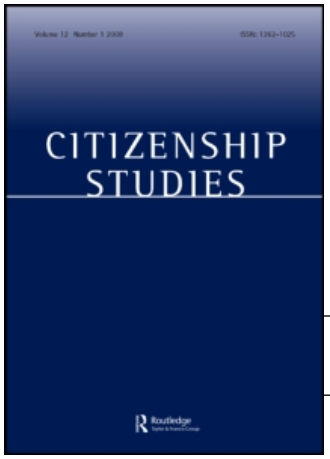

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The counter-hegemonic role of civil society: Palestinian–Arab NGOs in Israel

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This paper deals with the causes and impact of the rise in the number of Palestinian–Arab Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) in Israel in the last two decades. It provides a multi-level model that combines economic, political and cultural factors to explain the shifts in Palestinian-Arab political mobilization in Israel and as a result to the rise of a complex network of Arab NGOs. The paper demonstrates the way in which the civil institutions and their intensive involvement in public social affairs generate social capital that has internal as well as external political impact. Arab civil society institutions, which operate mainly separately from civil institutions of the Jewish majority, assist in the empowerment and the development of Arab society. They provide services in different fields, such as education, health, and planning. They also advocate and lobby for the rights of the Arab citizens inside Israel and internationally. Arab civil society institutions also provide information necessary for political mobilization, identity formation, and cultural preservation. In this framework the paper claims that they play a counter-hegemonic role vis-à-vis the Israeli state. However, the paper also claims that the broad advocacy and lobbying activity of Arab civil institutions did not manage to fully democratize Israeli policies towards Arab society, demonstrating the centrality of state identity and power structure when it comes to democratization processes. On a different level, the paper reveals that, although the Palestinian–Arab NGOs network has managed to lead to a liberalization process within Arab society, this process is partial and selective.

Keywords: civil society; NGOs; national minorities; nationalizing states; counter-hegemonic struggle; future vision documents

Introduction

In the early months of 2007, three political documents, delineating the wished-for relationship between the state of Israel and the Arab society in it, were published by Arab NGOs. These documents, referred to as the 'Future Vision Documents,' marked the deep involvement of Arab NGOs in public affairs and their attempts to access the Israeli public sphere and influence its agenda. The three documents were issued by the National Committee for the Heads of the Arab Local Authorities in Israel, Adalah – the Legal Center for Arab Rights in Israel – and Mada Al-Carmel – the Arab Center for Applied Social Research. They addressed most aspects of Arab life in Israel, including: land, housing and planning, economic and social development, education, culture, legal status, historical rights, women status, religious rights, and internal Arab affairs. The comprehensiveness

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of the documents in terms of their content and prominent individuals including politicians and civil society activists that generated them is a turning point in the relationship between the Jewish majority and Arab minority in Israel. The publication of the documents marks the deep involvement of Arab NGOs in various aspects of Arab collective life in Israel. They mirror their attempts to play a counter-hegemonic role vis-à-vis the state, seeking to influence its policies and promote the basic interests of the Arab society. They also mirror the occurring shift in Arab politics from focusing on formal-accommodative tools to using informal and counter-systemic means.

Drawing on the 'Future Vision Documents,' this paper examines two themes. First, it provides a comprehensive explanation of the causes behind the rising number of Arab civil society institutions in Israel. Second, it explores the relationship between the rising number of Arab NGOs and empowerment, development and democratization, issues viewed in the professional literature as linked to the rise of civil society institutions.

The examination of the Arab NGO sector, as mirroring the rise of civil society network, is necessary since it is an under-examined phenomenon, despite its growing impact on the public agenda. Several scholars, such as Shany Payes, Oded Haklai and Dan Rabonowitz have addressed the phenomenon (Rabinowitz 2001, Payes 2003, Haklai 2004). Payes' has been the most comprehensive so far. She focused on the expansion of the Arab NGO sector and pointed out the relationship between Arab NGOs and the Israeli state. She claims '[a]lthough the importance of [Palestinian–Israeli NGOs] are rarely acknowledged in scholarly literature, these organizations have in fact played a significant political role in the campaign of the Arab minority for civil equality in Israel' (Payes 2003, p. 82). She claims that:

> [Palestinian–Israeli NGOs'] contribution has manifested itself in the creation of avenues for participation in public life by groups that have traditionally been under-represented. First and foremost, they have empowered the Arab minority vis-a-vis the state and the Jewish majority. NGOs have also contributed to the process of empowerment by enhancing the professional ability of Arabs to oppose discriminatory state policies. (*ibid.*, p. 84)

She follows Korten, showing that Arab NGOs in Israel have been shifting from welfare through development to building political consciousness and mobility (*ibid*., p. 83, Korten 1990). Although these statements, made by Payes in 2003, are still partially valid today they have not established the necessary differentiation between the ability of NGOs in empowerment and development and their ability to promote political change and democratization. The mere existence of NGOs is not inherently equal to democratization, empowerment, or development. They are a necessary but not sufficient condition.

One of the limitations of Payes' study is that it is predominantly descriptive and is limited to the relationship of NGOs with the state. Payes' claim is true that in the last two decades there has been a constant rise in the number of Arab civil society institutions, with some major fluctuations in several historical junctions. Payes does not provide a comprehensive explanatory model to the rise of these civil society institutions. Therefore, this paper delves deeper into the direct as well as indirect causes of the rise in Arab NGOs in Israel. The paper complements Payes' claim that the rise in the number of these institutions and their intensive involvement in public social affairs generate social capital (Putnam 2000) that has some political impact. Arab civil society institutions, which operate mainly separately from civil institutions of the Jewish majority, assist in the empowerment and the development of Arab society. They provide services in different fields, such as education, health, and planning. They also advocate and lobby for the rights of the Arab citizens inside Israel and internationally. Arab civil society institutions also provide information necessary for political mobilization, identity formation and cultural preservation.

However, contrary to Payes' optimism this paper claims that the broad advocacy and lobbying activity of Arab civil institutions failed to democratize Israeli policies toward Arab society and, at the same time, did not lead to fundamental liberalization process within Arab society. In some aspects, this paper follows Haklai's cautious position, claiming that 'the impact of the mobilization of [Arab NGOs in Israel] on structural reforms [of the state] is debatable' (Haklai 2004, p. 165). On the other hand, this paper differs from Haklai's paper on a major point. Although he has contributed to our understanding of Arab NGOs in Israel, his claim that Arab NGOs should not be viewed as promoting universal civil values, but rather as 'a mode of *ethnic mobilization*, targeting the *empowerment of an ethnic community*' is rather biased (*ibid.*, p. 157). It means that Haklai does not consider the struggle for equal citizenship status by Arab NGOs as serving universal values that should have an impact on the democratization of the Israeli society and state. Furthermore, by limiting his treatment of Arab NGOs to ethnic boundaries, he turns this NGO network into being responsible for not achieving its goals instead of viewing the state as not being responsive to demands of a significant part of its citizenry.

Arab NGOs have their own particular characteristics. Rabinowitz has already shed some light on this topic, especially on the NGOs affiliated with the Islamic movement and the way these NGOs seek to empower Arab society (2001). Nonetheless, one cannot limit the activities and goals of Arab NGOs to this level only. Arab NGOs seek in various ways to promote civil equality in Israel and demand the democratization of the Israeli state. The extent to which they manage to create change remains debatable, since the democratization of the state depends on state willingness to incorporate excluded groups in the decision making processes.

Despite the rising number of Arab NGOs in the last few years and their significant lobbying and advocacy efforts, the Israeli state has taken measures that strengthened its ethnicizing and nationalizing policies (Peled 2007). For instance, in July 2007, the Knesset passed a discriminatory bill the 'Jewish National Fund Land'. The new bill specifies that lands of the Jewish National Fund (JNF) are to be allocated exclusively to Jewish people. The majority of the land under the control of the JNF (13% of the land in Israel) was transferred to it by the state and was originally in the ownership of Arab refugees or internally displaced persons. The bill was passed by a large majority of 64–16 Members of Knesset (MKs), with one abstention (Merinda 2007). Furthermore, the Knesset introduced a fundamental change to Israeli citizenship laws in July 2003, which was confirmed as constitutional by the Israeli Supreme Court in May 2006, abolishing the right of Arab citizens of Israel to family unification if married to Palestinians from the occupied Palestinian territories (Kohn 2006).

