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PEACEBUILDING AND CHALLENGES TO SECULAR AND NATIONALIST PALESTINIAN CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANIZATIONS IN GAZA

by
Yaser Alashqar

A thesis submitted to the University of Dublin for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Department of International Peace Studies, Irish School of Ecumenics
University of Dublin, Trinity College
March 2014
Declaration

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Summary

This study focuses on the themes of peacebuilding and civil society. It explores the role of secular and nationalist civil society organizations in peacebuilding at the local and political levels in Gaza. For over 20 years, Israeli-Palestinian negotiations have failed to achieve a just solution and settlement for Palestine. Furthermore, the international community has also been unsuccessful in responding positively to the Palestinian issue. Little attention has been given, however, to those local peacebuilding efforts in Gaza that strive to support human rights and just peace. Consequently, this study, carried out by a Palestinian researcher, discusses the contributions to peacebuilding made by secular and nationalist civil society organizations and the critical challenges they have been facing in the context of Gaza and the wider Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

To achieve this, three case study organizations in Gaza are examined. The three case studies explored are: the Gaza Community Mental Health Programme, the Palestinian Centre for Human Rights, and the Palestinian Centre for Democracy and Conflict Resolution. By drawing on the influential works of theorists such as John Paul Lederach, Johan Galtung and Beatrice Pouligny, civil society activities are discussed and analysed. These include those that support trauma recovery, victim representations, peace education, conflict resolution, mediation and democratic practices in Gaza. This analysis is enhanced and informed by the data collected and the interviews conducted through the field research in Gaza. The interviewees included participants and programme workers from the three organizations named above, and also some Palestinian political and academic representatives. The main method of interviewing used to gather the data was semi-structured interviews.

This thesis demonstrates the capability of civil society to promote political change and peacebuilding. It generates knowledge about the role of secular and nationalist civil society and the challenges that exist in the context of Gaza and the broader Israeli-Palestinian conflict.
Through a substantial research process of theoretical and empirical application, this study addresses three key topics:

- Firstly, the methods and activities employed by secular and nationalist civil society organizations to support peacebuilding in Gaza are critically examined.

- Secondly, the relationship between civil society peacebuilding and the Israeli-Palestinian political context is discussed.

- Thirdly, the crucial challenges confronting secular and nationalist civil society organizations and their peacebuilding role in Gaza are assessed from both political and civil society perspectives.
Acknowledgments

This thesis could not be achieved without the assistance of many people.

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List of Key Terms

**CSI:** Civil Society I (aims to promote liberal democracy and state-civil society cooperation).

**CSII:** Civil Society II (seeks to counter state-power and challenge injustices).

**CSOs:** Civil Society Organizations.

**Fatah:** The Palestinian National Liberation Movement. It is the largest political faction in the PLO.

**GCMHP:** Gaza Community Mental Health Programme.

**Hamas:** The Islamic Resistance Movement of Hamas. It is a major Palestinian paramilitary and political movement with grassroots infrastructure in Gaza.

**Intifada:** Meaning “uprising” in Arabic.

**PA:** Palestinian Authority, created following the Oslo Agreement in 1993 as a self-ruling government in Gaza and the West Bank under the PLO/Fatah leadership.

**PCDCR:** Palestinian Centre for Democracy and Conflict Resolution.

**PCHR:** Palestinian Centre for Human Rights.

**PLC:** Palestinian Legislative Council (i.e. the Palestinian parliament).

**PLO:** Palestine Liberation Organization.
An intellectual’s mission in life is to advance human freedom and knowledge.

Edward Said, the late Palestinian thinker and critic.
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For my parents and their journey through conflict and displacement.
Chapter 1: Thesis Introduction

Research Hypothesis: “secular and nationalist civil society organizations have played an active role in peacebuilding in Gaza at both local and political levels, and encountered complex challenges”

Introduction:

Palestinian civil society organizations have played a valuable role in the social and political arena in Gaza and the West Bank since the 1960s, especially after these Palestinian territories were illegally annexed by Israel in 1967. They engaged in the task of building national Palestinian infrastructure independent from Israeli domination. Hence, support and legitimacy for Palestinian popular organizations increased significantly among the Palestinians because of their active involvement in the political struggle for liberation between the 1970s and the late 1980s.

Moreover, since the signing of the Oslo Peace Agreement in 1993, some civil society organizations have been playing a role in peacebuilding in Palestine at the local and political level. Their activities and initiatives include, for example, civil society engagement in promoting just peace and coexistence, human rights, and trauma recovery.

In Beyond Bullets and Bombs: Grassroots Peacebuilding between Israelis and Palestinians, Judy Kuriansky points out that civil society encounters and people-to-people programmes led by Israeli and Palestinian local groups are providing not only hope but also practical and peaceful ways of ending the conflict and addressing its root causes through Track Two diplomacy. Kuriansky argues that with more support and attention, these civil society attempts could grow to provide the “tipping point for peace.” Similarly, Esra Cuhadar and Sari Hanafi conducted a study that largely examined the situation of Palestinian civil society in relation to issues of peace and conflict. Their assessment is that while some peacebuilding projects did not achieve the desired outcomes and faced challenges, the political “task-

focused initiatives” of civil society were found effective as a “complementary pre-negotiation strategy” especially when they engaged influential participants.²

There are, however, disagreements about the achievements of civil society and its role in promoting peace and human rights. These discussions and opposing debates are explored later in this thesis.

1.1 Research Process:

The research process consists of the following steps: (a) purpose of the research (b) research hypothesis (c) central research questions (d) research objectives (e) case studies (f) methodology (g) field research.

More information on these key steps in the research process is provided below.

1.2 Purpose of Research:

Exploring the role of secular civil society organizations in peacebuilding in Gaza and associated challenges is the main focus of this thesis. The overall purpose for the thesis is concerned with providing knowledge about secular civil society organizations in Gaza and their contributions to peacebuilding at the local and political levels.

It is important also to clarify a very important issue in this context. This is related to the overall purpose and focus of this research project.

In Gaza and the West Bank of Palestine there are secular and nationalist civil society organizations as well as Islamic community associations. The Islamic grassroots and social organizations have been providing welfare services and humanitarian support for the local Palestinian populations in Gaza. They mainly derive their ideology from the Islamic Resistance Movement (Hamas). Hamas is a paramilitary and political movement. As is explained further in Chapter 4, Hamas was founded in the late 1980s, by Palestinian members of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt. Hamas has based its political philosophy on both

community-based systems for local supports, drawing on Islamic charity values, and the use of armed struggle against the State of Israel as an occupying power. In other words, Hamas strategically combines nationalism with religion.

On the other hand, many secular civil society organizations in the West Bank and Gaza believe that service-provision, peacebuilding and human rights activities run in parallel and complement each other. As these civil society players suggest, this type of human rights and peace engagement helps to communicate Palestinian political ambitions as well as grievances to the Israeli public and wider groups around the world through effective peaceful means. Furthermore, it represents a form of nonviolent resistance to Israeli repressive policies in the Palestinian territories.

In this context, the policy of communicating and co-operating with Israeli peace and rights-based organizations derives legitimacy from both the Palestinian National Liberation Movement (Fatah) that signed the Oslo Peace Agreement with Israel in 1993 and its political program which has accepted negotiations with Israel as a formula to end the conflict. The Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) represents different nationalist factions and Fatah is the largest and leading faction in the PLO. Unlike Hamas, Fatah combines secularism with nationalism. Furthermore, secular civil society organizations do not principally and practically oppose the political talks as a way of promoting negotiated solutions and therefore they continue to receive financial assistance from major Western states and also political support from Fatah-Palestinian Authority.¹

In this thesis, the main focus is on secular civil society organizations and their role in peacebuilding in Gaza at the local and political level and the challenges which they have been facing. Also, the three case study organizations belong to this particular form of civil association. Hence, the term “civil society in Gaza” is used in this thesis to refer only to secular groups. And the terms “nationalist” and “secular” are employed interchangeably here to point to the non-Islamic domain of civil society in Gaza and its national roots in Palestinian history. The evolution and dynamics of civil society and its variations in Palestine are, however, examined in more detail in Chapter 4. By using the name “Palestine” in the context of this study, I am referring to the Gaza Strip and the West Bank of today.

The decision to focus solely on the secular sector of civil society in Gaza was taken for some important reasons. These included the realities that Islamic social institutions work mostly to address significant welfare and humanitarian needs of Palestinian society in Gaza. Hence, they are not engaged in peacebuilding activities such as official and non-official mediation, political dialogue and joint projects with Israeli organizations in the field of peace and human rights.

On the other hand, secular civil society organizations have been leading processes in these areas and facilitating broader activities of conflict transformation. Therefore, they meet a major objective of this research project that seeks to explore civil society contributions to peacebuilding in the Palestinian context of Gaza. Also, the engagement of secular civil society associations in political issues meets a significant objective of this study that is concerned with exploring the relationship between civil society peacebuilding and the wider Israeli-Palestinian political context.

1.3 Research Hypothesis:

This research study explores the hypothesis that: “secular and nationalist civil society organizations have played an active role in peacebuilding in Gaza at both local and political levels, and encountered complex challenges.”

The word “political” is used here to point to the Israeli-Palestinian political context, and “local” refers to the grassroots arena in Gaza. By stressing the word “active” in the opening hypothesis, I wish also to suggest a strong emphasis on the importance of all the activities concerning the engagement of civil society in peacebuilding. To summarize, these include psycho-social support for victims of violence, trauma recovery, dialogue encounters, advocacy and human rights, mediation and conflict resolution activities and engagement with Israeli and Palestinian groups. In academic terms, this research project is located in the peacebuilding and civil society areas of study and therefore it makes an original contribution to this field.

I am also interested in this hypothesis and its validity for two reasons. Firstly, I have been supportive of the civil society engagement in Gaza and the significant attempts that these local organizations are making to provide support to local populations and lead programmes
of peace and change. Secondly, after 20 years of official negotiations between the Israeli government and the Palestinian leadership, the Israeli-Palestinian political process has tragically failed in achieving a just peace and coexistence between the two peoples. In other words, state-based conflict resolution has resulted not only in political failure but also widespread frustrations and doubts throughout Palestine about the possibilities of a lasting peace between Israelis and Palestinians.

Amongst other reasons including the unconditional support of the U.S. for Israel and injustices in Palestine, this has partly happened because the international-based process has been too hierarchical and narrow in its design and focus on leaders of the conflict. Therefore, it has not integrated mechanisms to address the root causes of the conflict and support equality and justice. Nor has it included grassroots approaches. Instead, this official process has relied simply on international legitimacy for support and survival and has been transformed into a cover for structural injustices and further oppression. Chapter 4 discusses in more detail the context of this political failure.

Therefore, to emphasize again, my overall aim in this thesis and its hypothesis is to generate knowledge about civil society organizations in Gaza and their contributions to peacebuilding in the political and local arenas. Furthermore, I seek to provide an in-depth examination of associated challenges in the context of their engagement in Gaza and the wider conflict situation with Israel.

1.4 Research Questions and Objectives:

The research questions that this thesis addresses are as follows:

- What role do Palestinian secular civil society organizations play in promoting peacebuilding in Gaza?
- What is the relationship between secular civil society peacebuilding and the broader Israeli-Palestinian political context?
- What are the challenges to secular civil society organizations and their peacebuilding role in Gaza from both political and civil society perspectives?

Also, the research objectives for this thesis are:
• To study the development of Palestinian civil society and its role in the Palestinian struggle.
• To explore ways in which Palestinian secular civil society in Gaza can contribute to peacebuilding.
• To investigate the influence of Palestinian secular civil society organizations and their engagement in peace and conflict issues on the political context involving Palestinian and Israeli leaders.
• To identify the challenges that secular civil society organizations face in Gaza, especially those concerning issues of conflict, violence, military occupation, external donors, factionalism and politics.

1.5 Brief Context: Civil Society and Connections with Peacebuilding

Government officials are well positioned at times to strike peace and power-sharing settlements between former enemies. However, there is a growing recognition nowadays that if we seek to build solid foundations and generate public support to make peace agreements stand in exceptionally fragile situations, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and civil society organizations (CSOs) must be at the heart of such efforts. This is because recent experiences have shown that state-oriented conflict resolution has major weaknesses including the way in which the causes of deep-rooted conflict, which might affect sustainability, are overlooked. There is also the narrow and hierarchical focus on conflict leaders who may negatively facilitate exclusion and alienation of significant local players and their constituencies. This is in addition to the current realisation that peacebuilding is a broader process that has to integrate community development into its framework if it is to achieve successful outcomes.

Hence, without promoting grassroots widespread acceptance of political agreements and public participation by CSOs, there is a strong possibility that such agreements will not be effective enough to transform long-term and old patterns of hostilities and fears. David Bloomfield, for example, illustrates that the significance of bottom-up processes in conflict environments lies in their ability to encourage interactions and societal participation through which grievances and terms of future coexistence are defined and negotiated. The top-down

official approach is “exactly the realm where the pragmatists, the political thinkers and the realists try to see what needs to be done to build civic trust, to achieve political reconciliation, democratic reciprocity.” He concludes that civil society “should be also the interface where the two meet and could be co-ordinated and interwoven.”

Similarly, Ho-Won Jeong argues for the principle of reciprocity between governmental (Track One) and civil society (Track Two) approaches aimed at conflict transformation. He maintains that national initiatives for sustainable peace can have little impact on peacebuilding without political mobilization and vice-versa. Jeong adds: “institutionalisation of peacebuilding has to be balanced with creative processes existing at local level.” Thus, political means alone cannot be successful without the involvement of civil society and social forces that help to sustain peaceful solutions and community development. This is in addition to promoting positive management of differences through constructive encounters, and peaceful means.

In practical terms, peacebuilding organizations with good expertise and resources are not only positioned to support political resolutions to long-standing armed conflicts but they can effectively help individuals and parties to develop capacity and skills to manage conflicts peacefully. Having undertaken extensive research programmes on civil society globally over the years and more recently on the future of civil society in Ireland and Britain, the Carnegie UK Trust strongly emphasizes the link between civil society activities and combating problems of violence and discrimination. Despite the implicit recognition of failures of civil society in maintaining democratic principles in certain areas, the researchers suggest that a basic strength of civil society organizations is their ability to make a positive change through which “values and outcomes” such as nonviolence, non-discrimination, democracy, mutuality and social justice are nurtured and achieved.

Catherine Barnes makes the point that while informal groups give expression and direction to the social, political, spiritual, and cultural needs of society members, it is crucial to understand that civil society is far more than public-benefit nongovernmental organizations.

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"NGOs with technical-professional skills, however, can play an important role in providing services, promoting change and working with conflict", Barnes remarks.\(^8\)

However, the capacity of civil society to successfully help to bring about peace and stability should not be exaggerated. Beatrice Pouligny acknowledges, for instance, that there are documented cases of manipulation amongst some civil society actors who take on dual roles and benefit from existing ambiguity between formal and informal politics especially in conflict contexts. In these circumstances, she says, "they are just as discredited as the state."\(^9\) The report of the Carnegie UK Trust has noticed further that civil society is often assumed to be a good thing, but this is not a completely true and valid claim. This is because civil society organizations can contribute and commit to strengthening democracy and improve the well-being of deprived communities "as can they undermine human rights and preach intolerance and violence."\(^10\) This, of course, does not imply a sweeping statement that all civil societies are ineffective and therefore should be dismissed on that basis. Rather, it suggests that damaging prospects and negative aspects do exist. Overall, CSOs with the right resources and strategies are well positioned to provide a positive involvement in conflict situations.

All these arguments are, however, examined further in Chapter 3 (Theories of Civil Society and Connections with Peacebuilding).

1.6 Case Studies:

In order to support this research process, three case studies have been identified and selected. These are: the Gaza Community Mental Health Programme (GCMHP), the Palestinian Centre for Human Rights (PCHR) and the Palestinian Centre for Democracy and Conflict Resolution (PCDCR). The GCMHP, the PCHR and the PCDCR are located in Gaza. They belong to a secular and nationalist background. Also, they are leading peacebuilding activities, which meet a major goal of this thesis concerning civil society contributions to peacebuilding. Further information on the case studies and reasons for selection are provided in Chapter 5.


\(^10\)Carnegie UK Trust Report. op.cit., p. 11.
1.7 Methodology:

This study relies on primary and secondary sources to address the research questions and objectives. Data collection from the field is achieved by using the research method of interviewing. Therefore, available knowledge from the literature about effective techniques of interviewing is explored and put into practice in the field research.

For instance, Eric Drever provides a workable and helpful definition for the theoretical concept of interviewing, which is normally employed in research contexts:

The interview is a dialogue between two people, and its structure is shaped by the process of interaction: the interplay of question and answer, taking turns in speaking, both of you knowing what has been already discussed as you progress through a series of topics...The processes of analysis and interpretation involve dismantling this natural structure and reconstituting the material. This needs to be done in a disciplined way that can be explained and justified.11

In addition to utilizing this important understanding of interviewing, this research project employs particularly semi-structured interviews for investigation and data collection purposes. Drever also offers a useful explanation of the application and the function of this specific methodology:

The name ‘semi-structured interviews’ means that the interviewer sets up a general structure by deciding in advance what ground is to be covered and what main questions are to be asked. This leaves the detailed structure to be worked out during the interview. The person interviewed can answer at some length in his or her own words, and the interviewer responds using prompts, probes and follow-up questions to get the interviewee to clarify or expand on the answers.

Drever goes on to assess the main benefits of conducting semi-structured interviews with participants in research studies: firstly, they “gather factual information about people’s circumstances.” Secondly, they “collect statements of their preferences and opinions.” And thirdly, they “explore in some depth their experiences, motivations and reasoning.”12 It is for this reason of seeking in-depth explorations and clarifications from interviewees that

12Ibid. p.1.
questionnaires and surveys are not part of the research methods in this thesis. The limitations of the questionnaire and survey methodologies could present potentially challenging issues during research processes. For example, according to Fritz Strack and Leonard Martin, any ambiguity the respondent is aware of in an interview setting “could be resolved by asking for clarification. In surveys, however, further explanation is typically not available.” Hence, it “may even be discouraged for the sake of standardization.”

In this research process, the semi-structured interviews include three categories of interviewees. Field workers and staff of GCMHP, PCHR and PCDCR are interviewed to investigate their role in peacebuilding and subsequent challenges. The perspective of Palestinian political representatives from Hamas and Fatah on civil society in Gaza also form part of the field research. Further, the research explores an academic perspective on issues of civil society and challenges in the context of Gaza. This is undertaken with the intention of carrying out a thorough analysis of the role of secular civil society in supporting peacebuilding in Gaza at the local and political level, and associated challenges.

From a methodological point view, it is important that the interview participants are recognized as individuals and players who are influenced by both the conflict environment in which they exist and by their personal experiences. William Foddy explains further this dynamic in research situations:

> It is wrong to treat respondents as if they are passive players reacting only to the researcher’s demands. It is more fruitful to see respondents as active agents engaged in the task of trying to make sense of the questions that are put to them. They should be also seen as active agents who are constantly trying to exercise some control over the situations in which they find themselves.

As this research is undertaken also by a researcher who is Palestinian, an unintended bias may be reflected. It must be stated very clearly, however, that all attempts are made to subject the involvement of GCMHP, PCHR and PCDCR in peacebuilding activities to balanced assessment and scrutiny. While acknowledging that human beings are generally responsive to

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what they observe, some social scientists stress here that researchers researching their own society and conflict should be more self-conscious of their own attitudes and values in order to avoid imposing them on their own studies. In *Researching Violently Divided Societies, Ethical and Methodological Issues*, Maria Smyth points out that an effective way to address this concern would be to examine the “equal and opposite topic”, i.e. arguments and counter-arguments from various sources. Smyth acknowledges, nonetheless, that a significant advantage to inside researchers in conflict situations is “the degree to which an insider gains access to information that is often off limits to outside researchers.” This is crucial because while field visits could offer the majority of researchers useful opportunities to carry out studies, access remains the most problematic issue.

1.8 Field Research:

In addition to having this unique access, there are two realities that make me well placed to conduct this research and address the central research questions. They also equip me with important specialist knowledge:

- My language skills are crucial to this research. The perfect command of my native Arabic language and English as a second language qualify me to conduct interviews and collect data spoken/written in Arabic. This skill goes some way to allow interviewees enjoy greater freedom and clarity in speaking in their own native language of Arabic. Hence, the semi-structured interviews are conducted in Arabic and translated afterwards by this researcher into English.

- My existing contacts and working relationships with a range of Palestinian civil society organizations, academic institutions and political parties in Gaza serve the purpose of this research study well in terms of access and data collection.

Nonetheless, it is important to acknowledge also that conducting research in Gaza faces essentially some obstacles. Further reflections are offered on these research constraints in the final chapter.

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1.9 Thesis Structure-Chapter Headings:

Chapter 1: “Thesis Introduction”

This chapter provides the hypothesis claim and central research questions, and explains the methodology for this research project. It also introduces key concepts explored in the thesis including civil society and its connection with peacebuilding. Further, a brief introduction of case-studies and field research is presented.

Chapter 2: “Principles of Peacebuilding”

This chapter explores theories of peacebuilding and discusses the academic and practical understandings of the concept. It also examines the liberal peacebuilding paradigm and the key principles of a complementary and inclusive approach to peacebuilding processes at both local and political levels. This part draws on the works of distinguished academics and practitioners in the field of peacebuilding including Johan Galtung and John Paul Lederach.

Chapter 3: “Theories of Civil Society and Connections with Peacebuilding”

This chapter mainly explores definitions and theories of “civil society”. It assesses the revolutionary understandings of civil society roles such as leading struggles against injustice and repressive regimes. The liberal approach of locating civil society in the context of democracy and free market agendas is also examined. The discussions critically analyze the differences in theory and practice between the two civil society approaches (i.e. the liberal and revolutionary) and their current impact. In addition, civil society peacebuilding and its critique constitute a significant part of this chapter. All these arguments and debates draw on the influential works of some academics and intellectuals. These include, for example, Antonio Gramsci, Edward Said, Thania Paffenholz, David Lewis, Michael Edwards, Michael Foley and Bob Edwards and Jonathan Goodhand.

Chapter 4: “Origins and Development of Palestinian Civil Society”

In this chapter, the evolution of Palestinian social organizations prior to 1948 and post the 1967 War, is explored. Furthermore, the significant relationship between civil society
associations and the Palestinian national movement is analyzed. This means that the engagement of Palestinian grassroots groups in community service provision as well as the Palestinian Intifada (uprising) and resistance activities against the Israeli military occupation of Gaza and the West Bank is discussed. In addition, this chapter investigates the changing role of Palestinian civil society since the signing of the Oslo Peace Agreement in 1993 and the founding of the Palestinian Authority. The dichotomy of civil society identified in Chapter 3 is employed here for analytical purposes.

Chapter 5: “Case Studies and Research Findings”

This chapter incorporates all the data and information collected from the field research in Gaza and presents the research findings. Also, a descriptive account of the specific peacebuilding activities by the three case study organizations is provided here. Furthermore, this chapter summarizes the interviews conducted in the field research.

