s concern for local cultural norms and values, and the framework in which RCSD hopes to place its promotion of sustainable development and environmental protection. A number of Palestinian scholars have argued that traditional rural agricultural life is more sustainable than intensive irrigation and development in the fragile Palestinian ecosystem.<sup>82</sup> RCSD struggles to link these traditional forms of social and agricultural organization with environmental protection, based on the priorities and concerns of different ‘village ambassadors’ who coordinate their development priorities in the region. Talahmeh says that his organization’s first priority is to build general awareness of sustainable practices, of which he says the local knowledge is “less than zero.” RCSD also runs a people-to-people exchange with the Arava Institute for Environmental Studies, which is the extent of its relations with Israeli organizations. Talahmeh does not want to risk alienating Palestinians who oppose normalization with Israel, and does not engage in discussions of larger political issues. Beside, he says, “If we can’t go as students to Israel, we’ll go as laborers.”<sup>83</sup>

RCSD is a very young NGO still trying to build credibility with potential donors. It has very limited resources, and is attempting to develop in a region and sector that is alien to many donors and potential international partners. It has no website and has not published any documentation of its activities, except internally. Its unwillingness to partner with Israeli groups, and its association with some critics of the peace process, makes it unattractive to some potential supporters. Talahmeh claims RCSD is a model of across-the-board

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<sup>82</sup> Assaf, Said. “Overview of Some Traditional Agricultural Practices Used by Palestinians in the Protection of the Environment,” in Twite and Menczel, *Our Shared Environment*, Volume One, p. 1

<sup>83</sup> Interview with Tariq Talahmeh, Bethlehem, July 30, 2000.

inclusiveness, since its board includes members of various political and social movements, including Islamic activists, and is divided equally between women and men. Among its proposed projects are a Palestinian Center for Heritage Preservation, a national plan for rural development, and empowerment of local populations, including women and nomadic Bedouins. According to its profile, “The local people are our reference in doing any project. They will take the responsibility to make the decision about their priorities, and we have the role to make these projects more sustainable ... The locals can understand their life better than anyone else, what they want is just tutoring.”<sup>84</sup>

In the current political climate, RCSD has been forced into dormancy. Talahmeh’s brother was shot and seriously wounded while passing by a demonstration, and the closures between the West Bank and Gaza have forced an end to RCSD’s people-to-people exchange with the Arava Institute. Talahmeh himself has been unable to cross into Israel for any work or liaison activities, and has spent his time organizing food and medical aid for the impoverished villages around Hebron. According to an e-mail from the Arava Institute, he has contracted a kidney ailment and requires an operation, for which his colleagues and fellow alumni are raising funds and requesting support.<sup>85</sup> Here, as in the criticisms of Roy and Hammami, we see the vulnerabilities of small, highly individualized NGOs dependent on one or two managers working in relative isolation. Yet despite RCSD’s structural vulnerabilities, there is much to admire in its goals and means of formation. Talahmeh and his colleagues conducted extensive in-reach into his intended target communities, elicited community insights into priorities and local needs, and worked cooperatively with relevant government officials in adhering to standards of accountability and transparency. While one could criticize the governmental motivation to reconstitute the original NGO under new guidelines, Talahmeh himself was accepting of the need to work with ministries, and encouraged by their involvement.

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<sup>84</sup> RCSD profile.

## **Children for the Protection of Nature in Palestine**

Children for the Protection of Nature in Palestine (CPNP) is noteworthy because it is one of the only environmental organizations in the region affiliated with a religious group. CPNP is part of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Jordan and Palestine, one of the largest Protestant denominations in the Middle East. Environmental education forms the basis of the group's work, along with biodiversity protection, particularly birds. CPNP was formed in 1992 by Dr. Imad Atrash and is based in Beit Jala, a mostly Christian town adjoining Bethlehem.<sup>86</sup>

Since its formation, all of CPNP's major projects have been in environmental education and the study and protection of bird species. CPNP formed an Environmental Education Center in 1998, with objectives of establishing a nature museum, serving as a basis for nature conservation, providing educational assistance and resources to teachers, and promoting responsible ecotourism. CPNP is developing its natural history museum in cooperation with the European Nature Heritage Fund (Euronatur) of Germany. Numerous environmental education projects involve bird migration and protection, including a bird ringing project in cooperation with Israeli and Palestinian scientists, school children and volunteers. Migratory birds are captured, and bands placed around their legs to track their movement patterns. CPNP groups also record bird calls for analysis and send student groups off to various locations throughout Israel, the Palestinian Authority and Jordan for environmental education field trips. Among CPNP's publications are a series of maps and posters of Important Bird Areas in Palestine, a campaign sponsored by the Dutch Representative Office in Ramallah and Birdlife International's Middle East Division.

CPNP was the Palestinian partner organization for the landmark international project *Migrating Birds Know No Boundaries*, which brought together Israeli, Palestinian,

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<sup>86</sup> E-mail from Arava Institute for Environmental Studies, April 19, 2001.

Jordanian and American bird researchers and environmentalists. The project, sponsored by USAID's Middle East Regional Cooperation (MERC) office, was conducted by CPNP, the Society for the Protection of Nature in Israel, and the Royal Society for the Conservation of Nature in Jordan. The Jordan Valley, which includes the three populations, is one of the world's great centers for bird migration from Africa to Eurasia twice each year, and *Migrating Birds Know No Boundaries* was the first project to incorporate research and conservation efforts. The project gained a great deal of recognition and public support, including private sector donations and in-kind contributions in research from other nations.<sup>87</sup> For this project as well as their other public education projects, Imad Atrash and CPNP won a Euronatur Appreciation Award for Environmental Education.

### **Water and Environmental Development Organization**

As discussed in the first chapter, WEDO is an organization that conducts environmental education as well as scientific research and policy advocacy. Nader al-Khateeb is adamant that all WEDO's projects include an environmental education component, since he believes that true sustainability depends on education and awareness.<sup>88</sup> He says that NGOs have a lot of responsibility in communities, especially rural sectors, where populations are scattered and not well-served by ministries. His assessment of MEnA's position on NGOs as educators and implementers is similar to that of al-H'maidi's.

WEDO has produced an environmental education video distributed in schools at different levels, in Arabic, Hebrew and English. Because WEDO operates within Israel as well as the Palestinian Authority, Hebrew and English (the language of binational relations)

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<sup>86</sup> CPNP website, <http://www.cpnpeecp.org>

<sup>87</sup> *Migrating Birds Know No Boundaries* handbook ("haTzipporim haNodedot Einan Yod'ot Gvulot," Hebrew edition)—Prepared jointly by Israel Environment Ministry, USAID-MERC, Royal Society for the Conservation of Nature-Jordan, Tel Aviv University, Society for the Protection of Nature in Israel, Children for the Protection of Nature in Palestine, Israel Interior Ministry. See <http://www.birds.org.il/> for more information.

<sup>88</sup> Interview with Nader al-Khateeb, Bethlehem, July 30, 2000.

are used. al-Khateeb says that women, men and children are targeted with specific environmental education messages, based on their roles in society and the concerns that are likely to resonate with them. Women, for example, are taught of the public health issues related to managing waste in their communities, under the presumption that they are primarily responsible for the health and wellbeing of their families. WEDO is the Palestinian partner in the West Bank Environmental Clean-up Project (WECUP), along with Israeli Arab and Israeli Jewish members.<sup>89</sup> WECUP has produced posters and environmental education campaigns aimed at common-sense ways that environmental hazards can be reduced, including waste management around the home, community gardens, and responsible use of water resources. In its acclaimed project on the lesser kestrel, WEDO and its Israeli partner brought Palestinian children from Jericho and Israelis from Jerusalem together to make birdhouses for the endangered kestrel.<sup>90</sup> The project was originally portrayed more as an exercise in coexistence, but environmental education and appreciation for nature played a genuine role. al-Khateeb said, "We share a common environment ... We have to work together if we are to achieve results. Our kids grew up thinking all Israelis were soldiers who wanted to shoot them. Their kids thought all Palestinians were terrorists. We want to promote the environment as a tool to build peace."

Many binational environmental education campaigns are built along the same lines as the lesser kestrel project, with the goal of teaching tolerance and environmentalism in the same message. The potential worthiness, and possible risks, of this approach is discussed in Chapter Three, in the discussion of binational Israeli-Palestinian environmental NGOs. It is an entertaining digression, however, to ponder the disproportionate number of binational Israeli-Arab environmental education campaigns involving birds. One might speculate that bird migration, due to its intrinsic transboundary components, makes ornithology a good teaching example for the interconnectedness of ecosystems. Also, bird conservation avoids

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<sup>89</sup> WECUP website, <http://www.wecup.org>

the potentially troublesome issues involved in teaching about landfills, waste sites and nature reserves, which are wrapped up in the political issue of the control of land. It could be that birds are seen as culturally appropriate and easy to make relevant for children with different backgrounds. Finally, it could just be that people like birds.

## **Conclusion**

Non-governmental organizations and the Palestinian Ministry of Environmental Affairs are united in the belief that NGOs should be primarily responsible for developing environmental education and awareness program in the Palestinian Authority. The PA, however, is more restrictive in its perception of appropriate roles for NGOs, specifically environmental outreach, research, education and implementation of projects in cooperation with relevant ministries. The PA is less enthusiastic about NGO participation in policy development, although MEnA officials pledge to hold public meetings about setting priorities and determining management strategies. The histories of the three NGOs dealing with environmental education and awareness in Palestine suggests that MEnA has an understanding of ministry-NGO relations that gives cause for optimism in complementarity and productive relations on shared projects, but cause for concern in the arena of participatory development of policies.