This paper is not limited to state-Arab civil society relations but rather sheds some light on the complex relationship between civil society institutions and Arab society. The paper demonstrates the hesitant position taken by Arab NGOs vis-à-vis basic social problems in Arab society. As a result, the impact of Arab NGOs, including feminist NGOs, on empowering weak segments of Arab society and democratizing it is rather limited. Arab NGOs did not manage to promote liberal values and support the basic rights of underprivileged social groups, such as women, children, and the elderly. These groups may have received some support from various Arab NGOs, but their fundemental situation as underprivileged groups did not change.

This paper also points out several of the sources of weakness of Arab NGO sector, such as its fragmentation, personalization, sectarianism, and the close affinity between NGOs and political parties. The paper pinpoints the implications of these phenomena on the empowerment, development and democratization policies of the NGOs.

The ambivalent role of civil society

Contrary to the dominant view of civil society in the literature in most of the 1980s, many scholars raise doubts regarding the causal relationship between the number of civil society institutions and development, empowerment and democratization (Haynes 1996, Hulme and Edwards 1997, Clarke 1998, Edwards 1999, Wiktorowicz 2000, Mercer 2002). Whereas the democratization wave in South America (O'Donnel and Schmitter 1986, Schneider 1995) and Eastern Europe (Havel 1985, Pelcynski 1998) have led scholars to establish a positive relationship between the rise of civil society institutions and empowerment and democratization, it seems that in many other areas the rise of number of NGOs did not necessarily lead to major changes in the political regimes dominant at a time (Foley and Edwards 1996).

Based on the ambivalent role that civil society institutions played in different contexts, Quintan Wiktorowicz states that 'Rather than assume that civil society enables democracy or serves as a mechanism of empowerment, it is important to understand the political context that shapes and limits its potential as an engine of political change' (Wiktorowicz 2000, p. 46). The structural opportunities in which civil society organizations operate are crucial to their contribution to empowerment, development, and political change (Tarrow 1996). The state has a major effect on the ability of civil society institutions to influence their surrounding social and political reality. To support such a position, the German experience during the Nazi period is invoked (Berman 1997). According to Sheri Berman, the experience of the Weimer republic demonstrates that civil society has also a destructive potential, where civil society associations could be used by radical political forces to undermine democracy (*ibid*.). Keith Whittington has also raised doubts regarding the ability of civil associational life to lead to democratizations (Whittington 1998). Whittington demonstrated that in nineteenth-century America and, contrary to the Tocquevillian view, civil society associations tended to be sectarian and exclusive, leading to major tension and internal strife. Similar fears of the negative use of civil society institutions is raised by Foley and Edwards in regard to the radical and nondemocratic Islamic movements that may use NGOs to promote a nondemocratic theocratic political change (Foley and Edwards 1996).

Notwithstanding the dangers of negative use of civil society, most scholars agree to the positive potential of civil society institutions. Civil society institutions can contribute to the rise of counter hegemonic projects that set limits on authoritarian regimes. These institutions construct an autonomous sphere of social interaction that meets basic needs of ordinary people, despite the fact that the mere existence of civil society institutions does not inherently imply democratization.

The examination of civil society institutions in their political context integrates the policies and intentions of the political regime into the analysis. One should be aware that political regimes can utilize civil society institutions for their purposes, establishing a façade of democratic rule, while on the other hand limiting the contribution of civil society to fulfill tasks that are ignored or neglected by the state. Civil society institutions could be a part and parcel of neo-liberal process in which the state withdraws from taking a welfare role and gives this responsibility to civil society institutions supported by external resources. Although such a situation could lead to empowering civil society institutions, enabling them to exert pressure on the political regime, nevertheless, civil society institutions end up fulfilling a task that is usually a responsibility of the state.

Furthermore, a cautious stance regarding the role of civil society institutions should not ignore the difference between the ability of civil society to contribute to development

and empowerment and fall short of leading major political change. Civil society institutions can contribute to the wellbeing of ordinary people, especially in societies where large segment of the population is poor or neglected, without having to challenge the political regime. Such a positive contribution of civil society associations could be in cases of ethnic or other minorities, which have no intention or power to challenge the central regime, but still seek to empower the minority to improve its development. In cases in which states are ethnic – identified with one hegemonic ethnic group in it – civil society institutions can contribute to balancing state policies by investing resources in the neglected minority. In such cases, civil society can become a realm of protection for citizens without being overloaded with the task leading to fundamental political change. However, the empowerment of minorities or deprived groups of society 'can' in the long run contribute to the democratization of the political regime. Such a process has greater chances to be realized when minority civil society institutions are protected by civil society institutions that belong to the dominant majority and operate in concert to exert pressure on the political regime.

In sum, any examination of civil society institutions should be cautious not to equate the mere rise of NGOs with democratization. A thorough examination of the contribution and impact of civil society institutions has to seriously consider the structural circumstances under which they operate and the intentions and policies of the political regime towards them. Furthermore, when examining civil society institutions, we should not conflate the analysis of the relationship between civil society institutions and development and empowerment on the one hand and the analysis of their relationship with democratization on the other. Civil society institutions can contribute to development and empowerment and be either antidemocratic on the one hand or, at least not push towards democratization, on the other.

Arab politics in Israel

In the first three decades of state history, Arab demands for equality were based mainly on distributive justice and individual liberal philosophy, according to which the state should integrate its Arab citizens as equal participants in society and state.[1] Dominant political movements in the Arab minority, especially the Communist party, believed for a long period of time that it is possible to establish a common Arab-Jewish Israeli identity, subsiding Zionism as the dominant ideology of the state (Kaufman 1997). Based on such a dominant political vision, most of Arab society sought to promote its interests from within the formal political system, namely the representative system manifested in the Knesset. Accommodating the system and seeking to influence it from within was viewed as the best strategy in the given circumstances. The fact that such a strategy served the interest of the Communist party, the dominant political force authentically representing the interests of the Arab minority, made it even more solid. The Communist party challenged every voice that countered such a strategy and sought to co-opt any political force that developed separately such as the 'Abna'a Al-Balad Movement' (Sons of the Village/land), established in 1972. That was the goal behind the establishment of the Front for Peace and Equality in the Knesset elections in 1977. The Communist party integrated Arab national intellectuals and leaders that were active in the Nazareth area as well as broadened its representative base to include politicians who were not Communist, but strengthened the party (Rekhess 1993). This accommodative pattern of political conduct was followed by all Arab parties that were established since 1984. The Progressive List for Peace, established as a Jewish-Arab list, adopted a similar policy of influencing the official

political system by entering the Knesset, despite its strong nationalist rhetoric. The same goal was sought by the Democratic Arab Party, established as pure Arab party by a veteran of the Zionist Labor party in 1984.

The accommodative political strategy of Arab parties was adopted for good reasons. The experience of the 1948 war and the disintegration of Palestinian society leading to the dispersal of the majority of Palestinians living in the areas that became the state of Israel played a vital role in the minds of the remaining Arab population. The Palestinians who remained within Israel have suspected that their stay is temporary and that any 'wrong' behavior will lead the state to their expulsion. Furthermore, the enforcement of the Military government over areas inhabited by Arabs helped to control them and eliminate any attempt for alternative patterns of collective conduct (Cohen 2006). Manufacturing consent among Arab citizens has been one of the main goals of the ideological and disciplinary apparatuses of the Israeli state (*ibid*.). The educational and communicative systems, as well as the policing and internal intelligence agencies, have long tried to nourish an Arab collective consciousness that submits to the ideological and ethnic character of the state. Since 1948, hundreds of school books were introduced to educate the Arab community based on visions that were manufactured by Jewish educators and academics (Mari 1978, Bar-Tal 2005). Furthermore, the Israeli state introduced new media institutions in Arabic in order to set the agenda of the Arab population (Jamal 2006a). The Hebrew media has heavily contributed to delegitimizing any Arab opposition to state policies (Wolfsfeld *et al.*, 2000). The Police and General Security Service have been very active in Arab towns intimidating dissenters and encouraging either traditional clan leaders or others to cooperate in blocking any opposition to the well sophisticated control system the police and the security services established since 1948 (Lustick 1980). The Israeli methods of control have undergone many changes but remained persistent in seeking consent and in aiming to tame any Arab resentment of Israeli policies, be it civil or political (Rabinowitz 1997, Or Commission Report 2003).

