Resurrecting Civil Society?
Voluntary Grassroots Organizations and Citizen Empowerment in Palestine

Working Paper

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Abstract
This paper examines how the NGO-ization of civil society demobilizes and disempowers citizens and explores how social change actors in Palestine are remobilizing and re-empowering citizens through the creation of voluntary grassroots organizations (VGOs). Drawing upon the extant literature, the paper builds a conceptual framework for understanding how NGO-ization of civil society has demobilized and disempowered citizens through three mechanisms: 1) NGO professionalization, 2) fragmentation of issues, organizations, and people, and 3) colonization of social change agendas. It then analyzes how Palestinian VGOs are combatting NGO professionalization, fragmentation of issues, organizations, and people, and the colonization of social change agendas. The paper concludes by offering implications for theory and avenues for future research.

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Introduction

Nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) have for decades been celebrated for their theorized role as the *sine-qua-non* of civil society (Carapico, 2012). Liberal theories of civil society suggest that NGOs are spaces in which citizens build subjectivities and skills as democratic actors, serve as watchdogs over the state, and act collectively for social change (de Tocqueville, 1835; Diamond, 1994; Putnam, 1993, 2000). Guided by these theories, Western donors poured money into the Global South in the hopes that vibrant NGO sectors would empower and mobilize citizens and lead to better economic development outcomes as well as more democratic forms of governance. This was particularly true in the case of Palestine, where since the 1993 signing of the Oslo Accords Western donors have bankrolled a local NGO sector.

Scholars have argued that the influx of Western funds to Palestinian NGOs created a sector of professional, fragmented, and upwardly accountable organizations and sidelined a previously vibrant landscape of self-help groups and social movements (Challand, 2009; Dana, 2015; Hammami, 2000; Hanafi & Tabar, 2003; Jad, 2018; Jamal, 2007). Recently, however, Palestinian social change actors have begun to reject the NGO-ization of civil society and created voluntary grassroots organizations (VGOs) aimed at remobilizing local citizens. This paper draws upon the extant literature on civil society in the Global South to develop a conceptual framework to understand how the proliferation of NGOs leads to civil society professionalization, fragmentation, and colonization and ultimately demobilizes and disempowers citizens. It then explores how newly emergent VGOs are combatting civil society professionalization, fragmentation, and colonization in order to remobilize and re-empower citizens.

The paper proceeds as follows. The first section builds a conceptual framework for understanding how NGO-ization of civil society has demobilized and disempowered citizens through three mechanisms: 1) NGO professionalization, 2) fragmentation of issues, organizations, and people, and 3) colonization of social change agendas. The next section introduces the case of Palestine. This is followed by an explanation of the data and research methods. The following section analyzes how VGOs are combatting NGO professionalization, fragmentation of issues, organizations, and people, and the colonization of social change agendas in order to remobilize and re-empower citizens. The conclusion offers implications for theories of civil society and avenues for future research.

Conceptual Framework

Liberal theories of civil society narrate NGOs as vehicles of citizen mobilization and empowerment. When people join and participate in NGOs, the thinking goes, they express shared interests, debate priorities, develop common goals, and build norms of trust and reciprocity that allow them to act collectively for change (See, for example, Batiwala & Brown, 2006; Bratton, 1994; Carothers & Ottaway, 2000; Dodge & Ospina, n.d.; Fukuyama, 2001; Hadenius & Uggla, 1996). The collective action that results from membership or participation in an NGO can take any number of forms, from the enjoyment of recreational activities to social service provision to contentious acts of protest. No matter what the form, collective action is thought to empower citizens vis-a-vis the state and market and is seen as a hallmark of vibrant democratic societies. Thus by extension, NGOs are conceptualized in liberal theoretical frameworks as undergirding democracy (de Tocqueville, 1835; Diamond, 1994; Putnam, 1993).

Scholars studying the "associational revolution" that took place in the Global South from around the 1980s to present have found that the rise of NGOs has not led to more democracy.

Instead, NGOs have often *demobilized* citizens and *disempowered* them vis-a-vis the state, market, and international community (Atia & Herrold, 2018). The NGOs that proliferated in the Global South since the 1980s rarely resembled the citizen-led, voluntary associations that Alexis de Tocqueville witnessed in 19th-century American and on which liberal theories of NGOs base their core assumptions about NGOs' emancipatory potential. Rather, the vast majority of contemporary NGOs are managerial organizations that constitute a highly structured, regulated, and lucrative industry that is largely out of touch with everyday citizens.