The word that repeatedly comes to the fore in MEnA's understanding of Ministry-NGO relations is "coordination." The Palestinian Environmental Strategy and the discussion by Deputy Ministry Mohammad Said al-H'maidi depict a matrix of coordinated responsibilities for NGOs, ministries, municipalities and other public institutions in environmental management. This is a by-now-familiar model of near-corporatism, in which all public institutions take part by conducting their respective roles in what is basically a national enterprise of development, and it hearkens back to the PLO-Fateh model of

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<sup>90</sup> Silver, "A Flight for Peace Begins in a Birdhouse."

mobilizing a mass population for the common goal of national liberation. In this model, directives and strategies are chosen at the top, and all sectors contribute accordingly if sufficiently mobilized. It is not the model of trickle-up, participatory politics in which the concerns of the population are reflected in legislative priorities.

Innumerable observers have lamented the tendency of Arab regimes to co-opt and channel the nonstate institutions operating in their societies. Rather than open access to institutions of power, neopatriarchy and neopatrimonialism offer more likely avenues for authoritarian governments to cater to segments of society, by which “vertical lines of authority are maintained.”<sup>91</sup> The Palestinian Authority is apparently comfortable with NGOs operating in some spheres, including environmental education and implementation under the coordination of the Ministry, but prefers that policies and priorities be determined at the top. There is a subtle but crucial difference between public notification and public acceptance of Ministry projects, and the Ministry choosing its projects and priorities in response to the concerns of its citizens. By diminishing and discounting the role of NGOs in determining policy directions, and promoting environmental NGOs solely as educators and implementers, the Ministry of Environmental Affairs has made its preferences clear.

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<sup>91</sup> Parker, p. 13.

## **Conflicted Relations: Binational or Multinational Environmental NGOs in the Palestinian Authority**

The final category of environmental NGOs operating in the West Bank and Gaza and forming relationships with the Palestinian Authority in environmental sectors is binational (Israeli-Palestinian), or multinational. These groups are usually the largest, best-funded, and most integrated into international networks of researchers, policy advocates and activists. All the NGOs discussed in this chapter are funded mostly from the Israeli side or from international partners, although all except the Arava Institute for Environmental Studies claim to be equally Israeli and Palestinian in their orientation and focus. The Israel-Palestine Center for Research and Information and its affiliated Joint Environmental Mediation Service, the Palestinian-Israeli Environmental Secretariat, and Friends of the Earth—Middle East are all geographically located within the West Bank or East Jerusalem in areas claimed by the Palestinians. Despite that fact, they are identified mostly with their Israeli and international donors and partners, and face subsequent challenges of legitimacy. All conduct their work primarily in English, the language of Israeli-Palestinian relations, and all face crises associated with the violent interruption to the Oslo process in the *al-Aqsa Intifada* and reversion to open hostilities between Israel and Palestine.

### **The Danger of Promoting Environmentalism as a Proxy for the Peace Process**

We remember well the warning of Manuel Hassassian that pre-Oslo Palestinian NGOs are more strongly nationalistic and capable of surviving violent periods in Israeli-Palestinian relations, while the success or failure of more recently-formed NGOs is viewed as a function of the fate of the Oslo process. This applies a hundred-fold for those Israeli-Palestinian cooperative NGOs that sprung up in the early-middle 1990s during the most optimistic periods of the peace process. Such institutions exist also in the business, health, and social welfare sectors. It is a rude fact that for this period of time, Israeli-Palestinian

cooperation on the environment was viewed as a helpful proxy for supporting the peace process, and when the peace process withered, so did donor support for cooperation on the environment. This applies for a range of development and aid initiatives, as relayed in one mournful anecdote in a recent *Washington Post* article.

To feed newly impoverished Palestinians, the World Food Program last month sent word to wealthy donor countries that it needed \$3.9 million in additional funding. The request was met with silence.

“Donors say they're here to fund the peace process, not the Palestinian people per se,” said one aid official, who spoke on condition of anonymity. “Now there's no peace process, so there's less enthusiasm about giving money.”<sup>92</sup>

During the most idealistic periods, when IPCRI hosted its first “Our Shared Environment” conferences, speakers were forthright about the attractiveness of linking environmentalism to the process of building peace and mutual tolerance. Robin Twite of IPCRI opened the first volume of *Our Shared Environment* with the following call:

“All those who love the land between the Jordan and the Mediterranean [...] can readily see that its future is threatened by rapid uncontrolled development, population increase, political tension and many other dangers. The conference underlined the need for all concerned parties to work closely together if they are to achieve a future in which [all] can look forward to a life spent in a harmonious and positive environment. Nothing else will do.”<sup>93</sup>

This attitude has dominated much of the discussion on cooperative Israeli and Palestinian environmental management. Indeed, the plenary session in the 1995 conference was entitled “The Role of Environmental Issues in Promoting International Understanding and Cooperation in the Middle East.” Yet there is a crucial and perhaps deadly counterpoint to this perception. If donors and participants see environmental cooperation primarily as a vehicle for promoting co-existence and peace, then when the peace process fails, where does that leave the environment? As we have seen from numerous writings since the *al-Aqsa Intifada* began, it is in crisis. In conversations, many activists working in binational NGOs regretted their overwhelming dependence on the ebb and flow of the peace process, but few seemed able to suggest alternatives. With one exception all the binational

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<sup>92</sup> Hockstader, Lee. “Sanctions Suffocating Gaza Fragile Economy.” *Washington Post*, December 6, 2000, p. 1.

<sup>93</sup> Twite, “Toward a Common Future,” in Twite and Menczel, *Our Shared Environment*, Volume One, p. 3.

environmental NGOs were formed in the immediate afterglow of the signing of the Declaration of Principles, when the environment was viewed as an issue around which Israelis and Palestinians could rally together. Since that time, the appeal of cooperative environmental initiatives has faded rapidly.

On the surface, there is a natural attraction to environmental issues as a means of drawing Israeli and Palestinian communities together. As the title of the IPRCI conference noted, environmental benefits and risks are shared between communities and across borders. It is as impossible for Israelis to draw a curtain over Tel Aviv to prevent transboundary air pollution as it is for Palestinians to stop the hydrologic processes that carry their wastewater into pre-1967 Israel. Around the world, environmentalists call for collective responses to transboundary environmental threats. These same appeals that motivate the world's environmental activists—a common ecological heritage facing common threats—do exist in Israel and Palestine; they are simply harnessed to the hopes for resolution of a particular political conflict. It is when that political conflict takes a turn for the worse that the environment suffers. The binational environmental NGOs discussed here are wrestling with those dilemmas as we speak.

### **Palestinian-Israeli Environmental Secretariat**

The Palestinian-Israeli Environmental Secretariat (PIES) is the product of binational cooperation in two other fields, health and economic development. Formed in 1997, PIES is a project of the Palestine Council on Health (PCH) and the Israel Economic Cooperation Forum, both post-Oslo transition-era institutions, with whom it shares office space in the East Jerusalem suburb of Wadi Joz. PCH was a World Health Organization-sponsored organization that developed a national healthcare strategy. In a striking example of embryonism, nine of its ten units were eventually recruited into the new Palestinian Ministry of Health, while the original policy unit is all that remains as an independent

NGO.<sup>94</sup> The Society for the Protection of Nature in Israel (SPNI), the oldest environmental organization in Israel, is also a founding partner.

PIES depicts joint environmental projects as a potential means of promoting reconciliation and coexistence. It focuses its efforts in environmental education and the industrial sector, based on existing networks from the Economic Cooperation Forum. PIES intends to serve as a meeting-place for Israeli and Palestinian environmental NGOs, and speaks highly of its relationships with most of the NGOs discussed in this thesis, as well as other business and government contacts in the environmental field. Like most binational NGOs, PIES has an Israeli and a Palestinian co-director. In an interview, co-director Imad Khatib initially described relations with both governments and other NGOs as good, and said that PIES always works with Palestinian and Israeli NGOs to recruit participants for its activities.<sup>95</sup> A major focus of PIES' work is the transfer of expertise and technical skills to the Palestinian environmental community from Israel.<sup>96</sup>

While describing governmental relations as generally good, he acknowledged that PIES had registered officially as an NGO neither in Israel or the Palestinian Authority. He said the process was agonizingly slow in Israel, and no mature law existed in Palestine. For example, at the time of the interview, the Palestinian Ministry of Interior was registering domestic NGOs and local branches of international NGOs, but not binational NGOs. Khatib was sympathetic to the PA's need to develop institutions, but frustrated by the inability to progress and the existing NGO law. Due to these bureaucratic difficulties, PIES was contemplating registering overseas, presumably in the United States, instead of within Israel or the PA.

The difficulty of registering has more than symbolic significance. Many of the world's most prominent international environmental NGOs, including Friends of the

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<sup>94</sup> Interview with Dr. Abdel Rahim Abu Saleh, Wadi Joz, July 17, 2000.

<sup>95</sup> Interview with Imad Khatib, Wadi Joz, July 17, 2000.

Earth—International and the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) have partnerships only with registered organizations. While Khatib boasted of PIES' solid relations with the Royal Society for the Conservation of Nature in Jordan, and the International Union for the Conservation of Nature in Switzerland, these ties were on a personal, not institutional, level. Most of the initial funding for PIES came from the Dutch Representative Office in Ramallah. In the first year of operations, in addition to the initial support of Dutch seed money, PIES received \$490,000 in donations from the Swiss, South African, Norwegian, Canadian and Irish governments, as well as prominent liberal pro-peace Jewish philanthropies in the United States (the Cummings-Dorot Foundations and the Goldman Fund).

Despite the high levels of political and financial support that PIES has enjoyed, Khatib stressed the uncertainty of the future of PIES' work, when interviewed during the Camp David negotiations between Chairman Arafat and Prime Minister Barak. "Politics interfere with every aspect of our lives," he said, stressing the vulnerability of cooperative binational NGOs to the vicissitudes of security concerns.<sup>97</sup> This vulnerability is noteworthy because PIES' two honorary co-presidents are Leah Rabin, widow of the former Prime Minister, and Dr. Fathi Arafat, brother of Chairman Arafat. If an institution with the funding and political connections of PIES complains of the vulnerability of its work to political crisis, it bodes poorly for NGOs with less prominent or well-endowed supporters.