Despite the material and ideological hegemony of the state and despite the fact that the Arab minority never abandoned formal politics, this society managed to develop new conceptual horizons leading to the emergence of an oppositional consciousness (Jamal 2007a). This is manifested in the moral and political justifications Arabs utilize to challenge Israeli discriminatory policies. The Arab opposition to submit to the Israeli control mechanism started as early as in the 1950s. However, it did not become apparent until the mid-1970s. Since then we witnessed the rise of a new political leadership that took the lead and introduced new patterns of political behavior (Jamal 2006b). Arab politicians have challenged Israeli policies and introduced new demands seeking to achieve full equal, active and effective citizenship, including full representation in existing state institutions and establishing special organizations in domains neglected by the state.

In the last two decades, Arab intellectuals and politicians are reframing their struggle for equality in Israel by emphasizing the obligation of the state to recognize them as an indigenous national minority (Jamal 2005). They are demanding an official recognition as an indigenous people entitled to collective rights that should be translated into self-government. The demand for collective rights does not replace the demand for full citizenship equality, but rather complements it. Collective rights are increasingly viewed as a precondition to guaranteeing individual equality (*ibid*.). The demand is for self-government in several aspects of Arab life, including education, communication, planning, control over resources, social welfare, and development (Haifa Document 2007, Future Vision 2007). Arab citizens increasingly demand affective representation and full

participation in defining the policies and priorities of the state, including determining the future of the land resources owned by the state, which were confiscated from Arabs since 1948 and are devoted since then for exclusive Jewish use only.[2]

One of the manifestations of this oppositional consciousness is the growing number of Arabs disillusioned with Israeli democracy (Jamal 2007b). Although the majority of the Arab population still takes part in the elections to the Knesset and despite the fact that the three major Arab parties advocate participation, we witness a constant change in the position of Arab citizens vis-à-vis elections to the Knesset. Since the late 1980s, there has been a constant drop in the number of people participating in elections (Jamal 2002). The widespread abstention of the Arab population in the 2001 prime ministerial elections, and the drop in the number of Arab voters in the 2003 and 2006 Knesset elections have sharpened the debate between those who still hold some trust in parliamentary politics, and those who call for a boycott on ideological principles. Amendments to the election laws, introduced by the Knesset in May 2002, aiming at putting limits on Arab Knesset members and later on their persecution strengthened the claim that participating in the Israeli elections only legitimates the state and its ideology without accruing benefits to the Arab population (Jamal 2007c). Whereas some Arab parties convince people that participation in the elections and having representatives in the Knesset gives the Arab population a chance to raise its voice in the Jewish public, critics of parliamentary politics call on the population to act outside the parliamentary framework through participation in social movements, the work of NGOs, and international lobbying.

This latter trend has been a central ideological component of the Abna'a al-Balad movement since the 1970s. In the mid-1990s, part of the Islamic movement, led by Sheikh Ra'ed Salah, also adopted this position. Salah called for a boycott of Knesset elections, and for Arabs to operate in separate spaces in which they are not committed to the procedural rules of the parliamentary system set by the Jewish majority (Rubin-Peled 2001). Several Arab academics adopted this idea, viewing an imbalance between the benefit the Arab community secures by being represented in the Knesset, and the price the community pays by legitimating the Zionist character of the political system. They emphasize the fact that political parties are prohibited from running for the Knesset under a platform that rejects the notion of a Jewish state, or advocates for change to that state identity, something that limits the ability of Arab parties to use legitimate democratic means to challenge the hegemony of the Jewish majority over state institutions.

Another manifestation of the oppositional consciousness is the growing number of civil society institutions that act on local, regional and national basis, and present a new model of political activity. The mid-1970s have marked the initial process of establishing NGOs in order to address a pressing collective need. Arab NGOs began advocating community interests and sought to provide services to the Arab community in areas neglected by the state. One of the first NGOs was the 'Committee for the Defense of Arab Lands,' which was established in order to lobby against the Israeli policy of land confiscation. During this period the 'Arab Student Union' was established and as well as the 'Union for Arab High Schools Students.' These NGOs were hyper political and sought to represent the basic rights of the Arab community in Israel. This wave of establishing civil society institutions was promoted by the Communist party and was used by it to promote its own political interest's vis-à-vis the Israeli authorities that viewed the party as illegitimate opposition albeit legal (Bashir 2006).

The number of Arab NGOs began to rise constantly since the early 1980s. Although not all registered NGOs are active, the number of those active reached around 1,517 NGOs. In the 1990s, a new wave of NGOs began to operate, reflecting the oppositional

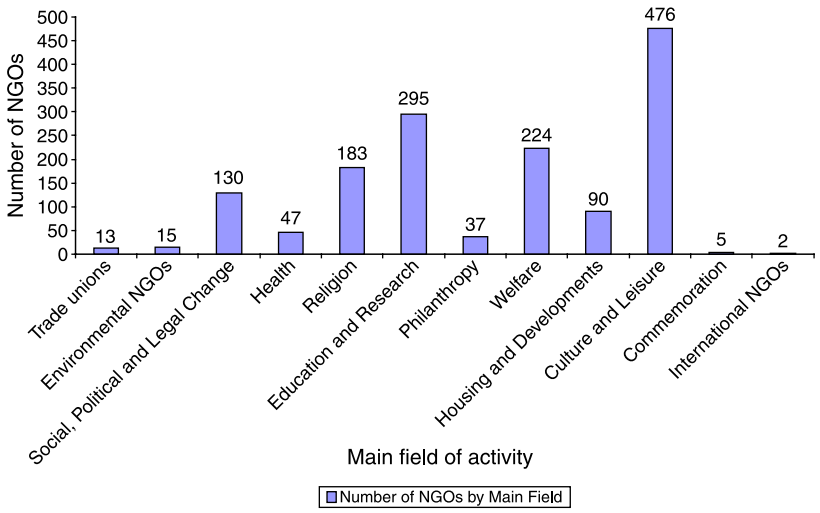

Figure 1. Distribution of NGOs according to main field of activity.

consciousness mentioned earlier. There are 1,385 autonomous service providing and 132 advocacy NGOs in Arab society in Israel.[3] The wide network of Arab NGOs that operate in different fields forms a counter-public where the interests of the Arab community are represented in such areas as land and urban planning, housing, health services, educational infrastructure, legal rights and services, media and communication, and human rights monitoring (see Figure 1).

These NGOs seek to develop and empower Arab society, as well as defend its basic rights vis-à-vis the state. They provide goods and services not adequately or sufficiently offered by the state (Payes 2003). The activities of the Arab NGOs in various fields have challenged state policies and led to important changes in some fields. Adalah's contribution to the Israeli legal discourse and its impact on state policies in several fields have been significant. The lobbying activities conducted by Mosawa have also influenced, at least slightly, the allocation of resources by governmental institutions. Al-Aqsa Society has had a direct impact on the renovation of important religious and historical Arab sights. These examples and many others illustrate the contribution of Arab NGOs to the welfare of the Arab society in Israel. Although one cannot claim that NGOs have led to revolutionary results, nonetheless one has to recognize the impact of Arab NGOs on Israeli public sphere and on the development and empowerment of Arab society. NGOs have certainly assisted in answering some of the needs of the Arab community in a situation where it is discriminated against by state agencies.