In this section I draw upon extant literature to develop a conceptual framework for understanding how the rise of NGOs in the Global South has led to the demobilization and disempowerment of citizens. I argue that this citizen demobilization and disempowerment has taken place through three primary mechanisms: 1) NGO professionalization, 2) fragmentation of issues, organizations, and people, and 3) colonization of social change agendas.

NGO Professionalization

Most NGOs rely on grants for their financial sustainability, and in order to secure such funding they need managerial capacity. Typically, the biggest grants come from international aid organizations and international private foundations, both of which tend to have complex application and reporting requirements (Alexander, Nank, & Stivers, 2004; Bratton, 1994; Suárez & Gugerty, 2016). Local funders—both government agencies and private grant making institutions—also require grant applicants to fill out a variety of forms in order to win and administer grants. As a result, NGOs build infrastructures to support managerial functions. NGO office spaces are typically well equipped with office furniture and technology and sometimes more closely resemble corporate offices than spaces of voluntary activity (Chahim & Prakash, 2014; Hammami, 2000; Hanafi & Tabar, 2003).

In addition to physical infrastructure, staff members fluent in the donor's language and proficient in filling out application forms and project evaluations are necessary. Grant applications regularly ask organizations to draft "business plans" that lay out an organization's strategic vision and describe the specific projects that will be undertaken to advance that vision. Budgets, logic models, explanations of staff members' talents, and other data are required to make the case for funding. At the end of a grant period, organizations must report back to the funder on the activities conducted, the outputs created, and the broader impact made. All of this grant administration requires a set of professional, managerial skills among organization staff members (Bano, 2008; Bornstein, 2003; Elbers & Arts, 2011; Henderson, 2003).

Fragmentation of Issues, Organizations, and People

NGO work tends to be highly fragmentary. Fragmentation is manifested at three main levels—social issues, organizations, and social change actors.[1] NGO work typically fragments social issues into small pieces. Rather than mobilizing large numbers of people around a common societal vision, organizations focus on narrow components of larger social problems (Eikenberry & Kluver, 2004; Ferguson, 1994; Hammami, 2000). For example, an NGO concerned about health care in society might target women's reproductive rights. An organization dedicated to improving a society's education levels may target literacy among primary school aged children. An NGO that wanted to improve employment opportunities might promote social enterprise for recent male graduates of universities. Human rights NGOs might focus alternatively on legal aid or transitional justice or women's rights. These narrow focus areas of NGOs often wind up splintering larger social problems into small, seemingly

[1] For a lengthier analysis of the fragmentation caused by NGO-ization, see Zencirci, G. and C. Herrold. (In progress). "Project-Think and the Fragmentation of Civil Society in the Middle East."

manageable parts. But in doing so, they detract attention and energy away from the larger problems.

Although partnerships and collaborations among NGOs are touted as best practices that reduce duplication and enhance sectoral strength, in reality NGOs are often highly competitive institutions (Herrold & Atia, 2016). As they struggle to earn legitimacy among donors and beneficiaries, NGOs compete with each other to be perceived as the best provider of a particular service. Collaborations, when they do happen, are often propelled by a funder and fizzle after the grant period ends. More natural collaborations are not unheard of, of course. In the wake of the 2011 uprisings in Egypt, for example, human rights NGOs worked together to promote democratic change and to advocate for a new NGO law. But such collaborations too often occur in times of major crisis or opportunity rather than more organically and regularly across time.

Finally, NGOs fragment people. In much of the Global South, NGOs provide some of the highest salaries in society. As they hire staff members skilled in development jargon (and often the English language) and pay them lucrative salaries, NGOs create a strata of elite employees who become relatively out of touch with the organization's beneficiaries. And within NGO sectors themselves, staff members jostle to hold the highest positions at the most prestigious NGOs (Bayalieva-Jailobaeva, 2014; Hammami, 2000; Henderson, 2003; Holmén & Jirström, 2009; Kuzmanovic, 2010).

Colonization of Social Change Agendas

In order to win grants, NGOs must propose, conduct, and evaluate projects that fit within the agendas and priorities of donor agencies (Kuzmanovic, 2010; Sundstrom, 2006; Thayer, 2017). Every step of project administration requires accountability to the donor. Applications must prove that the NGO has the knowledge, infrastructure, and skills to carry out the types of

activities that the donor prioritizes. The must then report back to the donor on its progress and conclude the grant period with a thorough report of how the organization achieved the goals that were agreed upon by the donor and NGO. As they become adept at anticipating and proposing the types of projects that donors prefer to fund, NGOs gradually shift the sector's focus toward the politics and priorities of donor institutions and away from local needs.