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<sup>96</sup> Palestinian-Israeli Environmental Secretariat (PIES). *Nature Knows No Boundaries: Activities Report for the Period July 1997-February 1999*. Wadi Joz, Jerusalem, 1999.

<sup>97</sup> Interview with Imad Khatib, Wadi Joz, July 17, 2000.

## **Israel-Palestine Center for Research and Information/Joint Environmental Mediation Service<sup>98</sup>**

IPCRI, the Israel-Palestine Center for Research and Information, has unusual stature in binational cooperation. While most binational NGOs were formed in the early 1990s following the Madrid and Oslo Accords, IPCRI was formed during the worst days of the *intifada* in 1988, before the peace process existed. In its literature, IPCRI draws an explicit contrast between it and similar organizations that arose after the Declaration of Principles.

IPCRI was born before a Middle East peace process existed ... In 1993, after Oslo, when working on Israeli-Palestinian peace became fashionable, organizations and institutions, academic research centers and private sector initiatives sprouted like mushrooms after the rain. However, after the wave of terror following the Rabin assassination and the election of a right-wing government in Israel, most of the international and local initiatives disappeared as the financial resources for this work [were] diverted to other parts of the world. IPCRI did not disappear. In fact, during this very difficult period IPCRI's agenda swelled with new initiatives as did its legitimacy in the eyes of the Israeli and Palestinian governments ...<sup>99</sup>

Based originally in East Jerusalem, IPCRI relocated to Bethlehem after the Palestinian Authority assumed control of the city. IPCRI's two co-directors are American-born Israeli Dr. Gershon Baskin and Palestinian Dr. Zakaria al-Qaq, with additional staff and management for its five divisions of operations: Strategic Affairs, Peace Intelligence, Pathways Into Reconciliation, Law and Development, and Water and Environment. With this varied range of activities, IPCRI is engaged in Israeli-Palestinian research and dialogue from the level of high school peace education classes to off-the-record workshops with senior Israeli and Palestinian legislators and military personnel. Its range of publications covers such fields as civil society, the future borders of Jerusalem, economic development and cooperation, and religion in public life. The breadth of IPCRI's work, and its level of contact with the Palestinian and Israeli governments, as well as major funders like USAID, the European Union, and major governments worldwide, makes IPCRI's role a significant one in its fields.

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<sup>98</sup> This section is based on my experiences as an intern at IPCRI/JEMS in summer 2000, when I participated in some of the projects discussed here. This assessment represents my own views, not those of IPCRI or JEMS.

<sup>99</sup> IPCRI. "A Vision for the Future of IPCRI: A concept paper for the years 2000-2010."

At the time of its foundation, IPCRI stated its guiding principles:

- IPCRI would be established as a fully joint organization based on equal partnership and ownership.
- IPCRI would be managed by two directors - 1 Israeli, 1 Palestinian and on the basis of full parity.
- IPCRI would have a Board of Directors comprised of equal numbers of Israelis and Palestinians, with two Chairmen, 1 Israeli and 1 Palestinian.
- IPCRI's work would be constructive in nature, aimed at proposing political policy options that would enhance the mutual interests of both sides.
- IPCRI would direct itself at enlisting the support and the involvement of people from the center of both societies and not from the fringes.<sup>100</sup>

IPCRI has kept these principles at the fore, while acknowledging greater ease on garnering support and participation from the Israeli side than the Palestinian. IPCRI has the unusual distinction of registration both in Israel and the PA, having been “grandfathered in,” despite the general Palestinian unwillingness to registering binational NGOs.

The IPCRI Water and Environment program, founded in 1992, is directed by Robin Twite, O.B.E., a Briton who has spent much of his life in Israel. The program began with a high profile with its *Our Shared Environment* seminars and workshops, and benefited from high levels of cooperation with leading Israeli and Palestinian researchers and activists. Laskier credits this initial effort for raising awareness both domestically and internationally about the fate of the Middle Eastern environment.<sup>101</sup> The range of IPCRI-affiliated activities runs from such seminars, and training programs in solid waste or nature reserve management, to discussions of public awareness of environmental issues and environmental health. Most of IPCRI’s activities are at the policy and training level, with the goal of developing capacity in a range of management issues. IPCRI operates at an institutional rather than implementational level, with participants from environmental NGOs, business

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<sup>100</sup> IPCRI website, [www.ipcri.org](http://www.ipcri.org)

<sup>101</sup> Laskier, Michael M. “Israeli Activism American-Style: Civil Liberties, Environmental, and Peace Organizations as Pressure Groups for Social Change, 1970s–1990s.” *Israel Studies*, Volume 5, Number 1.

leaders and ministries, but does participate in some implementation activities, such as a wastewater project in Hebron with WEDO cooperation.<sup>102</sup>

The Joint Environmental Management Service (JEMS) is IPCRI's latest environmental initiative, in cooperation with the Consensus Building Institute (CBI) of Cambridge, Massachusetts. JEMS aims to introduce the techniques of environmental conflict resolution to the Middle East by training Palestinians and Israelis. The goal is to eventually develop a corps of trained environmental mediators on-staff within ministries, NGOs, and the community to prevent political and cultural conflicts from exacerbating environmental disputes—and vice versa. The project is funded by the V. Kann Rasmussen Foundation, a major funder of environmental projects worldwide, and training has begun with ten Israeli and ten Palestinian participants despite the *al-Aqsa Intifada*. The training sessions led by CBI's Lawrence Susskind took place in Turkey in December 2000, which illustrates the need to set binational activities outside the context of the conflict. While training has occurred, JEMS' pilot mediation attempts, addressing the badly degraded Jerusalem-Ramallah road and joint sewage management in the Qalqilya (PA)-Kfar Saba (Israel) area, have been halted.

The fact that IPCRI's environmental program and JEMS continue to operate during the *intifada* can be seen as cause for optimism, but on a very basic level its work has been severely curtailed. The office which houses the organization in Bethlehem is often closed because it is on the main Jerusalem-Bethlehem road near border police stations, and clashes are frequent. As a result, IPCRI has relocated to the former campus of the Tantur Ecumenical Institute, in Area C (full Israeli control) between Jerusalem and Bethlehem. But Palestinian staff members cannot always cross borders to attend meetings or do research, and the necessity of training JEMS participants overseas is indicative of the stress that the organization suffers. While there are options to conduct business electronically via e-mail

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<sup>102</sup> IPCRI Water and Environment Program website, [www.ipcri.org/envir.htm](http://www.ipcri.org/envir.htm)

and the telephone, much of IPCRI's mission can be characterized by the wish for Israelis and Palestinians to work together cooperatively and develop productive ties. Nonetheless, staff of CBI and IPCRI report that JEMS has taken off successfully, and other prominent members of the Middle East environmental community confirm that IPCRI and JEMS stand almost alone in that regard during the *intifada*.<sup>103</sup>

### **Friends of the Earth—Middle East**

Friends of the Earth—Middle East was founded by South African-born Israeli Gideon Bromberg in December 1994. Unlike the binational NGOs described above, FoEME is a four-nation partnership of Israelis, Palestinians, Egyptians and Jordanians, headquartered in Amman with regional offices elsewhere. EcoPeace, as it was first known, was the first-ever umbrella organization comprising such a membership, and its peak had more than 200 partner organizations. In 1998, EcoPeace became the Middle East chapter of Friends of the Earth—International, the world's largest network of environmental organizations. FoEME is the only Friends of the Earth chapter that operates on a regional rather than national level, and its formation differs significantly from other chapters. While national chapters are usually founded when local environmentalists agree to campaign together on crucial issues, FoEME developed from Bromberg's initiative to create an umbrella organization operating regionally. According to Paul Wapner, FoE's global structure is confederational, with individual chapters allowed to determine their own policies, funding priorities, and so on. They are bound to the global organization "only in name and orientation," and frequently join FoE—International only after years of independent operation on the local or regional level. Groups that apply for membership are

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<sup>103</sup> Interview with Hillel Shuval, Medford, Massachusetts, March 27, 2001.

reviewed and then put on a year-long probation period before being recognized as official FoE affiliates.<sup>104</sup>

FoEME is registered in the United States as a 501(c)3 non-profit, due to the difficulties of registration in Israel and the Palestinian Authority. Most of its funding is from Western consulates and representative offices, and pro-peace Jewish groups in the United States. Additional supporters include European and North American environmental NGOs and a range of peace groups. Palestinian co-director Anis Salah says that EcoPeace originally presented its mission as “support[ing] peace through environmental issues,” a portrayal that quickly became unsustainable as the peace process sputtered. Following the transformation into FoEME and greater links with world environmental forums (FoE-International, the Global Environment Facility, Euro-Med Partnership), the environmental message became more central to FoEME’s mission.<sup>105</sup>

FoEME’s objectives include strengthening NGO capabilities in cooperation with governments, assessing the transboundary environmental implications of development projects, forging a common environmental agenda among NGOs, information collection and sharing, and promoting sustainable development and peace in the region.<sup>106</sup> Some particular projects include renewable energy “solar villages”, a regional development plan for the Dead Sea basin, a sustainable tourism initiative in the Gulf of Aqaba, and research on the environmental implications of trade and investment in development projects.<sup>107</sup> According to Salah, interviewed at FoEME’s East Jerusalem office, FoEME is trying to define new links between funding agencies and the Ministry of Environmental Affairs, via the World Bank working group on Palestinian NGOs. Salah described this World Bank forum as the

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<sup>104</sup> Wapner. *Environmental Activism and World Politics*, p. 122-123.

<sup>105</sup> Interview with Anis Salah, Shu’fat, July 19, 2000.