Causes behind the gradual expansion of the Arab NGOs sector

When it comes to explaining the extensive rise in the number of Arab NGOs in the last two decades it is necessary to look at immediate and direct causes as well as remote and indirect ones. Furthermore, there are internal as well as external, negative and positive causes that have to be considered. Only the combination of all these factors can provide a satisfactory explanation for the quick and constant rise of the number of NGOs active in Arab society (see Table 1).

Table 1. Internal and external causes behind the expansion of Arab NGO sector in Israel.

Internal	External
Negative factors:	
1. Decline of traditional forms of social solidarity and mutual support	1. Ineffective political Participation in the Knesset
2. The weakness of Arab political parties	2. Lack of sufficient social and economic services provided by the state
3. Inefficiency of social services of the Arab municipalities	3. Segregated Israeli job market and lack of economic opportunities matching capabilities of educated Arabs
Positive factors:	
1. The growing of individual autonomy in Arab society	1. The globalization of the human, minority and indigenous Rights' discourse
2. Growing number of Arab academics and their professional capabilities	2. The rise of social movements and civil society in other countries of the world
3. The rising socio-political consciousness of the Arab population and its insistence on equal citizenship rights	3. The rise of the Israeli NGO sector and its vibrant presence in the public arena
4. The rising social entrepreneurship among young Arab leaders and the success of many Arab NGOs	4. The availability of external financial resources

Internal negative factors

1. Arab social structure in general, and in Israel in particular, has been undergoing a massive change. The familial solidarity that characterized Arab society, which provided one of the most important sources of support for the individual, has been eroding in the last few decades. Although one cannot claim that the Arab family does not exert power in the daily life of the average Arab citizen, nevertheless the extended family can no longer be considered as a coherent sociological entity. The Arab family shrunk to include almost only first blood ties. This major change is neither homogenous nor universal. Nonetheless, it is leading to the rise of alternative social mechanisms to fill the gap of solidarity and support. Local, regional, and national NGOs with clear philanthropic orientation have been playing an important role in providing such a social need. This role has been extended to include NGOs providing alternative educational frameworks, such as the pre-schooling systems established in Arab towns and cities mainly by NGOs affiliated with the Islamic movement and elementary schools, established by regional or national NGOs to set an alternative educational system to the official one provided and strictly controlled by the state.
2. One of the characteristics of Arab politics in Israel is the inability of Arab political parties to influence the decision-making process in Israel (Jamal 2007b). One reason behind this is that Arab parties are a recent phenomenon of only the last two decades. Except for the Communist party, which is a Jewish–Arab party despite the fact that since the mid-1960s it is dominated by Arabs, the first pure Arab party, the Democratic Arab party, was established in Israel in 1988. The United Arab List and the National Democratic assembly entered the Knesset elections only in 1996. This late access to the political arena has resulted in an exclusion from main junctures of power in the Israeli political system to minor influence in the political system. Arab parties have not been able to efficiently represent the basic interests and needs of the Arab society. They are not given a chance to influence basic decision making

processes that have direct implications on the Arab population. This reality has not lead Arab citizens to abandon the Israeli democracy.

Despite the declining number of Arab voters for the Knesset, the majority of eligible Arabs still participate in the elections. Most Arab citizens vote for Arab parties, holding the state rather then the parties responsible for their poor economic and political situation. Notwithstanding this pattern of behavior, many Arab leaders began searching in the last decades for alternative methods and mechanisms to influence the Israeli state and lobby for Arab rights. Whereas a minority of people became apathetic, many of those disappointed from the Knesset began establishing professional NGOs that anchor a subject matter central to the welfare and interest of the Arab society. In many cases, the activists establishing the NGOs or leading them were affiliated with particular political party or political movement, such as the case of the Galilee Society or Al-Aqsa society.

3. Arab municipalities have been always discriminate against in the allocation of governmental resources (Al-Haj and Rosenfeld 1988, Razin 2000, Fares 2002b). To that one should add the inefficiency in running Arab municipalities caused by internal political reasons, mainly familial patronage politics (Jamal 2006b). As a result, Arab municipalities were never in a position to be able to provide efficient social services to their population. This situation has led many young activists to take the lead and initiate local or regional organizations that assist the poor families, especially towards the opening of the school year or before central holidays. These initiatives were developed and even politicized, mainly by the Islamic movement, which viewed philanthropy as an important pillar in the Islamic faith. Therefore, many of the NGOs, providing basic social services, such as funds for education or financial support for poor families are affiliated with the Islamic movement, thereby forming a basic source of its influence and power among the Arab population.

External negative factors

1. As mentioned earlier, Arab parties are excluded from the major junctions of power in the Israeli regime. Arab parties are viewed as illegitimate partners when it comes to forming governmental coalitions in Israel. Even in crisis situations, such as during the Rabin government in the early 1990s that needed the Arab parties to maintain its rule, the Arab parties were not brought into the coalition but were asked to form a minority block in the Knesset that prevented the opposition from having a majority and vote out the government. Since they are in the opposition, Arab parties cannot exert political pressure or lobby efficiently for the basic rights of the Arab society. Therefore, Arab leaders, especially those disappointed in formal politics, have been seeking new avenues of influence. Many of them viewed the NGO sector as a good avenue of influence that does not entail commitment to the rules of the game set by the Knesset. Some of the major advocacy and lobbying NGOs, such as Adalah and Mosawa, provide the parties with important informative and political backing. They empower the parties either by providing them with information or by sharing the responsibility for convincing state agencies to change their policies. These two NGOs advocate the case of the Arab society internationally, thereby broadening the pressure on the state to change its policies towards this population.
2. The Israeli state has never viewed Arab citizens in equal terms, enacting polices that translated its dominant ethnic character into the social reality (Jamal 2007a).

Government policies have not only discriminated against Arab citizens but also excluded them from social and economic benefits provided by the state in major fields such as preschool services, social security, health services, educational youth frameworks, public libraries, and care for the elderly. The lack or deficient provision of such basic services has deepened the need for internal social support. However, the decline of traditional norms and forms of solidarity mentioned earlier made new forms of social support necessary. Exactly in this unintended collusion between state policies and social transformations that philanthropic and welfare NGOs appeared to be necessary and as a result began to form. In the last few years, the municipalities in Israel in general and in Arab society in particular have sought to deliver some of these services, especially in social welfare and sport, but also through independent social actors, such as NGOs. This development is part of a broader process of privatization that meets the neoliberal philosophy dominant in Israel today. This trend has resulted in the rise of many local NGOs.

3. The Israeli job market has been always segregated on national grounds. 'Avoda Ivrit' (Jewish handcraft) has been a basic Zionist value since the initial stages of the movement. The integration of Arabs into the Jewish economy was fraught with social and economic disadvantages in that Arab workers were generally hired for jobs on the bottom of the employment scale (Lewin-Epstein and Semyonov 1993). Arabs, who were mostly farmers during the 1950s and 1960s, lost their land as a result of a systematic process of land confiscation (Kidar and Yiftachel 2006). This policy has led to a proletariatization of Arab society, leading to total dependency of Arab labor n the Jewish economy. The lack of a broad employment infrastructure in Arab towns, and the evident preference of Jewish employers for Jewish workers caused income gaps, inequality and clear differences in standard of living for the two communities. Liberalization of the job market in the 1980s and 1990s further highlighted the structural inferiority of the Arab labor force in Israel. The expansion of labor force opportunities in the scientific, academic, and service sectors and the reduction in the number of people employed in manual work, including the agricultural sector made discrimination against the qualified and professional Arab labor force even more conspicuous. In 1999, 50.5% of the Ashkenazi Jews (descendants of parents from European–American origins), and 23.7% of Mizrahi Jews (descendants of parents from Asian–African origins) were engaged in academic, professional, or administrative professions. On the other hand, only 14.7% of the Arab labor force occupied the same fields that year (Adva Institute 1999). Most Arabs with an academic background are employed in the field of Arab education as teachers and headmasters. In 2002, 65% of the Arab labor force was still engaged as skilled and unskilled workers in the fields of construction, light industry, and services (Fares 2002a). The absence of Arab workers in lucrative fields, such as high-tech, informatics, aviation, and communication, clarifies not only the structural inequality that the Arab labor force is facing, but also explains the need of Arab academics to look for alternative job opportunities. The marginal presence or complete absence of Arab professional workers in most governmental offices and state companies, such as the electric company, Mekorot (administrator of the water economy in Israel), BezEquation (the 'national' telephone company), Solel Bone (a construction corporation), Amidar (a public housing company), etc., lead to major frustration among the Arab educated elite. Of the 59,938 workers in the state's services in January 2000, only 2,835 (5%) are Arabs, most of whom worked in either the Ministry of Health or the Ministry of Education (Sikkuy 2000).