It is important to note that not all NGOs succumb to donor pressure. AbouAssi (AbouAssi, 2013) points out that rather than blindly adopting donors' agendas, some NGOs reject or quietly negotiate funding and even others voice their perspectives to the donor. But with the largest donor agencies firm in their priorities, NGOs that adopt a strategy that falls short of exiting the relationship with the donor tend to extend the reach of donors' priorities into society and thus serve as partners in the colonization of social change agendas.

Citizen Demobilization and Disempowerment

Through processes of professionalization, fragmentation, and colonization, NGOs demobilize and disempower citizens (Atia & Herrold, 2018). NGO professionalization draws energy away from citizen activism and toward the administrative bureaucracies of operating formal organizations. As NGO staff earn increasingly high salaries, their incentives become income- and career-focused rather than change-oriented. The fragmentation of civil society breaks down overarching social issues into narrow components and in the process narrows constituencies. As NGOs compete against each other for funding and prestige and employees compete for higher-paying jobs, civil society is further divided and disempowered from mobilizing as a coherent whole. The colonization of social change agendas further demobilizes and disempowers citizens by wresting control of social change agendas away from citizens and into the purview of elite NGOs and their institutional donors.

NGO-ization of Civil Society in Palestine

Research on the Palestinian context has confirmed that the deleterious effects of NGO-ization are present throughout the Occupied Territories (Bhungalia, 2015; Jad, 2018; Marei, Atia, Bhungalia, & Dewachi, 2018; Murad, 2011; Nakhleh, 2012; Tartir, 2018; Wildeman & Tartir, 2014). The influx of foreign aid since the signing of the Oslo Accords in 1993 created a large sector (estimates suggest that there are approximately 3,000 NGOs in Palestine) of professional organizations that sidelined a vibrant culture of self-help and mobilization within civil society (Challand, 2009; Hammami, 2000; Hanafi & Tabar, 2003; Tartir, 2017). Collective efforts to combat the Israeli occupation were increasingly channeled into disparate NGOs, and the technocratic programs and projects that NGOs undertook failed to tackle the root causes of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict (Springer, 2015; Taghdisi-Rad, 2010; Tartir, 2017).

A number of scholars have argued that foreign governments have deployed aid to Palestinian NGOs as a form of governance operating alongside and in concert with the Israeli occupation (Atia & Herrold, 2018; Bhungalia, 2015; Marei et al., 2018). By implementing a regime of discipline control from abroad via local NGOs, foreign governments have influenced economic development and political reform in ways that advance Western agendas, debilitate local social networks, substitute neoliberal economic development for the realization of rights, and suppress a culture of national liberation (Challand, 2009; Murad, 2011, 2014; Nakhleh, 2012).

Data and Methods

The empirical evidence that undergirds my argument is drawn from ethnographic fieldwork conducted in Palestine for three summers: 2016, 2018, and 2019. During each of these months, I was based in Ramallah for three months and traveled throughout the West Bank to

participate in organizations' activities, interview organizations' leaders and members, observe organizations' meetings, workshops, and conferences, and talk informally with countless individuals who engage with civil society in Palestine. I conducted 55 semi-structured interviews that generally lasted between one and two hours. By observing and participating in groups' activities, I witnessed the manifestations of NGO-ization on civil society as well as how social change actors worked to revive a culture of citizen mobilization within the Palestinian context (Schatz, 2013). Examples of activities in which I participated in include an art walk, community farming days, village site visits with a popular committee, arts and culture events, hiking and running excursions, and political tours. In addition, I reviewed organizations web sites, social media sites, and other documentation that organizations produced.

Because of the politically sensitive nature of activism in Palestine, I guaranteed anonymity to all of my interlocutors, promising not to reveal their or their organizations' names. The types of organizations included in this research included international NGOs, formal Palestinian NGOs, informal Palestinian grassroots groups, international donor agencies, and Palestinian donor agencies. I also spoke with individual activists and scholars familiar with Palestinian civil society.