Chapter 6: “Research Analysis”

In this chapter, a critical and close analysis of the case study organizations and their role in peacebuilding is carried out. Hence, successes and failures, strengths and weaknesses, contributions and challenges to civil society peacebuilding at the local and political level are all discussed. The main purpose of this chapter is to respond to the central research questions and apply the theoretical frameworks from Chapters 2 and 3.

Chapter 7: “Final Conclusions”

Chapter 7 seeks to review the entire research process. Also, it presents the major research outcomes of this thesis by means of final conclusions.

1.10 Contribution to Knowledge:

This research enhances the understanding of the central role of civil society and its importance as a driving and positive force for peace and change. Since there is satisfactory literature available on governmental achievements in Peacebuilding and Conflict Transformation, this thesis helps to fill the academic gap in terms of the civil society
engagement and the leading of peace processes in conflict-torn societies. Also, it demonstrates the capability of indigenous groups in supporting political and peaceful change.

In particular, this study generates knowledge of secular and nationalist civil society organizations and their role in promoting peacebuilding in Gaza. Furthermore, this research defines the relationship between civil society and the Israeli-Palestinian political context. Also, the research analysis helps academics and practitioners alike to understand the specific and complex challenges that nationalist and secular civil society is encountering in Gaza within the wider context of Israeli-Palestinian politics.

Conclusion:

This chapter has presented the hypothesis claim and the central research questions, and clarified the methodological approach and research process for this study. The next chapter explores some conceptual principles of peacebuilding.
Chapter 2: Principles of Peacebuilding

Introduction:

This chapter examines the two major approaches to peacebuilding which have generated a great deal of interest: The first is "liberal peacebuilding" and the second is, as I describe it, "complementary peacebuilding." As will be discussed further, with the active involvement of the United Nations (UN) missions and multilateral organizations, the liberal peacebuilding project aimed at presenting Western liberalization as a magic formula for ending national and ethnic conflicts creating stability and building market-oriented democracies. Around the same time, a parallel practice of complementary peacebuilding developed that paid close attention to the root causes of conflicts and the political and socio-economic grievances that had originally led to violence and instability. Expanding further on the notion of positive peace as explained by Johan Galtung, this inclusive approach sought to facilitate local and national peace processes with strong emphases on injustice, the role of grassroots and high-level leadership, transformation of the causes of conflict, equal rights, healing, peaceful coexistence and sustainable peace.

As will be illustrated later, academia has participated in promoting both models of liberal and complementary peacebuilding. For example, in the liberal peacebuilding school, Roland Paris is considered to be a leading scholar. In the context of liberalization and neoliberal agendas, this academic participation has been understood as an integral part of the wider relationship between power and knowledge. Similarly, some significant academic contributions have equally been made to support a more inclusive and bottom-up approach to peacebuilding. John Paul Lederach is seen as a major theorist and practitioner of the root causes and multidimensional peacebuilding school. In this context, depending on the political and social circumstances of the conflict situation in question, peacebuilding can be driven locally, bottom-up, or more officially through a top-down process.

However, before this discussion proceeds, there is a conceptual issue that should be clarified. In this chapter, I develop the concept of complementary approach to peacebuilding to support a more critical and comprehensive examination of the case studies in this research project. Therefore, while the theme of complementarity may have emerged in literature before, the
term “complementary approach” is not derived here from any particular theory or source. Instead I argue that to interpret practical peacebuilding processes in a complex conflict situation like that of Gaza by merely considering one exclusive theory is limiting and unhelpful in gaining a deeper understanding and analysis of these challenging processes. Therefore, varied and relevant conceptual aspects of peacebuilding and suggested roles of civil society in processes aimed at peacebuilding as proposed by John Paul Lederach, Jonathan Goodhand, Nick Lewer, Johan Galtung, Luc Reychler, Herbert Kelman, Beatrice Pouligny, Catherine Barnes, Martina Fisher, Paul Van Tongeren are applied in Chapter 6 (Research Analysis). These are employed in order to examine the peacebuilding activities facilitated by the case study organizations in Gaza.

The process of developing the complementary approach for the purpose of this research study involves three stages: (a) presenting and critiquing the liberal peacebuilding framework; (b) providing an alternative complementary approach to peacebuilding; (c) clarifying and establishing the role of civil society in peacebuilding processes. The first and second stages are addressed in this chapter, and the final third stage is discussed in Chapter 3.

The overall purpose of this chapter is to define the relevant conceptual elements and practical understandings of a peacebuilding framework, which could be utilised in explaining and examining this research topic on peacebuilding activities and civil society engagement in Gaza. Hence, this chapter explores first the evolution and practical principles of liberal peacebuilding, and then it examines the complementary approach to peacebuilding and related characteristics. Major peacebuilding theories expounded by Paris, Lederach and Galtung are also discussed in some detail. Finally, the conclusion offers a general summary of the main arguments and points discussed in the chapter.

2.1 Liberal Peacebuilding:

The end of the Cold War brought about new dynamics in the international arena and politics which played a major role in determining the fate of mostly non-European countries which were specifically facing radical challenges of violence and the breakdown of their political, economic and security infrastructures. In many cases, the causes of such tragic circumstances were a combination of internal ethnic and political issues and the colonial legacy of the recent
past. Many of these countries (e.g. Rwanda, Liberia, and Mozambique) were still emerging from an era of direct colonialism by major European powers, or affected by the U.S. military interventions (e.g. El Salvador, Nicaragua and later Somalia, Afghanistan and Iraq).

In this context, Roland Paris explains that the rise of the liberal peacebuilding project on the international stage was motivated by both the triumph of liberal Western democracy in the post-Cold War politics and also the perceived threats of state failure and collapse in non-Western countries. According to Paris, this instability represented humanitarian as well as strategic challenges to international security. From a humanitarian point of view, "this violence inflicted appalling losses on civilian non-combatants" and 90 percent of the victims of these armed conflicts were civilians. Further, internal conflicts were the main source of mass refugee movements in the 1990s. Therefore, from a strategic standpoint, "civil unrest represented a threat to regional, and even global, stability. Several internal conflicts spilled over international borders and undermined the security of adjacent states." In particular he cites the spreading of the Rwandan conflict into Zaire in the mid-1990s triggering a regional war.16

In effect, the task was handed to the UN to manage these rising political and security problems with the active support and guidance of the U.S. government and other powerful European states and organizations.17 In his attempt to address these challenges, Boutros-Ghali, the former Secretary-General of the UN, submitted a report in 1992 that became commonly known as "An Agenda for Peace." While it included a number of definitions for peace related missions, the most interesting concept that the report revealed was the introduction and interpretation of "Post-Conflict Peacebuilding" that Boutros-Ghali presented to governments and multilateral agencies as a practical understanding of peacebuilding. He defined it as "action to identify and support structures which will tend to strengthen and solidify peace in order to avoid a relapse into conflict."18 In this context, the UN launched its first flurry of peacebuilding operations in war-torn societies including Namibia, El Salvador, Mozambique, Cambodia, Angola, Liberia, Rwanda, Bosnia, Croatia, Guatemala, East Timor,

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17 Ibid. p. 2.
18 Boutros-Ghali. “An Agenda for Peace”, Report is available online, see UN Homepage: http://www.un.org/Docs/SG/agpeace.html
Kosovo, and Sierra Leone. In total, 14 major UN operations for peacebuilding were deployed between 1989 and 1999 to areas and states experiencing internal conflicts.¹⁹

In his examination of this process, Ho-Won Jeong points out that more systematic attention was given to “post-conflict reconstruction” with the shift of international focus from Cold War politics to civil wars and state collapse. Therefore, since the Namibia-UN operation in 1989, “peacebuilding has been widely recognized as a distinctive area of policy and operations” through which the UN had moved from monitoring peace and ceasefire-agreements to building political institutions and managing elections.²⁰ Furthermore, as Elizabeth Cousens argues, alongside preventive diplomacy, peacemaking, and peacekeeping, the term post-conflict peacebuilding “became the fourth pillar of a comprehensive approach by the UN and other international bodies to peace and security, not only between states but just as important, within them.”²¹ This was the context in which the concept post-conflict peacebuilding gained currency and became widely accepted with its two major components: liberalism and intervention.

In *At War’s End Building Peace After Civil Conflict*, Paris maintains that the essential function of UN operations and liberal post-conflict peacebuilding has been exclusively informed by the Western formula of “liberalization” in political and economic terms in order to end violent conflicts and manage failed states. He points out further:

In the political realm, liberalization means democratization, or the promotion of periodic and genuine elections, constitutional limitations on the exercise of governmental power, and respect for basic civil liberties, including freedom of speech, assembly, and conscience. In the economic realm, liberalization means marketization, or movement toward a market-oriented economic model, including measures aimed at minimizing government intrusion in the economy, and maximizing the freedom for private investors, producers, and consumers to pursue their respective economic interests.²²

With the active support and participation of major Western institutions and intergovernmental organizations, by making their political, economic, military resources available (including those of NATO in the case of Bosnia), all of the UN peace operations worked towards a

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¹⁹Paris. op.cit., p. 3.
²²Paris. op.cit., p. 5.
shared common task: “transforming war-shattered states into liberal market democracies as quickly as possible.”

Furthermore, similar to Edward Said's *Culture and Imperialism* and his thesis of the historical and unstated participation of European culture and novelists in European colonial adventures, some observers acknowledge that Western academia reflected this liberal spirit and provided important knowledge for advancing the liberal project in peace and security terms. In her intellectual analysis of the politics of the liberal peace from 1990 to 2010, Meera Sabaratnam has presented an interpretation of this relationship between knowledge and power in terms of liberal peacebuilding and international conflict management. She remarks that many Western academics in international relations and peace studies, and political science, assisted further in this process by developing concepts such as responsibility to protect, state-building, internationalization of security dimensions and failed states.

In this context, these failing or failed states were no longer recognized as states transitioning from decades of exploitation and foreign rule. This academic discourse, according to Sabaratnam, contributed to neo-liberal policies of interventionism and violation of state sovereignty in many countries and helped to legitimize new wars, including those of Iraq and Afghanistan. Further, it has actively provided the moral and political justifications of the liberal peace enterprise and its imperial and internationalist agendas. Sabaratnam observes:

[Peace and security studies] pushed international multilateral policy on conflict in a more or less consistent direction: on the basis of superior knowledge, deeper involvement, more commitment and the use, of force where necessary; [in other words] the international community could and should undertake more comprehensive and extensive interventions to secure global peace. This broad [academic] consensus became a basic truism of what came to be understood in later years as ‘the liberal peace’ by its critics.

The term “international community” was invented as a semantic and political cover for a new international order that continues to be dominated by the United States and its allies and their respective power-interests worldwide. In a recent interview, Noam Chomsky posed this critical question: “Exactly who is this international community? It's not the non-aligned

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23Ibid, p.5.

countries, which are most of the world.” Rather, the international community is “Washington and whoever happens to be going along with it.”\textsuperscript{25} However, the term has been accepted as a neutral concept, and as a force for good. Therefore, it is within this context of historical, political, intergovernmental, international, economic and academic endorsement that the liberal peace and its associated intervention components have been largely seen as a successful Western model of conflict management and as a remedy for national and international conflicts worldwide. The enthusiasm for this model manifested further in situations of military occupation where the UN agencies and other international powers, including the U.S. and Britain, sought to build a liberal and market democracy.

However, the significant failures of the liberal peacebuilding project and associated UN operations in many places soon became clear. Despite the military intervention and heavy involvement by the UN, European Union (EU), Military Allies of North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank, countries like Cambodia, Angola, Rwanda, Bosnia, El Salvador and later Afghanistan and Iraq have not witnessed durable peace and stability. In Angola, organizing elections was the central priority of the UN and no attention was paid to armed groups and their claims which led to their refusal of the election results and resumption of the fighting. In Rwanda, violence and genocide erupted after elections and ethnic and political differences worsened. In Bosnia, liberalization created an institutional vacuum and reinforced the power of black markets, and deepened the ethnic and nationalist divisions. Cambodia saw a return to military coups and political conflicts in the course of political liberalization.\textsuperscript{26} Thus, the liberal peacebuilding and multilateral interventionist approaches have come under greater scrutiny and criticism. Some of these critical perspectives are summarized below.

2.2 Critique of Liberal Peacebuilding:

David Chandler points out that the fiercest criticism of liberal peacebuilding has been connected to issues of Western hegemony and power dynamics within its workings and strategies. This power-based critique asserts three fundamental points: firstly, the policies of liberal peace ultimately reproduce the conditions for conflicts in the course of serving the


\textsuperscript{26}Roland Paris. “Critiques of Liberal Peace” in Campbell, Chandler and Sabaratnam, op.cit., p.34.
interests of dominant Western powers and international financial institutions such as the IMF and the World Bank. Secondly, liberal peace ensures the continuation of neoliberal capitalism. Thirdly, liberal peace policies should be seen as political and power-based rather than as merely technical solutions. Also, in this context, the political project of liberal peace ignores crucial local concerns of identity and culture. As Carol Rank and Marwan Darweish point out further in *Peacebuilding and Reconciliation*, the imposition of the Western style of democracy through liberal peace works more in “the interest of the rich and powerful of the West, than in the interests of local people.”

In addition, Oliver Richmond questions the moral history of the agents of liberal peacebuilding who “were in the past colonial administrators and today may well be officials or employees of the UN, UNDP, World Bank, EU, OSCE, donor agencies, NGOs or the state.” These officials, he argues, will also resort to coercion if their policies do not meet their liberal standards, or if they have been met with local resistance. More importantly, Richmond explains the futile strategies of liberal peacebuilding:

> [In the liberal peacebuilding programme] marketisation removes protectionism making competition and so livelihoods very difficult for new post-conflict entrants in the market system. Democratisation focuses politics on the party system and their general and often nationalist agendas. Human rights supplant human needs. The rule of law endorses all of this and protects private property and may even entrench socio-economic inequality and a class system. International support, loans, grants, advice, companies, peacekeepers, agencies and NGOs are supposed to compensate for this removal of agency in these areas, and to focus on empowering civil society, citizens, and the state to operate in their confines.

Similarly, Syrian academic Abdul Aziz Said and Nathan Funk add here that the wider historical context of international politics and global political system should be recognized as a “struggle for power” which has been marked by clear rejection of the value syntheses and concepts of peace as defined by other cultures. Also, this power struggle has always been combined with an attempt to subordinate alternative ways of life. Therefore, liberal

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30 Ibid. p.237.
peacebuilding has now re-packaged this significant power imbalance in the form of “authoritative prescriptions” linked to market and democratic reforms and the UN “civilizing missions.” Therefore, as Said and Funk conclude, the danger with these agendas driving the liberal peace project is that they do not only export institutional fixes to areas experiencing instability and conflict without any local roots, and hence encourage dependency and paternalism, but they also seek to legitimatize war to defend and secure a “hegemonic peace.”

It is clear from the critical views above that the liberal peacebuilding model offers only solutions of marketization and democratization to situations of conflicts and violence. Such solutions are mainly informed by the wider economic and political framework of liberalization. The driving assumption behind this model is that its offerings are universal and should, and must, be applicable for all societies to transform them into “liberal”, peaceful, and acceptable partners in the new world order. This international order engenders domination and power imbalance. The model of liberal peacebuilding is also problematic because it does not recognize its own limitations as well as the validity of other political and economic cultures. Furthermore, the liberal peacebuilding enterprise has not paid attention to the root causes and socio-political grievances of many of the societies that hosted the UN missions. Hence, they have experienced a return to violence and conflict. The political engineering of liberal peacebuilding assumes that marketization and democratisation leads to conflict transformation and liberal democracy. Instead, these ineffective policies have created new problems in the economic, political and social spheres in conflict-torn societies as discussed previously.

Finally, these critiques have also pointed to the irreconcilable power dynamics of the liberal peacebuilding project and the human needs of indigenous communities. In other words, it employs top-down approaches to peacebuilding which serves the particular interests of neoliberalism and reproduces inequalities and problems of marginalization and hegemony for the indigenous population, as illustrated previously.

32 Ibid. pp. 107&112.
Therefore, for all these reasons, I suggest considering a more effective alternative framework of peacebuilding, one that focuses on indigenous interests and supports the transformation of core issues in conflict through local, as well as political, participation and inclusive approaches to equality and healing. This is what is described as a complementary approach to peacebuilding earlier in this chapter. The following section explores some of the conditions that strengthen this conceptual framework and give it credibility before its principles are discussed.

2.3 Complementary Approach to Peacebuilding: Understanding The Context

The failures and criticisms of liberal peacebuilding in the last two decades have directed attention to another inclusive practice of peacebuilding. This complementary practice has some significant characteristics including a close and comprehensive analysis of indigenous agency and various levels of leadership. It also recognizes the complexities of conflict situations and therefore encourages various peacebuilding initiatives according to the position and capacity of political and local actors. More importantly, this complementary approach, as I describe it, places a strong emphasis on the root causes of conflict and socio-political and economic grievances involved. Structural violence, dialogue, equal rights, access to resources, trauma recovery, community building, local participation and peaceful coexistence, have all been highlighted as critical aspects of peacebuilding within this inclusive framework of conflict transformation and positive peace.

Furthermore, in Peacebuilding as Politics, Cultivating Peace in Fragile Societies, Elizabeth Cousens analyzes some of the major achievements of this comprehensive approach to peacebuilding. Understanding of history, inquiry of particular causes of conflict, uniqueness of different cases, holistic assessments of conflict, factors of interrelationship, authoritarian and exclusivist structures, economic and social deprivations, the role of various national and regional actors and the impact of politics are all currently given equal and serious consideration in major peacebuilding strategies. In short, peacebuilding here “implies an analysis of whatever constellation of political, social, and economic forces led to a particular armed conflict.”

In this sensitive and complementary approach, rather than adhering to the narrow and power-based liberal peacebuilding agendas of reconstructing the political and economic domains of conflict-torn societies, international assistance is also requested to help

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33 Elizabeth M. Cousens and Chetan Kumar, with Karin Wermester, op.cit., p. 8.
redress economic and social inequalities to support peace and ensure its effectiveness and sustainability.34

As said before, the leading academics and practitioners of this school of peacebuilding include John Galtung and John Paul Lederach. Galtung laid the transformative foundations of negative and positive peace and later Lederach expanded and provided greater theoretical clarity through the introduction of grassroots engagement and the different levels of leadership in peacebuilding. Their intensive engagement has helped to transform theories of peace and conflict. The term “post-conflict peacebuilding” which, as discussed earlier, gained currency through the liberal peace project and UN operations, has not been a central element in Lederach’s theory. Instead he maintains that peacebuilding processes are complex and multi-layered and can take place before official negotiations and the signing of peace agreements, during negotiations and also after political settlements have been reached. This is dependent on the structure of society in question and the political and social circumstances of the conflict context.35

Therefore, theorists such as Lederach with extensive peacebuilding practice, and Galtung have turned attention to more pressing issues than the rigid practices and bureaucratic terms associated with liberal peace such as “post-conflict reconstruction and peacebuilding.” Instead notions such as sustainable peace and reconciliation, positive and negative peace, have been put forward and stressed. In her review of the intellectual history of international conflict management from 1990 to 2010, Meera Sabaratnam elaborated further on this conceptual and practical shift in peacebuilding practices:

Whilst the lofty discourses of the duties of liberal internationalism and changing sovereignty norms took place on the stage of international politics, other themes of trauma, illness, healing informed a parallel and more dovish academic and practitioner discourse towards conflict, which sought a more conciliatory and therapeutic approach to intervention.... [As a result], a cognate emphasis on reconciliation and healing also emerged from practitioners such as John Paul Lederach... [Therefore] these kinds of discourses provided the basis for an increased role for transitional justice and human rights mechanisms under the umbrella notion of sustainable peace.36

34Ibid. p.8.
Other factors in international politics have helped to further strengthen this discourse. According to Abdul Aziz Said and Nathan Funk, peacebuilding processes associated with local ownership and root cause strategies gained greater legitimacy and acceptance among many intellectuals and policy-makers as a result of the continued setbacks of liberal peace and subsequent recognition of three significant issues: that peace must be localized; that culture and traditions are an important resources for supporting lasting peace; and that outsiders should act as facilitators for national peace efforts, not as social and political engineers of the economy and society. Both writers indicate that Lederach has developed these emergent themes further by prioritizing indigenous agency and its crucial role in peacebuilding and by drawing on the cultural knowledge of local people.37

This is the wider context in which the complementary approach to peacebuilding has strengthened and gained legitimacy in theory and practice, has influenced major international peacebuilding organizations and has informed their facilitative role in peace processes worldwide. Some of the practical principles and models that Lederach and Galtung have suggested to advance this inclusive and complementary approach to peacebuilding are discussed in the next section. Lederach's and Galtung's theoretical models are used firstly, as an illustration of the complementary approach to peacebuilding that I have proposed in this chapter, and how it may appear in practice. Secondly, they include some defining characteristics of the complementary approach. These major elements are discussed below and applied to the research analysis in Chapter 6. Finally, Lederach places a strong emphasis on various levels and activities involved in conflict transformation. Therefore, his model clarifies better the relationship between civil society and peacebuilding processes, which is central to this research topic and the challenges to secular Palestinian civil society organizations.

2.4 Principles of Complementary Peacebuilding:

Johan Galtung, who is known as the father of Peace Studies because of his significant contributions to the field of Peace Research, has introduced two working definitions of peace. One is concerned with “negative peace” and the other is related to “positive peace”. He argues that negative peace relates to the absence of violence and the acceptance of

37Said and Funk, op.cit., pp.112-119.
unbalanced power relationships and injustice, and unequal access to resources. From this perspective, violence is perceived as the main problem and it is thought that by eliminating it the conflict will be brought to an end. The root causes of the violence and conflict, such as institutional and structural discrimination in society, a lack of equal and fair political representation, economic exploitation, military oppression and injustice, are subsequently left unresolved in situations of negative peace. Liberal peace theories that advocate economic and political liberalization as a formula to manage armed and national conflicts over land and human rights may conform to “negative peace” by neglecting the origins and motivations that initially generated political unrest and fatal cycles of violence.

On the other hand, “positive peace” suggests transforming society into a better and more just place where the direct and indirect experiences of violence, as well as the structural elements of inequality and repression, are addressed. Positive peace, according to Galtung, is of critical significance since it seeks to transform the conflict situation beyond the mere absence of violence (i.e. cold peace) into a sustainable peace including positive relations between conflicting parties and local communities based on inclusive human rights and justice for all. In this context, peace processes should also attempt to deal with psychological traumas and healing, community dialogue and interactions, peaceful relationships, and representative democratic institutions followed by peaceful coexistence. Achieving all these complex tasks would be the intended objectives of “positive peace” from Galtung’s perspective. Furthermore, involving people in non-violent change processes is considered a key approach in strengthening positive peace. Therefore, positive peace encourages grassroots dialogue and the restoration of broken human relationships. Living in a liberal context where violence is absent, yet beneath the surface exists deep injustices and human rights abuses, is a recipe for potentially explosive conflicts. This is the danger of negative peace and also the incentive to stimulate a move to positive peace.