This reality has led some of the Arabs to look for independent jobs, such as in commerce, or in the professional market. Many Arab families, able to finance their children's study, encouraged them to study medicine, law, or civil engineering. These professions were conceived to be prestigious and independent, with a high income. In a later stage, those who graduated from college and did not seek to be independent professional and were politically conscious saw the NGO sector as a good avenue to combine at least three elements: descent job, professional autonomy, and a sense of contribution to the welfare of Arab society. Therefore, it is important to note in this context that some of the Arab educated elite joined the NGO sector voluntarily and not because of the lack of job opportunities in the Israeli economy. These view the NGO sector as an avenue for protest and contention and thereby challenge the state and its policies.

Internal positive factors

1. As mentioned earlier, Arab society has been undergoing major structural changes. The extended family structure has been declining and instead there has been constant rise in the centrality of the small family cell. Although this process is not homogenous, it is recognized in all parts and segments of Arab society. An important splinter of this process is individualization. This last process is intensified with the influence of the democratic system in Israel on Arab society. These factors have broadened the autonomy of the Arab individual, mainly men but recently in large cities also women. This individual autonomy has enabled Arab individuals to seek futures beyond their tradition, norms, or scope of the family. Among the avenues of individual mobility is the NGO sector, which is usually based on voluntary and individual decisions. The NGO sector is a realm that is beyond the family but does not fall within the confines of the state, thereby enabling a major space for personal freedom and autonomy (Hegel 1952, Keane 1998, Rosenblum and Post 2002).
2. This process has been aided by a constant rise in the number of Arab academics and other Arab educated elite in Israel. Despite the fact that the number of Arab academics is still low compared to the Israeli–Jewish society, nevertheless the rising number of academics has acted as a social agent with initiative providing answers to pressing needs and fighting harmful policies. The available data on Arab students and academics show a clear growth in their numbers (Al-Haj 2003). In 1956/7 there were 46 Arab students, which amounted to 0.6% of all students in the Israeli universities that year. In the school year 1979/80 the number went up to 1.634 (3%). In 1998/9 the number of Arab students went up to 7.903, which is 7.1% of all students in Israel. These changes show that there is clear expansion in the number of Arab citizens that attend higher education to get a profession or improve her/his chances in the job market. The percentage of Arabs students that finished their BA studies went up in a decade (1988–1998) from 6.7% to 8.7%. The rise in the number of Arab academics and cultural elites has influenced the political awareness of the whole Arab population which was made better aware of its rights.

   This new educated elite has acquired very important social and cultural capital that made it aware of its own disadvantages relative to Jewish–Israeli counterparts or compared with Arab educated elites in the Arab world, where avenues of mobility and promotion are much higher. While seeking avenues of influence, this elite has to face the limits set on its integration in the economic and political fields. The NGO sector became a default solution for some and a free choice for others.

Regardless of the reason, given the structural opportunities available for the average Arab academics and the fact that their national commitment cannot be translated into state patriotism, they sought the civic avenue, namely the NGO sector, in which they can combine personal career with a national commitment towards the Arab minority.

3. The success of some of the NGOs reflected a broader social process, among which is the rise of a strata of Arab social entrepreneurs that set new models of political and social thinking and behavior. These social entrepreneurs did not operate in the business world, but nevertheless adopted much of the patterns of thinking and behavior dominant there. They had to be fully aware of the Israeli political scene, of the opportunities within the international NGO sector and have the capabilities to compete over scarce resources provided by the foreign funders. The initial success of these entrepreneurs and their ability to lead their NGOs into social and political prominence led many other Arab activists to follow the lead. The successful NGOs and their leaders became a model to imitate in the local, regional, and national level. Many new NGOs were either established by people who were previously employed in the field and decided to go independent or by a particular NGO that sought to expand on one aspect of its activities or encourage the rise of a new avenue of civic activity. In many cases, the entrepreneurs establishing a new NGO were aware of what needs to be done in order to promote and succeed in their project.

External positive factors

1. An important factor that influenced the rise of Arab NGO sector was the rise of similar sectors in other parts of the world. The success of the pressure exerted by civil organizations on the authoritarian regimes of eastern Europe during the 1970s–1980s influenced many political and civil activists, as well as scholars, to believe that civil society contributes to empowerment (Touraine 1983, Diamond 1994, Feldman 1997). Civil society was conceived to be not only necessary but also sufficient for democratization. This belief led to the rise of NGOs in many countries all over the world. Among the central groups that viewed NGOs as a good avenue to promote their interests were indigenous and national minorities, which began establishing NGOs to protect their rights. NGOs were viewed also as agents of empowerment and development and therefore were established by many deprived groups. This belief in NGOs' power to lead to political democratization, empowerment, and development influenced Arab leaders in Israel. The rise of NGO's in the occupied Palestinian territories intensified the process. Political or social activists that did not want to join the parties or state agencies began establishing their own NGOs.
2. The international trend was strongly felt within the Jewish sector in Israel. Hundreds if not thousands of NGOs were established in Israel since the enacting of the NGOs law in 1980. Israeli NGOs were established mainly by Jewish activists and were engaged with matters concerning the Jewish population in Israel. Therefore, they were conceived to be national (Ben-Eliezer 2001, Yishai 1997). Although there were attempts to integrate Arabs in some Israeli NGOs and there were many Jewish–Arab NGOs established to promote the relationship between the two communities or provide services needed in both communities, Arab social

entrepreneurs were not ready to be on the margins of Israeli civil society the way they are on the margins of the Israeli polity and economy. Arab social entrepreneurs therefore took the Israeli Jewish NGO sector as a model that could be imitated based on the same legal regulations.

3. The final but crucial factor influencing the quick rise in the number of Arab NGOs in Israel is the availability of foreign financial funding. It is hard to evaluate the amount of money pumped into the Arab civil sector in Israel. Nevertheless, one can speak of several millions of dollars that are distributed to tens of NGOs. The first main source is Western countries mainly European, American, and Canadian. The second source is Arab countries. Most of the money received from Western sources goes to secular NGOs, whereas most of the money received from Arab states goes to religious NGOs belonging to the Islamic movement. Only a small number of Arab NGOs received money from the state. This heavy dependency of Arab NGOs on foreign donors raises the fears expressed in the literature that ideas are driven by priorities of donors (Hulme and Edwards 1997). The suspicious reaction of American donors to the publication of the Future Vision Documents, mentioned earlier, is a good example to illustrate the inherent relationship between donors' agenda and policies adopted by NGOs (Merinda 2007).

Impact and implications of the growth in Arab NGO sector in Israel

As indicated earlier, the literature on the role and impact of civil society institutions is neither united nor monolithic. Nevertheless, there are several themes that are common to most examinations of NGOs and civil society. These themes sum up the disputes between NGOs' scholars and will form the frame within which the impact of Arab civil society institutions will be addressed, namely democratization, empowermen, and development. Such a task is not easy to be summed up briefly. This section will present general ideas supported by selective examples. It is not an overstatement to claim that each of the following cases could become a focus for future independent research projects.