<sup>106</sup> FoEME website, [www.foeme.org](http://www.foeme.org)

<sup>107</sup> Friend of the Earth—Middle East. “Building Partnerships to Promote Ecologically Sound Development in the Middle East.”

means by which NGOs have their greatest impact on PA policies, because their concerns reach donors directly.

At the time of the interview, Salah described both NGOs and MEnA as “in a good mood” about cooperation in a range of implementation sectors, although Salah regretted that the Ministry had developed all its regulations from within, without NGO assistance or participation.<sup>108</sup> Salah repeated the frequent claim that his NGO’s relations to MEnA and other ministries were dependent on personal connections, rather than a solid institutional arrangement. FoEME’s annual General Assembly is open to all regional environmental NGOs, which vote on core priorities for the coming year and elect a four-member secretariat to implement policy. The secretariat and staff conduct most activities, while informing and consulting with member NGOs.

FoEME has been badly battered by the *al-Aqsa Intifada*. “We don’t see any public activity taking place—certainly not for the next three months and maybe not for the next six months,” said Bromberg in an interview in November 2000.<sup>109</sup> That period will surely be extended further in the current political climate. FoEME’s project to declare the Dead Sea basin a World Heritage and Biosphere Reserve in the United Nations Economic and Social Council has fallen through, as has its work on a Jordanian-Israeli cleanup of the Gulf of Aqaba and its opposition to a planned USAID-funded Palestinian highway system. The East Jerusalem office in which this interview took place was closed due to fears of violence, and no updates of the FoEME website and or new publications have emerged since early 2000. Reportedly, all cooperation with Egypt has ceased, as Arab professionals who cooperate with Israelis are blacklisted and boycotted.

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<sup>108</sup> Interview with Anis Salah, Shu’fat, July 19, 2000.

<sup>109</sup> Fletcher, Elaine Ruth. “An Environmental Partnership Pays the Price of War.” *Eretz*, November-December 1999, pp. 62-63.

## **Arava Institute for Environmental Studies**

The Arava Institute for Environmental Studies (AIES), housed in a kibbutz in the southern deserts of Israel, qualifies for inclusion here only because of its key role in educating Palestinian environmentalists. AIES' board of directors and staff are all either Israeli or American, its registration as an NGO is Israeli (with Canadian and American registration as well), and its program of instruction is in English. Since 1996 a mixed class of Israeli Jews and Arabs, Palestinians, Jordanians, Egyptians and non-Middle Easterners have been taught a wide curriculum of graduate-level environmental science, management, law, policy and ethics in the kibbutz overlooking the Jordanian border. Given its unique location, among its academic specialties are coral reef management in the Gulf of Aqaba, sustainable agriculture, and desert ecology. With a student body of around 30-40 students per semester, AIES has taken its classes on field trips through Israel, the Palestinian Authority, Jordan and Sinai.<sup>110</sup>

Among AIES graduates are a number of Palestinians working with leading environmental NGOs, including former and current staff on IPCRI, RSCD, and FoEME. Indeed, one of the objectives of the Institute is to create a network of trained leaders in the environmental field who can conduct a dialogue across borders in the Middle East, forming a nexus for future cooperation. With the *al-Aqsa Intifada*, borders have been closed off to potential Palestinian students and faculty, and pressure within Egypt and Jordan has dissuaded most students from attending. "We thought about whether we should just cancel the whole thing," said program director Miriam Ben-Yosef.<sup>111</sup> Founder Dr. Alon Tal, the American-born founder of numerous Israeli environmental initiatives, explains that AIES continued operation with a smaller student body and greater emphasis on the Israeli Arab community, a previously underserved sector, but that funding from pro-peace NGOs in

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<sup>110</sup> This discussion is based on my experiences as a student at AIEs in its first year of operation in 1996-1997.

<sup>111</sup> Hausman, Tamar. "Environment Also Intifada Victim." *Ha'Aretz*, January 12, 2001.

North America and Israel has fallen precipitously.<sup>112</sup> Tal has also launched the Arava Center for Environmental Policy Research, based on recognition that Israel's own environment has languished despite high degrees of funding and awareness. The Center has completed eight projects under contract to various public and semi-public agencies, including the Israeli Ministries of Environment and Health and the Jewish National Fund.<sup>113</sup>

### **Inherent Problems for Cooperative Environmental NGOs and the Struggle for Legitimacy in the Palestinian Authority**

As the discussion in this chapter indicates, cooperation between Israelis and Palestinians in the environmental sector began with great optimism in the early and middle 1990s, but has fallen sharply in the current political climate. The vulnerability to outside political and security crisis is clear, and indeed has been so since previous crises during the Netanyahu administration and conflicts over Hebron and the Israeli tunnel along the Tunnel Mount. During all these periods, binational cooperation has been severely curtailed, but has always recovered. The current *intifada* may follow a similar pattern, but in the death toll, economic dislocation, and political hostility, it seems certain to last far longer. The election of Ariel Sharon of the Likud Party will assuredly pose yet another obstacle for the renewal of binational NGO cooperation.

But behind the banal observation that binational NGO cooperation is staggeringly vulnerable to renewed hostility between Israel and the Palestinian Authority lies a more deep-seated concern about the fate of such cooperative environmental ventures. Israel and Palestine are at such different levels of socioeconomic development and civic education that priorities in one sector are likely to be discounted or ignored in the other. Cases can be seen in the work of the Israel Union for Environmental Defense, the Arava Center for Environmental Policy Research and other Israeli environmental policy NGOs. The Arava

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<sup>112</sup> Interview with Alon Tal, Medford, Massachusetts, March 1, 2001.

Center, for example, has completed studies on fines for environmental non-compliance, reducing greenhouse gas emissions, and policies for protecting open areas and forests.<sup>114</sup> These focuses are the environmental policy concerns of the developed world, and indicate a perception that development-oriented environmental problems like access to clean water and adequate grain, have been solved within Israel. (A survey of Israeli Arab populations, Sephardi ‘development towns’ of the Negev, Russian immigrants in slums, or the disgraceful living conditions of some 300,000 Thai and Romanian ‘guest workers’, will quickly reveal that this is not entirely the case.) Michael Laskier writes that Israeli environmentalism has developed along similar paths and with similar influences as European and American predecessors, with partial successes and numerous failures.<sup>115</sup> Without a Constitution or bill of rights, and with NGO leadership dominated by Ashkenazi secular élites, Israeli NGOs face continued difficulty reaching sizable enough constituencies to have true impacts on policy. Few Israeli environmental NGOs concentrate on environmental justice, basic environmental education, or development, which limits their ability to find common ground with Palestinian colleagues for whom these concerns are paramount.

As long as the Israeli-Palestinian disparity in prosperity and living conditions continues to widen, it will remain difficult for Israeli and Palestinian environmental NGOs to develop common priorities. On the questions of environmental protection vis-a-vis development, there are special concerns frequently noted in the difficulties of cooperation between NGOs in the developed and developing world. Lawrence Susskind discusses the “North-South split” as one of the three serious obstacles to global cooperation on the environment, along with sovereignty and the need to find adequate incentives to conserve.<sup>116</sup>

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<sup>113</sup> Hausman, Tamar. “Eco think tank fills state gap.” *Ha’Aretz*, January 12, 2001.

<sup>114</sup> Arava Center for Environmental Policy Research Annual Report, 2000-2001.

<sup>115</sup> Laskier. “Israeli Activism American-Style.”

<sup>116</sup> Susskind, Lawrence. *Environmental Diplomacy: Negotiating More Effective Global Agreements*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 1994, pp. 18-21.

Although he stresses that “unofficials” including the non-governmental community have key roles to play in the international environmental treaty system, Susskind primarily addresses state-to-state relations and international organizations. But related differences between developed-world and developing-world NGOs have fostered similar difficulties.

Environmental NGOs in the developed world are characterized as principally concerned about biological diversity, climate change, endangered species of animals and plants, or diffuse global concerns, while NGOs in the developing world frequently advocate on issues of displacement of indigenous people, destruction of livelihoods, erosion or loss of agricultural land, urban air pollution, shortages of water, or alternative models of development.<sup>117</sup> But while disparities between the “North” and “South” are easy to conceptualize, albeit simplistically, they are rarely as pronounced, visible, or in such close proximity as in Israel and Palestine. Impoverished rural Palestinian villages with inadequate water or sewage sit a few kilometers across the Green Line from well-tended and prosperous Israeli towns (or more strikingly, alongside new Israeli Jewish settlements within the West Bank). Under such conditions, even the most well-meaning NGOs, wishing to cooperate to mutual benefit, are likely to reach profoundly different conclusions on environmental or development priorities.

Other difficulties that are likely to arise between Israeli and Palestinian NGOs include management structures and funding. According to Nitza Nachmias and Amiram Bogot, Israeli NGOs are heavily dependent on state funding via allocations or contract vehicles, and stake out policy issue areas or provide social services as “franchises” for the state, whereas Palestinian NGOs provide the bulk of social services instead of the PA, with funding from outside donors.<sup>118</sup> They see similarity between Israeli and Palestinian NGOs

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<sup>117</sup> Porter, Gareth and Brown, Janet Welsh. *Global Environmental Politics* (Second Edition), Westview Press, Boulder, 1996, p. 111.

<sup>118</sup> Nachmias, Nitza and Bogot, Amiram. “The Role of NGOs in Developed and Developing Countries: Comparing Israeli and Palestinian NGOs.” International Society for Third-Sector Research Fourth International Conference, Dublin, Ireland, July 5-8, 2000.

only in the realm of advocacy for rights or empowerment. These differences in structure, organization, audience, aims, and funding will pose continual challenges for Israeli and Palestinian NGOs attempting to cooperate in the environmental field, and for those binational NGOs with joint staffing and management.