Thus, challenging inequalities, injustices, repression and underrepresentation at the community and political level should be a natural outcome of positive peace and this is where peacebuilding can take on more inclusive roles. Nick Lewer argues that:

As well as dealing with the immediate effects of war such as destruction of property and the killing and wounding of soldiers and civilians, peacebuilding can open up questions of social justice, economic exploitation, political oppression, gender and race discrimination and abuse of human rights.\(^\text{39}\)

What should be added to Lewer’s argument is that peacebuilding can also offer opportunities for moving forward and laying down solid foundations for a long-term peaceful and shared future that would heal the past and no longer allow oppression and discrimination to be tolerated. As stated in Chapter 1, in places such as the West Bank and Gaza, international peace plans that were concerned more with short-term crisis-management than creating alternative opportunities and addressing the central issues of dispossession and Israeli military repression caused widespread frustration and a lack of a genuine change. This has subsequently resulted in continued hostilities and confrontation and a failure to build sustainable peace.

In volatile conflict contexts, the task of achieving just peace involves a strategic commitment and creativity. Lederach’s analogy of a burning house presents the case for not only putting out the fire and repairing the damage that has been caused to the “house”, but it also promotes an examination of why the house lacked fire-safety measures in the first place, what caused the fire to erupt, what warning systems and preventive steps could be installed in order to move from the stage of “fire-fighting” to “fire-prevention” in the future.\(^\text{40}\)

2.4.1 Levels of Leadership in Peacebuilding:

In *Building Peace: Sustainable Reconciliation in Divided Societies*, Lederach identifies firstly the types of actors who, with some external help, play a significant role in leading peace processes. He also presents a framework through which high-level and grassroots activities for peacebuilding can be initiated in accordance with the capacity and position of these actors and leaders. Lederach’s levels of leadership and complementary approaches required in peacebuilding situations are discussed in the following section.\(^\text{41}\)


\(^{40}\) Lederach. op.cit., p78.

\(^{41}\) Ibid. pp. 38-43
2.4.2 Top Level Leadership:

According to Lederach, negotiating formal peace agreements lies generally within the domain of political leaders and negotiations are usually facilitated by public figures and international players acting as mediators or intermediaries. The overall purpose of such an engagement is to achieve a negotiated settlement to the conflict between senior political leaders. This is initiated by a process of high-level talks and negotiations which usually produce a peace treaty or agreement that commits parties in conflict to democratic and political mechanisms for resolving hostilities and claims instead of using arms to achieve their goals.

Therefore, working generally through conflicting issues and negotiations with the parties and encouraging compromises embodies the ambition of mediators and their governmental and organizational sponsors. In this respect, Bernard Mayer describes effective mediation as a “powerful intervention tool.” The significance of this tool, according to Mayer, lies in its ability to help disputants maintain their power over important issues in their lives and it also assists them in moving through a “difficult conflict process.” In many cases, this happens when all sides of conflicts reach what William Zartman called a “mutually hurting stalemate”; where all players have been affected by the continued violence and consequences such as insecurity and a lack of achievement in political objectives through armed conflicts. Hence, according to Zartman, they come then to seek common ground to strike a political agreement by means of talks and negotiations, of which mediation represent a significant method.

Some observers also warn that engaging national leaders should not lead to the alienation of major local actors in the conflict and their constituencies as it may cause them to commit further acts of violence to demonstrate their role and presence. According to Brand-Jacobsen and Carol G. Jacobsen, in hierarchical and power-oriented processes, “the all too frequent focus on leaders” assumes not only that the appropriate representatives can be identified, but that they will advocate for the interests of those they are supposed to represent. Therefore, the problem that local or national parties to a conflict might feel left out and neglected if not

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invited to participate in the negotiation process is “real and may lead to destabilization and threats to the process by those kept outside.”

2.4.3 Middle Range Leadership:

These are persons who function within leadership positions not necessarily defined or controlled by the structure of the formal government or major opposition movements. As Lederach explains, middle-range leaders can be individuals who enjoy positions of leadership in certain sectors of society such as education, business, agriculture, or health. They may also represent leading members within networks of faith groups, academic institutions and humanitarian organizations. These leading individuals are also characterized by the pre-existing relationships that cut across the lines of conflict and identity divisions within conflict contexts. In other words, as Lederach argues, middle range leaders are simply connectors; who mediate communication and contacts among local but opposing groups as well as ranks of political leadership from both sides. If utilized well, these connectors can be significant players in peacebuilding processes as they have the ability and resources to rise above traditional norms of divided societies and look beyond narrow gains for opportunities and alternatives. According to Lederach, they also “might provide the key to creating an infrastructure for achieving and sustaining peace.” The domain of activities here covers three categories: problem-solving workshops, conflict resolution training and the development of peace commissions.

Problem solving workshops are significant in two ways: firstly, they ensure that there is societal interaction and participation involved from all the sections of faith, academia and business in the search for positive peace and relationship-building. Thus broader public participation is much needed after the breakdown in the social fabric of society, years of animosity and psychological or physical walls. Secondly, these workshops and interactions provide useful tools and skills for political activists and peace workers to strengthen their capacity in dealing with conflicting issues and supporting real changes in the hearts and minds of influential participants. In Ireland, the Glencree Centre for Peace and

45 Lederach. op.cit., p.40.
46 Ibid. p.46.
Reconciliation, apart from other community and youth projects, organized and facilitated about a hundred political dialogue workshops in the run-up to the Good Friday Agreement of 1998. This informal political dialogue brought together middle range politicians and grassroots activists to explore possibilities of building relationships and identifying ways to advance the Irish political process. It is suggested that this was a modest contribution to strengthen the peace process and build community bridges and cooperation between governmental leaders, civil society and political activists in Northern Ireland.47

Herbert Kelman embarked on a similar journey in Israel and Palestine a few years before the Oslo Peace Agreement was signed at the White House in the U.S. in 1993. Kelman maintains that the greatest value of the interactive encounters was that in the short term they sustained the belief that a negotiated solution remained within the parties’ reach. He argued that in the long term, “they helped to begin the process of transforming the relationship between the former enemies”.48 Therefore, it is clear from this experience and the efforts of the Glencree Centre for Peace and Reconciliation in Ireland that such civil society activities have an important degree of influence on senior and local leaders in conflict and the broader political process being developed to manage it.

2.4.4 Grassroots Leadership:

Lederach stresses here that this level of leadership represents both the masses and the base of society. As life at this level is characterized by the basic needs of survival because of conflict and human suffering, the grassroots leaders can be also involved in the struggle to find and deliver food, shelter and safety for their own people on a daily basis. To be specific, leaders here include people who are engaged in community development and rebuilding such as local members of NGOs, health officials, community activists and refugee camp leaders.

As Lederach emphasizes, what is unique about this type of leadership is that leaders well understand the fear and real suffering of deprived communities even if they are not living through it themselves. They have an expert knowledge of internal politics and know the national officials of the government and its opponents. Furthermore, representatives of

47Glencree Centre for Peace and Reconciliation. Dublin: Glencree’s Summer School, 2006. See also http://www.glencree.ie/site/political_workshops.htm
grassroots leadership witness firsthand and have direct personal experience of the deep-rooted hostility and mistrust that exists in conflict settings.49

Lederach speaks here about two specific challenges that confront players and local activities for peace: (a) that which deals with a massive number of people in practice so that the implemented strategies touch both the indigenous populations and their leadership but often have no comprehensive programme designed for reaching them; (b) many people in the conflict environment are survivors with on-going concerns about meeting basic needs of food, shelter and safety. Thus, endeavours aimed at peace and conflict resolution can be seen as an unaffordable luxury. Still, the valid conclusion here is that practical and helpful solutions do come into existence from these surviving communities and from their rich traditions that can at times provide local methods for resolving conflicts and promoting harmony. According to Lederach, this section of society can be engaged in peacebuilding efforts that focus on psychological trauma, prejudice and discrimination reduction, empowerment through training, self-awareness, peace commissions and dialogue committees. With good flexibility and adaptation, they engage in creative processes and seek to make original contributions to the peacebuilding efforts.

In Somalia, for example, after the fall of President Mohamad Siad Barre in 1991 the formal infrastructure of the country disintegrated and most Somalis became dependent on their clans for security and traditional conflict resolution mechanisms. Given this reality, members of Somali *Egada* (a forum for Somali intellectuals for peace started in 1990) advocated a bottom-up approach to these internal problems and the Somali unrest. With some external assistance, a conference was held outside the country which brought clan and local community leaders, rather than militia or official parties, to discuss and explore methods of reducing physical insecurity and identifying rightful representatives of the clans’ concerns. Lederach observed that group members involved reported that once an initial agreement had been made about the security and representation issue, it was possible then “to repeat the same process at a higher level with a broader set of clans” with the aim of using traditional ways to promote stability and reconciliation.50

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49Ibid. p. 43.  
50Lederach, op.cit., p. 53.
Furthermore, in Mozambique, prior to the initiation of the formal peace process by senior politicians, local faith leaders were horrified by the atrocities of the civil war but determined to open dialogue channels between government leaders and rebels. This grassroots initiative eventually helped to put an end to acts of revenge and violence and aided a successful and peaceful transition in the country.\textsuperscript{51} In Northern Ireland, long before the official peace talks started in early 1990s, the popular movement of Peace People was formed in 1976 and campaigned nationally against the use of violence on all sides. One of the leaders, Mairead Corrigan, won the Noble Peace Prize in recognition of the peoples’ brave efforts to challenge the status quo and struggle for peace and change. In fact, a careful examination of the current Northern Irish post-Good Friday era suggests that high-level political endeavours aimed at deepening peacebuilding and promoting coexistence are working in parallel with many local groups and community organisations, which are also encouraging viable alternatives to division and conflict.\textsuperscript{52}

For all these reasons, it is Lederach’s model that has proposed clearly that while local communities are at the receiving end of suffering and trauma, the task of making and sustaining peace is still granted efficiency and legitimacy through their significant engagement and leadership. This has also significantly increased the practice of partnership between local peace groups and international governmental agencies to address peace and conflict challenges. Most importantly, it has marked a departure from the traditional thinking that for a long time relied mainly on state officials and powerful governments to transform political disputes and violent conflicts. Consequently, this model is an important achievement both in conceptual and practical terms. Furthermore, as stated before in this chapter, the strength of the relationship that it demonstrates between civil society engagement and effective peacebuilding processes makes Lederach’s theory central to this research project in its assessment of peacebuilding activities in Gaza and the challenges to secular civil society organizations.

Lederach’s theoretical framework of leadership levels and related approaches has, however, invited some criticism and disagreement. Coordination and connection between the levels of


\textsuperscript{52}For further information on Northern Ireland Peace Process and the role of civil society, see David Stevens. The Land of Unlikeness: Explorations into Reconciliation. Dublin: Columba Press, 2004.
leadership is central to the deficiencies of the theory according to Thania Paffenholz. The critique she presents suggests a lack of sufficient elaboration on the linkages between the three levels of leadership and the practical application of the theory. In other words, given the increasing gap between formal and informal politics, the coordination aspects between civil society approaches and political processes require further clarity. Also, the effect of modern developments on local leadership and capacities for peace need a deeper examination as these indigenous structures often experience transformation as a result of these developments. Another critical observation is that the middle-level element might not work in all societies, and perhaps a more direct approach that involves political leadership and grassroots leaders is also a valid option in peacebuilding situations depending on the cultural norms and the power structures of the society and the conflict in question. In a separate case-study, Ho-Won Jeong, makes this direct connection without the need for the middle level link. He remarks that the "institutionalisation of peace-building has to be balanced with creative processes existing at the local level." These critical comments on Lederach’s model of peacebuilding must be given equal attention and some of them are employed in Chapter 6 in relation to civil society activities in Gaza.

2.5 Complementary Approach: Final Theoretical and Practical Considerations

Utilizing holistic models promoted by Galtung, Lederach and other theorists, this thesis endorses a complementary approach to peacebuilding based on the following reasons. Firstly, the complementary approach recognizes the root causes of conflict and suggests practical ways to address them. Secondly, it focuses on local ownership and therefore better explains the connection between civil society and peacebuilding processes. Thirdly, this comprehensive approach also acknowledges the usefulness of complementary and parallel efforts of both bottom-up and top-down processes aimed at building sustainable peace.

Fourthly, the rigid use of peacebuilding as an activity that can only take place in a “post-conflict setting” is not central to this theory. Furthermore, other academics have also stressed this role of peacebuilding and the importance of extending it beyond the narrow terms of “post-conflict recovery or reconstruction”, which were originally promoted by the UN and

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international organisations with their interventionist policies in the wider context of liberal peace. In *The Ethics of Peace and War*, Iain Atack stresses the diverse elements involved in the task of supporting and sustaining peace. He argues that peacebuilding represents a "multidimensional activity" which is achieved by "nonviolent methods such as processes of conflict resolution, mediation and negotiation." As such, notions of negative and positive peace should remain central to these processes. Highlighting this evolving and inclusive understanding of peacebuilding, which goes beyond its original connection with UN missions and "post-conflict peacebuilding", Jonathan Goodhand indicates that current comprehensive peacebuilding integrates strategies for "working around conflict", "working in conflict and "working on conflict." In other words, engagement in peacebuilding can entail conflict reduction measures, work to address its causes and effects, and promote conflict prevention as parallel efforts.

In addition, Elizabeth Cousens points out that the practice of peacebuilding should remain flexible because it can occur before, alongside, or even in the absence of formal conflict resolution effort and political settlement. Therefore, peacebuilding activities may take place, for example, in the context of a failed peace process such as the Israeli-Palestinian situation and where political and sustainable resolutions have been absent. Michael Barnett adds that despite organizational and policy-related differences, it became clear that peacebuilding means more than stability promotion. He argues "it is designed to create a positive peace, to eliminate the root causes of conflict" and to "allow states and societies to develop stable expectations of peaceful change." Furthermore, Maria Lange described peacebuilding as a "palette" that contains artistic sceneries drawn by different but related colours. This research study accepts and indeed encourages this wider understanding of peacebuilding beyond its exclusive and rigid use as actions and efforts designed merely for post-conflict contexts.

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57Elizabeth M.Cousens and Chetan Kumar, with Karin Wermester, op.cit., p. 14.
Finally, another practical reason for not using the liberal peacebuilding paradigm as a guiding framework to assess peacebuilding engagement and civil society in Gaza in this research is that liberal peacebuilding with its “post-conflict strategies” has been closely associated with UN operations and Gaza has never hosted an international and multilateral UN peacebuilding mission before. Also, the U.S. has been acting as the main mediator in the Israeli-Palestinian political context since the signing of the Oslo Agreement, and it has not allowed any other significant party or international organization such as the EU or the UN to play an influential role in the Israeli-Palestinian situation. In this respect, Noam Chomsky points out that not only has the U.S. been blocking an international consensus calling for a political settlement to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict on the well-known terms of the two-state solution but it also continues to impose the precondition that the Israeli-Palestinian negotiations must be exclusively “supervised by Washington.” This policy aims to maintain U.S. domination over the Middle East region and its resources and is also designed to ensure protection for Israel as a military and strategic ally.60

Taken together, these are the main reasons for employing the complementary approach to peacebuilding as the main conceptual model in this research study.

Conclusion:

This chapter has identified and discussed the most useful frameworks and principles of peacebuilding, which could be applied to the case studies in this research project. To achieve this task, both paradigms of liberal as well as complementary peacebuilding have been presented and examined in some detail along with their characteristics. Furthermore, the Introduction to this chapter clarified that the process of developing the complementary approach as the overall conceptual framework in this research study includes three stages contained in Chapters 2 and 3: firstly, explaining and critiquing liberal peacebuilding; secondly, providing an alternative complementary approach to peacebuilding; and thirdly, analyzing and establishing the role of civil society in processes aimed at peacebuilding. The first and second stages of this framework have been already covered in this chapter, and the

The discussions of liberal peacebuilding demonstrated by the marketization and democratization formula has been represented, and imposed, as ready remedies and technical fixes for situations of conflict and violence. These remedies have been advocated by some international powers and UN operations with the active support of multilateral and powerful institutions such as the IMF, WB and the EU. As pointed out previously, Roland Paris, the main advocate of the liberal peacebuilding enterprise, argues that multilateral interventions and UN missions in many conflict contexts throughout the 1990s and between 2001 and 2004 in the case of Iraq and Afghanistan, have sought to achieve a shared goal: transforming conflict-torn societies into liberal and market-oriented democracies. Western academia participated in this interventionist process through developing supportive concepts of failed states, responsibility to protect, state-building, internationalization of security threats and the role of the “international community” in managing international conflicts.

Furthermore, the critique of the liberal peacebuilding model points to problems of imperialism, domination, power interests, reproduction of inequalities and conflicts, removal of protection structures and re-organization of economic and political systems of mostly non-Western societies to advance the neo-liberal agendas of interventionism. In addition, when major failures and setbacks began to appear and a number of countries that hosted these UN operations witnessed a return to violence and divisions, it became obvious that issues such as transformation of root causes of conflict in worn-torn societies and local ownership of peacebuilding were ignored in favour of economic and political liberalization in the context of liberal peacebuilding.

In seeking a more effective and credible, and locally-oriented peacebuilding framework, this chapter has explored the complementary approach to peacebuilding and the development of a more holistic engagement in situations of national and political conflicts. As explained earlier, the complementary approach to peacebuilding has been developed to support a more critical and comprehensive examination of the case studies. As such, the term “complementary approach” has not been derived from any particular theory or source. In this thesis, the major function of the complementary approach advocated here focuses on applying specific characteristics from a number of peacebuilding theories to specific elements
of the case studies. This is the inclusive framework that will be utilised specifically at the
research analysis stage in Chapter 6.

As discussed before, the complementary approach to peacebuilding has some significant
characteristics that are relevant to this thesis and peacebuilding activities in Gaza. It
encourages a close and deeper analysis of the indigenous agency and various actors in
leadership in society. It also recognizes the complexity and uniqueness of different conflict
situations and therefore supports various and parallel peacebuilding initiatives according to
the position and capacity of political and local actors. More importantly, this complementary
approach emphasizes the root causes of conflict and subsequent socio-political and economic
grievances involved. Structural and institutional transformation, dialogue, equal rights, access
to resources, trauma recovery, community building, local participation and peaceful
coexistence, are all key issues in the complementary approach. The rigid use of peacebuilding
as an activity and a process that can only take place in a post-conflict setting is not included
in this theory.

Based on all these practical and conceptual reasons as discussed earlier, this study does not
aim to either employ the liberal peacebuilding theory or its linked practices of post-conflict
peacebuilding as a framework for the examination of the civil society and peacebuilding in
Gaza. Instead, the complementary approach to peacebuilding will be utilized as a model
through which peacebuilding initiatives and activities in Gaza can be examined and analyzed.

Finally, to develop these conceptual principles and foundations of the complementary
approach further, the next chapter (Theories of Civil Society and Connections with
Peacebuilding) explores theoretical definitions of “civil society” as discussed by Antonio
Gramsci and Michael Edwards, as well as the views of leading theorists in the field of civil
society peacebuilding. These include Jonathan Goodhand, Thania Paffenholz and Beatrice
Pouligny. The next chapter enhances the understanding of the relationship between civil
society and peacebuilding, and also identifies the role that civil society organizations can play
in supporting peacebuilding.
Chapter 3: Theories of Civil Society and Connections with Peacebuilding

Introduction:

The purpose of this chapter is to explore definitions and theories of civil society as well as civil society’s relationship with peacebuilding. The radical and liberal understandings of civil society functions and roles are also examined. The resulting analyses are employed in Chapter 6 to explore the main theme of this research study: civil society and peacebuilding in Gaza and challenges to secular civil society organizations at the local and political level.

This chapter discusses the historical evolution and development of civil society in a European and non-European context (e.g. the Middle East) as well as examples of definitions of civil society and assigned functions. In addition, the discussions aim to assess various understandings concerning civil society with the hope of clarifying the term and gaining a better idea of its usefulness and role. Expanding on what has been established in Chapter 2, this chapter examines civil society in relation to peacebuilding processes with a special emphasis on conflict-torn societies and civil society contributions to conflict transformation and peacebuilding efforts. This special emphasis is placed because the civil society organizations examined as case studies in this research are operating and involved in peacebuilding activities within the context of the ongoing Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Furthermore, a critique of civil society peacebuilding is included. This chapter ends with a summary of the main arguments presented in the discussions.

Before we proceed, it is important to reiterate here that the process of developing the complementary approach as the main conceptual model in this research study involves three stages which are presented in Chapters 2 and 3: firstly, clarifying and critiquing liberal peacebuilding; secondly, providing an alternative complementary approach to peacebuilding; and thirdly, establishing and analyzing the role of civil society in processes and initiatives aimed at peacebuilding. Both the first and second stages have been covered in Chapter 2, and the third and final stage of civil society peacebuilding is addressed in this chapter. This particularly helps to develop further the complementary approach and apply it afterwards to the case studies in Chapter 6 (Research Analysis).

The historical roots of the concept of civil society are explored in the following section.
3.1 Civil Society: Roots and Evolution

The term "civil society" can be traced back to the works of ancient Greek and Roman philosophers, as well as having roots and foundations in ancient Muslim science, a point we revisit at a later stage in this chapter. In the Western context, civil society as a concept emerged during the Scottish and continental Enlightenment of the late 18th century. As it will be discussed later, it was then rediscovered at the end of World War II in the early 1940s as European attention was focused on rebuilding vibrant Western societies free of war and intimidation in the hope of transforming states involved in decades of animosity and hostilities into states of cooperation and peaceful coexistence across the European continent.

As it will be illustrated further, around the same time, intellectual groups and middle class elites began to articulate the need for greater citizen association and management of their own affairs in open societies. Developing cultural and social institutions has been an integral part of this continued process. After the societal and political division of World War II many European states began to accept the citizens' role in reconstructing divided communities post World War II. Thus, with the acknowledgment of war devastation, concerns about the breakdown of security and order and the external and internal implications of both World War I and II, a number of European cultural and citizen groups formed and became active. They placed a strong emphasis on the language of collaboration among both citizens and nations across border and identity lines.61

These developments did not emerge in a political vacuum. An understanding developed that barriers between perceived enemies had to come down at societal and grassroots levels before a comprehensive state of peace and security could prevail in the political arena. History has shown that following World War II, in a dramatic and brave gesture of citizen-power and determination to make peace, two Swiss writers brought Mayor Kolbe of Frankfurt together with the French leader of Godaalt; the two embraced and joined their respective cities in a friendship pairing. This interaction facilitated subsequent cultural contacts and lasting solidarity across the cities of Frankfurt and Godaalt.62 Most importantly thought it demonstrated the transformative capacity of civil society actors in conflict situations and

62 Ibid. p.190.
established what state diplomats and official treaties could not achieve alone: transforming the centuries-old tradition of Franco-German hostility into a culture of peace and cooperation.