NGOs and democratization

A basic assumption of the liberal literature, especially the Tocqvellian tradition, is that NGOs bolster civil society by virtue of their participatory and democratic approach. A strong and plural civil society is necessary to guard against excesses of state power. NGOs are viewed as central to the mobilization of pressure for political change. Civil society is considered to be important for checking abuses of state power and for preventing authoritarian forces from taking over a political system. It is also important for encouraging wide citizenship participation and public scrutiny of the state. NGOs strengthen the institutional arena, giving more opportunity to different social groups to have a voice and to form a watchdog vis-à-vis the state. Furthermore, NGOs can lead to an associational revolution in which one or more NGOs deal with topics of public concern. The process of NGOs networking is very helpful in pluralizing civil society, expanding the number of voices addressing government and establishing a buffer zone between the state and the citizens. Such a zone is important for the autonomy of the individual and her pursuit of the 'good life.'

There are about 1,517 acting Arab NGOs out of almost 33,000 NGOs in Israel in general. One should note that Arab NGOs amount to almost 5% of all NGOs in Israel. This is relatively a small number that does not represent the percentage of the Arab population

in Israeli society (18%). Nevertheless, the 1,517 existing NGOs mirror a trend that has been taking place mainly in the last two decades.

NGOs are being established in order to address needs and interests of groups of citizens, thereby increasing the number of voices exerting pressure on the government to meet certain needs. The rising number of Arab NGOs since the early 1990s has marked the intensive pluralization of Arab society. The variety of NGOs in terms of mandate, mission, and strategic goals is very high. There are numerous NGOs in the field of development, empowerment, advocacy, and lobbying. There is also a great number of NGOs in the social welfare, educational, legal, housing, public health, and religious fields. The multiplicity of NGOs in terms of ideological and political orientation is also very high. The high number of NGOs certainly reflects plurality and diversity, thereby contributing to the internal democratization of Arab society. The diverse number of Arab NGOs contributes to tolerance and to internal dialogue between the different organizations and social groups they represent. Despite their differences, Arab NGOs, managed to introduce new social, political, and cultural patterns of behavior which were not carried out by political parties. The number of conferences organized by NGOs and in which activists and the public participate is in far higher proportion then before they were founded. Arab NGOs have opened new spheres of deliberation for the Arab public. These new spaces enable various segments of the Arab public to participate in discussing matters of public interest, be they vis-à-vis the state or internal to Arab society.

Furthermore, the variety of Arab NGOs mirrors the rising attempts to scrutinize state policies and challenge official decisions that harm the Arab population, while replacing state agencies in providing support for the average Arab citizen. The NGO sector is leading to a fundamental associational change that increases the number of voices raised against governmental neglect, forming a buffer zone between the state and Arab citizens. Arab NGOs assist Arab citizens to be aware of misuses of power by the state and provide strategies of resistance.

To illustrate this point suffice it to highlight Adalah's recent success to convince the Supreme Court, leading to a landmark ruling on 27 February 2006 in which the seven-Justice panel unanimously ruled to cancel a governmental decision establishing 'National Priority Areas,'[4] finding that it discriminates against Arab citizens of Israel on the basis of race and national origin. The Court declared that the division of the country into 'National Priority Areas' (NPAs) in the field of education should be cancelled since the policy lacks clear and consistent criteria in the awarding of very lucrative benefits and discriminated against Arab citizens of Israel (Decision No. 2288).[5] The Supreme Court gave the Education Ministry a year to change its policy and marked it as unconstitutional, something that could lead to major changes in other fields. The success of Adalah to discredit governmental policy that has been applied in various fields is a clear example of the role and impact that Arab NGOs could have on the democratization of the state.

However, as mentioned in the theoretical introduction, one has to be cautious when it comes to the inherent relationship assumed between civil society institutions and democratization. One has to address the question of why the advocacy and lobbying of NGOs do not always succeed. To clarify this issue and answer the question I relate to five different interrelated topics.

When it comes to creating political change leading to democratization, state intentions are very important to evaluate the contribution of NGOs in the context of democratization. The Israeli state, which is an ethnically nationalizing state (Brubaker 2004), sought ways to dismantle NGOs demands for more equal allocation policies and bypass requests for integrating more Arabs in decision making positions. The government policies towards Arab

NGOs are best mirrored in the policies adopted to overcome court rulings and bypass its verdicts when these verdicts promote equal rights for Arab citizens, such as in what has become to be known as the Ka'adan case.[6] Furthermore, although Arab NGOs can always address the Supreme Court, the intentions of other state agencies are very important when examining the influence that the NGO sector could have on democratization. The example of the Bill of the 'National Jewish Fund Land,' mentioned earlier, demonstrates the state's legislative branch attempts to bypass court rulings. The same could be said about the attempts made to block activities made by the Committee of Internally Displaced Palestinians in Israel, seeking to promote the rights of the internally displaced. Another example of state efforts to block activities of Arab NGOs is manifested in declaring religious and traditional sights, such as mosques and cemeteries, as closed military zones, aiming to prevent efforts made by Al-Aqsa society to renovate them.[7]

Another important issue to address when examining the impact of Arab NGOs on democratization is the influence that the donors have on NGOs policies. Although Arab NGOs in Israel were not set as a result of an external scheme and are grassroots organizations stemming from genuine needs, this does not mean that they cannot fall into the 'trap' of survival, developing 'upward' rather than 'downward' accountability. The fact that the major financial support of Arab NGOs, with the exception of the Islamic NGOs, comes from Western countries one has to consider the relationship between the agenda of these sources and governmental policies. The support given to Arab NGOs could free the Israeli government from its responsibility towards Arab society without having to pay the price of loosing its tolerant and democratic appeal.

In their classical book, *The Civic Culture*, Almond and Verba claimed that 'Pluralism, even if not explicitly political pluralism, may indeed be one of the most important foundations of political democracy' (Almond and Verba 1989, p. 265). Notwithstanding this position, however, the pluralization of society and the rise of diversity could reflect fragmentation and become a ground for destructive competition, especially when the state views internal divisions as a major tool of domination. As could be seen in the case of Arab NGOs, there is a clear split between the secular and the Islamic NGOs. Each of these sectors operates separately. On the other hand, a brief look at the relationship between the NGOs within each sector shows there is much evidence that many NGOs boycott each other or fiercely compete with each other on personal grounds or based on their party affiliation. Many of the prominent Arab NGOs are affiliated with political parties and this pattern of relationship leads to much tension between them, thereby harming their ability to mobilize commonly to achieve the rights of their constituency. This internal competition between Arab NGOs has a vital constructive dimension, but it has also negative implications. Much energies and resources are invested in waging internal competitions rather than in developing plural civic culture.

The personalization of NGOs should be viewed as another important phenomenon harming the democratization role of NGOs. As Hadenius and Uggla have claimed, the 'traditional norms, rituals and patterns of authority are part of the reason why a strong and viable civil society is absent in many Third World countries' (1996, p. 1625). Although one should not expect that social norms and deeply rooted socio-cultural values and behaviors have to be totally transformed in order for civil society to develop, some democratic attributes and communicative norms have to develop in order that civil society promotes tolerance, willingness to compromise and respect for opposing viewpoints (Diamond 1994, p. 8).

When examining Arab NGO sector in Israel one notices that some traditional norms and patterns of authority still dominate many of the NGOs such as its, personalization.

The personalization of institutions and leadership roles is by no means unique to Arab society. It has been a familiar feature of the political landscape throughout history, and continues to exist in varying degrees in many parts of the world, including Israel. Overall, however, its significance as a shaper of politics, especially public institutions, began to decline with modernity and the spread of democratic forms of government and the influence of modern media (Deutsch 1966, Mutz 1998). Despite the fact that such a process has partially taken place in Arab society, the identification of public institutions, such as parties and NGOs with particular leaders is still common. Personal patterns of leadership in NGOs is very common, where leaders control the decision making process and enforces his/her will on the rest of the staff. This pattern of behavior turns many of the NGOs internally undemocratic, characterized by authoritarian or charismatic personalized leadership limiting the contribution of their NGO to the flourishing of civic culture.