The final factor that emerges throughout the discussion of binational NGOs is the struggle for legitimacy in Palestinian affairs. When relations have been generally positive and the peace process has advanced, binational NGOs have played leading roles in bringing together leading scholars, advocates and policymakers. IPCRI's *Our Shared Environment* conferences, Arava Institute alumni networks, and FoEME's general secretariat of regional environmental NGOs, are striking examples. These play invaluable roles in linking professionals and creating opportunities for productive partnerships and knowledge transfer. When the peace process falters, however, all these forums in which environmental networks can be created have collapsed. The fundamental problem is the shaky legitimacy within the Palestinian Authority of cooperative NGOs whose funding and direction emerge from Israel or Jewish sources. It is notable that IPCRI, FoEME, and the originating institutions for PIES were formed by Israelis or international supporters of the peace process, rather than Palestinians. While all the aforementioned organizations have Palestinian co-directors and staffing, they have never been seen as wholly legitimate in the Palestinian Authority or among the general Palestinian population. Comparing the relative abilities of solely-Palestinian think tanks and environmental advocacy groups, these binational groups fail in conducting operations during periods of political strife, as the *al-Aqsa Intifada* makes abundantly clear. Most recently, word has emerged that the Palestinian Ministry of NGO Affairs has actively worked to make life difficult for NGOs cooperating with Israeli organizations. According to Gershon Baskin of IPCRI, the Minister of NGO Affairs is "actually leading the battle against joint activities, and Palestinian institutions that engage in

such activities are targeted for punishment and boycott.”<sup>119</sup> The recent track record of political difficulties demonstrates the fundamental unsustainability of the current model for binational cooperation, especially as political strife exacerbates differences in environmental and developmental priorities.

## **Conclusion**

Binational and cooperative environmental NGOs, formed with great fanfare and abundant funding in the post-Oslo period, have proven severely vulnerable to downturns in the peace process. While they recorded notable initial successes in developing much-needed arenas for networking for environmental professional and advocates, these NGOs have been less capable of jointly implementing projects, and their work in the Palestinian Authority is subject to continual struggles for political legitimacy. Most binational NGOs have given up on registering officially in the PA, and their ability to influence Palestinian policy suffers accordingly.

These difficulties can be blamed generally on the inability of normalization and cooperation to continue during political and military strife, but background issues also contribute to the faltering success. The environmental priorities of Israeli environmentalists may appear irrelevant or abstract to Palestinian activists, who are more dedicated to resolving more fundamental development needs. The meeting grounds for Israeli-Palestinian projects have frequently been ecosystem and biodiversity issues, which provide ample opportunities for environmental education, but do not meet the basic environmental needs of underdeveloped Palestinian communities. Additionally, the different funding systems and structures of Israeli and Palestinian NGOs may play a contributory role to the difficulties of binational NGOs or cooperative ventures in functioning effectively.

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<sup>119</sup> E-mail communication with Gershon Baskin, IPCRI mailing list, April 19, 2001.

The success of such NGOs in the future will likely depend on the creation of lasting institutional and personal ties between Israeli and Palestinian environmentalists, like those created through IPCRI's conferences, FoEME's secretariat of NGOs, and the Arava Institute's alumni networks. These networks must be maintained and cultivated vigorously in order to withstand the security and political crises that erupt all too frequently. It does not seem likely that Israeli and Palestinian NGOs will have the same priorities in environmental management priorities, however, due to the vast disparity in wealth and development. For that reason, a wise allocation of efforts favoring binational awareness and education campaigns, and professional and academic cooperation on policy, may be more effective than trying to jointly develop environmental management priorities.

## **Conclusion: Professional Successes and Political Failures**

The discussion of environmental non-governmental organizations in the Palestinian Authority cannot conclude with a blanket assessment of their activities as successful or unsuccessful. It must be recognized that each of the NGOs discussed in the preceding three chapters has different constituencies, different supporters, and different goals. Their ability to achieve preferred outcomes in their policy or implementation initiatives is quite different from their ability to promote their preferred models of public policy formation and participatory politics. We find that Palestinian environmental NGOs have achieved substantive accomplishments in the professional fields of environmental monitoring, water and land research, and environmental education, which must be considered absolutely essential to further progress in sustainable development. We also find that attempts by NGOs to create inclusive models for policy development, create legitimate political space for alternative voices, promote democracy in the Palestinian Authority through the Palestinian Legislative Council, and liberalize the PA's approach to state-society relations, have generally failed.

This mixed result reflects the compromises that Palestinian NGOs made along the course of the Oslo process. By adopting standards of accountability and professionalism and content areas demanded by potential Western donors, and pursuing normalized relations and professional ties with Israeli counterparts, they became attractive as recipients of development assistance funds and technologies. But by pursuing these very attributes and practices that made their sector attractive to outside governments and private donors, NGOs became vulnerable to criticism inside the Palestinian Authority—much of it opportunistic

and unjustified—that they represent outside interests and not the legitimate concerns of the Palestinian people. These attacks on the basis of legitimacy have escalated immeasurably during periods of crisis like the *al-Aqsa Intifada*, during which a for-or-against mentality develops. The NGOs that are most vulnerable to these opportunistic criticisms are groups promoting or representing binational cooperation, but also those vigorously promoting alternative models for Palestinian political and policy development. While it could be argued that there were few funding options other than Western governments, it should also be noted that some NGOs have managed to balance support from Western and local donors and clients. WEDO conducted studies for the local private sector, Palestinian ministries, and foreign development agencies, and conducted outreach within both Arab and Jewish sectors in Israel, although this could be countered in pointing out that WEDO is in an advantageous position based on its tenure.

Only those policy and research NGOs that had established political legitimacy dating to the first *intifada* have managed to consistently thrive in the current climate of PA-NGO relations. Palestinian environmental NGOs outside the policy sphere are in more favorable positions in the Palestinian Authority, insofar as they collect information, oversee development projects, and pursue education campaigns as part of a “coordinated” effort with priorities set by MEnA. These NGOs that cooperate with PA ministries—by assuming the Authority’s preferred roles in implementation—operate quite successfully, because of their implicit acknowledgement of PA supremacy in determining policy priorities. But when NGOs push for inclusion in policy-making or legal protections for non-governmental freedom of association and freedom of movement, they are persistently rebuked by PA executive branch, even if the Legislative Council may be supportive.

The Palestinian Authority approach to NGO relations can be characterized as more authoritarian than authoritative. The PA cannot claim that it successfully meets the needs of its citizens, and in its struggles with other centers of power— Hamas, non-governmental organizations, municipal councils and traditional elders and families, or Israeli occupiers—it resorts to crude political thuggery or more sophisticated media and legal campaigns to cut off the public policy sphere from NGOs that are not seen as PLO-friendly partners. The controversy over the NGO Draft Law is only the most egregious and well-reported instance. Other concerns in PA-society relations include the Palestinian unwillingness to register binational NGOs, political censorship and harassment of the press, the disenfranchisement of the Palestine Legislative Council (a traditional NGO ally), and the troubling actions of the Ministry of NGO Affairs in blacklisting researchers and organizations that partner with Israelis. Only NGOs that are historically part of the nationalist struggle and cozy with Fateh may escape these fates, and indeed prosper.

### **Near-Term Prospects for PA-NGO Relations and the Environment**

In the near term, NGO freedom and access to policy-making is unlikely to improve. The *intifada* has brought about a hardening of lines and increased authoritarianism in the Palestinian Authority, while simultaneously degrading the ability of the PA to achieve anything like a functional government. These trends bode poorly for peaceful pluralistic politics, while increasing the likelihood of violent factionalism.

Binational environmental cooperation (either in joint Palestinian-Israeli NGOs or in cooperative ventures between Palestinian and Israeli professionals and activists) is desperately vulnerable to the ebbs and flows of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. This is

troubling not only for binational NGOs but also for Palestinian environmental NGOs which have thrived on ‘normalization’ and funding and partnership relations with pro-peace donors, development agencies, and Israeli environmentalists. The additional problem of different developmental stages and priorities is an obstacle to substantive cooperation between Israeli and Palestinian environmental NGOs. Binational networks of environmental leaders, like those created through IPCRI forums, professional associations, FoEME and the Arava Institute, are failing to live up to their initial promise due to continued hostility and closed borders. It is noteworthy, however, that as Israeli-Palestinian governmental relations plunged into hostility following the outbreak of the *intifada*, the working group that remained operational the longest was the water group, made of representatives from the Palestinian Water Authority and Mekorot, the Israeli equivalent. This continued relationship, and JEMS’ continued work in environmental conflict resolution training, illustrate some potential in the environmental and water sectors for renewed cooperation once the security situation improves.

Nonetheless, it appears clear that environmental quality within the Palestinian Authority will continue to decline in terms of infrastructure, public health, undeveloped areas, trees and agriculture, and air, water and soil quality, so long as the *intifada* and economic blockade continue, and the Authority refuses to dedicate priorities to sustainable development and quality-of-life issues. Particular crises in water and land are already seen, as supplies of drinking water have been seriously diminished and agricultural land has been rendered off-limits due to continued fighting and the creation of “security zones.” Most likely to be affected are those communities adjacent to Israeli areas (for security reasons) and those semi-rural areas on the outskirts of sprawling and dirty Palestinian cities.

Palestinian Authority corruption and nepotism represents another environmental hazard, as seen in the reckless beachfront development on the Gaza Strip, owned and built by companies and individuals with close ties to Fateh leadership.

### **The Future of Palestinian Environmental NGOs and Western Donors**

The work of Palestinian NGOs in creating alternative centers for political power in NGO networks and the PLC has failed, at least on the short term. The NGO sector, once an authentic alternative political arena to the PLO and Hamas, has been transformed into a sector of educated middle-class development assistance professionals, funded from the outside, without the necessary political legitimacy to propose a participatory democratic Palestinian political sphere. Palestinian Authority President Arafat, a master of disempowering alternative political voices among the Palestinians, has quite successfully and ruthlessly marginalized NGOs—the final NGO law a notable partial exception. All these factors represent serious challenges not only for the NGOs themselves but for the Western donors who have funded and supported them. The civil society dilemma within the Palestinian Authority is ‘nested’ within a broader international system, in which donor agencies and governments play a sizable role.