Organizations were selected for inclusion in this study through a process of snowball sampling, since no registry of voluntary grassroots organizations exists (Bleich & Pekkanen, 2013). I am currently building a database of VGO that will include their goals, activities, geographic scope, membership bases, etc., that will be housed at Birzeit University and will serve as a local resource for social change actors. That database will remain under construction as I continue fieldwork through 2020 and 2021.

Interview transcripts and field notes were coded and analyzed thematically using an inductive approach (Guest, MacQueen, & Namey, 2012) in order to develop a thick description of how participants understand the civic sphere in Palestine and their role within it, and how these meanings are conditioned by political, economic, and social factors (Geertz, 1973).

Voluntary Grassroots Groups and the Remobilization and Re-empowerment of Palestinian Civil Society

In this section, I deploy the conceptual framework developed earlier in the paper to analyze how Palestinian social change actors are re-mobilizing and re-empowering citizens through the creation of voluntary grassroots organizations.

Combatting NGO Professionalization

Leaders of VGOs rejected the professional, lucrative nature of Palestine's NGO sector and stressed their voluntary, informal nature. Most rejected the idea of registering as a formal organization, despite the fact that without such registration they could not fundraise from major institutional donors. One group founder, who spent the early part of his career in the formal NGO sector, voiced the adamant refusal to register that many group leaders expressed. "Originally I was intimidated and got into the system," this group founder explained. "Now I am outside of it. [The group] has no registration. I had a 'meeting' with the security officials. I was asked about licenses. We don't need a license because we are an initiative, not an organization. The moment the initiative becomes close to registration is the moment I will kill it" (author interview, June 12, 2018). While some VGO leaders chose not to register despite the fact that it meant they could not fundraise, others believed that a rejection of registration and a rejection of fundraising went hand in hand. "Some organizations believe that they can be more sustainable as a registered organization. [We] refuse to register or formally organize. We do not want to be part of the

system, which means accepting rules and laws that make our work difficult. We see ourselves as grassroots. And we don't need a license because we don't fundraise. We refuse donations from international organizations and from Palestinian organizations. We want to be totally free" (author interview, July 8, 2018).

The rejection of registration was not universal among VGOs. Recognizing the challenges of sustaining themselves as informal organizations, some group leaders contemplated the idea of formally registering. But they were ambivalent. As one VGO leader explained, "We are considering registering. We think it could be safer to have a real organization, it might help us to sustain ourselves. But we would not allow registration to change our culture and we wouldn't even have to tell people that we are registered. It would just be to safeguard our existence" (author interview, July 2, 2019).

While some VGOs paid a single or a few staff members, most relied exclusively on volunteers as leaders and members. Groups' decisions to be voluntary were based both on a rejection of foreign aid and on a commitment to restoring a culture of voluntarism throughout Palestinian society. The leader of one group who rejected funding explained, "We need to work without funds so that we are not under pressure to do what we don't want to do. We are free to do what we want. There are many organizations like us, doing things just because they want to. From 2011 to today we have no funding. We use volunteers, people who want to help" (author interview, June 5, 2018).

Some groups maintained a physical meeting space (never referred to as an "office"), but it was inevitably small and barebones. Other groups existed without a physical space, organizing themselves through social networking and relying on a variety of donated spaces when they met physically. "We are trying to work in the public space," explained one group member. "Before,

we had a room in the center of Ramallah that was owned by the university but we could use it. But the Palestinian Authority didn't approve because we were talking about politics in meetings. So, we lost the space. We realized - do we need on place? Is having one place making us closed? We are not exposed to the public when we are in one space. Plus, there is always the risk of losing the space. We should be in different spaces in order to expand the group. It's not easy of course, we must beg people for space to meet" (author interview, July 11, 2018).

Finally, VGOs thought creatively about how to measure progress toward their goals. They believed that the quantitative measures typically employed to evaluate the outputs of projects were not meaningful indicators of social impact. Instead of using numerical metrics, many activists told stories to convey the significance of their work. By sharing these stories through social media, activists believed that they accomplished a number of objectives including being transparent about their work, assessing progress in ways that were true to the work, and galvanizing support for their work by sharing stories which people could easily relate. As a leader of a hiking group said of the group's Facebook page, "The website, it should be for stories, not metrics. We are not keeping track of numbers; we just live the experience. After every hike we post reflections about the hike" (author interview, June 5, 2018).