The Patriarchal social structure is another important factor that has to be considered when examining the role of NGOs in democratizing society (Kandiyoti 1991). This factor is especially important when it comes to impact of feminist NGOs on women rights in society. Although there are a number of feminist Arab NGOs seeking to promote women's rights and change traditional social patterns of behavior, the impact of these NGOs on Arab society is marginal. Some women NGOs are traditional, operating according to Islamic law. Others, which are secular, do not dare engage in direct conflict with dominant social and cultural norms. Furthermore, there is much social resistance to efforts made by women NGOs, especially when it comes to women taking central social roles or women having autonomy over their bodies. The waves of Islamization characterizing Arab society in the last two decades render feminist efforts to liberalize society rather very limited to symbolic fields only (Shalhoub-Kevorkian 2007).

NGOs and empowerment

Empowerment is viewed as one of the most basic contributions of NGOs. When looking at the literature on NGOs one finds that it is usually assumed that NGOs lead a process of enhancing the capacity of individuals or groups to make choices and to transform those choices into desired actions and outcomes. Central to this process are actions which both build individual and collective rights, and improve the efficiency and fairness of the organizational and institutional context which govern the use of these assets (Mercer 2002, Alsop *et al.* 2007). NGOs are expected to provide their stake holders with information necessary to socially and geographically widen their possibilities of political participation; to provide information that is lacking in order to uncover discriminatory governmental policies; to deepen the personal and organizational capacity of citizens' engagement in the public sphere; to enhance the representation of interests of the marginalized groups within the wider public arena; to campaign in behalf of marginalized groups, especially in the case of minorities, and seek to influence public policy towards them; and to challenge state power by developing alternative sets of perspectives and policies and by monitoring its activities. These roles of NGOs strengthen civil society by increasing the number of intermediary organizations between citizens and state (Fisher 1998).

When examining Arab NGOs in Israel one finds that most of the expected tasks described in the literature are aspired for. Some of the Arab NGOs enhance the capacity of individuals and groups within Arab society to make better choices by providing them with the necessary information. Many NGOs have developed special capacities to research the field in which they are active. For instance, *Women against violence*, a feminist NGO that provides shelter for battered women has conducted a large research on the attitudes of Arab

society on women status and roles (Ghanem 2005). I'lam has conducted its own research on media consumption culture in Arab society (Jamal 2006a). Mada has investigated Arab attitudes on various political and social topics (Mada Al-Carmel 2004, Rouhana 2007). The Galilee Society ran its own social index poll. Mosawa has published extensively on budgetary issues and explicated the areas and methods where Arabs are discriminated against (Fares 2004).

These NGOs and others have published their own newsletters, brochures, booklets, and other publications. The information provided by Arab NGOs has been very important and necessary for Arab as well as other political parties to exert pressure on the political system to change public policy in certain central fields. One of the best examples is Mossawa's follow up on the governmental budget and its implications on the Arab society. Another example is the information provided by the Alternative Planning Center on housing and planning policies of the state, and their implications on the Arab population. A good example in this regard is the publishing of the plan to expand residential areas in upper Nazareth in order to block the development of the Arab village Ein-Mahel (*Kul al-Arab* 2007).

An important example of the empowering role played by Arab NGOs is the extensive educational program developed by the Arab Association for Human Rights (HRA) in Arab schools. HRA runs an educational program in Arab elementary and high schools, in which pupils are exposed to human rights discourse and are made aware of their basic rights as humans and as citizens. The aim of the program is to empower pupils and make them aware of the gaps between their tangible reality, and their fundamental human and civil rights. Such a mission reflects the community anchoring and outreach of the HRA, empowering a greater segments of Arab society by teaching them, not only what their rights are, but also how to achieve them. The HRA educates for human values, such as liberty, equality, and individual autonomy. Such a task does not only help pupils be aware of their rights vis-à-vis the state, but also to be aware of the repressive norms and values within the traditional Arab society.

Another educational program developed by the Islamic organization Iqra'a, developed special centers to assist school pupils before exams, offering special courses that prepare high school students for university studies and operates on university campuses to assist students in their studies. Such activities come to empower Arab youth and certainly contribute to what Rabinowitz has described as special model of civil society developed by the Islamic movement (Rabinowitz 2001).

Notwithstanding these constructive activities the internal fragmentation and competition between Arab NGOs weaken its empowering mission. A brief look at the Arab NGO scene in Israel shows the fierce competition over financial resources on the one hand and over public appeal on the other. In many cases one finds that the competition between NGOs on financial resources aligns with party affiliation or ideological grounds. The NGOs affiliated with the Islamic movement and the secular NGOs hardly cooperate (*ibid.*). The differences between them and secular NGOs are usually limited either to ideological or personal reasons. However, since Islamic NGOs' empowerment and development activities are utilized to nurture the movement's political power and since the Islamic movement, both wings, is not concerned with the state taking its role in certain fields, such as education, this leads to major gaps between the different camps of the Arab NGO sector.

The competition between secular NGOs, however, over financial support is much stronger, since all of them are supported by the same European or North American foundations. This tension has led according to some activists to 'industrial espionage,' where certain NGOs either helped in drying other NGOs from financial resources

by leaking misinformation about them or by 'stealing' ideas and programs and presenting them to donors as originally theirs.

Another example of the fragmentation within the Arab NGO sector is on spatial and geographical background. Arab society is located in three almost completely separate areas, namely the Galilee, the Triangle area and the Negev. The NGO sector is most developed in the Galilee, especially in the three big Arab or mixed cities – Haifa, Nazareth, and Shafa'amer. There are serious gaps in number, size, and scope of activity of NGOs between the three areas. Almost all the Arab NGOs operating on the national level are located in the Galilee. The exceptions are the NGOs affiliated with the Islamic movement that is centered in Um Al-Fahem, one of the largest Arab cities in the northern part of the Triangle area. This gap between the number, size, and scope of NGOs leads to some tension and competition between the regions and lead to the pluralization of particular places at the neglect of others. The gaps between Galilee and Negev are huge. In fact, most national NGOs that established an office or extended their activities to the Negev area had to close their office or stop their engagement there. An exception is the office and activity of Adalah, which came under regional attack. The Regional Council of the Unrecognized Villages (RCUV) in the Negev has several times accused the NGOs coming from the north of ignoring the authentic needs of the local Bedouin population and operating in forms that promote their interests rather then the interests of the population.[8]

NGOs and development

It is hard to address all themes related to development. Therefore, this part will be limited to two themes only: namely wage gap and poverty and pre-school education. Both issues demonstrate that Arab society shares many characteristics with societies in the developing world. These characteristics make the contribution of NGO to development central.

Arab society in general is located on the lower economic scale in Israel. According to the National Insurance Institute, comparisons between the average wage data from Arab and Jewish settlements indicate that the average Arab income is 60% that of the average Jewish income (Bendleck 2002). Recent information about the equality index released by the Adva Center in December 2006, notes the average income of an Arab employee is 72% that of the average urban employee income in Israel (Swirski and Konor-Attias 2006). It is important to note that the same study puts the average income of a Jewish employee of oriental origin at 100%, while the average income of a Jewish employee of Ashkenazi origin is 139%.

The number of Arab citizens living under the poverty line is far beyond their proportion in society. The number of Palestinian Arab families living in poverty has increased from 47.6% of all Palestinian Arab families (112,300 families) in 2002 to 48.4% of all Palestinian Arab families (119,700 families) in 2003. The overall percentages of poor families in Israel, however, was 18.1% in 2002 and 19.3% in 2003. The percentage of poor Jewish families in 2002 was 13.9%, compared to 14.9% in 2003. This data reflect the big gap between Jewish and Arab families (Fares 2004).