In the 1960s and 1970s political struggles for freedom and social justice taking place in South America and Eastern Europe against totalitarian regimes, brought the re-emergence of liberation projects and revolutionary interpretations of civil society. These ideas were similar to Antonio Gramsci’s political writings and understandings of the essential role of social activists and intellectuals in national crises and situations of widespread tyranny. The proposed role for intellectuals and social activists is to provide political education for societies as well as challenging the hegemonic state. According to Gramsci, this is achieved through national and political struggles. In other words, in Fascist Italy and Eastern Europe, because of gross human rights violations and political repression, the liberation movement advocated for a socially and politically active engagement by national civil society groups especially in contexts of oppression and a lack of freedom and association. Gramsci was a leading scholar in this school of thought.

Alongside the recent massive economic and globalisation processes of the 1990s, liberal understandings of civil society also emerged. The principle of this global movement has been to promote liberal democracy and development worldwide based on the Western experience of political and economic liberalization. In addition, cooperation between the state and civil society is deemed an essential and central component in this liberal approach. Unlike Gramsci and his notion of political and popular struggles against state hegemony, Michael Edwards strongly advocates for partnership processes between the government and social agencies. Edwards maintains that CSOs can adopt a more direct and effective approach by “working with the government” and building a “positive relationship” with state institutions. This is an attempt to achieve change by means of developmental approaches, persuasion and protest from within institutional structures for the benefit of “the poorer and less powerful”, as Edwards points out. In other words, working to address globalization issues, and cooperating with the state is a valid choice for civil society players because, as he argues further, positive interactions between government agencies, the market and voluntary groups

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need to focus on "common goals such as poverty reduction, human rights and deep democracy, and collective strategies to reach them."^64

The contrast between the two approaches is interesting and striking. On the one hand, Gramsci believes that countering state power and confronting repression in the context of seeking political change and social justice requires active engagement and politicised struggles by the masses, civil society organizations, and the intellectuals of the society.^65

Challenging the state in national and political crises is key in Gramscian philosophy (as some writers came to call it), rather than trying to reform the government from within. This represents the school of civil society resistance. On the other hand, Michael Edwards and liberal groups believe in building a civil society for debate, association and "civil behaviour"; a "good society" that can meet the current realities of market, democracy and also the "facts of life", as he put it.^66

In this sense, Edwards represents a liberal and global civil society movement which has been associated with liberalization in political and economic terms in the Western world. In addition, Edwards' ideas seem to conform to the neoliberal school of global civil society which appeared with the "good governance agenda." I engage with the good governance agenda later in this chapter. As discussed in Chapter 2, this neoliberal politics has also been the driving force behind the concept and practice of liberal peacebuilding, which is essentially based on market economy and Western style democracy. However, it is important to point out here that the Gramscian concept of popular and political struggles by national civil society groups and intellectuals is not granted recognition in this liberal and co-operative approach with the state, which Edwards and others have promoted.

In general terms, the Gramscian philosophy is based on a historical experience of a civil society that had suffered from state oppression, political control and a lack of associational freedom. By using the word historical, it is not suggested that such thinking is currently irrelevant or outdated. As a matter of fact, Gramsci's ideas and understandings of civil society still hold true today as state hegemony and dictatorships continue to exist in many

countries around the world and subsequent struggles by civil society, faith groups and intellectuals for civil and political rights continue to be a stark reality. The ongoing uprisings in the Middle East against authoritarian governments, which have been supported by some Western powers, and grassroots movements fighting for change and freedom are valid examples of the relevance of the Gramscian notion of popular struggles in today’s world.

To develop a better understanding of civil society and its functions and roles, Edwards’ and Gramsci’s theories of civil society are employed in the discussions below with further analyses. It is sufficient now to stress that disagreement and debate among academics, practitioners and within state circles continues on whether civil society organizations (CSOs) should uphold and work with the state or have an independent role that can challenge unjust policies and counterbalance destructive politics. While there is an existing knowledge about services and actions that civil society actors are able to facilitate, it is accurate to say that there is no agreed understanding that connects the historical and present experiences of civil society or clarifies what the term exactly means and represents in the current context. Also, as it will be discussed later, the specific role that civil society groups can play in divided societies and conflict-torn communities is still contentious and lacking clarity.

Before these important arguments are examined, the growth of civil society institutions in recent history is explored further.

3.2 Civil Society in Recent History:

In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, a strong culture of civil society association evolved in Western Europe and the U.S. It went through three phases as it proceeded to gain recognition and presence in social and political terms. The first phase saw academic and middle class elites demanding civil and human rights, as well as freedom of thought and political participation. During the second phase, social movements comprising of the working class, farmers and churches entered into the sphere of civil society and made political and social claims for rights and participation. The third and final phase of the 1960s witnessed the birth of new social movements that included women’s liberation, student unions, peace and environmental citizen groups as well as nongovernmental organizations (NGOs). According to Christoph Spurk, in the final phase, these new movements expanded significantly both the
range and scope of civil society activity. However, Edward Said argues that this process involved more than just a gradual development and expansion of civil society in recent history. He suggests that wider power struggles constituted a key part of its growth. Said analyzes further:

The Middle Class from which European and American businessmen eventually emerged grew out of a long battle with the feudal aristocracy; one of the results of the struggle was the French Revolution. That was later to produce an internal social dynamic involving the new class and remnants of the old. The new class not only produced wealth and industrialization, but also culture, including the great realistic novel, scientific and philosophic societies, operas and concert halls, philanthropies. All this constantly challenged or restricted the power of the monarch or the executive.

In addition, with the repression and violence committed by dictatorships in Eastern Europe and South America during the 1960s and 1980s, the concept of civil society was back in fashion in the Western context though with a strong emphasis on the revolutionary aspect. Social activists in Latin America and Eastern Europe embraced this sphere and its social energy during their resistance against repressive regimes. The activists were influenced by two important factors: the Gramscian understanding of civil society and the fall of the Berlin Wall which was seen as a significant victory for peoples’ power and their legitimate demands for political reforms and freedom.

The recent discourse on civil society seems, however, to have forgotten or perhaps ignored the historical variety and wider evolution of civil society. Rather it has become rigid in its use outside of the Western context and reluctant to acknowledge the historical existence of the roots of civil society in non-European cultures. Christoph Spurk claims that civil society has been an almost purely Western concept; “historically tied to the political emancipation of citizens from former feudalistic monarchies and the states during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.” Although he seems to be a little critical of this argument, Spurk does not challenge it clearly. Furthermore, he highlights that civil society associations that might

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70 Christoph. op.cit., p.12.
have existed and functioned in non-Western regions before barely "surface in the international debate about civil society." However strong evidence about what should be perhaps called hidden civil society cultures outside the West does surface in non-European contexts and shows that civil society there has a historical role and legitimacy.

In the Middle East, for instance, there are good examples of the vibrant presence and growth of civil society structures outside the Western realm with their own distinct features and characteristics. But, as Augustus Richard Norton points out, the problem with the majority of European researchers who study civil society representations in the Middle East region is that they seek "exact correspondence with the formal institutions of Western civil society" and therefore unique precedents and experiences are overlooked. Furthermore, as the Israeli intellectual and historian Ilan Pappe analyzes, many Western scholars approach their work in the Middle East without "empathy and solidarity with the people of the area", and the end result in this situation is the production of more "negative, stereotyping material."

Historically, civil society in the Middle East was connected with Arab intellectuals voicing their understanding of Islamic philosophy and human science, as well as Muslim business leaders establishing their own economic activities and cultural contacts with wider groups throughout Asia and Africa. However, with the end of direct Western domination and the founding of post-colonial Arab independent states between the 1930s and the 1960s, most Middle Eastern governments restricted and suppressed the independent activities of their own citizens. They did this in order to control the educated and politically active groups, those very groups which originally resisted and questioned the legitimacy of European colonization and the subsequent undemocratic regimes planted there by Britain and France, the two former colonial powers in the Middle East. In seeking to maintain their authoritarian and exclusive power, the ruling elites have become more distrustful and repressive towards autonomous forms of organization in the last three decades. And yet these "patterns of authoritarianism" explain the weakness of civil society more than culturalist and orientalist arguments concerning informal association in Muslim and Arab histories.

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71 Ibid. p.12.
74 Norton. op.cit., p.5.
Furthermore, Jacqueline and Tareq Ismael use the example of civil society in the Islamic state in the early centuries of the second millennium to demonstrate the existence and the active engagement of civil society outside the Western context:

In contrast with the Western tradition, then, [Islamic] civil society did not need to advance its interests through the state to counterbalance state power. The strength of the Muslim bourgeoisie was derived from their organization and extensive commercial and financial networks.... The Islamic urban middle class derived its independence from the sovereignty of law, independent judiciary and integrated matrix of Islamic society.75

Perhaps what is changed about the current shape of civil society worldwide is the influence of the globalisation project and the economic changes that have had a huge impact on the sector and its nature. Since the 1990s, the rise of globalized CSOs and institutions, particularly in Europe and the U.S., is attributed to a number of political, economic and geographical factors. According to Thomas Grothers and William Barndt, the global movement towards democracy and active citizenship opened up the space for civil society agents in formerly war-torn countries and dictatorial countries around the world. Secondly, in the U.S. and Western Europe, public weariness with exhausted party systems sparked a great interest in civil society as an important means of social renewal.

Thirdly, especially in developing countries, privatization and market reforms presented civil society with the opportunity to step in and involve itself as some governments pulled back their reach and influence. Fourthly, the information revolution and the internet provided new tools for establishing connections and empowering citizens throughout the world. Fifthly, Grothers and Brandt argue that the emergence of "national governments" and people performing "civil duties" with recognized and equal rights for all regardless of gender or ethnic backgrounds is also an important factor. Sixthly, the founding of voluntary organizations and the culture of service provision has been critical in the development of today's civil society. Seventhly, the lower cost of transportation and the relative absence of borders in certain geographical areas (e.g. the European Union) contributed positively to the development of recent civil association and regional projects.76 Another significant factor, discussed by David Lewis and others, which I will focus more on later, is the emergence of

the “good governance agenda” in the early 1990s. This agenda suggests that civil society has the ability to balance growth and stability in liberal and democratic national states.

3.2.1 Civil Society in Recent History: Critical Reflections

Some conflicting issues developed in parallel with the current global expansion and interaction of civil society. For example, cheap and modern transport, while it is significant in facilitating the movement and emigration of groups and individuals across borders, has also created problems of integration, discrimination, competition and sometimes conflict over resources and access in societies. Stephen Mennell points out here that groups of people whose skin is of a different colour, or who have grown up with different ways of life, are continuously thrust together, “and the result is likely to be more conflict and friction, hatred and even violence.”77 Similarly, advanced communication systems created the opportunity for extremist and right-wing groups in Europe and elsewhere to promote divisions and fears across religious and ethnic lines. Furthermore, according to Mennell, “national elites” in colonial states have been able to create “imagined communities” through their manipulation of modern media resources in shaping accepted narratives of national history and identity. Mennell also challenges the notion of “Western civil behaviour” that some middle class thinkers tend to emphasize in the debate about the present realities of Western civil society. As he puts it, there is no guarantee that such civility would be sustained if “security and order” broke down in major European cities.78

In terms of the public weariness with the party-system and traditional politics and the rise of national civil society institutions as alternatives as argued by Grothers and Barndt, Edward Said elaborates that the reason for this widespread weariness is that most representative democracies, with few exceptions, have failed to bridge the gap between the will of the masses and their supposed representatives. Thus, as he indicates, the notion that the government is the representative of the people does not seem to obtain credibility in many Arab and European countries including England and Italy.79 Said also draws attention to another reason for the increasing interest and engagement in civil society institutions: it is

78Ibid. p. 13.
concerned with the irony and perhaps the reality at present that resistance to state policies has moved from formal to informal politics. This is because, in formal politics, the “other party” simply becomes part of the political game and not part of the effective opposition. Moreover, as he suggests, “the idea of opposition has disappeared from the scene of formal politics. Now it is lodged elsewhere- in the university, in the church, in the labour movement, and so on.”

To conclude, the main point is that the very same developments which facilitated the significant growth of civil society in recent history, have equally presented formidable challenges to this sector. A good illustration of this phenomenon is the irreconcilability of global civil society, which emerged in modern history with globalization and economic progress, with more national society interests. This remains problematic. There does not seem to be a unified or agreed framework to effectively connect the national and global trends of civil society. This is why civil society representation continues generally to lack unified structures and agendas. What is required is a civil society-based dialogue that can seek common understandings and unity across national and global civil society movements, and identify the relevant approaches for various local contexts in accordance with their unique socio-political realities. This would help to reduce the current disconnection between global and national civil society groups. This is also important to achieve because the relative absence of genuine innovation and transformation at the governmental level today, requires civil society forces to provide new alternatives and ideas through social and intellectual means. In addition, a more coherent and organized civil society voice would likely increase the legitimacy and credibility of civil society institutions and approaches in the making of better societies.

3.3 Clarifying Civil Society:

Having explored the origins and roots of civil society in past and present times in different contexts, the rest of the chapter is divided into two sections. These sections are to clarify further the concept of civil society and its current use, and explore its connections with peacebuilding. The first section examines the position and understanding of civil society in governmental and academic circles, using the definitions of the British Government, the

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80Ibid. p.190.
World Bank and the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) as a template for discussion. The second section discusses the theoretical and practical application of civil society peacebuilding in divided societies and conflict situations. This is particularly important since this research study is focusing on peacebuilding activities by civil society in Gaza and the challenges to secular CSOs there within the context of the continued Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

3.3.1 Governmental Approach:

The British Department for International Development (DFID) produced a report in 2000 on new strategies for "Making Government Work for Poor People." While the report sets goals for alleviating poverty in the so called developing world through development programmes, it presents an interesting definition of civil society. The report defines civil society as:

All civil organizations, associations and networks which occupy civil society between the family and the state except firms and political parties. And who came together to advance their common interests through collective action. It includes volunteer and charity groups, parents and teachers associations, senior citizen groups, non-profit think tanks, and issue based activists. By definition, all such civic groups are non-governmental organizations (NGOs). The NGOs which come together under the banner of global civil society to campaign on globalization related issues constitute a sub-set of broader civil society.\(^1\)

Similarly, the Centre for Democracy and Governance Unit in USAID defines civil society in terms of functions and operations as "non-state organizations that can act as a catalyst for democratic reform." In addition, the World Bank in the "World Development Report" of 2001 suggests a slightly different focus on the issue. Its conclusion is that CSOs can "promote political empowerment of poor people, pressuring the state to better serve their interests."\(^2\)

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\(^2\) Ibid. p.7.
These three governmental working definitions raise a number of striking issues when discussing concepts and roles of civil society in cultural and political contexts in both Western and non-Western environments.\(^3\)

First, there seems to be a shared understanding in the definitions of how a model functioning democracy should look like with the three systems in place: state, market economy and civil society. This is in addition to the assumed clear-cut distinction between the workings of these three sections. In the last two decades, the U.S. and some major European powers have been advancing the creation of what David Lewis calls a "virtuous circle" between state and economy, based on the Western experience of the "good governance agenda." The underlying motivation behind this three-aspected model is that by sustaining multiple but connected systems, a successful and democratic state would be able to balance and reflect important aspects such as good politics, democracy, societal growth and equity. Discussing liberalism in the context of civil society, Hakan Seckinelgin adds that Western advocates of this liberal approach tend to locate civil society and nongovernmental organizations between the state and the market as a third central structure in "modern democratic states."\(^4\) David Lewis explains further:

Since the 1990s the ‘good governance agenda' has deployed the concept of civil society within the wider initiatives of supporting the emergence of more competitive market economies, building better-managed states with the capacity to provide more responsive services and just laws, and improving democratic institutions and deepening political participation. Support for the emergence and strengthening of non-governmental organizations has formed a central part of this agenda.\(^5\)

Lewis illustrates further that “the dominance of this [neoliberal] ideology obscured the potential value of other understandings of civil society.”\(^6\) Furthermore, Jacqueline and Tareq Ismael stress the potential for damaging consequences from this approach. They warn that capitalism assumes that transferring liberal practices to non-Western contexts is acceptable, regardless of the local political and economic cultures of the society in question.

\(^3\) USAID and DFID are official units within the British and U.S. government systems, and although the World Bank is an intergovernmental organization, I still use the expression “governmental definitions” in this discussion for clarity reasons.
\(^4\) Seckinelgin. op.cit., p.9.
Furthermore, they emphasize that with the end of the World War II and the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, liberal Western efforts intensified to give currency and validity to this civil society perspective and to “assess the adaptation of non-Western cultures to the political culture of economic liberalism.”\textsuperscript{87} From this point of view, national and global civil society representations are utilized in political economy terms to support a strong relationship between society and the state, economy and culture in the context of capitalist development (i.e. virtuous circle). This is the first problematic issue in the three governmental definitions presented above from the USAID, DFID and the World Bank.

The second issue is that it appears that the practical understanding of civil society grants informal groups no political status. In other words, empowering the poor, and promoting a Western style of democracy and providing services in a free society is the required task, without any recognition of significant political engagement by national civil society or grassroots actors. This is contentious because experiences of civil society in Fascist Italy, Hungary, Palestine and other countries showed that the realm of civil society activity extends beyond supporting the poor and providing health and education services. Social activists and popular political movements have brought down oppressive governments before in some of these countries and continue to lead political campaigns, opposing dangerous and unjust state policies. What is happening across the Middle East today presents further evidence for this argument. In Egypt, through non-violent and popular protests, civil society leaders and youth activists entered into the political arena by demanding political reforms and change, which subsequently caused the repressive regime of Mubarak to collapse.\textsuperscript{88}

However, political action and resistance by civil society is not given any acknowledgment or weight in this governmental approach presented in the three definitions above. This exclusion of useful and significant elements of civil society is unhelpful and damaging in the context of social and political change.

The third issue is that it is clear from the definitions above that we have arrived now at \textit{two versions} of civil society and two conflictual perspectives of its role. The first one, as it is communicated in the governmental concepts above, is concerned with promoting civil society

\textsuperscript{87}Ismael. op.cit., p.2.
\textsuperscript{88}For more information on Egyptian Revolution, see: http://english.aljazeera.net/indepth/opinion/2011/02/2011121414422998168.html
as a voluntary and social force for development, liberal democracy and service provision. In brief, it does not entail elements of political resistance and civil disobedience towards the state. The second version associates forces of civil society with democratization in combination with national struggles, popular resistance and organized protests as critical components for seeking change and justice while challenging state hegemony. Assessing the two perspectives under the titles of “Civil Society I” (liberalism and state-civil society cooperation) and “Civil Society II” (political and popular struggles and civil society resistance), Michael Foley and Bob Edwards elaborate further:

Proponents of “Civil Society II” wish to include groups that enable citizens to mobilize against tyranny and counter state power. In doing so, they rightly emphasize the conflictual nature of civil society. They also tend to emphasize new forms of association, because political and traditional associations are often tainted by cooperation with the regime. Proponents of “Civil Society I” likewise define civil society in ways that fit their particular context [e.g. the definitions of USAID, the World Bank and DFID and their strong emphasis on specific functions of civil society including globalization, empowerment of the poor and better services].

Interpreting further the differences between Civil Society I (CSI) and Civil Society II (CSII), Lewis states:

As a new policy agenda took root during the rest of the 1990s, stressing good governance on the one hand and neo-liberal economic policies on the other, NGOs became viewed as alternative or substitute service providers in health, education and agriculture, sometimes as part of privatisation policy [i.e. CSI].....A different strand of civil society thinking, which is far more ready to acknowledge conflict and ambiguity, has also been influential around the world [i.e. CSII]. Drawing on the work of Gramsci, this perspective argues that civil society is the arena, separate from but enmeshed with state and market, in which ideological hegemony is contested, implying that civil society contains a relatively wide range of organizations which both challenge and uphold the existing order...These two different civil society traditions can therefore usefully be distinguished – the liberal and the radical.

The advocates of CSI continue to argue that because of market economies and open political systems in the West today, protesting against government and leading political campaigns is not an effective approach for civil society groups as they are better positioned to enhance services and democracy and perhaps improve state-decisions and actions. Hence entering into

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90 Lewis. “Old and New Civil Societies?” op.cit., no page numbers given.
partnership and cooperation with the system agencies is believed to be essential. On the other hand, there are other civil society forces that continue to believe in CSII and its effectiveness. These forces are reluctant to enter the governmental sphere, either preferring to sustain their independence for fear of complicity and disconnection from the masses. Hence, they are seeking to resist and to change, and are prepared to mobilize the masses and engage in political struggles against state power and policies.

Furthermore, as Lewis indicates, supporters of CSII draw inspiration and ideas from Antonio Gramsci’s philosophy about local people and workers in their political struggle against the authoritarian regime in Fascist Italy throughout the 1920s. Gramsci did not accept the simple notion that civil society actors and intellectuals should be concerned with civic education and cultural activities. He defined trade unions and other grassroots groups as political actors, leading popular struggles and offering political education for the masses and especially for the oppressed. In his writings in *Prison Notebooks*, he asserts:

The trade-union movement is nothing but a political movement, the union leaders are nothing but political leaders……During [national] struggles, strikes, etc., the masses are required to show the following qualities: solidarity, obedience to the mass organization, faith in their leaders, a spirit of resistance and sacrifice.\(^91\)

Vincent Kavaloski advocates a similar view to Gramsci. He argues that civil society representatives should not be understood in terms of complementary and assistance roles to the state. Instead, their principle objective should be concerned with creating effective *opposition* to dangerous “state policies”, and promoting alternative non-violent resistance. According to Kavaloski:

[Citizens’] intervention is not just a complement to official diplomacy in pursuing of national interests. Much of it, in fact, is carried out, not to assist official leaders, but in opposition to them and their policies - policies that may appear to citizen activists as bellicose, short sighted and dangerous. Much international citizen activity, I argue instead, constitutes nonviolent resistance, specifically non-violent social intervention.\(^92\)

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91 Gramsci. op.cit., pp.77&418.  
92 Kavaloski. op.cit., p.8.
However, as discussed briefly in the Introduction to this chapter, Michael Edwards, who is a supporter of the liberal CSI, sees the essential position of civil society from a different perspective. Today, as he suggests, there is a good case for establishing a positive civil society-state relationship and for building what he calls a “good society.” This is because, Edwards argues, the state and social agency share common goals and interests in deepening democracy and human rights and reducing poverty. In other words, challenging the government and its institutions is not a realistic choice in this changing modern world. His reasons relate to “facts of life”, as he describes it. For example, Edwards maintains that governments worldwide continue to be the larger provider of education, health, agricultural and other vital services that people need. Also, the state remains a significant determining factor and player in political changes on which sustainable development depends. He argues further that it is a fact of life that “in (most countries) government controls the wider frameworks within which people and their organizations have to operate.” Therefore, working with the state organizations to change from within, supporting community development, liberal democracy, and social and educational services are valid and practical choices by nongovernmental organizations to ascertain a civil and good and associational society for the benefits of its poorer members, as he argues.