Western donors must reassess their relationship with NGOs in the environment and development sectors, in light of the current situation. It is evident that major donors and international development agencies have contributed, quite inadvertently, to the present distress for environmental and development NGOs. Their contributions to the non-governmental sector have weakened the potential political credibility of NGOs, and created the perception of NGOs as a privileged class of educated élites. The funding of binational

environmental NGOs as a means of supporting the Oslo process has had particularly negative unintended consequences, as it has inextricably linked the cause of environmental protection to the waxing and waning of the negotiations.

The United States Agency for International Development, due to restrictions on funding the PA directly, is obliged to spend money on behalf of Palestinians solely via NGOs. This assistance has traditionally been given to international NGOs which partner with Palestinian NGOs, including Catholic Relief Services, the Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA), and American Near East Refugee Aid. Little USAID money goes directly to Palestinian non-governmental organizations, and notably, little USAID effort is made in pursuit of Israeli-Palestinian cooperation, except for Middle East Regional Cooperation (MERC) research in science, agriculture, and the environment. USAID's annual budget for the Palestinians is \$75-85 million, emphasizing democratization, water resources, microlending and business development.<sup>120</sup> According to a senior USAID official, USAID's strategic priorities encourage NGOs to submit proposals for cooperative agreements—a process midway between a contract tender and a grant proposal.<sup>121</sup> International NGOs have greater experience and familiarity with such procedures than small local NGOs, and are more capable of meeting USAID's accountability requirements. Likewise, the World Bank's \$15 million NGO fund often supported outside NGOs working within the Palestinian territories.

The United Nations Relief and Works Agency, as the leading international agency providing educational, health and welfare services to Palestinians, has fairly dense relations with the NGO community. As it employs some 10,000 Palestinian refugees in the West

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<sup>120</sup> USAID website, [http://www.usaid.gov/regions/ane/newpages/one\\_pagers/wbg.htm](http://www.usaid.gov/regions/ane/newpages/one_pagers/wbg.htm)

<sup>121</sup> Senior USAID official, not for attribution.

Bank and Gaza, UNRWA is also a major employment sector. Its planned budget for 2000, with pledged contributions of \$257 million, has an estimated budget deficit of at least \$27 million, with an acknowledged decline in the quality of services provided for its 3.8 million registered refugees in the West Bank, Gaza, Jordan, Lebanon and Syria.<sup>122</sup> While UNRWA is not primarily engaged in civil society development, it conducts its operations to provide emergency employment, healthcare, and schooling with the understanding that a nation without those basic needs cannot develop a functional society. UNRWA does host women's program centers with literacy and job training, and youth activities centers.

Development agencies from the European Union, its member states, Canada and Japan are the major contributors to the environmental NGOs discussed here. While UNRWA is not a true funding agency, its ubiquity in Palestinian social service provision makes it a significant actor of NGO concern. To a lesser extent, the remaining additional funding agencies that sustain environmental NGOs in the Palestinian Authority are mostly private and Western-based. They include Jewish organizations, private development NGOs, peace and reconciliation groups, and others with interest in the Middle East. Few operate principally within the environmental sector.

The role of development and relief agencies and Western donors in the evolving PA-NGO relationship cannot be overstated. Because both NGOs and the Palestinian Authority are reliant on development assistance, there are inherent conflicts for financial and technical resources. For a time, the size of the overall development 'pie' for the Palestinians expanded fast enough to minimize the visibility of the conflict, but those days have long passed. Since the initial euphoria over the Declaration of Principles, with a decline that began with Yitzhak Rabin's assassination and the election of Binyamin Netanyahu, the overall foreign

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<sup>122</sup> UNRWA website, <http://www.un.org/unrwa/finances/31dec.htm>

support for the peace process—as reflected in dollar contributions—has failed to meet the promised amounts.<sup>123</sup> This has led to a deficit between expectations and realities, which only compounds the political and security crisis.

Improvement in donor-NGO relations requires an understanding by donors of the development of endogenous civil society organizations. The infusion of funds from Europe and North America following the Declaration of Principles created an artificial market for opportunistic NGO formation on the part of Palestinian educated professionals, and that seeming artificiality contributed to the political vulnerability of the non-governmental sector. Future funding programs should be devoted more to grassroots organizations, such as the Rural Center for Sustainable Development in Hebron, than to the ambitious binational programs. Small community-level programs in education, water resources and environmental health, with an emphasis on realizing benefits for human populations, should be prioritized over biodiversity and more abstract environmental concerns. All of these efforts could be directed at support of NGOs that develop from the community level in response to genuine environment and development needs. This may require more effort from donor agencies than mere requests from proposals; it necessitates ground-level research to determine where viable groups representing broad constituencies may arise. This is difficult work that not all development agencies and donors are capable of accomplishing, but it is

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<sup>123</sup> From the signing of the Declaration of Principles through November 1996, an estimated \$2.996 billion in loans, grants, guarantees and in-kind assistance was pledged to the Palestinian people by the European Union, United States, Japan, Saudi Arabia, and Norway, in descending order by amount. (From Palestinian Development InfoNet. “Development Assistance to the West Bank and Gaza: An Overview,” March 1997. <http://www.arts.mcgill.ca/MEPP/PDIN/pdoverview.html>) Yet by the end of 1998—several years later—the actual amount spent (1994-1998) was only an estimated \$2.5 billion, despite numerous supplementary promises of aid during the peace process evolution. (From Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs, IOB Policy and Operations Evaluation Department, “Review of the Netherlands development programme for the Palestinian territories, 1994-1999.” IOB Evaluation No. 282. The Hague, November 1999.) This is part of a larger trend, more pronounced in recent years, of widely publicized promises of massive development funds from a country, followed by far smaller amounts actually reaching the Palestinian territories.

essential if donor-support non-governmental organizations in Palestine are to regain the political credibility and viability that they have ceded since the forming of the Palestinian Authority.

### **Scenarios and Prerequisites**

Further development of the capabilities and successes of environmental NGOs in Palestine depends on a range of factors. The most pressing is a cessation of the current hostilities and a restoration of a peace process based on the principle of a structured and negotiated Israeli withdrawal from the Gaza Strip and West Bank in exchange for assured security and recognition of Israel's borders. While enthusiasm for the principle of land-for-peace has waned to the point of near-invisibility, few other options short of total war or unending and costly occupation seem available.

In the introduction to this work was stated the assumption that “the current political and security hostilities—although severe—are but a temporary backsliding in the general development of a consensus” on a two-state solution. Should that be the case, there are a number of scenarios for the fate of environmental NGOs in the Palestinian Authority. But for any long-term progress to be made in environmental protection, sustainable development, and civil society liberalization, some prerequisites must be met.

## Palestinian Authority Democratization

It was clear, when the Palestinian Legislative Council was effectively removed from political power and the lawmaking function was reduced to near irrelevance, that advances in democratic governance made during the first years of the Palestinian Authority had been quickly reversed. The consequences for NGOs were even more severe than for the population or polity at large, because NGOs developed by far their best relations with political leaders in the PLC. The legislative branch was far more eager to work with the non-governmental sector on a cooperative basis than the ministries of the executive branch, even recognizing the positive role played by certain ministerial officials. Recognizing the critical role that the PLC can play, it is also important to acknowledge that restoring the legislative branch to a position of real power is difficult to imagine, under current circumstances. Power is concentrated among friends and partners of Arafat, or among rivals amassing power bases of their own in the military and security forces. Few of the real holders of political power are elected at all. But the PLC's reemergence from the shadow of Arafatization must occur to enable the viability of non-governmental organizations as actors with genuine social and political potential.

In addition to the strengthening of the PLC, there are other developments within the Palestinian Authority that would benefit the NGO community, especially in the sustainable development and environmental protection fields. First is a loosening of the security mindset to prioritize human development and quality of life issues, from health to housing to education to economic growth. All have suffered from the occupation and decades of systematic underdevelopment, and the government of the Palestinian Authority has not acted with commensurate concern, even accepting for grave resource shortages. In the meantime,

security forces and special police units have proliferated. Second is a strengthening of the elected municipal councils and regional governorates, to offset the strong power bases of unelected elders and *hamula* networks. Recent examples of the hazards of these persistent power centers include violent retributive killings, nepotism and links with Israeli-Palestinian criminal networks. But while NGOs would benefit from stronger elected local governments, they should not be too publicly eager to see centuries-old social orders fall away; they are already susceptible to criticism that they represent outside interests with no respect for indigenous societal organization. A third factor in democratization, the fight against corruption, is also a double-edged sword in that regard. Corruption in the PA is endemic and has enormous negative consequences for participatory politics, as it funnels power and resources along patrimonial lines and prevents public engagement in decision-making. But calls to combat corruption are open invitations for a strong central authority to assert control, with equally negative repercussions.

Democratized political institutions in the Palestinian Authority are essential for NGO development as capable, competent institutions in their fields of work, whether as educators, implementers, or policy developers and advocates. But mere democratization and the ‘rule of law’ is not enough. Changing attitudes among donors and development agencies, new foci for international and binational cooperation, and better NGO management are also vital.