Development activities provided by NGOs are expected to have made an important contribution to the welfare of society. Looking at the Arab NGO scene one notices various types of activities that lend support to different segments of Arab society. Many of the welfare and development activities are conducted by religious NGOs. These NGOs have adopted a special model of operation that meets the needs of Arab society (Rabinowitz 2001). Religious NGOs provide poor families with basic groceries every holiday. They

collect their own resources from society and sometimes abroad in order to provide poor families with the support they need (see later).

Furthermore, religious NGOs have provided Arab families with pre-school education in many towns and cities, a basic service that is not universally provided by the state (Filk and Ram 2004). For example, I'qra'a, an NGO that specializes in providing support to high school pupils and in preparing them for university studies, has alone established kindergartens in more than 30 Arab towns and cities.[9] This NGO has 21 centers in which after-school activities take place. Such a scope is very impressive when taking into consideration the fact that the financial resources of the NGO are very limited and are usually generated from the Arab public through activities organized by the NGO itself. An important characteristic of Iq'ra'a's activity is that many of them are conducted by volunteers. When compared with secular NGOs, there are no secular NGOs with such a scope of voluntary educational activity. This pattern of conduct mirrors the attempts made by NGOs, especially religious, to find internal solutions to problems that Arab citizens face daily.

An important characteristic of the religious NGOs concerned with development activities, especially in education, is that they know how to prioritize social change. Religious NGOs are deeply involved in establishing a society that is religious and at the same time aware of modern needs. For that purpose, leaders in the movement declare clearly that despite the unfortunate discriminatory policy of the state, they are satisfied to be given a chance to help their own society to develop and promote education according to Islamic tradition.

When it came to educational development, the state has always discriminated against Arab society. The state not only did not assist in establishing independent and alternative schools when Arab parents sought such an option, but also blocked the way for new initiatives, seeking to keep the whole Arab educational system under its direct surveillance. The experiences of Massar in Nazareth and Hiwar in Haifa with the Education Ministry are good examples of the difficulties that NGOs can face, when they challenge the exclusive control of the state over the Arab educational system. The same could be said about the pre-school systems opened by local NGOs in various localities. In most cases, the state was not willing to extend help to these schooling institutions leaving the responsibility to the NGOs to come up with solutions for their own needs.

These initiatives, led by the growing network of NGOs, whether secular or religious, are playing a growing role in social service provision, strengthening civil society, and establishing what Clarke (1998) has called 'virtual parallel state' or what could be called, in the case of the Arab society in Israel, 'default cultural autonomy'. The withdrawal of the state from social services and the unwillingness to assist in providing educational solutions for pre-school children is enabling the Arab NGO sector to establish spheres of education and other social services autonomous from direct state control.

The Israeli state decided to gradually withdraw its social services, leaving thousands of people in need for basic help (Filk and Ram 2004). The decline of the Israeli welfare state demonstrates the importance of an active and broad NGO sector that provides services for those who fall on the margins of the economic cycle. On the other hand, when looking at the Arab NGO sector and its resources, one notices the limitations of the sector. As pointed out by many NGO scholars, it is doubtful that NGOs can offer sustainable substitution for state spending (Edwards 1999), an observation that is applicable to Arab NGOs in particular, despite their good intentions.

Conclusions

The Palestinian–Arab society in Israel has undergone major changes in the last two decades. One of the most dominant changes has to do with the restructuring of Arab politics from one focused solely on formal tools, such as elections, whereby the political party was the main political agent, to adding informal politics, where NGOs became a new and important mobilizer. This change is especially important since the NGO sector provided Arab society with services that the political parties did not manage to extract from the state. When looking at the Israeli public agenda one cannot but notice the dominant role played by NGOs in bringing Arab issues to the fore. The Arab NGO sector has provided services in many fields where the state has failed. It pressured state institutions to change their policies in various fields. Thereby, the Arab NGO sector plays a strong counter-hegemonic role vis-à-vis the state, assisting political parties to improve their role in the political arena. Furthermore, the NGO sector provides a sphere of autonomy from direct state power. Despite the fact that the state is not ready to consider the devolution of its power, other than what exists between the central government and the local authorities, still the Arab NGO sector, whose sources are mostly foreign manages to be relatively and by default autonomous.

Notwithstanding the counter-hegemonic role played by Arab NGOs, one cannot but address the gaps between their impact on democratization versus empowerment and development. As demonstrated above, the Arab NGO sector did not manage to strongly democratize the Israeli state towards Arab society. On the contrary, the more the Arab NGO sector is active the more the state is becoming more ethnically oriented. The Citizenship law and the Jewish National Fund land are two cases that illustrate the willingness of the state to take racial measures in order to avoid providing Palestinian–Arab citizens with equal substantive citizenship rights.

However, the fact that Arab NGOs do not manage to make a serious impact does not mean that they do not make efforts. The weak impact of Arab NGOs on the political character and cultural–ethnic identity of the Israeli state cannot and should not be blamed on the NGOs. The state has been reluctant to respect any efforts made to change its policies towards Arab society. Arab NGOs did not manage to convince or 'force' the Israeli state to change its policies and identity in order to accommodate Arab identity and basic rights as equal Israeli citizens.

When looking at empowerment and development one finds that the situation is better. There is no doubt that Arab NGOs managed, either by their own resources or by extracting resources from the state, to solve many problems in the Arab society. Suffice it to look at what has been done concerning the basic rights of the unrecognized village in order to get a feel of the contribution of Arab NGOs to the welfare of Arab citizens. Although Arab NGOs cannot provide their constituency with all solutions and, despite their internal fragmentation, personalization, lack of institutionalization and the possibility that they play into the hands of neoliberal forces, their contributions to empowerment and development cannot be ignored. By providing the Arab society with tools to face state institutions, Arab NGOs are playing a very important counter-hegemonic role.

Notes

1. An exception in this regard has been Al-Ard (the land) movement, which drew its name based on the principle of 'first occupancy' and challenged the state on collective national terms. On Al-Ard see: Jiryis (1976).
2. See the law proposal to amend the Israeli Land Authority presented by MKs Uri Ariel, Zeev Alkin and Moshe Cahlon to the 17th Knesset on 25 June 2007. The MKs explain that

'the amendment of the law aims to enable the ILA to continue and administer the lands of the Keren Kayemet (Jewish National Fund) that form 13% of the lands of the state, according to the goals the Keren Kayemet set for itself with its establishment in 1901, to settle Jews in the land of Israel.' Such a law came to bypass a decision of the Israeli High Court declaring all discriminations in the allocation of land resources as illegal and ensure that lands of the Keren Kayemet are allocated to Jews only. For the document of the law proposal see: http://www.knesset.gov.il/privatelaw/data/17/2711.rtf

3. By autonomous service providing NGOs I mean those that are not financed fully by the state or any of its agencies, such as the Israeli Association of Community Centers. For details on this type of NGO see: http://www.matnasim.org
4. The Israeli government has always adopted a policy that divided the country into different areas that were given different levels of attention from governmental offices. The areas that received the mark A were given priority over other areas in the allocation of official resources. Areas close to borders, especially in the northern boarder with Lebanon, were given special attention and drew much governmental investments. The priority areas include usually exclusively Jewish residential areas. Arab towns and villages have been systematically excluded from these areas. For more details on this policy see Yiftachel (1998).
5. H.C. 2773/98 and H.C. 11163/03, *The High Follow-up Committee for the Arab Citizens in Israel et al. v. the Prime Minister of Israel*, http://www.adalah.org
6. The Kaadan case has to do with an Arab family that sought to move and live in a Jewish town near its original village. Its request was rejected by the Israeli land Authority. The Israeli High Court changed the decision. On this case see Jabareen (2002).
7. Personal interview with Sheikh Kamel Rayan, a prominent leader of in the Islamic movement, the southern wing and head of Al-Aqsa Society, Tel Aviv, 24 July 2007.
8. Personal interview with Atwa Abu Freih, General Director of the Regional Council of the Unrecognized Villages in the Negev, Beer Al-Sabe'a, 8 June 2007.
9. Interview conducted by my assistant, Umayma Diab, with an activist in I'qra'a NGO in Um Al-Fahem, 13 August 2007.

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