3.3. 2 Making Sense of The Debate:

CSI and CSII came about as a result of varied political, economic and historical circumstances. On the one hand, CSII, which Gramsci and others have supported, represents a context where local communities and groups had a long history of state control and oppression. Therefore, challenging and resisting government power has developed as a key principle for achieving liberation and social justice. We have seen valid and practical examples of this approach in Italy, Hungary, Poland, Egypt, Palestine and South American countries. This also explains why many individuals and groups belonging to this type of civil society have been reluctant to enter into cooperation or partnership arrangements with the state. They fear either legitimizing unjust policies or becoming “part of the game.” However, while facing issues of inequality and hegemony is crucial, it is important to emphasize the point that representative agencies and actors of any type of civil society cannot and should

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93 Edwards, op. cit., p. 94.
94 Edwards and Hulme, op. cit., p. 16.
not seek to replace the state or compete for control, as damaging prospects may exist. Firstly, this may result in power struggles between state and non-state actors that divert attention and energies from central issues of freedom and equality. Secondly, if the state’s effectiveness declined, the danger would be that violence may rise. Instead, focus should be on replacing repression and injustice with inclusive civil and political rights as well as democratic representations.

On the other hand, the developmental and liberal CSI, which Michael Edwards and others advocate, is an inevitable product of a new global era. This era has witnessed and generated rapid social, political and economic changes since the 1990s. As discussed previously, these include the fast growth of the information revolution, privatization, democratisation and active citizenship, the good governance agenda, the emergence of world cooperation in economic development affairs and finally globalization. In addition, as Hakan Seckinelgin and David Lewis suggest, these new institutions and practices of CSI have dominated the socio-political scene since the 1990s. Also, they continue today to actively support civil society-state collaboration and liberal approaches for the enhancement of the three structures of state, market economy and civil society. This is presented in the context of building “modern democratic states” and balancing growth and equity in new societies.

Critiquing this dominant policy and its effect on state and society alike following the end of the Cold War, Tony Judt points out that the fall of Communism was seen as “the end of History.” Therefore, the world would “belong to liberal capitalism- there was no alternative- and we would all march forward in unison towards a future shaped by peace, democracy and free markets.” However, as Judt argues further, no one could credibly suggest that what replaced Communism was an era of “idyllic tranquility.” Post-communist Yugoslavia lacked peace and the successor states of the Soviet Union had little democracy. And concerning free markets, “they surely flourished but it is not clear for whom.”

Martin Shaw discusses also particularly the negative impact of this liberal culture and practice on the historical civil society forms of resistance and popular struggle. He observes:

[Western states] created the conditions for massive processes of economic and cultural organization. In this context, the old civil society [i.e. CSII] declined and with

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55 Mennell. op.cit., p.11.
it many of the forms which were most characteristic of it in mid-twentieth century (churches, mass political parties and trade unions) - all of which have tended to lose membership and influence. Civil society has been partially renewed in new institutions [i.e. CSI] which are less formal, less tied to particular social interests and less national.  

However, although CSI and its approaches may present opportunities for economic and political progress, it has critical weaknesses. These are examined in the following section.

3.3.3 Civil Society I: Critical Issues

It is clear from what Shaw says about old and new forms of civil society and Western economic processes that these renewed civil society institutions of CSI are historically tied to the process of free markets that facilitated their emergence in the first place. This means that the existence and the continuation of CSI are closely determined by the progression of the capitalist market system and not by any local, national or moral foundation. Michael Edwards' thesis reflects this notion by proposing that "a civil society cannot survive where there are no markets, and markets need a civil society to prosper." Using Palestine as an example, Edward Said suggests instead that the scope and the interests of liberal civil society organizations have to be broadened out beyond the capital agenda. According to Said, moral awareness and civil society structures with national goals are significant principles in change processes. Hence, he goes on to propose that the real requirement for development "is not simply capital but an awakened social consciousness and a serious interest in national civil institutions." Being connected closely with the fate of capitalism is a major weakness of this CSI approach.

A second weakness is related directly to how the tasks and duties of civil society are seen by CSI. In other words, reducing the role of CSOs to merely empowering the poor and working with people around globalization problems is misleading and limiting and carries within it a liberal understanding from a specific political culture. The liberation experience of many countries and their respective struggles against dictatorships and state repression suggest that

98 Edwards and Hulme. op.cit., p.50.
the role of grassroots groups is wider than what is implied in these governmental definitions and CSI practices.

The political tasks of civil society are ignored because these political protests and actions from below in today’s New World Order may be seen as politicized and threaten the entire Western process of, what David Lewis called before, the “good governance agenda” and the creation of the “virtuous circle” of state, market and civil society globally. Therefore, in line with this neoliberal ideology, the management of public and foreign affairs should be left to political elites and national governments, while citizen initiatives should be more concerned with providing basic services and fostering civility and democratic patterns. This is a narrow definition by advocates of CSI of both the nature and the significance of the role that civil society activists and organizations can play in various situations. The three concepts of civil society, proposed in the governmental understandings previously, are derived from a specific liberal culture of economic liberalism and good governance. And therefore, they all belong to CSI and its understandings of the civil society agency and social functions. This shows further limitations and weaknesses.

Thirdly, in terms of the fast growth of CSOs that the strong institutions and global forces of CSI enhanced, one should acknowledge that CSI, supported by powerful market economies and globalisation trends, has facilitated the emergence and the evolution of a strong and functioning NGO sector, nationally and internationally. Some positive achievements by NGOs in addressing development and armed conflict issues and providing assistance for reaching peace agreements between conflicting parties and former enemies are still notable. It is important also to remember that a significant factor in this efficiency of CSOs lies in their ability to offer parties and groups opportunities to take part in society, and even to improve or change it. This is how some major NGOs have been remarkably successful, especially in the context of peace and conflict resolution.¹⁰⁰

The negative aspect of this structured NGO approach is, however, the decreasing role given nowadays to less formalized and native groups in promoting development and change. The complex processes of establishing political economies and professional civil society between the state and the market structures make indigenous groups less attractive to donors and

¹⁰⁰See, for example, Jonathan Goodhand. *Aiding Peace? The Role of NGOs in Armed Conflict*. op.cit.
influential funding agencies. This is in part due to a perception their poor resources and understanding of, as it is called, professionalism. Consequently many indigenous initiatives are side-lined and many grassroots leaders find themselves unable to make a real difference without the same substantial support that strong NGOs receive. Furthermore, the professionalization of NGOs has led some to act similar in manner to commercial consulting firms by abandoning the values of volunteerism and non-profit services.

Therefore, taken together, ignoring national priorities and adopting the culture of free market and economic liberalism, dismissing the revolutionary experience and the liberation role by national civil society actors and organizations as irrelevant facts of life, and undermining the presence and the function of indigenous community groups by supporting the professionalization culture, are all critical issues of weakness and limitation for CS1. If this global trend of civil society seeks to improve its practice and effectiveness, these major challenges should be addressed. Similar critical arguments, however, should apply to CSII in terms of strengths and weaknesses.

3.3.4 Civil Society II: Critical Issues

Resisting the state is not enough to change radical situations of injustice and abuses of human rights. Activists and intellectuals have to engage and participate during and after the repression or crises have ended and offer lasting alternatives for rebuilding their societies. The critique is that some experiences have shown that civil society representatives and citizen groups succeeded in putting an end to authoritarian regimes but they failed to sustain their political engagement once the situation had changed. For example, in the case of Latin America, Robert Pinkney argues that civil society extended “greater resistance to authoritarianism but failed to develop a major role for itself once democracy had been restored.”

Egypt is another valid example where the youth and popular movements of the 2011 revolution could not regenerate themselves in political terms after the authoritarian regime had collapsed, and subsequently the organized social and political forces of the Muslim

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102 Robert Pinkney, quoted in Thania Paffenholz, (ed.) Civil Society and Peacebuilding. op.cit., p.11.
Brotherhood had dominated the political scene. This opens up the question of sustainability and long term-strategies by CSII.

In addition, the methods of change and resistance that have been traditionally employed by CSII should adapt and integrate the new tools of the social media. Mobilizing and raising awareness for political causes does not only happen through popular protests and public strikes. Moreover, David Harris points out that although the Gramscian philosophy of political resistance and mobilization through grassroots struggles (i.e. CSII) influenced many intellectuals and activists in Britain and also around the world especially throughout the 1970s and 1980s, the current weakness lies in its inability to “transform old cultures into new forms and dynamics.” Harris, however, acknowledges the great benefits of the Gramsci’s work for the academic and cultural debates, and the politicization of cultures. Thus, to strengthen the Gramscian (CSII) approach, what is needed is a transformation of the traditional forms of popular and civil society resistance and, most importantly, sustainable engagement throughout change processes. Together these will assist in dealing better with the current and new challenges of today’s world, which include, for example, globalization, privatization and political economies.

To sum up, CSI and CSII produce qualified CSOs and associations. As discussed above, they both enjoy strengthens and suffer weaknesses, and have been born out of two different eras and circumstances. In short, CSII of resistance and national struggles has originated from a historical context of political repression by the state. Its experience is, nonetheless, still relevant today. Supported by a strong liberal ideology, CSI of development and economic liberalism combined with state-civil society cooperation is a product of globalized policies and political economies. Therefore, as Lewis also emphasizes, the crucial recognition of these different understandings of civil society helps us to better interpret the changing relationships between citizens and state, and the shifting dimensions of the broader institutional landscape at local, national and global levels. In fact, this useful perspective is critical in evaluating and understanding the changing role of the Palestinian social organizations. This is addressed in the next chapter (Origins and Development of Palestinian Civil Society).

104 Lewis. “Old and New Civil Societies?”, op.cit. No page numbers given.
To extend this discussion, the second theme of this chapter is explored: civil society and connections with peacebuilding. It is important to stress again here that the process of developing the complementary approach as the overall conceptual framework in this research study consists of three stages in Chapters 2 and 3: firstly, explaining and critiquing liberal peacebuilding; secondly, providing an alternative complementary approach to peacebuilding; and thirdly, analyzing and establishing the role of civil society in processes and initiatives aimed at peacebuilding. This is now the third and final component within this conceptual understanding and complementary approach to peacebuilding; which is employed afterwards to examine the role of civil society in supporting peacebuilding in Gaza and the challenges to secular CSOs in Chapter 6 (Research Analysis). Also, the following section discusses civil society in relation to peacebuilding processes with a particular emphasis on conflict-torn societies and civil society contributions to conflict transformation efforts. This particular emphasis on conflict situations and peacebuilding efforts is important because the civil society organizations examined as case studies in this research are operating and involved in peacebuilding activities within the context of the ongoing Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

3.4 Role of Civil Society in Peacebuilding:

State officials are well-positioned at times to facilitate peace and power-sharing agreements between former adversaries. However, there is a growing recognition that if we seek to build solid foundations and generate public support to make peace agreements stand in exceptionally fragile situations, civil society and community organizations must be at the heart of these efforts. This is because recent experiences demonstrated that state-oriented conflict resolution approaches have major weaknesses, including the way in which root causes of conflict are overlooked. There is also the narrow, hierarchical focus on conflict leaders which may negatively facilitate exclusion and alienation of significant local players and their constituencies. This is in addition to the current realisation that political mediation and the signing of political deals is not enough to address old patterns of conflicts and animosity.

Furthermore, Mathijs Van Leeuwen points also to the evolution of the international thinking and strategies concerning the role of civil society in addressing peace and conflict issues. The shift from conflict resolution to conflict prevention has created a greater recognition of informal actors in transforming conflict and democratizing societies. Van Leeuwen observes
that two outcomes emerge as a result of this development. Firstly, the acknowledgment that civil society agencies are able to make a significant contribution towards managing and preventing future conflicts. Secondly, formal peace processes cannot fully succeed without the participation of local players.\(^{105}\)

As discussed in Chapter 2 (Principles of Peacebuilding), peacebuilding should include the initiation of structural and community-based processes to address issues of victimhood, equal rights, violence, access, resources, representation, repression and peaceful coexistence (i.e. positive peace). Hence, without promoting grassroots and widespread acceptance of political settlements and public participation, there is a strong possibility that such peace agreements will not be effective enough to transform long-term cultures of injustices and conflicts. Ho-Won Jeong argues here for the principle of reciprocity between governmental and nongovernmental approaches aimed at conflict transformation. He points out that national initiatives for sustainable peace can have little impact on peacebuilding processes without political mobilization and vice-versa, and adds: “institutionalisation of peacebuilding has to be balanced with creative processes existing at local level.”\(^{106}\)

Hence, the two approaches need to be employed effectively in situations of peacebuilding. This also suggests that political means alone cannot be successful without the involvement of civil society and social forces that help to sustain peaceful solutions, as well as promoting constructive management of differences through peaceful interactions. In other words, building positive peace and reaching beyond the mere absence of violence (negative peace) in conflict contexts involves both political and civil society activities.

The engagement of CSOs in peacebuilding processes is the argument and the debate which this section focuses on and seeks to explore. However, this is not without challenges. Generally speaking, any attempt to clearly define the role of civil society actors in peacebuilding is problematic. There are a number of reasons for this. Firstly, the concept and practice of peacebuilding lacks an agreed definition. In Chapter 2 it became clear how the discourse of peacebuilding is currently dominated by the liberal peace discourse which deals with conflict and peace issues from the perspective of economic and political liberalization.


\(^{106}\) Jeong, op.cit. p. 150.
(i.e. market-oriented democracies). Thania Paffenholz elaborates further by suggesting that any effort to "unpack our understanding of civil society role in peacebuilding is challenging" because the essential meaning of peacebuilding is contentious in both theory and practice, and cultural understandings make it more difficult to conceptualize. Also, the liberal peace theory makes it more elusive to distinguish other concepts of peacebuilding and civil society. Secondly, a critical issue in this debate is that scholars and practitioners face a serious deficit of theories about the concept of civil society peacebuilding.

These challenges are important to acknowledge because they place real constraints on defining the role of civil society in peacebuilding processes. Nonetheless, taking these limiting factors into account, the role of CSOs in promoting peacebuilding is explored below so that the complementary approach to peacebuilding in this study is also better defined.

In practice, civil society organizations with good expertise and resources are not only able to advance political resolutions to long-standing armed and ethnic conflicts but they effectively can help individuals and parties to develop capacity and skills to deal with, and manage conflicts peacefully, without having to resort to violence. Also, the Carnegie UK Trust Report emphasizes strongly the connection between the involvement of civil society and combating challenges of violence, discrimination and social justice. The Report researchers suggest that a basic strength of informal organizations is their capacity to help make a positive change through which values and outcomes such as "nonviolence, non-discrimination, democracy, mutuality and social justice are nurtured and achieved; and as means by which public dilemmas are resolved in ways that are just, effective and democratic."

Beatrice Pouligny points out also that not only CSOs enjoy the capacity to encourage a culture of peace and understanding in conflict environments but they are also capable of making a meaningful contribution to societies emerging out of political and violent conflicts. These are situations in which members of concerned communities have suffered and survived horrific violence and traumas. In such circumstances, civil society initiatives can help to reconstruct the social fabric of society, the broken trust as well as the psychological damage that has been caused by the violence. Pouligny argues that civil associations and citizens

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108 Ibid. p.43.
groups are central players in specifically transforming hostilities and conflicts and in nourishing new values of cooperation and rights in war-torn communities. Most importantly, they could support the local state to re-establish law and order. As she puts it:

Local civil societies, through monitoring and lobbying activists, may push the local state into fulfilling its responsibility for implementing the rule of law. They are often seen to carry the best hopes for a genuine democratic counterweight to the power-brokers, economic exploiters and warlords who tend to predominate in conflict-ridden weak or failed states, and may even capture electoral processes.¹¹⁰

Furthermore, Catherine Barnes makes the point that while informal groups give expression and direction to the social, political, spiritual, and cultural needs of society members, it is crucial to understand that civil society is far more than public-benefit nongovernmental organizations. As Barnes has stated, “NGOs with technical-professional skills, however, can play an important role in providing services, promoting change and working with conflict”.¹¹¹

In Agents for Change: Civil Society Roles in Preventing War and Building Peace, Barnes explains further that civil society in conflict contexts combines particularly three significant powers: “the power to resist oppressive forces”, and “the power to expose oppression” and also the “power to persuade.” Hence, these distinguished advantages place civil society players in a unique position to lead various peacebuilding initiatives during violent conflict and after it has been transformed. Barnes points out:

[CSOs] play roles at every point in the development of conflict and its resolution: from surfacing situations of injustice to preventing violence, from creating conditions conducive to peace talks to mediating a settlement and working to ensure it is consolidated, from setting a global policy agenda to healing war scarred psyches.¹¹²

Moreover, David Bloomfield illustrates that the significance of bottom-up endeavours in conflict-torn societies exists in their ability to encourage interactions and societal participation through which grievances and terms of future coexistence are defined and negotiated. The opposite top-down official approach, he points out, is “exactly the realm where the pragmatists, the political thinkers and the realists try to see what needs to be done

to build civic trust, to achieve political reconciliation, democratic reciprocity.” His conclusion is that civil society “should be also the interface where the two realms meet and could be co-ordinated and interwoven.” Similarly, emphasizing this vital connection, in *Partners in Peace: Discourses and Practices of Civil Society Peacebuilding*, Mathijs Van Leeuwen clarifies that what distinguishes CSOs in conflict situations is their “comparative advantage of local knowledge and contextual understandings of barriers and opportunities” to making and sustaining peace at the local and national level. Also, unlike international organizations, they have an “inherent understanding” of the future post-conflict context and associated challenges. In practice, according to Leeuwen, this has placed national agencies central to any effective efforts at transforming conflict and, confirmed the contributions of civil society to peace in conflict and post-conflict situations.

Assessing how civil society groups have supported efforts and activities aimed at building peace in 65 cases including the Balkans, Northern Ireland, Rwanda, Georgia, Kenya, Colombia, Lebanon, Israel/Palestine, Guatemala, Paul Van Tongeren and his fellow researchers conclude that CSOs are able to create “safe spaces” where groups and individuals can join forces to engage in dialogue and help change their societies “based on justice and the rule of law.” More importantly, one of their major findings is that this informal sector opens up possibilities and facilitates greater participation and involvement in the quest for sustainable and just peace beyond the traditional notion of political activism. Thus, artists, teachers, students, young people, businessmen, business-women, labour union members, academics, environmentalists, journalists, religious leaders, all are afforded opportunities for confronting injustice and promoting peace through civil society interactions.

Moreover, in *Civil Society and Peacebuilding: A Critical Assessment*, Thania Paffenholz writes of the increasing linkages between civil society peacebuilding and political processes at the top level. As she points out, through information campaigns, public opinion polls, advocacy and lobbying, civil society players connect the population to the “official mediation process.” However, Paffenholz acknowledges that the communication flow from the population to the negotiation process continues to be a challenge, which requires greater

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114 Van Leeuwen, op. cit., p.38.
efforts and coherent strategies by civil society. Nonetheless, as these official and unofficial connections are receiving increasing attention in peace processes, civil society representatives continue to gain further legitimacy and credibility in the context of peacebuilding. Therefore, as she suggests, there is now a "general acceptance that national actors should play the leading role in peacebuilding and that the role of outsiders should be limited to support."^{116}

In their 2010 study of localized approaches to peacebuilding, Abdul Aziz Said and Nathan Funk have attempted to define further the insider-outsider relationship in the context of civil society peacebuilding. They suggest that external organizations and players can enhance local efforts aimed at peacebuilding through: (a) playing a mediating role between national projects and international resources, such as allocation of funding and sharing information; (b) redirecting the focus of the global media on local processes; (c) providing access to international conferences where opportunities of sharing expertise can be created; and (d) helping local partners to link and network with larger groups and audiences beyond their immediate environment.^{117}

In her evaluation of the role of civil society especially in war-torn societies, Martina Fischer suggests also that local CSOs and community groups make significant contributions to peacebuilding in various but related areas. These include, for instance, establishing alternative media, monitoring elections and democratic processes in society, providing peace education, organizing inter-religious dialogue and facilitating youth leadership. Furthermore, leading initiatives for disarmament and political processes, promoting arts, music and films to counter cultures of violence and conflict, strengthening peace constituencies, offering support to marginalized groups of refugees and women, lobbying for human rights and protection of civilians in war times, documenting war crimes, dealing with trauma and providing psychosocial support for conflict victims are recognized as important contributions to peacebuilding. However, similar to Said, Funk and Paffenholz, Fischer believes that international support and partnership with organizations working on the ground is a key factor for addressing the peacebuilding challenges in societies torn by conflict and violence. Fischer elaborates further:

*In war times, [local] NGOs contribute to maintaining or improving relationships by fostering action across conflict lines and ethnic divides through informal exchanges*

^{116}Paffenholz, op.cit., pp.57- 58.
^{117}Abdul Aziz and Funk, op.cit., p. 134.
and joint projects....International NGOs, political foundations and local communities have created partnerships with, and support programmes for, groups and individuals in conflict-torn societies in order to enable conflict transformation and peacebuilding. Many NGOs work to lobby, monitor and influence the policy of governments and international organizations...Aiming to raise public awareness of the needs of war-torn societies. (Emphasis added)

Undertaking all these complex and risky tasks in conflict situations require CSOs to possess certain abilities and advantages to influence conflict dynamics and make a positive impact. In this regard, Paul Van Tongeren makes the case for civil society involvement in the area of peacebuilding in a violent conflict context. According to Tongeren, CSOs have the ability to: (a) operate without being constrained by limiting mandates of foreign policy agendas; (b) gain access to areas inaccessible to official leaders; (c) engage in dialogue with several parties without losing their credibility; (d) deal directly with grassroots communities; (e) work in confidentiality without media coverage and scrutiny; and (f) take risks and effectively network given their longstanding relationships and connections.

Given these comparative strengths, Martin Shaw suggests also that civil society actors make a difference in conflict situations by facilitating a “direct representation” of combatants and victims. In this context, through informal contacts and meetings, CSOs can function as a mediating body for this significant representation, and for clear communication of grievances and conflicting claims to wider communities and groups beyond their immediate borders.

Luc Reychler, similarly, seems to consider the role of civil society players in the field to be critically important in relation to representations. He maintains that their presence in conflict environments does not only constitute available expertise, but they are also able to act as “field-diplomats.” This is through setting up early warning systems for rising conflicts, advocacy for the victims of violence, supporting existing peace structures and bringing different groups together for dialogues.

The engagement of civil society in peacebuilding efforts has been also receiving further attention within the theory and practice of sustainable peace as suggested by John Paul

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119 Paul Van Tongeren, quoted in Martina Fischer op.cit., p. 9.
120 Shaw, op.cit., p.12.
Lederach. Lederach is the leading academic and practitioner for the sustainable peace theory. As explained in Chapter 2, Lederach’s model proposes an active role for civil society and local actors in peacebuilding processes, which aims at transforming the conflict and building sustainable and just peace through joint political-civil society initiatives. His theory is based on interconnecting official and grassroots levels to facilitate and sustain peacebuilding activities. Lederach suggests three levels for leadership that can equally coordinate and support peacebuilding efforts in divided societies. These are senior government leaders (military personal, politicians, and diplomats), middle-range leaders (academics, peace and civil society practitioners, faith representatives and NGOs) and local leadership (grassroots activists, indigenous constituencies, refugee camp leaders, and peace and humanitarian workers). Lederach has proposed an active engagement for civil society players within the framework of middle-range and local leadership.