#### Donors and Development Agencies

Sheila Carapico makes the assertion that numerous NGOs have cropped up in the Arab world solely as part of NGO ‘rent-seeking’ for donor attention and funds. She claims that this trend became particularly evident during a period in which international donors in were more interested in assisting nonstate actors in development projects. The U.S. Agency

for International Development, for example, now makes NGOs frequent recipients of aid, and implementers of USAID projects via contractual arrangements.<sup>124</sup> Carapico writes that

“There is a hard-currency market suited to implementation of this [Western-derived development] agenda, and savvy bilingual intellectuals in Cairo, Ramallah, Tunis and elsewhere have learned how to work the system.”<sup>125</sup>

Such NGOs, she says, often choose their locations, names, and areas of policy interest solely to attract international (non-Arab) support, from donors and international organizations with a preference for English-speaking, spreadsheet-using, business attire-wearing recipients.

Rema Hammami of Birzeit University has written that Palestinian NGOs represent the “professionalization of politics,” a new employment sector for economically and educationally advantaged élites where wages far exceed the public sector. With salaries from donors in American dollars or European currency, NGO activists have become a new prosperous middle class of Palestinian political life. This leaves NGOs vulnerable to opportunistic criticism from the Authority that they form a spoiled, Western-dependent sector in society whose true allegiances lie elsewhere.<sup>126</sup>

In discussions with NGO leadership, relations with donors and funders thus play a necessarily prominent role. The funding mechanisms that sustain the NGOs discussed in this document are varied, including direct grants, open bids for contractual services, payment on a project basis, donations of technical assistance and in-kind services, and numerous other mechanisms. Donors, or clients depending on the circumstance, include foreign

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<sup>124</sup> Walker, Dwight. “USAID and the Environment,” in Twite and Menczel, *Our Shared Environment*, Volume One, p. 283. In the Middle East, USAID assistance to the environmental sector usually takes the form of water treatment and environmental management support. A senior USAID administrator, speaking not for attribution, recently mentioned American proposals for a network of desalination facilities spanning from Syria to Sudan, for an estimated \$40 billion. Yet desalination proposals, to be funded from the U.S. or Europe, have been discouraged by the Israeli and Palestinian leadership, on grounds that developing alternative sources of water might weaken positions in negotiating the fate of the Jordan River watershed. This position is shared by the USAID administrator and Hillel Shuval of the Hebrew University.

<sup>125</sup> Carapico, p. 14.

<sup>126</sup> Hammami, p. 27.

development agencies, private non-governmental donors from the West, the Palestinian Authority, and Israeli NGOs.

If there are two single recommendations that could be made such donors, they could be summarized as follows. First, donors should not fund environmental groups if their primary concern is the peace process. Second, donors should respond to domestic demand in the NGO market, rather than pushing resources into an already glutted system. The first concern has been addressed in Chapter Three. The second emerged most clearly in an interview with Dr. Abdel Rahim Abu Saleh of the Palestine Council on Health. PCH (a parent organization of the Palestinian-Israeli Environmental Secretariat) took the extraordinary step in 1994 of calling on donors to stop financial support of NGOs for a period of two years.<sup>127</sup> PCH argued that newly-formed organizations were mere consumers of donor resources, operating with great inefficiency, and that redundancy was rampant in the post-Oslo boom in the NGO sector. Using an apt medical metaphor, Abu Saleh said that a system of triage had become necessary to determine which NGOs were truly viable.

Such a system never developed, although it could be argued that the decline in funding that followed the post-1996 decline in the peace process served such a purpose. Poorly managed NGOs did fade away, and the evolving Palestinian Authority ministries took up many roles that had been handled by disparate non-governmental organizations. But Abu Saleh's warning bears more than a hint of relevance today. Donor agencies, be they private or governmental, should fund frugally and be wary of creating an economic environment of NGO rent-seeking for high wages. A worthwhile policy to explore would be for donors to fund NGOs that have already sought out some kind of indigenous role and support reflecting a true response to community needs. In addition to this primary concern

comes some more general concerns, reflected elsewhere in this paper. Donors in the environmental sector should orient their concerns toward the community level, in order to meet genuine indigenous concerns. This will necessitate a more accepting understanding of the links between development and the environment in an impoverished society. When children lack clean water and sufficient food, and streets are strewn with broken glass and rusted-out frames of automobiles, it is difficult to create compelling arguments for concern over bird migration—as hard as well-funded donors might wish it so.

#### International and Binational NGO Cooperation

Although there is much to fault in the execution of the partnerships between Palestinians and Israelis in environmental NGOs, and the attempted joint and larger regional environmental cooperatives, the evident need for such partnerships remains undeniable. But for future positive developments in Palestinian sustainable development and environmental protection, Israeli cooperation with Palestinian NGOs must come on Palestinian terms. This means a focus on reaching underserved populations in rural and village areas with development assistance and an improved physical and organizational infrastructure. Israeli NGOs and partner organizations can help build capacity for these initiatives within the Palestinian environmental sector based on transfers of technological and organizational techniques, and a restoration of NGO and university ties on the basis of scientific cooperation.

To facilitate this process, willing Israeli partners should build on the personal and professional ties formed in AIES, FoEME, the Israeli-Palestinian Working Groups on water and the environment, and the other existing forums, both physical and on the Internet. Israeli

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<sup>127</sup> Interview with Dr. Abdel Rahim Abu Saleh, Wadi Joz, July 17, 2000.

environmentalists with access to information technology should explore means of eliciting evidence of community needs and priorities with indigenous Palestinian partners, and bridging the gaps between community needs and shortfalls in local capacities. This applies simultaneously to a need on the Israeli side for environmental NGOs to make better in-reach efforts toward their own underserved communities (Israeli Arabs, Bedouin, immigrants and Sephardi communities in development towns, migrant laborers) who are left out of the prosperity of the modern Israeli economy.

On a related note, Palestinian and joint Israeli-Palestinian environmental NGOs would benefit from better institutional ties with European and international researchers and advocates. Surprisingly few of the NGOs surveyed made a point of pursuing networks with international NGOs in the environmental field. PIES observed their difficulty cooperating with the World Wide Fund for Nature and Friends of the Earth—International, both of which require that partnering organizations have officially registered locally. For reasons discussed in Chapter One, this is a difficult requirement. While FoEME is part of an international network, it is a loose and deliberately anarchic one. Friends of the Earth's national chapters meet only once per year in a General Meeting, where an executive community and chairperson are elected. This structure does not favor broad horizontal linkages between national chapters, which is a true loss for the Palestinian environmental community for one reason in particular. Friends of the Earth—International has been a leader in calling for environmental reform of the World Bank and other multilateral development banks (MDBs).<sup>128</sup> Since the World Bank and other related institutions have such a large role to play in Palestinian development, links with FoE chapters could be highly beneficial in effectively advocating for sustainable development priorities on World Bank-

funded projects. FoEME does sit on the World Bank working group on NGOs, but there is certainly room for further growth.

### NGO Management

Finally, necessary prerequisites for achieving more favorable scenarios for NGO freedom, civil society development, the advancement of participatory politics and environmental protection include changes in the ways that Palestinian environmental NGOs are managed, and the partnerships that they pursue.

On its face, the model pursued by the Rural Center for Sustainable Development in Hebron seems almost optimal in its careful forethought, productive cooperation with relevant PA ministries, emphasis on integrating all social sectors, and strategic alliance with an Israeli environmental education organization. RCSD also provides environmental outreach and sustainability education in the rural and village sectors of the southern West Bank, a community traditionally alienated from the commercial and political centers of East Jerusalem, Bethlehem, and Ramallah. While RCSD's structure and aims seem strongly sustainable and reflective of local needs, one must acknowledge that it and organizations like it face real challenges. Because RCSD is based in the rural, largely undereducated sectors far from the élites of larger cities, it faces difficulties in funding and policy access, as well as in the hiring market for skilled professionals. But should RCSD integrate itself at least partly into the professional centers, via cooperation with other NGOs for example, it could present a highly appealing organizational model for other Palestinian environmentalists to consider emulating.

Aside from the questions of target audiences, geographical location, and internal structure, NGOs should pursue better business relations, and links to other non-

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<sup>128</sup> Wapner, pp. 138-141.

governmental sectors including universities and municipalities. The only NGOs that discussed their relationships with the burgeoning Palestinian private sector discussed their work as consultants. PIES, for example, has a project on integrating environmental management systems into industrial facilities, while WEDO has had contracts for environmental impact assessments for foreign firms. But Jad Isaac of ARIJ specifically mentioned his displeasure on NGO-private sector relations, and the issue did not arise in many interviews at all. The potential for better NGO-business relations is clear. Acting Deputy Minister al-H'maidi of the Ministry of Environmental Affairs mentioned fourteen areas of "fruitful relations" with business, ranging from cooperation on planning joint Israeli-Palestinian industrial estates to assistance in gaining ISO 9000 and 14000 certifications on environmental management processes.

Clearly, there is a pragmatic reason for environmental NGOs to work productively with industrial sectors, because industry is linked to many potential environmental concerns. But there is also a political incentive. Both industry and NGOs have reasons to be troubled over the difficulty of registering operations legitimately in the Palestinian Authority, and both are vulnerable to the frequently haphazard and predatory practices of officials working in the name of ministries. Corruption and nepotism are equally harmful to both the NGO and for-profit sectors, and this offers a common incentive for better relations. This incentive is shared with universities and independent scholars, all of whom could benefit from Palestinian liberalization in academic affairs and freedom of speech and publication. A final possible sector for cooperation exists in the municipal and regional governments, many of which are closer to their communities' environmental and developmental needs than the Authority ministries, and which may be productive partners for NGO cooperation.

## **In Closing**

I undertook this study beginning in summer 2000, based on my personal belief at the time that while tensions remained substantial, there was a clearly understood path toward Palestinian statehood as part of a negotiated settlement with Israel. Although that path has met with far greater resistance than most observers had foreseen, I believe that it remains valid, although its final destination has been pushed further into the future. At the time, I was cognizant of the enormous environmental and development problems facing the Palestinian communities, and of the need to build capacity within indigenous institutions to confront and manage them. My interest in that sector was then well advanced due to prior study, and my research in the Palestinian environmental community was undertaken as part of my commitment to study and possibly assist in meeting those needs. Aware of Palestinian Authority political culture, I felt that strengthening non-governmental organizations offered the best opportunity to confront environmental challenges facing the region.