Combatting Fragmentation of Social Issues, Organizations, and People

VGOs actively worked to combat fragmentation and competition. At the social issue level, VGOs brought people together to address needs and challenges through holistic, long-term mobilization efforts. To be sure, grassroots groups did conduct activities within identifiable issue realms, including arts and culture, agriculture, sports and recreation, charity, etc. But cutting across these activities was a commitment to mobilizing citizens in Palestinian solidarity and combatting the Israeli occupation. The leader of a running group explained that in addition to

weekly runs, group members, "do hikes, we enjoy sharing food, stories, getting to know each other. We became unstoppable as a community. We are building a movement, it's not about running" (Author interview, May 23, 2019).

Reviving a culture of voluntarism within Palestinian society served as a key component of movement building. VGO leaders explained that prior to the signing of the Oslo accords, there was a vibrant culture of voluntarism within Palestinian civil society. By helping neighbors, volunteering became, in the words of one activist, "political, economic, and social volunteering" (author interview, May 31, 2019). Working together on a voluntary basis built solidarity, strength, and resolve among Palestinians and, to many activists' minds, undergirded the first and second intifadas. Reviving a culture of volunteering that had been sidelined by professional NGO work constituted a movement of resistance.

Building trust went hand in hand with combatting fragmentation. As the leader of a charitable VGO explained, "We are a movement, a group. Not an NGO. A voluntary youth group. Many youth were active, came together. Let's have a vision and gather our efforts. We formed three years ago but individuals were working for years. Volunteers have various professional jobs. We are most active in Ramadan. We provide food packages in different cities. Last year, just Ramallah. Now also Nablus, Jericho. The more people you reach, the more you learn, the more you build trust" (author interview, May 31, 2019).

In order to cohere as a wider sectoral movement, voluntary groups sought out formal and informal ways to collaborate with each other. A number of groups conducted joint activities that raised awareness and revenues for all groups involved. For example, a group of arts groups in one small city conducted a regular art walk that exposed participants to the organizations' work and brought in very modest revenues from participant fees. Perhaps more importantly, the art

walk institutionalized a support system among the arts groups. The director of one of the arts groups explained, “I do freelance work because I don’t want to be connected to a company or NGO. So, I created a studio. The studio is next to [another artist] with [an up-cycling group] and an instrument maker. [Another artist] from [another group] plus and [a cafe that supports local artists] and [another arts group] are close too. There is a community of artists. The idea of the art walk started because we are so close to each other. We support each other. We try to use local resources too, and be independent” (author interview, July 6, 2018).

Still other groups cultivated cohesion at multiple levels, including across organizations and across different groups. A group committed to local farming, for example, partnered with other groups in Palestine’s farming community when it conducted activities. It also hosted a community garden that brought together local Palestinians and built networks to connect farmers to consumers. The overarching goal of these collaborations was to strengthen local agriculture, but the process of connecting people through farming was an important outcome in itself. In fact, collaboration was so important to this group that its name meant “partnership.” Across all of these VGOs and activities was a desire to bring Palestinians together and build solidarity as a strong, cohesive Palestinian community.

Creating a family environment within VGOs was one way of cultivating cohesion among people. A member of one group explained, “I feel these people are my family. We care for each other. This is the first time I’m part of a social…not movement really…we don’t even identify [the organization formally]. But in school, there is no voluntary group like [us]…We are raised to compete against each other. Also, there are divisions between schools, e.g. public vs private. We in [this group] wish there were something like [this group] when we were in school” (author interview, July 11, 2018).

Geographic divisions were a commonly cited challenge that groups strove to overcome. Interviewees described multiple levels of geographic division: between the West, East Jerusalem, Gaza, and Arab Israeli communities, between cities within the West Bank, and between urban and rural communities. Through their activities, groups attempted to bridge these divides. Hiking groups, for example, used hikes to connect urban and village communities. As the leader of one such group explained, "When we gather for the hike we sit in a big circle and check in. We get to know each other, there are people from different cities. We want all participants to know each other." Then, during the hike, the group gets to know people in the villages through which they pass. "Every hike we see local people from the village. We sit with old people and hear their stories. We do voluntary work for people in the village. We see ancient places and learn about old wars. Old people say what happened. People who were involved in the resistance" (author interview, June 5, 2018). A running group similarly bridged geographic divides by hosting runs in various West Bank cities. "We are not just a running group," the group leader explained. "It's a way to communicate with each other. In different cities we learn about each other. We connect divided cities. I used to go to Bethlehem just for Christmas, now I have friends there. I never thought I could have friends in Jaffa and Bethlehem but now I do" (author interview, May 23, 2019)