Examining further the contributions that CSOs can make to transform ongoing and violent conflict situations, in *Aiding Peace: the Role of NGOs in Armed Conflict*, Jonathan Goodhand has also provided an illuminating account of civil society’s role in peacebuilding in theoretical and practical terms, demonstrating the diverse tasks of national organizations in the context of armed conflicts and comprehensive peacebuilding processes. Goodhand divides NGOs into three categories according to the type of peacebuilding intervention they wish to be engaged in and their expertise and resources allow. This means that a civil society organization may choose to specialize in a specific area to support transformational processes aimed at cultivating positive change and sustainable peace. The three categories are: (a) Direct intervention: that is delivery of assistance and aid, direct implementation of projects without working through intermediary organizations; (b) Capacity building: that is developing the capacity of individuals or contact organizations to sustain the effects of projects and long-term programmes of peacebuilding; (c) Advocacy: that is, influencing and lobbying policymakers and decision-makers to engender and support changes at the macro level.

Finally, in working with conflict and making change, dilemmas, nonetheless, arise. Two examples propose themselves: distance and the U.S. ‘war on terrorism’. Distance is a key challenge for civil society engagement in international or external contexts of conflict and peacebuilding. The disconnection with remote civil wars and conflicts is problematic. In

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123 Goodhand, op.cit., pp.15-16.
other words, the gap between external peaceful societies and war-torn countries is increasingly widening. Information regarding these distant situations is mediated by a third party, which is normally the media. Depending on how partial and honest media sources are, this can either increase or decrease the distance. Also, at the heart of this issue is the question of responsibility. For many people and national governments, being open to other political and social problems may involve taking a degree of responsibility and responding to the conflicts. In this regard, Martin Shaw stresses that distance does not only exist but it also evolves with complexity and according to political and media reactions to international crises. Therefore, it either strengthens or weakens the response of civil society to external conflicts. Shaw illustrates:

Distance, psychological or even geographical, is not a straightforward question. Distance is complex and relative and is constantly established, undermined and negotiated in our responses to conflict and violent situations. Media coverage of global crises both creates and undermines a variety of forms of distancing.\(^{124}\)

Elaborating further on the second challenge mentioned above in relation to civil society peacebuilding and the U.S. 'war on terror', Andrew Clapham warns that there are serious consequences and substantial risks for civil society engagement with perpetrators of violence and non-state armed organizations. This is because of fears about granting legitimacy to armed groups and perhaps giving them a voice. He argues further that the majority of governments and state agencies are wary of contacts with non-state armed actors and have attempted to avoid them since the September 2001 attacks in the U.S. As a result of representing and engaging with combatants, CSOs, according to Clapham, will be targeted on the grounds of “assisting terrorists”, and being “complicit with terrorism.” Hence, obtaining funds and attracting international donors may prove extremely difficult. Clapham also concludes that there is now awareness among civil society groups that involving “non-state actors needs a degree of political sophistication if one is to avoid the ‘terrorist tag’.”\(^{125}\)

To conclude this discussion concerning the role of civil society in peacebuilding, some major points need to be reiterated. As illustrated previously, it is widely recognized now that government initiatives and actors alone cannot transform long-term conflicts and situations of

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\(^{124}\) Shaw, op.cit., p.8.

widespread violence and injustice. Hence, effective peacebuilding processes should employ parallel bottom-up and top-down approaches. Also, it is understood that any attempt to clearly conceptualize civil society peacebuilding is extremely difficult and faces obstacles. Among other reasons discussed previously, this is because the current discourse lacks a shared definition of peacebuilding and its precise components, given that cultural and political understandings (e.g. liberal peacebuilding) come into the picture and makes it a more contentious concept to theorize and understand. As a result, a defined and agreed role for civil society in peacebuilding is still lacking among academics, practitioners and policymakers, and is open to interpretation.

However, the arguments and discussions above have attempted to clarify the role of CSOs in peacebuilding processes, with a special focus on civil society engagement in conflict-torn societies. As said before, this particular connection between war-torn societies and the role of civil society in conflict transformation was emphasized because the CSOs examined as case studies in this research are operating and involved in peacebuilding activities within the ongoing Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Hence, drawing on theoretical frameworks provided by some distinguished theorists in the field of civil society peacebuilding, the previous conceptualizations suggested that the roles of CSOs in peacebuilding are diverse and multiple, interconnected and as complex as conflict itself. In short, these include: promoting non-discrimination; nonviolence and equal rights; cooperating with the local authorities to establish the rule of law; resisting and exposing oppression; creating conditions conducive to peace talks and consolidating political agreements. Furthermore, the engagement of civil society in peacebuilding involves: playing a mediating role between official and unofficial endeavours; sharing local knowledge of barriers and opportunities of making and building peace at the national and community level; and linking the local population to the formal negotiations process. Also, in the context of partnerships, international civil society players provide critical access to funding and international conferences through which opportunities of sharing expertise and global networking are created.

Furthermore, the previous discussions have demonstrated that civil society contributions to peacebuilding to transform conflict situations extend to some significant areas such as: alternative media; elections monitoring; peace education; inter-religious dialogue; youth leadership; arts and films; and marginalized groups in societies such as refugees and women. Also, these significant areas include: human rights and protection of civilians in war times;
documentation of war crimes; trauma recovery; representation of combatants and victims; grassroots participation in peacebuilding; humanitarian assistance; capacity building and advocacy.

3.4. 1 Critique of The Role of Civil Society in Peacebuilding:

To provide a more critical perspective about civil society and peacebuilding, another argument that should be discussed here is that the capacity of civil society to successfully help to bring about peace and stability should not be exaggerated. While there is credible evidence in relation to the positive contributions that civil society organizations have made, and can make in peacebuilding and conflict situations as illustrated above, there are documented cases of manipulation amongst some civil society actors who take on dual roles and benefit from existing ambiguity between formal and informal politics, especially in conflict contexts. In these circumstances, as Beatrice Pouligny says clearly, “they are just as discredited as the state.126 Besides side-lining local efforts for conflict resolution, the installation of liberal peace NGOs and the subsequent professionalization of peacebuilding, for example, have increased the ambiguity of civil society roles and tasks in peacebuilding.

Also, similar to what Tareq and Jacqueline Ismael and Hakan Seckinelgin warned previously concerning the danger of transferring economic liberalism and its model of CSI to non-Western culture, recent experiences have shown that this practice of model-transfer has been taken further into the realm of international civil society peacebuilding. For instance, during the Cambodia peace process of the 1990s, when the United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia (UNTAC) was unsuccessful in finding identical institutions of a civil society that would fit the Western criteria, the UNTAC reportedly employed its available physical and organizational resources to assist with founding a new civil society structure and culture that would meet the “Western understandings” of civil activity.127

Pouligny suggests compelling consequences of this damaging political behaviour and the resulting negative engagement of civil society in peacebuilding. She points out that it “narrows the range of organizational modalities considered.” It also conveys the idea of a “clear distinction between what is political and what is not” (i.e. founding a Cambodian ‘civil

126Pouligny, op.cit., p.501.
127Ibid. p.497.
process’ distinct from the ‘political process’). And it “tends to conceal the distinctions made between indigenous and outside NGOs.” This is harmful because these practices in civil society peacebuilding lead to newly ‘exported’ expertise and crowd out local efforts and actors, and also create a weak membership base for civil society peacebuilding.\textsuperscript{129}

In *International Statebuilding: The Rise of Post-Liberal Governance*, David Chandler remarks that civil society has been hijacked by neo-liberalism which also employs civil society peacebuilding to support liberal governance. Given that liberalization in government and the free market system constitute essential components of CSI, as discussed before in this chapter, this means that CSI has been promoting a particular approach to peacebuilding directed by the political agendas of good governance and the creation of Western-oriented democracies as a workable remedy for countries experiencing conflict and unrest. Therefore, Chandler suggests that practitioners and scholars of peacebuilding should acknowledge that civil society is currently an area of “policy intervention”, and it represents another tool of Western colonialism since culture and race are no longer acceptable justifications for Western domination. Within this interventionist politics, he explains, expanding civil society as a balancing model to enhance state-building and contain any resulting conflicts and destabilizing effects is considered to be vital. Chandler analyzes further:

\[\text{After race and culture} \text{ civil society is the third of a series of interconnected and overlapping policy paradigms through which Western engagement and intervention in the colonial and post-colonial state has been negotiated and reflected. In fact, policy intervention only becomes possible with the expansion of civil society as a framework for understanding and managing social problems, resulting from interventionism and the political reconstruction of the state.}\textsuperscript{130}\]

Thania Paffenholz remarks here that the liberal peacebuilding paradigm opens up the civil society sphere for its own interventionist purposes in two particular ways. Firstly, it views civil society as an alternative service delivery supplier when the government is not able to deliver or suffers from significant weaknesses because of internal unrest and lack of political and economic liberalization. Secondly, it considers civil society to be a vital part in the

\textsuperscript{128}Ibid. p.498.
\textsuperscript{129}Paffenholz. op. cit., p. 59.
process of implementing the liberal peacebuilding agenda. As a result, some serious consequences have developed and impacted on civil society peacebuilding.

For example, according to Mathijs Van Leeuwen, the relationship between these neoliberal approaches and international NGOs has become clearer and is critiqued now by indigenous representatives and players. Sharing the military and political goals of government is central to this criticism. Many external NGOs are seen by grassroots agencies as representatives of foreign policy agendas. In Iraq and Afghanistan, as Leeuwen observes, the majority of international CSOs working there believe that peace and security will come from the good governance agenda and its associated project of institution-building. And therefore they have been actively participating in the process of transforming these societies into liberal peace and democracy. In this context, critical questions such as whose peace is being promoted and who determines civil society’s shape and its framework in situations of military invasion, come to the surface and undermine the idealized image of civil society and its role in peacebuilding.

For this particular reason, Abdul Aziz Said and Nathan Funk warn also that civil society players involved in peacebuilding are at times used by external powers as agents of “cultural imperialism”, which assumes that “technique will travel” and that “the same institutional solutions” are applicable to all societies regardless of their political tradition and cultural orientation. Hence, they suggest that national and international organizations need to show greater awareness and understanding of these critical problems.

Another significant point that must be made in this critique of civil society’s role in peacebuilding is that civil society actors have themselves undermined democracy as an alternative to conflict in some cases. Kristian Harpviken and Kjell Kjillman examine how the undemocratic actions and policies of external civil society organizations enhanced exclusive associations in some African states, and ignored the ethnic organizations that constitute the most vital part of civil society in many parts of Africa. Not only they did not support wider participation, plural identities and acceptance, as civil society players are assumed to do, but they also portrayed rejection, exclusion and political bias. Hence, the end result, as Harpviken

131 Paffenholz. op.cit., p. 60.
133 Abdul Aziz and Funk. op.cit., p. 123.
and Kjellman conclude, is that “the failure to promote democracy in Africa has stemmed partially from a failure to recognize and accept social realities.”\textsuperscript{134}

Gezim Visoka provides another example where Serbian informal organizations in Kosovo participated in creating a state of fear and insecurity instead of supporting stability and democracy. Following the war in 1999, the Serbian government worked to build “parallel structures” within the sectors of health and education and public services to enhance its own interests and presence in Kosovo. According to Visoka, these civil society structures have contributed to violence and attacks against non-Serb citizens and constituted a “significant obstacle to the representation and participation of Serbs in Kosovar institutions.”\textsuperscript{135}

The abuse of civil society sector and its potentials by the military state for its own interests has been observed in other experiences as well. In Israel/Palestine, the Israeli government, for instance, turned a blind eye to the creation of Hamas’s social and grassroots institutions in Gaza in order to weaken the strength of the more secular PLO/Fatah, and facilitate an internal conflict among the major political players in the Palestinian situation.\textsuperscript{136} With the current division and absence of national unity in the Palestinian situation, it is clear that this colonial policy, which essentially encouraged the growth of a particular political group for conflict ends, has produced fruitful outcomes for Israel. In \textit{Civil Society in the Middle East}, Augustus Richard Norton rightly remarks that certain sections of civil society in the Middle East lend their support to the authoritarian state and its abusive exercise of power. In this context, authoritarianism and oppression of citizens are enhanced by civil society elements.\textsuperscript{137}

Furthermore, CSOs are generally assumed to automatically support conflict transformation in situations of violence and peacebuilding. This is not a completely valid claim. The reason is that civil society groups can commit to transformative initiatives as well as prolonging conflict satiations, which have had a long history and claimed the lives of many people. Raffaele Marchetti and Nathalie Tocci argue that while significant attention has been devoted to civil society and its role in preventing and resolving conflict, little efforts are made in the literature to examine the connection between CSOs and conflict escalation. They suggest that

\textsuperscript{134}Kristian Harpviken and Kjell Kjellman. “Civil Society and the State”, in Paffenholz (ed.). op.cit., p. 35.  
\textsuperscript{135}Gezim Visoka. “The Obstacles to Sustainable Peace and Democracy in Post-Independence Kosovo”, in Carol Rank and Marwan Darweish (ed.) op.cit., p. 36.  
\textsuperscript{136}Richard Norton. op.cit., p. 10.  
\textsuperscript{137}Ibid. p. xv Preface.
some of the methods utilized for civil society peacebuilding, such as media and public
campaigns, monitoring activities, mass gatherings and dialogue, can be also critically 
employed by civil society actors for destructive purposes: to sustain the conflict and maintain 
the political state quo in societies suffering from division and violence.

Most importantly, in some contexts, civil society actors have also delayed peaceful 
resolutions and obstructed official endeavours aimed at negotiating a political and just 
settlement to long-running disputes. For this particular reason, both authors propose that 
orGANIZATIONS WHO ADVOCATE THE CONTINUATION OF CONFLICT AND INJUSTICE SHOULD BE CALLED 
"CONFLICT SOCIETY ORGANIZATIONS" (CO SOS) INSTEAD OF CS OS. Marchetti and Tocci elaborate 
further and provide current examples:

At times these [civil society] activities can contribute to the management and 
settlement of conflicts. Yet on other occasions they may constrain the scope for 
government manoeuvring, reducing the prospects for compromise. The lobbying 
efforts of the American Israeli Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC) as a third party 
(i.e. US) Co SO on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, or the Armenian Diaspora in France 
and the US regarding the Turkish- Armenian relations are notable cases in point.138

Similarly, Mary Anderson analyzes specific ways in which civil society actors sometimes 
play a negative role in worsening conflicts and contributing to divisions in local communities, 
instead of helping to facilitate peace and change. Anderson explains, for instance, how aid 
assistance managed and provided by informal groups, can be used to do harm rather than 
good. This includes favouring recipients, unfair distribution, releasing funds for war through 
humanitarian assistance and delivery, and damaging local markets. Her conclusion is that 
despite their best efforts to maintain “non-partisanship” in terms of the warring parties, 
represents of peace and humanitarian NGOs in the field still influence “intergroup 
connectors and dividers by either worsening dividers or ignoring/undermining connectors.”139

Funding and tensions between CSOS are also critical issues that must be acknowledged when 
discussing civil society and its role in peacebuilding. Assessing the impact of the fierce 
competition for funding on the capacity and commitment of civil society players, Catherine

138 Raffael Marchetti and Nathalie Tocci. “Conflict Society: Understanding the Role of Civil Society in 
139 Mary Anderson. “Do No Harm: Enhancing Local Capacities for Peace”, in Luc Reychler and Thania 
Paffenholz(ed.) op.cit., p. 258.
Barnes points out that the focus on generating fundable projects can sometimes result in a “disconnect between the peacebuilding initiatives and conflict context.” Moreover, because of the constant pressure and need for project funds, an NGO culture has emerged which is opportunistic and driven by a “project mentality”, as Barnes describes it. Martina Fischer adds here that a major criticism of NGOs points to their changing performance depending on the requirements of donors, and therefore they often lack independence because they are often either state or donor-driven.

In the context of these negative aspects, it is also equally importantly to be aware of internal conflicts among civil society representatives themselves. Civil society relations are not always peaceful. A lack of unity generally between CSOs is still a constraint on implementation. This results in organizational conflicts which divert the social energy and commitment of activists and groups, and reflect negatively on civil society members in a community-based setting. Fischer refers also to the lack of democratic controls and checks in the civil society sector, which may help to explain these conflictual elements among informal agencies and players. Commenting on internal tensions within the sphere of civil society and the implications involved, Hizkias Assefa points out:

Civil society is a microcosm of the overall society and mirrors all the divisions and fault lines in the community. Therefore, it is inevitable that civil society actors have their own biases and loyalties. They may lack the objectivity and distance to undertake the reconciler roles... Civil society actors themselves might need a reconciliation process before they can play reconciler roles.

According to Alexis De Tocqueville, while these civil society conflicts may not lead into anarchy, they do constantly bring about a degree of social disharmony in society. Therefore, some observers like Stephen Mennel, continue to argue that since divisions within CSOs are inevitable, the presence of a strong functioning state is essential in managing and regulating this associational realm and its promising as well as harmful potentials.

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140Barnes. Agents for Change. op.cit., p. 84.
141Fischer. op.cit., p. 9.
144Alexis De Tocqueville, quoted in Foley &Edwards. op.cit., p.5.
145See, for example, Stephen Mennel. Civilization and Decivilization: Civil Society and Violence. op.cit.
From all previous examples and discussions, it is clear that civil society actors and organizations have the potential to play a negative role in particular situations and cases. These include: imposing Western notions of civil society on non-Western societies; crowding out local staff and weakening grassroots involvement; participating in neoliberal policies and interventions; undermining democracy; supporting the military and authoritarian states; obstructing political resolutions and escalating conflict. The negative aspects of civil society also involve: worsening divisions among connectors and dividers; competing for funding; promoting a culture of project-mentality; creating internal conflictual relations within the civil society sector; and lacking the credibility to support reconciliation in some contexts. These major examples represent real issues and problematic roles which are directly associated with the realm of civil society. Taken together, they suggest clearly that capacity of civil society to always make a positive contribution to peacebuilding should not be romanticized. Also, in focusing on peacebuilding activities by some CSOs in Gaza, this research takes into account all the critical observations discussed above in order to provide a more balanced and informed analysis of civil society and peacebuilding activities, and the challenges to secular civil society organizations in Gaza.

Conclusion:

Drawing on the definitions of USAID, DFID, the World Bank and academic understandings, this chapter has explored various conceptualisations of civil society and established that two powerful versions still currently represent this ever evolving and growing sector: CSI and CSII. Antonio Gramsci’s philosophy of civil society resistance against state hegemony and national liberation experiences continue to inform CSII. On the contrary, economic liberalism and the good governance agenda still dominate CSI and the ideology of its supporters including Michael Edwards. In making sense of this complex debate, the previous discussions analyzed the weaknesses and the strengths of both civil society approaches. For example, despite its relative success in creating a specific culture of development and professional NGOs, CSI suffers significant weaknesses. These weaknesses included paying little attention to national priorities and adopting a culture of free market and liberal democracy, and undermining the legitimate presence and function of indigenous community groups by supporting NGO professionalization and commercialization for political interests.
On the other hand, although CSII has demonstrated its success and relevance in old and modern history and in places like Fascist Italy, Egypt, Palestine, South America and Eastern European countries, it still has major weaknesses. Transforming traditional cultures of national resistance and popular struggles into new forms and dynamics in this changing world, and providing a more sustainable and political engagement beyond the mere collapse of the oppressive regime and authoritarian powers, are central to these challenging weaknesses.

As emphasized before, the significant recognition of these different understandings of civil society (i.e. CSI and CSII) helps us to better understand and explain the changing relationship between citizens and the state, and the shifting dimensions of the broader institutional landscape at local, national and global levels. Chapter 4, which examines the evolving role of the Palestinian social agencies in both the nationalist movement and Palestinian society generally, benefits from this useful perspective.

This chapter has also successfully established the connection between civil society and peacebuilding activities particularly in war times and conflict situations. The particular relationship between conflict-torn societies and civil society’s role in conflict transformation was emphasized because the CSOs examined as case studies in this research are operating and involved in peacebuilding activities within the ongoing situation of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The previous arguments and discussions have demonstrated that civil society contributions to peacebuilding in conflict environments extend to significant areas including: elections monitoring; peace education; inter-religious dialogue; youth leadership; arts; marginalized groups in societies such as refugees and women; human rights and protection of civilians in conflict; and documentation of war crimes. These significant areas also include: war victims; dialogue and just peace; humanitarian assistance; capacity building; advocacy; and policy-making processes.

To reflect a deeper analysis and understanding of the theme of civil society peacebuilding, this chapter includes also a discussion of the negative aspects of civil society in the context of peacebuilding. These involve: imposing Western notions of civil society on non-Western societies; crowding out local staff and weakening grassroots involvement; participating in neoliberal policies and interventions; undermining democracy; supporting the military and authoritarian states; and obstructing peaceful resolutions. The negative aspects of civil society
also include: worsening divisions among connectors and dividers in conflict situations; competing for funding; promoting a culture of project-mentality; creating internal tensions within the civil society sector; and lacking the objectivity to play the reconciler roles in some situations.

The concluding assessment here was that there should be a greater awareness of the potentially damaging prospects of civil society and their implications for peacebuilding. This research takes into account these critical observations in order to help provide a deeper analysis of civil society and peacebuilding activities in Gaza.

The relationship between CSOs and peacebuilding constitutes an important theme in the chapter because it was the final component of the conceptual model for this study. To reiterate briefly, the process of developing the complementary approach as the main conceptual model in this research study included three stages in Chapters 2 and 3: firstly, explaining and critiquing liberal peacebuilding; secondly, providing an alternative complementary approach to peacebuilding; and thirdly, exploring and establishing the role of civil society in processes and activities aimed at peacebuilding. Both the first and second stages have been dealt with in Chapter 2, and the third and final stage concerning the role of civil society in peacebuilding has been addressed in this chapter.

Therefore, the complementary approach to peacebuilding is now fully developed and this research study applies it as the overall conceptual model. This means that varied and relevant aspects of peacebuilding and suggested roles of civil society in processes and initiatives aimed at peacebuilding (as proposed by John Paul Lederach, Jonathan Goodhand, Nick Lewer, Johan Galtung, Luc Reychler, Herbert Kelman, Beatrice Pouligny, Catherine Barnes, Martina Fischer, Paul Van Tongeren) are applied and employed in the examination of the peacebuilding activities facilitated by the case study organizations in Gaza. Chapter 6 (Research Analysis) focuses on the practical application of this theoretical complementary approach in order to help explain and analyze the role of civil society in supporting peacebuilding in Gaza and the challenges that secular CSOs face there at the community and political level.
The next chapter addresses the origins and development of Palestinian civil society in social and political terms. It also discusses the three phases of transformation that this sector has experienced in Palestine.
Chapter 4: Origins and Development of Palestinian Civil Society

Introduction:

This chapter provides important background knowledge of Palestinian civil society and its internal dynamics and variations in recent history. The main purpose of this chapter is to explore the development of secular and nationalist civil society and examine its changing role in the Palestinian context and struggle for political independence. Overall, the three phases of civil society transformation are discussed, namely: phase 1 concerning service provision and alternative structures under Israeli military rule in the late 1960s and during the 1970s, phase 2 concerning civil society resistance and liberation struggle in the first Palestinian Intifada (i.e. uprising of 1987-1993) and phase 3 in the context of civil society and the Oslo peace process of the 1990s.