Following the interviews and field study and the review of literature, events have overtaken some of my initial enthusiasm. I still feel that strong non-governmental organizations and civil associations offer great promise, but it is increasingly clear that focusing on NGOs and civil society alone cannot provide all the answers in a tightly constricted policy space. Those NGOs that have succeeded in their limited professional endeavors in the environmental sphere have been generally unable to prevail in achieving their vision of Palestinian social and political organization, in which communities, associations, businesses, activists and an elected legislative branch can direct the priorities of the Palestinian Authority. The security crisis prompted by the *intifada* and Israeli crackdown can bear the blame for some of the travails of the NGO community, as can corruption and a host of other factors, but the closing message is that the state still matters—even when the state is weak, does not control all its territory, and is not formally recognized

as a state. Donors, scholars, and activists working in environmental protection and sustainable development must acknowledge that fact as they continue their vital work. While the NGO sector and the advancement of civil society have enormous value, it does not substitute for capable governance and other needed institutions in developing nations struggling with the need to provide for their people while protecting their fragile environments.

## Appendix One: Environmental Concerns in Palestine

Although this paper is concerned with environmental NGOs in the Palestinian Authority, it is not intended to address any particular environmental problem, *per se*. However, it would be foolhardy to discuss issue-based NGOs without acknowledging the issues that give them a rationale for existence.

Major environmental surveys of the West Bank and Gaza were conducted by the Applied Research Institute—Jerusalem. ARIJ, a Palestinian think tank discussed in Chapter I, released its *Environmental Profile of the West Bank* in eight volumes, for each of the West Bank's governorates (regional administrative areas), between 1995 and 1997.<sup>129</sup> The Israel-Palestine Center for Research and Information (IPCRI), discussed in Chapter III, held annual conferences between 1994 and 1995 on “Our Shared Environment,” in which leading Israeli and Palestinian scholars, along with Jordanians, Egyptians, and Europeans and Americans, debated environmental and development priorities. The proceedings of the first two conferences were bound and published, and offer insight into pressing environmental issues throughout the Levant.<sup>130</sup> The vast majority of the environmental NGOs in the region, including those which are profiled in this thesis, participated in one or both of the conferences. Finally, the Palestinian Ministry of Environmental Affairs (MEnA), operating with financial and technical assistance from the Dutch government, has published two recent surveys of its environmental strategy and policy on environmental assessments.

Most of the additional research into the environment in the PA and Israel is concerned with water, particularly the interplay between water scarcity, national security, and diplomacy. The classic work in the field is Miriam Lowi's *Water and Power: The*

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<sup>129</sup> Applied Research Institute—Jerusalem. *Environmental Profile of the West Bank* (8 volumes). 1995-1997. <http://www.arij.org/profile/index.htm>

<sup>130</sup> Twite, Robin and Menczel, Robin (editors). *Our Shared Environment*. Two volumes, IPCRI, Jerusalem, published 1995 and 1996.

*Politics of a Scarce Resource in the Jordan River Basin*. This work is among the innumerable analyses of the political, diplomatic, engineering, legal and security aspects of water shortage in the Levant, which discuss not only Israeli and Palestinian, but Jordanian, Syrian and Lebanese water concerns. In the field of environmental security pioneered by Thomas A. Homer-Dixon, the Jordan River Basin is viewed as one of the archetypal settings for armed conflict over an environmental resource, but for a wide variety of reasons, such conflict has not taken place.<sup>131</sup>

Palestinian environmental issues can be depicted in terms of *resource scarcity* issues, *pollution*, *environmental health* issues, *ecosystem health* issues, and *development, land use and infrastructure* issues, and *environmental and civic education*. This brief listing is drawn from the environmental surveys conducted by ARIJ, IPCRI, and MEnA, and incorporates the concerns common to all.

### Resource Scarcity

MEnA describes the two most pressing environmental issues facing the Palestinian Authority as resource scarcity and pollution. Water scarcity is the best-known and most widely studied environmental constraint, but Palestine also is scarce in land, trees and green space, and natural resources. The principal resources are stone for construction, gravel and small known quantities of natural gas. Larger quantities may exist off the coastline of Gaza, but the economic, political and engineering constraints of developing those sites are not yet fully explored.

### Pollution

Water, air and land pollution are ever-present illustrations of the environmental degradation of the Palestinian Authority. In the case of water, water scarcity is intimately

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<sup>131</sup> For some possible discussions of why, see Allan, Tony. "Watersheds and Problemsheds: Explaining the Absence of Armed Conflict Over Water in the Middle East." *MERIA Journal*, Vol. 2 No. 1, March 1998. The discussion takes into account 'virtual water' in the form of grain imports, the enormous costs of a potential military conflict, and the willingness to unsustainably overdraw current resources within a state's own territory rather than compete for resources within another state's boundaries.

linked to water quality—when groundwater sources are depleted, pollutants accumulate quickly and aquifers can be permanently rendered unfit for human use. Poor wastewater management (of sewage and “greywater”) has resulted in the infiltration of groundwater supplies with fecal coliform bacteria, fertilizer and pesticide runoff and other pollutants. In the case of land and ground pollution, solid waste management lags far behind world standards. Unsanitary landfills contribute additionally to groundwater pollution, and hazardous waste from poorly-maintained sites is a growing concern. Air pollution in Palestine comes in the form of vehicle exhaust, factory emissions, dust from concrete and stonecutting operations, and other poorly tended industrial and domestic sources.

#### Environmental Health Issues

Linked to pollution are a number of environmental hazards which have had measurable effects on public health. Among those hazards are lead pollution in leaded gasoline exhaust, urban air pollution (NO<sub>2</sub>, SO<sub>2</sub>, and suspended particulates) with particularly severe impacts on the elderly and children, and untreated sewage infiltrating drinking water supplies. Unmonitored, unofficial water stations are additional vectors for illness, and the poorly monitored solid waste sites have been implicated in burgeoning populations of feral animals and insects which can spread disease. Hospital waste and hazardous waste, including heavy metals and industrial chemicals, have further health risks.

#### Ecosystem Health Issues

While a casual glance around the cities of the West Bank or Gaza reveals little in the way of biodiversity, Palestine has an ecosystem with unique and vulnerable populations of birds, plants and wildlife. More than 2,500 species of wild plants live in the region, more than 800 considered rare. The migratory bird population that traces its routes high above Israel, the PA and Jordan twice each year is one of the marvels of the avian world, and more than 80 species of wild mammal and 380 species of birds are endemic. The coastal zone of Gaza and its millennia-old fishing port are endangered by agricultural runoff, pollution and

hazardous coastal development. The Dead Sea, which borders Israel, the West Bank, and Jordan, is one of the world's most unique and vulnerable ecosystems. Finally, the traditional agricultural-pastoral societies of the West Bank are susceptible to the effects of ecosystem degradation, especially soil erosion and deforestation.

#### Development, Land Use and Infrastructure Issues

As the Palestinian economy and society develop, choices made in development, land use and infrastructure play a growing role in environmental concerns. For the first time in history, Palestinians are making their own policies on energy, transportation, industry and urban planning. All of these decisions have serious environmental components. The Palestinian Environmental Assessment Policy is intended to mitigate environmental damage while promoting economic development, but there is much work to be done and few resources for it. The PA is eager to catch up on its infrastructural development, and various lending agencies and foreign development programs have offered help. These new developments include road networks, power plants and electrical infrastructure, an airport and seaport in Gaza, new government and private sector buildings, tourist facilities and housing construction. Construction has leapt far ahead of any environmental considerations, and formerly isolated villages on the outskirts of Bethlehem, Hebron and Ramallah are rapidly becoming encompassed by concrete and sprawl. The Ministry of Planning and International Cooperation (MOPIC) is authorized to address many such infrastructure plans, but MEnA has authority over environmental assessment. Speaking generally, environmental oversight is marginal.

#### Environmental and Civic Education

While a technical understanding of Palestine's environmental problems has developed among some policymakers, academics and NGOs, civic education about the environment is poor. Non-governmental organizations have taken the lead in addressing these shortcomings, in the form of radio and newspaper columns, posters, public meetings

and face-to-face interviewing and surveying. In schools, churches and mosques, civic educators have tried to build awareness about environmental concerns, often in the context of public health. There is an additional layer to environmental education which involves bringing information specifically to decision-makers in government, business and law. That form of environmental outreach can take the form of environmental education or lobbying, depending on the mode and purpose of the discourse, or one's personal perspective on the issues at hand.

## **Appendix Two: Actors in Environmental Policy-Making**

There are numerous players in the environmental field operating within the Palestinian Authority, and between the PA and the outside world, including Israel. This is a representative, but not a complete, list of actors.

- 1) Palestinian ministries and governmental offices
  - a) Ministries of Agriculture, Environmental Affairs, Health, Transport, Planning and International Cooperation
  - b) Palestine Economic Council for Development and Rehabilitation
  - c) Municipal governments, village councils and regional governorates
  - d) Palestinian Water Authority
  - e) Palestinian Energy Authority
- 2) Non-Governmental Organizations
  - a) Exclusively Palestinian NGOs
  - b) Binational (Palestinian-Israeli) NGOs
  - c) International NGOs with local representation or affiliates
- 3) Lending agencies, international organizations and foreign development banks
  - a) World Bank and International Monetary Fund
  - b) US Agency for International Development, and Japanese, European and Arab foreign development agencies
  - c) Relevant United Nations offices (UN Relief and Works Agency, World Health Organization, UNDP, UNICEF, etc.)
- 4) Israeli Civil or Military Authorities, in Areas C and B as appropriate
  - a) Israeli settlement governments
  - b) Israeli Defense Force

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