Combatting Colonization of Social Change Agendas

Grassroots groups rejected upward accountability to donors and proactively positioned themselves to be accountable first and foremost to the communities they served. VGO leaders stressed that they listened and responded to local needs. "If you want to make the community better, look at their needs and listen," said one group leader. (author interview, July 1, 2018). He went on to point out that Hamas had gained loyalty and trust by listening and responding to

needs. “Hamas was good with NGOs working with people on their needs. They built schools, clinics, kindergartens through NGOs. They worked with the community. People grew up with loyalty to Hamas.” (author interview, July 1, 2018). But rather than trying to gain loyalty, group leaders sought to build partnerships to address local needs. “We all have responsibilities. We need to make our own change. I’m not trying to change you. I’m trying to awaken you to your choices. I’m living what I want. Everyone one of us has different keys, knowledge that we must share. The future depends on sharing. We are there to give each other keys, not arguments. The point is sharing, not convincing” (author interview, July 1, 2018).

Being downwardly accountable to local citizens meant involving everyday people in all aspects of organizational administration and programming. Members of the local community in which the groups worked served as leaders and volunteers and played key roles in decision-making. Activities were deliberately inclusive. Arts and culture groups, for example, brought art into the streets and created art salons that were open to all members of the community. Community gardens brought together Palestinians to support farm owners. Hiking and running groups instituted rules stating that everyone was welcome and equal—including men and women, adults and children—in order to ensure that the group was serving all who wanted to participate.

A number of groups were also working to create local funding streams for Palestinian groups. Some promoted “community philanthropy” whereby the group itself served as a middleman in a Palestinian funding process. The group solicited donations from major donors—including international foundations, local professionals, and members of the Palestinian diaspora—and then granted the funds to local community groups in a community-led decision making process. That is, while the community philanthropy group was responsible for raising the

funds, it was members of the local community who decided which groups should be awarded grants. Crowdsourcing was another new and promising activity, with crowdsourcing groups working to connect donors from around the world to Palestinian groups. In both community philanthropy and crowdsourcing, the goal was to wrest power from big donors and return power to local communities. The voluntary groups who worked without fundraising expressed a similar goal of empowerment. "We feel that we can do things by ourselves," said a member of one group. "We don't have to wait for an NGO to help make a garden or a part. In Palestine today people are always waiting for an NGO, we have become dependent. We try to show people you don't need to wait. We try to connect people to this proactive initiative." (author interview, July 11, 2018)

Conclusion

Liberal theories of civil society, which assume that NGOs are both capable of, and interested in, mobilizing and empowering citizens for social change have been widely contested in literature that studies civil society in the Global South. As this paper has shown, the literature analyzing the NGO-ization of civil society in the Global South suggests that the construction of formal NGO sectors demobilizes and disempowers citizens through mechanisms of NGO professionalization, the fragmentation of issues, organizations, and people, and the colonization of social change agendas. As a result, much of the literature on civil society in the Global South endorses a gloomy narrative: once-vibrant spaces of collective action and citizen engagement have given way to formal, bureaucratic NGOs that are relatively out of touch with local populations, thus leading to the hollowing out of civil society.

This paper has shown that NGO-ization need not be the death knell for civil society. In the case of Palestine, social change actors have begun to reinvigorate a culture of collective

action and civic engagement through the creation of voluntary grassroots organizations. Through a wide variety of activities, VGOs are reviving a habit of voluntarism, a spirit of solidarity, and an ethos of resistance within Palestinian civil society. Their efforts mirror the more informal social change strategies we are witnessing around the world, as activists move away from formal NGOs and pursue change through informal and virtual networks, social movements, community-based philanthropy, and social enterprises that, while formal, are at least independent of donor control.

Whether the more loosely organized and loosely networked activists can sustain their mobilization and social change strategies over the long term remains to be seen. There is certainly reason to believe that many such efforts will fizzle. In the wake of Egypt's 2011 Arab Spring uprisings, to name just one example, the youth who led the protests responsible for ousting former president Hosni Mubarak failed to formally organize after the revolution and were unable to project any sort of influential voice in subsequent political transformations. At the same time, there is reason for optimism. New forms of community philanthropy and crowd funding are proliferating throughout the world, as activists seek to shift the power over social change agendas away from institutional donors and into local communities and local activists. With the perils of NGO-ization clearly established, researchers now have an opportunity to study how contemporary social change actors are reinvigorating civil societies around the world.

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