To provide a more comprehensive perspective, the chapter explores first the Palestinian social structures before the creation of the Israeli State in 1948. It then analyzes the growth of Palestinian local organizations in Gaza and the West Bank from the late 1960s and defines their relationship with the Palestinian national movement in phase 1 and 2 outlined above. To provide a wider context of the social dynamics in Palestine, the emergence of Islamic CSOs in the 1980s is also discussed. Phase 3 of the peace process is considered where the changing role of civil society in Palestine following the signing of the Oslo Peace Agreement of 1993 is examined. The discussions here also include the nature of the relationship between the Palestinian Authority and CSOs, and also the impact of external donors on Palestinian civil society groups during the Oslo period. Finally, the chapter examines the failure of the Israeli-Palestinian peace process and contextualizes the current political context of CSOs in Gaza and the West Bank. The conclusion provides a general summary of the main arguments in the chapter and introduces the next chapter in the thesis.

It is important to note here that current contributions by Palestinian secular CSOs to peacebuilding in Gaza and associated challenges are assessed in Chapter 6 (Research Analysis).
4.1 Civil Society in Palestine: Brief Context

Although Palestine is recognized as a conflict-torn society, Palestinian social structures are historically well-established. The civil society sector advanced progressively following the creation of the State of Israel in 1948 in Palestine and Israeli occupation of Gaza and the West Bank in 1967. However, this particular advancement in the 1960s and 1970s was shaped and accompanied by complex political realities and conflicts. In other words, civil society had been integrated into the Palestinian long-term strategy of liberation and the rebuilding of statehood. The activities undertaken by grassroots groups involved the provision of social services to Palestinians who lived under Israeli military occupation, participating in nonviolent struggles against Israeli control of Palestinian territories, and finally engaging in the realities of the peace process of the 1990s.

The nature of Palestinian civil society has varied and changed over the past four decades. The transition from one phase to another had been crippled by external and internal interests and also by political challenges. In addition, because the leadership of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) and its largest faction, Fatah, were based outside Palestine until 1993, grassroots organizations and social activists who were politically motivated became a major leading force in the Palestinian struggle in Gaza and the West Bank. Therefore, they engaged in two challenging tasks: promoting independent Palestinian institutions and supporting the Intifada.

To examine these dynamics further and provide a deeper understanding of their implications nationally and politically, it is important that that the historical context before 1948 in which Palestinian social structures existed within a particular framework is explored.

4.1.1 Civil Society Prior to 1948:

As will be discussed later, organized and sustainable institutional life in the Palestinian situation effectively began and developed as a crucial strategy for resistance and state-building after the 1967 War and Israeli military occupation of the reminder of Palestine, namely Gaza and the West Bank. Absence of a legitimate authority and deprivation of national rights represented the wider context in which this active associational process emerged and evolved according to political developments in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.
However, social activities and structures existed in Palestine during the historical Ottoman period and the British rule of the country from 1917 until the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948.

During that time, the rural nature of Palestinian society and prominent clans dominated the social structures in Gaza and the West Bank, especially in Jerusalem where these elite families and their politics came into the national scene during the era of British control of Palestine. These influential families included, for example, the Husseinis, the Nashashibis and the Khaldis in Jerusalem and the Shawas in Gaza. Palestinian communities were rural and 80 percent of the population depended on farming and agriculture for their income and livelihood. Therefore, as Sara Roy argues, institutional development in Palestine at that time was mainly in response to immediate needs and not a “strategy of social development.”

As a result, the powerful families acted on behalf of the population and their needs and they, in the process, represented the Palestinian community. Moreover, based on their status and power, not only did they see themselves as the rightful and legitimate representatives of the Palestinian indigenous populations but also as “natural intermediaries between local society and the dominant external authority” during both Ottoman and British periods in Palestine, as the Palestinian historian Rashid Khalidi points out. This combined role of civil society and political representation, assumed by the notable families as the main components of Palestinian traditional and social structures prior to 1948, derived its power and legitimacy from deeper roots in Palestinian society beyond issues of access and influence. According to Yehoshua Porath,

This elite drew its authority from traditional prestige factors such as religious status (filling religious posts, belonging to the Ashraf [i.e. notables], possession of landed property and long-standing family claims to positions in the Ottoman administration, along with a consciousness of noble origin....It thus needed no popular democratic confirmation of its status.

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These urban social actors and their local rural clients constituted the main features of the Palestinian social life before 1917 and during the Ottoman era in Palestine. However, with the arrival of massive numbers of Jewish immigrants from Europe between the 1920s and the 1940s and the advancement of the Jewish Zionist project during British rule of Palestine, these influential social players entered into the national framework and contributed to the early formation of the Palestinian national movement. Following the Balfour Declaration in 1917 and the stated British commitment to facilitating the goal of the Jewish Zionist movement in establishing a Jewish homeland in Palestine, the sense of nationalism increased among the Palestinian elites and they voiced their opposition to Zionism. Hence, a significant section of the Palestinian leadership worked to preserve Christian and Muslim unity among the Palestinian population and established joint organizations to support the national movement and strengthen its social foundations. Therefore, the process of creating associational infrastructures had been closely linked to the threat of Zionism and its quest of colonizing Palestine with British support. In his focused study of that particular period, Porath elaborates further:

The resurgence of nationalist feeling throughout the country in the wake of the 1929 riots led to the awakening of the various associations previously dormant. Several attempts were also made at that time to widen the organizational framework. In both Ramallah and Ramleh-two towns in which the leaders of opposition (Bulus Shihadah and Sheikh Sulayman al-Taji Al-Faruqi) had considerable influence-Muslim-Christian Associations were set up, and the one in Ramleh even began to show signs of activity....[Nonetheless] this organizational character suited the traditional social structure and the accepted status of the local elite.\footnote{Ibid. pp. 280 -282.}

Though it played an important role in national and social revival, the dividing politics of notables and their differences over power issues and effective approaches to address Britain and influence its support for Zionism, proved destructive and undermined any real possibility of building strong social and national institutions. For example, some of the notables wanted to engage Britain and convince it through diplomacy and dialogue of the Palestinian demands for self-determination, and still some others sought to fight British and Zionist forces and achieve national liberation through armed struggles. Discussing this polarized state of affairs, Rashid Khalidi provides a critical account:
Although the Palestinians were able to present a united front to their foes and for many years after World War I, the internal divisions among the elite eventually surfaced, ably exploited by the British, with their vast experience of dividing colonized societies in order to rule them more effectively. They were exploited as well by the Zionists, whose intelligence services presumably engaged in undercover activities among the [Palestinian] Arabs in these years that have yet to be fully elucidated.\textsuperscript{151}

In \textit{Popular Resistance in Palestine}, Mazin Qumsiyeh reflects further on the negative impact of these divisions and differences among the social and political elites on the entire Palestinian project of statehood and independence. The national struggle, points out Qumsiyeh, for freedom and self-determination was “hampered by quarrels between the Husseini and Nashashibi factions and the elites’ isolation from the interest of most Palestinians.”\textsuperscript{152}

This, in fact, was the historical context in which Palestinian social players and structures had existed and evolved in political and national terms until 1948 and the establishment of Israel. Therefore, to sum up, the main characteristics of the Palestinian social developments prior to 1948 included: the rural nature of society, urban elitism, family status and landownership, patronage and client dealings, integration of a social and nationalist framework under the elites’ authority, power dynamics among the social and national players, and divisions among the elite representatives and their factions within a wider dangerous conflict involving the British and Zionist forces, and the Palestinians.

\textbf{4.1.2 Palestinians After 1948:}

In 1948, the Palestinians people were shattered by the \textit{Nakba} (i.e. Catastrophe) and its disastrous consequences on their lives, existence and society. The Nakba refers to the destruction of hundreds of Palestinian towns and villages and the expulsion of 700,000 Palestinians in 1948 as a result of the creation of the State of Israel in Palestine, and Zionist massacres during that time. In the period between 1948 and the mid-1960s, the Palestinians seemed to have “disappeared from the political map as an independent actor, and indeed as a

\textsuperscript{151}Khalidi. op.cit. p. 24.

people." Also, a new system of foreign rule was imposed on them by their Arab neighbouring states. The Egyptian authorities took control of Gaza and the West bank came under Jordanian rule following the 1948 tragedy. In Gaza, the Egyptian government banned any political organizations and restricted associational activities, stressing the temporary political status of the Gaza Strip.

The Nakba, however, reinforced and sustained pre-existing elements of the Palestinian identity. "The shared events of the 1948 thus brought the Palestinians closer together in terms of their collective consciousness, even as they were physically dispersed all over the Middle East and beyond", as Rashid Khalidi points out in his examination of the Palestinian national identity from the Ottoman period to the first Palestinian Intifada of 1987. It was this collective identity and consciousness as an oppressed people with a national and just cause that led to the re-emergence of Palestinian nationalism in the mid-1960s. These developments put the Palestinians back on the "political map" of the Middle East and beyond. The reformation of the national movement had been enhanced by a new middle class leadership in exile, which organized political structures like Fatah and the PLO and excluded the elitist leaders who had failed during British rule and the 1948 Nakba. The PLO represented different nationalist factions and Fatah became the largest and leading faction in this political structure. In the context of liberation and nationalist politics, the PLO-Fatah became the major Palestinian political force in exile from the mid-1960s onwards. It also attracted a vast popular support and allegiance from the Palestinian diaspora and refugees inside and outside Palestine.

The three major phases of Palestinian civil society transformation from the late 1960s to the 1990s are examined in the next section.

4.2 Phase 1: Civil Society and National Structures (1960s-1980s)

The creation of the State of Israel resulted in the annexation of approximately 78% of historical Palestine and the displacement of more than three quarters of a million people who

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154 Roy. op cit., p. 229.
156 Ibid. p.27.
fled to the West Bank and Gaza. Also, seeking safety from the Israeli atrocities of 1948 and the subsequent 1967 War, thousands of Palestinian people crossed the borders into Jordan, Lebanon and Syria and have stayed in these countries as refugees until this present time. The United Nations Works and Relief Agency (UNRWA) has been providing humanitarian services to Palestinian displaced persons and refugees outside Palestine and in particular inside the Gaza Strip and the West Bank including East Jerusalem. These areas are also recognized by the UN as the “occupied Palestinian territories” since Israel expanded its state and occupied them illegally during the 1967 War. The United Nation Security Council responded by issuing 242 Resolution that called for the Israeli occupying power to respect international law and for the “withdrawal of Israeli armed forces from territories occupied in the recent conflict.” Furthermore, it called for “achieving a just settlement of the refugee problem.”

At the Palestinian level, the relationship between the national leadership of the PLO and Palestinian local grassroots organizations evolved in significant terms following the Arab-Israeli War of 1967 and Israeli military occupation of Gaza and the West Bank. Since the re-emergence of the national movement in the early 1960s, the Palestinian nationalists sought to achieve the total liberation of Palestine through Arab power and nationalism, and the establishment of a democratic secular state in all of Palestine. However, the 1967 War and the military victory of Israel over the Egyptian, Syrian and Jordanian joint forces, and Israeli occupation of the remainder of Palestine (i.e. Gaza and the West Bank including East Jerusalem), made the Palestinians lose confidence and faith in the ability of the neighbouring Arab countries to deliver liberation. As Mazin Qumsiyeh points out, the 1967 War transformed the political and geographical landscape in both negative and significant positive terms. It forced the Palestinian people and their national leadership to realize that “Arab leaders were impotent to bring about change” and also that the time had come for the Palestinian leadership to make their own strategy and begin to build their own independent institutions.

158 Qumsiyeh, op. cit., p.130.
4.2.1 Changing Political Framework and Institutional Growth:

By the early 1970s, this strategic change slowly materialized in Palestinian politics. The goal was no longer concerned with the achievement of the total liberation of Palestine through Arab nationalism and the creation of a secular democratic state in all of Palestine. Instead, the national movement, led by the PLO, was willing now to create a national authority and autonomous Palestinian entity on any part of Palestine that Israel might withdraw from. The occupied territories of Gaza and the West Bank represented the overall base and foundation for the possibility of creating a Palestinian self-rule government on the homeland soil as an initial step on the way of gradual and complete independence. The overall objective was to build a Palestinian independent state alongside the State of Israel. This constituted the emerging and new political framework from the early 1970s onwards, which influenced the social structures in the occupied territories. As a result, most of these existing and newly formed local organizations inside the territories adopted the PLO nationalist and secular agendas for the Palestinian project of state-building in Gaza and the West Bank.

In his study and examination of the Palestinian national movement from 1949 to 1993, Yezid Sayigh remarks that the PLO had wanted to create a "revolutionary authority" with a defined territory and international relations" based on the Chinese and Vietnamese experiences of national liberation. The long-term goal was about achieving statehood. Examining further the relationship between this nationalist thinking and, in his own words, the emerging "statist framework" and how it had contributed to the growth of associational life in Gaza and the West Bank in the 1970s, Sayigh argues:

Increasingly, the institutional initiative was being taken at grassroots level and by a new generation of activists... A key element in their emergence as a distinct force was the establishment of three universities in the West Bank in 1972-1975.... The social and economic transformations in the occupied territories were not uniform in their impact, nor led to similar political results. Yet, they were sufficient to allow the PLO to redirect the political engagement and nationalist identification of significant sectors of the population towards its own, statist framework.... It was within this context that all the guerrilla groups sought allies and constituencies in the occupied territories, determinedly retaining political and operational control in their own hands all the while.

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Israeli military control and the banning of political parties inside Gaza and the West Bank was also another major factor for the nationalist groups to penetrate the institutional sphere in the territories and use it as a platform for political expression. In this regard, Andrew Rigby points out that because of their inability to organize openly, various political factions had employed the trade unions, social and professional organizations, student unions, and other grassroots organisations as “arenas for political competition.” Fatah demonstrated particularly a sustained and strong interest in students, workers and women’s organizations as “prime groups for mobilization and recruitment.”

The usefulness and significance of these social networks extended beyond political influence and competition. They would “shield the military apparatus” of factions and gather intelligence about the enemy and analyze them, and send their assessment to the “appropriate bodies” in political organizations as Sayigh indicated further. Therefore, not only did grassroots groups provide social services to the local population in the occupied territories but they also represented a means of political resistance.

4.2.2 Inside and Outside Conflictual Relations:

Tensions at times developed between local associations and the leadership of the PLO outside the territories as Fatah worked to seek and fund allies within particular social circles such as women’s and the trade union and student groupings and excluded other social players from political and financial support inside Gaza and the West Bank. This included the Palestinian Communist Party and their popular grassroots organizations which Fatah distrusted and viewed with suspicion. In this context, the PLO/Fatah leadership on the outside created, for instance, a division in the trade union movement in 1981, channelling the Sumud (steadfastness and resilience) funds to its own supporters and client associations.

Another notable example of such conflictual relations between the national leadership on the outside and social forces on the inside is that the PLO/Fatah ranks in exile focused mainly on sustaining their political “statist framework” through popular organizations as a vehicle for Palestinian self-determination and also as a challenge to Israeli power in the occupied territories.

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161 Rigby, op.cit., p. 49.
162 Sayigh, op.cit., p. 474.
163 Roy, op.cit., p. 229.
164 Rigby, op.cit., p. 49.
territories. However, some social groups and their young professional leaders who were educated in the West and enjoyed independent sources of funding, disagreed with the PLO statist strategy in the institutional sphere and saw it as an organizational tool to co-opt, and not to mobilize the wider social base. In this context, they argued that the PLO viewed the local population as passive and target audience to be co-opted through the *Sumud* funds and service provision. Therefore, these professional and social representatives sought active participation from all sectors of society as a form of both political action as well as collective empowerment. This represented a sharp contrast with the PLO statist approach and the role of the local constituencies in implementing political strategies as they perceived it, and caused further tensions between these popular organizations on the inside and the mainstream leadership outside the occupied territories.  

4.2.3 Social Organizations: Alternative Power and Political Representations

By aligning generally with the national movement and the PLO as the main political and powerful actor within the Palestinian situation (albeit in exile), the Palestinian local organizations found themselves in a very delicate and unique position. On the one hand, their declared goal was to support the Palestinian people through social and community services but, on the other hand, they willingly entered into the core politics of the conflict by being part of the Palestinian struggle and the national movement. This required these grassroots groups to provide leadership in the occupied territories, given that the PLO was operating from outside Palestine. Local leaders, therefore, had no alternative but to embark on this combined socio-political role in the complexities of the conflict. In other words, removing themselves from the political struggle would have meant a fundamental disconnection with the community and the context in which they existed, and perhaps a loss of legitimacy.

In practical terms, while working within the nationalist agenda facilitated greater popularity and financial possibilities, it certainly meant that social organizations had to meet two expectations. The first was to sustain the culture of service provision in Gaza and the West Bank and, the second, to extend resistance and mobilization to *directly* challenge Israeli military rule in the occupied territories. As it will be discussed a little later, the element of

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165 Sayigh. op. cit., pp. 611 -612.
direct and active resistance by civil society had particularly manifested itself during the Intifada of 1987.

Nonetheless, it is in this broader and more complex political context that the grassroots movement gained a stronger position and acquired more importance in both Palestinian society and the national movement throughout the 1970s and the 1980s. Describing this era, Uda Olabarria Walker points out:

Due to the lack of a Palestinian governing authority in the West Bank and Gaza and Israel’s blatant disregard for the socio-economic needs of the occupied population, Palestinian grassroots organizations were forced to work independently for the development of the Palestinian community.\(^\text{166}\)

Building social and economic infrastructures in the occupied territories was not a priority from the perspective of the Israeli authorities and their colonial policies. The development of political structures and national institutions could lead to Palestinian independence and hence this should be prevented by military means. Israeli defence minister stated in 1985 that “there will be no development in the occupied territories initiated by the Israeli government.” And, as he went on to declare, “no permits will be given for expanding agriculture or industry there, which may compete with the State of Israel.”\(^\text{167}\) Control and military occupation, and not political independence or economic reconstruction, was the message from the Israeli government to the Palestinians in Gaza and the West Bank.

Nonetheless, Palestinian grassroots and nationalist organizations were determined to fill this organizational and institutional gap that the Israeli government had ironically created in the occupied territories. Through academic research and personal observation in the region, Andrew Rigby provides an analysis of this situation:

In a somewhat paradoxical manner, the absence of certain state services created the institutional space for the development of alternative, Palestinian “quasi-state” organizations and agencies. Through the provision of much needed services and facilities, such grass-roots organizations gained the allegiance of the majority of the

\(^{166}\) Walker, op.cit., no page number given.  
\(^{167}\) Quoted in Sayigh, op.cit., p. 608.
Palestinian population, and as such constituted the nucleus of an alternative structure of authority and power to rival that of Israeli military government.  

Therefore, not only did the social and popular movement with its national liberation component become coherent and legitimate, but it also transformed into an effective representative for a Palestinian alternative social and political infrastructure outside of Israeli domination throughout the 1970s and the 1980s. However, with the outbreak of the popular Intifada in 1987, these powerful grassroots organizations embarked on a direct resistance role in support of the broader Palestinian struggle for national independence. The Intifada in the occupied territories provided also a much-needed support to the external and isolated Palestinian national leadership in exile, which was clearly deteriorating following the Israeli invasion of Beirut and the departure of the PLO from Lebanon in 1982. Furthermore, boosting the PLO statist framework of the early 1970s and their goal of creating a national authority in Gaza and the West Bank as discussed earlier, the Intifada established further “the inside”, the occupied territories, as the centre of gravity of Palestinian politics, rather than “the outside”, the Palestinian diaspora, where it had been located for many decades.

4.3 Phase 2: Intifada Struggle and Resistance (1987-1993)

The popular Intifada came about as a response to Israeli military control of Palestinian land and people. International peace plans to resolve the conflict had failed as they continue to do so also today. This is largely because Israel has consistently refused to allow Palestinians to have complete independence and full national rights. As a child growing up in the Intifada and amidst military intensity, I revolted against the unjust status quo and participated in this local resistance movement by different available means including stone-throwing, enforcing public strikes and taking part in public demonstrations and events. The Intifada can only be understood if it is put in the right context of freedom versus control, the weak and the powerful, equality and inequality, privileges and a lack of fundamental human rights.

In *Palestinian Children and Israeli State Violence*, James Graff and Mohamed Abdolell point out that the Intifada was aimed at “breaking Palestinian dependence on Israel and securing

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the national and individual rights of Palestinians.” Therefore, according to Graff and Abdolell, “Palestinian children who are old enough to understand what military occupation means, want the Israelis to leave.” Hence, they had been active in confronting and harassing Israeli soldiers and settlers. They were also major targets for the Israeli army and settler attacks. Israeli settlers are armed and living illegally, contrary to international law, in settlements and houses built on Palestinian land in the occupied territories.

The Palestinian human rights organization Al-Haq presents an accurate and credible account of the root causes of the Intifada:

The popular uprising by the Palestinians in the Occupied Territories should have come as a surprise to no one. The uprising has primarily been an act of collective anger, a reaction to twenty years of expropriation, disenfranchisement, oppression and frustration. In the light of the continued failure on the part of the international community to protect the population living under the occupation and to safeguard their rights, it also reflects a loss of confidence in the political will and ability in other states to carry out their responsibilities under international law.171

Furthermore, in The Politics of Dispossession: The Struggle for Palestinian Self-Determination, Edward Said remarks that what made the Intifada unusual is that the adversaries have unusual histories and what “they dispute is perhaps the most unusual piece of territory in history: Palestine, a land drenched in historical, religious, political and cultural significance.”172

4.3.1 Popular Committees: Civil Society and National Initiative

As discussed earlier, because of the external presence of the PLO and the existence of the Israeli armed forces inside Palestinian areas, civil society groups and activists became an important part of the national leadership which worked to protect the Palestinian population and maintain the Intifada. Considering the changing tasks and challenges ahead, a stronger and combined structure of local civil society and nationalist movement, therefore, emerged.

during the uprising. This consisted mainly of what was called the “popular committees.” The committees were initially suggested and supported by the National Unified Command (NUC) which was made up of factions’ representatives and civil society nationalists of the Intifada. As the popular committees came into existence and functioned, grassroots leaders along political activists in Palestinian society became also the leading forces of this resistance initiative and its activities throughout the occupied territories. This internal civil society-political alliance formed a significant part of the ongoing process of attaining national independence and enhancing the legitimacy of the Palestinian leadership developing inside Gaza and the West Bank. The committees were also responsible for supporting the Intifada struggle and maintaining the evolving infrastructure for Palestinian independence. The overall political objective was to achieve a Palestinian independent state alongside the State of Israel.

The popular committees and their resistance role consisted of the following: 173

1. Strike Forces: Their main function was to defend the Intifada activities especially in intense situations involving Israeli troops and settlers. They also ensured that the instructions of the UNC of the Intifada for public protests and strikes were implemented and Israeli spies were punished.

2. Women’s Committees: The female members of these committees were responsible for specific areas in the struggle. They promoted, for instance, local economy by producing home-made products and clothes, selling them in small shops they themselves managed. They also held regular meetings with women coming from different neighbourhoods to discuss the progress of the Intifada and related developments. They paid regular visits to villages and small towns, offering basic healthcare and adult literacy classes. Their activities also included demonstrating solidarity with bereaved families and the injured and newly released political prisoners. In certain circumstances, according to Andrew Rigby, the women organized themselves into “snatch squads” to rescue youths from the hands of Israeli soldiers through chaos and confusion set up for the soldiers. 174

173 For a detailed explanation of Popular Committees, See Rigby, Living the Intifada, op.cit., pp. 22-23.
174 Ibid. p.22.
3. Guard Committees: The Guard committees were formed to protect Palestinian property and growing institutions from armed settlers and street criminals. Their main function was to create a degree of local security and protection for communities living through the Intifada.

4. Popular Education Committees: Because of the regular Israeli closure of Palestinian schools in the Intifada, the task of these committees was to provide "home-based education" for young boys and girls. Teachers and tutors were the driving force behind this education campaign.

5. Food and Supply Committees: Their responsibility was to identify the humanitarian needs of the local population and deliver food supplies especially to areas and residents who were under curfew and severely lacked foods.

6. Medical Committees: Providing medical treatment to the injured resulting from confrontations with the Israeli army and supplying general medical services to people was the core of their assigned role.

7. Committees for Self-sufficiency: Members of these committees worked to ensure that the local community was not a consuming market for Israeli goods. As Rigby noticed, they suggested local methods that encouraged families to do home-economy and showed people how to achieve self-sufficiency by growing their own vegetables, food and rearing chickens.

8. Social Reform Committees: The primary function of these committees was to design and facilitate a "community-based conflict resolution service" for resolving disputes at both community and individual levels. Rigby indicated that the reason for these activities was to "replace the Israeli courts" in the occupied territories which many Palestinians refused to recognize during the Intifada.

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175 Ibid. p.23.
176 Ibid. p.23.
177 Ibid. p.23.
9. Committees to Confront the Tax: The aim of these committees was to expel Israeli tax collectors who came with the Israeli troops during their invasions of towns and villages.

10. Merchants' Committees: Recognizing the strength of the business sector, the Merchants' committees focused on engaging local shop-owners and small businesses in the national initiatives of the Intifada. This included participating in public and general strikes.

11. Information Committees: The Information Committees coordinated media sources in Gaza and the West Bank. It had worked with local journalists and international news agencies to report the Intifada events and their political purpose. In addition, supporting and substituting Palestinian journalists who were illegally arrested by the Israeli army constituted an important part of their role.

4.3.2 Deeper Understanding of Popular Committees:

The previous section provides a clear idea about the functions and the joint structures of civil society and political leadership, which had developed during the years of the Intifada. The experience of the popular committees suggests that it had connected well with the various sectors in Palestinian society. Most importantly, the committees responded effectively to immediate community needs and offered tangible solidarity to bereaved families, the injured, political prisoners and those in refugee camps among others. This initiative was very effective because the popular committees had been, above all, made up of and driven by local civil society groups and political activists. They drew on both people's experiences and skills and their unshakable commitment to the Palestinian cause.

Also, the presence of political organizations in the committees had certainly granted them further credibility and support but, overall, relying on the human resources and expertise available in the indigenous community had contributed to a greater sense of unity and cooperation between all sections of Palestinian society. In effect, by joining the popular committees and playing a significant leading role in their activities, local organizations had to deal with two challenges: supporting the Intifada and the struggle for liberation as well as sustaining the culture of service provision which they initiated in phase 1.
Discussing these crucial challenges and subsequent outcomes, Uda Olabarria Walker points out:

From 1987-1990, the grassroots organizations served as the driving and organizing force behind the popular committees of the intifada while continuing to provide services for the Palestinian community. Throughout this period, many organizations became more formalized and moved into professional civil society spheres including research centres, human rights organizations and advocacy groups.\(^{178}\)

However, the popular committees experienced two critical issues which threatened cohesion and unity: coordination and internal politics. Firstly, while there is credible evidence that indicates the popular committees proved to be of importance to the community and offered valuable support to groups and families involved in the political struggle of the Intifada, the degree of coordination between these socio-political structures was not always effective. For example, at times when the Strike Forces in Gaza declared a public strike throughout Gaza and the West Bank. The strike would only be observed in certain places and not in all Palestinian areas. Rigby also observes that “consistency and standardization” were difficult to achieve within the structure of the popular committees.\(^{179}\)

Secondly, narrow political affiliation to factions constituted also a problematic issue that occasionally presented challenges to the popular committees and left them vulnerable to factional loyalty and divisions. Nonetheless, there was an advantage to dual membership of factions and local popular committees. Available information indicates that the committees flourished and grew bigger in size and effort in areas where a political faction operated prior to the Intifada and a pre-existing system of grassroots networks was active.\(^{180}\) This phenomenon provides a better understanding of the link between national and local politics and how factional realities play out and influence conflict-torn societies.

4.3.3 Examples of Resistance by Popular Committees:

As well as helping to create and lead the popular committees for the purpose of direct resistance to the Israeli state and its imposed military rule in Gaza and the West Bank,

\(^{178}\) Walker, op.cit., no page numbers given.
\(^{179}\) Rigby, op.cit., p.23.
\(^{180}\) Ibid. p.23.
grassroots organizations encouraged the establishment of local coordinating sub-committees in villages and towns to enhance civil society resistance in the Palestinian territories. They reflected the balance of influence enjoyed by the different political organizations within the area. Through these sub-committees, each local area developed its own resistance functions and duties in accordance with its capacity. For example, villages near Israeli army camps and settlements put in place systems of advance warning of attacks. Villages remote from Israeli settlements organized strikes and were actively involved in the harassment of settlers travelling to and from their places of work inside Israel. Similarly, some sub-committees in refugee camps prioritized the delivery of food supplies to neighbouring towns whose repeated curfews and suffering had greater effects on their residents than other areas.

In addition, each village sub-committee had its own local communication system. They occasionally distributed information and leaflets to families and individuals about the next resistance activities and the list of protest events they planned to coordinate so that community members could come forward and participate. Public and national strikes were also central activities and they could last for a few hours or go on for a few days, depending on the nature of the protest and its causes (e.g. release of prisoners, deaths, boycott, etc.). These are all examples of the role of Palestinian local groups and civil society in providing resistance through the broader context of popular committees.

This community-based liberation process had also created a sense of ownership and empowerment felt by all people inside Gaza and the West Bank. Having lived through that period, I remember clearly how important it was for people in Gaza including my family to discuss and understand the instructions of the popular committees. Their daily and weekly communiqués were read carefully and observed, sometimes even read aloud to public gatherings. This sheds more light on what can be seen when the leadership of a particular political struggle is from, and belongs to, the community. Regardless of legitimacy, it also grants validity to the fact that grassroots leadership has the ability to unite various sections of society in liberation struggles.

4.3.4 Israel and Intifada:

The military response of the Israeli government to the 1987 Intifada and to political and civil society developments in Palestinian areas resulted in further intimidation and repressive measures including deportations and long prison sentences without trial for many members of the popular committees and grassroots organizations. The West Bank based human rights group Al-Haq provides an illuminating account of these unjust policies. Their report states:

The [Israeli] authorities have preferred to target Palestinians who through their activities in local organisations and movements are perceived by the authorities as having gained leadership positions in their communities. By removing this group through selective deportations, the Israeli authorities continue their policy of keeping the Palestinians leaderless and hence easier to control.\footnote{\textcopyright\-Al-Haq. op.cit., p. 145.}

The main concern for Israel was that the Intifada had been gaining momentum in general and the popular committees had been receiving more support and strength in Palestinian society in particular. This was because the committees succeeded in transforming the role of ordinary Palestinians into active participants in the struggle for political independence. The Israeli authorities, therefore, responded by outlawing the popular committees and their activities. By banning these local organizations and deliberately subjecting their leaders to arrests, the Israeli government assumed that it could bring the popular committees, as well as the aspirations of the Intifada and civil society, to an end.

4.4 Theoretical Application: Phases 1 and 2

From the previous discussions about phases 1 and 2 of Palestinian nationalist civil society and its development, it can be accurately concluded here that the actions and the activities of Palestinian civil society in these two phases conform to the framework of Civil Society II (CSII). As illustrated further in Chapter 3 (Theories of Civil Society and Connections with Peacebuilding), CSII draws on established traditions of challenging the state, and, as Antonio Gramsci advocated, initiating a national struggle against its repressive policies by local organizations and civil society forces. As Bob Edwards and Michael Foley argue, CSII wants
to “enable citizens to mobilize against tyranny and counter state power.” Furthermore, as David Lewis points out, unlike the liberal and globalized civil society (i.e. CSI) which has emerged through the good governance agenda and focused on economic liberalism and democratization from the perspective of privatization and civil society-state cooperation, this influential thinking of CSII around the world argues that civil society is the arena in which “ideological hegemony” is contested and challenged.

Examples of challenging hegemony and countering repressive state power by civil society are witnessed in Palestinian recent history. For instance, in phase 1 and throughout the 1970s and the 1980s, Palestinian grassroots groups engaged in the development of the Palestinian society and provided crucial social services to local communities living under Israeli occupation. This strategy aimed at undermining the Israeli state system of military rule in the occupied territories and resisting its domination over society by means of institutional resistance and alternative national structures. Also, in phase 2, the Intifada produced a process of politicization in which local organizations played a significant direct role in resisting the military policies of the Israeli government in Gaza and the West Bank. As a result, measures and actions such as the formation of the popular committees as civil society and political structures and the creation of more advanced and professional civil society institutions were taken to contest the existing order of military control and end oppression by the Israeli State in the occupied territories. These measures sought also to assert the political independence of the Palestinian people through active civil society resistance and mobilization, and institution-building. In this context, local and social organizations extended strong resistance to state power and hegemony in the Palestinian struggle.

Hence, the role and the engagement of Palestinian nationalist and secular civil society in the specific period of phase 1 and 2 should be read and interpreted within the framework of CSII.

However, with the signing of the Oslo Peace Agreement between Palestinian and Israeli leaders in 1993, phase 3 of civil society transformation in Palestine came into existence and presented major political and organizational changes to this particular form of Palestinian CSII. Nonetheless, before these changes are examined, it is important that the broader social

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183 Foley and Edwards. op.cit., p. 3.
184 Lewis. “Old and New Civil Societies?” op.cit., no page numbers given.
and institutional realities in the Palestinian society are discussed. Part of these crucial dynamics was the emergence of the Islamic social and community structures in the occupied territories throughout the 1980s. In the next section this particular development of civil society will be explored so that the wider situation of the secular and nationalist social agencies is contextualized in this study.

4.5 Civil Society: Islamic Framework

The development of Islamic informal institutions in the occupied territories was connected to two ideological and political forces: the Muslim Brotherhood (MB) and later Hamas. As the MB expanded in Egypt in the 1940s, they turned their attention to Palestine as an essential cause for Muslims and also because of its prominent religious status as a holy land in Islam. Their aim was to extend their presence and influence in their neighbouring and significant Palestinian constituency. Since it was founded in the late 1920s, and especially between the 1950s and 1980s, the MB had been mainly concerned with the Nahada (renaissance) of Muslim societies by returning them to the true path of Islam as a precondition for liberation from colonialism and oppression. In other words, liberating the ‘soul’ was an essential prerequisite for freeing the ‘homeland’ from the point of view of the MB. Therefore, as Sara Roy points out, the MB chose to focus on preparing the “liberation generation through proselytizing and religious education” towards achieving renaissance.¹⁸⁵ Hence, nationalism and politics of national liberation contradicted their reformation strategy.

It was within this ideological framework and philosophy that members of the MB and a small number of Palestinian individuals who joined them during their study in Egypt, began to arrive in Gaza and the West Bank in the 1970s and put this religious revival strategy into practice. As discussed before, this was a time when Palestinian nationalist sentiment and secular politics had been dominant. Ahmed Yassin, who was a Palestinian refugee and a member of the MB and later became the leader of Hamas, played a key role in establishing the institutional framework for the Islamic transformation in Palestinian territories, and particularly in Gaza where he enjoyed greater freedom to organize. In order to achieve their goal and in line with the MB thinking, Yassin decided not to engage in any resistance activities against Israeli military occupation. Instead, he and his supporters directed their

attention and efforts towards grassroots communities and services to secure a social base and win public support for their Islamic revivalism project. Israel, on the other hand, was pleased to see an alternative and a challenger for the PLO emerging in the Palestinian territories and believed it would weaken its Palestinian nationalist and secular enemy. Studying the early formation of the Palestinian Islamic movement and Hamas, Beverley Milton-Edwards and Stephen Farrell point out:

Throughout the 1970s and 1980s Yassin and his followers assiduously set about building ever expanding networks of mosques, charitable institutions, schools, kindergartens and other social welfare projects—seeds planted early with a view to later harvesting hearts and minds and souls. It was not until the eruption of the first Palestinian Intifada in December 1987 that Yassin formed Hamas, to capitalize on the spontaneous outburst of street-level protest against Israeli occupation.186

The overall coordinating body of these newly established local networks and organizations in Gaza was Al-Mujamma’ Al-Islami (Islamic Centre), which Yassin built with Israeli permission in 1978. The leaders of the Mujamma’ saw secular nationalists as a threat to their reformation agendas and Islamization of Palestinian society. Hence, professional associations and other local institutions that traditionally aligned with the PLO became battlegrounds between the followers of the Mujamma’ and the supporters of the national movement.187 Nonetheless, in the overall context of Israeli military occupation and oppression, the Islamic movement and its effective grassroots networks, proved their vitality to the Palestinian community by providing essential services to local people and addressing their immediate needs with a good degree of coherence and organization.

The Mujamma’ and its civilian structures throughout the Gaza Strip had doctors for people who needed free medical care, and had lawyers for Palestinian prisoners in Israeli prisoners. Also, it employed social workers who provided loans and financial assistance for students to pursue their education in school and university, and allocated welfare assistance to thousands of poor families and their children.188 In this context, as Sara Roy observed, the Islamic

187 Ibid. p 44.
188 Ibid. p.10.
associations in Gaza “provided islands of normality and stability” in a socio-political situation of chaos, dispossession, trauma, dislocation, and pain.\textsuperscript{189}

This was the overall context in which Hamas and their grassroots networks emerged and came to play a significant role in the Palestinian political and social arena in later years and especially after the second Intifada in 2000.

However, as the central focus of this research study is on secular CSOs, the third phase of their transformation in the Palestinian context will now be explored.


As stated before, the current challenges and peacebuilding contributions of civil society in Gaza are not examined in this chapter. This major theme, which is the main focus of this research study, is addressed in Chapter 6. Therefore, in what follows, the issues and changes that the Palestinian grassroots organizations faced following the signing of the Oslo Peace Agreement 1993 between the PLO-Fatah leaders and Israel are examined. In short, phase 3 of Palestinian secular and nationalist civil society is discussed here.

As demonstrated in the previous discussions, local nationalist organizations had been the backbone of the Palestinian struggle for independence and statehood especially from the 1970s to the early 1990s. One should not doubt the purely political role that those organizations embarked on in resisting Israeli power and colonial policies in the Palestinian occupied territories. Political independence and service provision was central to the core of civil society actions. Hence, it is an established fact that the goals of the Palestinian national and liberation movement (represented by the PLO) met up with the aspirations of the local activists and grassroots organizations. This resulted in both forces joining up and attempting to achieve a shared task: gaining national independence and statehood.

Also, during the particular period of the Intifada, as Walker pointed out before, many Palestinian organizations “became more formalized and moved into professional civil society

\textsuperscript{189}Roy, \textit{Civil Society and Hamas}, op.cit., p. 5.
spheres including research centres, human rights organizations and advocacy groups. This institutional progression allowed them to receive also significant funding from other external sources including Western and international organizations but, as it will be seen from the changing dynamics in the 1990s a little later, this situation fundamentally changed with the launch of the peace process and the creation of the Fatah-dominated Palestinian Authority (PA) as the Palestinian representative and governing body in Gaza and the West Bank.

In phase 3 of civil society, the evolving dynamics and transformations experienced by secular and nationalist CSOs throughout the 1990s can be identified in three key areas. The first is conflicting relations between civil society and the PA. The second is the shift in international funding and the impact on civil society structures. The third is the changing relationship between CSOs and external donors. I discuss below each issue separately.

4.6.1 Civil Society Post Oslo: Relations with Palestinian Authority

With the embedding of secular civil society organizations into the wider Palestinian struggle for liberation and independence, it is noteworthy that Palestinian CSOs had accepted a significant result: politicization of the civil society sector. Thus, following the initiation of the official peace process, they were closely observing the creation of a Palestinian governance structure. Through significant political and financial Western support, the Fatah-controlled PA started to build government institutions and a solid cabinet to represent the peace process leadership and evolving political realities. In relation to CSOs, the PA had argued that like any new state, civil society should be regulated. CSOs in the Palestinian territories did not initially oppose embarking on a meaningful transformation that would reflect changing contexts and responsibilities. Most importantly, an urgent question was: what is the socio-political strategy for a post-Oslo context? Anticipating the changes ahead in civil society, the social and political activist during the Intifada, Mustafa Barghouti, and current leader of the Palestinian National Initiative (Al-Mubadra) states:

It is inevitable that there will be some polarization and differentiations in this broad-based sector [of civil society], especially in that some of the activists in this [local] movement perceive their role as temporary and are waiting for the establishment of a Palestinian authority... Consequently, a proportion of what are considered NGOs

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190 Walker. op.cit. No page number given.
today will be transformed into government organizations or will become part of the authority’s structure. 191

However, evidence suggests that suspicion not partnership or solidarity dominated the relations between the PA and civil society organizations during the peace process and throughout the 1990s. The PA perceived the secular and politicized sector of civil society as a strong social force that enjoyed deeper connections with local communities and a shining history of success in challenging Israeli military rule in the occupied territories. For the PA, this could potentially weaken the power of the young government of the Palestinian Authority. The PA politics at that time seemed more connected to holding the reins of power and ensuring that influential social organizations were not challenging the management of the Palestinian political situation and the developing policies in Gaza and the West Bank. 192

In 1995, the PA made some attempts to formalize the situation by making draft laws prior to the establishment of a Palestinian Legislative Council (PLC- Palestinian parliament). Although they never published the contents, the proposed laws were leaked to the public. The proposed provisions included requiring CSOs to register with the Ministry of Social Welfare and obtain a separate licence from the appropriate department in accordance with their field (e.g. Ministry of Justice for legal organizations, Ministry of Education for education groups, etc.). Furthermore it was proposed that official permission would be needed from the Minister of Social Welfare before CSOs could receive foreign or local donations. Civil society activists would also not be permitted to participate in more than one organization. In addition, restrictions on cooperation with organizations based outside the Palestinian jurisdiction and preventing NGOs from holding bank deposits in excess of one month’s expenses were suggested.193

To deal with this conflict, the majority of secular CSOs in Gaza and the West Bank, who wanted to remain independent and active in society had aggressively protested nationally and internationally against these draft laws and mobilized partner organizations abroad. Thus, in late 1995, and after the release of the draft legislations, the Donor Conference in Paris

192 Ibid. p.95.
193 Ibid. p.98.
criticized the PA proposals concerning the regulation of CSOs. This prompted the officials of the PA to declare that they had no plans to endorse the draft legislations and they would postpone the deliberations and consult with CSOs once the elections of the PLC were concluded.194

Some observations can be drawn from these conflicting relations. Firstly, the PA demonstrated to the Palestinian public and civil society actors that its practices were undemocratic. Secondly, instead of seeking to build coalitions and strategic understandings with these successful Palestinian grassroots associations, certain elements within the Palestinian Authority wanted to dominate, and cultivate a culture of mistrust and fear between the two sections. Thirdly, the dividing politics of the Oslo peace process sowed the seeds for not only divisions between CSOs and the PA, but also among civil society groups themselves. Hence, some organizations aligned with the PA out of fear or for private gain while others continued to oppose its policies.195 Fourthly, while it is true that European and global donors had been supportive of a strong Palestinian Authority, they did not exercise enough pressure from the beginning on the PA to commit to democratic rule. This demonstrated emerging double standards. Fifthly, the radical shift in funding in favour of the PA weakened the secular and nationalist civil society’s infrastructures and paved the way for deeper disputes.

According to the Palestinian academic Khalil Shakaki, this particular phase bore witness to coercion against wider sections of civil society including media agencies. For example, opposition newspapers were banned and on some occasions they were allowed to reopen under certain conditions and implement a change in their editorial direction. Furthermore, individual activists and civil society leaders who expressed a strong criticism of the PA and the Oslo project were either intimidated or sent to prison by government security forces. As a result, concerned social groups and media representatives began to exercise “self-censorship.”196 Furthermore, as Shakaki points out, civil liberties and democratic practices

194 Ibid. p.98.
“have been seriously undermined by PA polices aimed at strengthening central control, “protecting” the peace, and asserting national agendas.”

Another example of this internal conflict was the funding crisis which erupted between the PA and the representatives of CSOs in the late 1990s. This crisis led to the creation of the Ministry of NGO Affairs (later changed to a commission) to manage issues and dealings between the PA and civil society organizations. Denis J. Sullivan points out that the establishment of this particular government department was followed by the introduction of further controlling measures to restrict popular organizations and their influence. For instance, many CSOs came to be monitored by the PA Mukhabrat (General Intelligence Services) which called leading activists and civil society members for interviews and handed them questionnaires to answer about their work, projects, and salaries from their respective organizations. Here are some samples from the questionnaires that help to gain a better understanding of the growing hostility between civil society and the PA:

- Have you ever belonged to a Palestinian organization?
- Have you ever been a member of a political party?
- Has any of your family been charged with spying [for Israel]? Name and date.
- Write a personal report about events in your life.

Given these examples, it is clear that conflictual relations and mistrust continued to dominate the relationship between the PA and the nationalist and secular sector of civil society in the course of the Oslo peace process.

The second issue for CSOs during the Oslo phase is the shift in international funding and policy, and the impact on civil society structures. This is examined in the next section.

4.6.2 International Policy Shift: Implications for Civil Society

The initiation of the Oslo Peace Process of 1993 between Israel and the Palestinian leaders was instrumental in the evolution of the organizational structures of secular CSOs. Regional and international priorities changed from funding community-based programmes and services....
managed by Palestinian local groups, to offering financial and political support to the PA. As discussed before, the stated goal was to strengthen the capacity of the PA to govern and continue with the Oslo project. As a result, certain grassroots organizations were no longer able to sustain or fund their activities and facilities and they dissolved. Others either sought to rely on their close and special relationship with some political factions for financial and institutional survival. Some organizations ceased their independent operations and eventually merged their human and physical resources into the government institutions of the PA. For instance, the Health Service Council, which throughout the first Intifada delivered 60% of healthcare services and managed approximately sixty-two clinics across the West Bank and Gaza, had integrated itself into the Palestinian local government agencies, and the managing director Anis Al-Qaq, joined the PA as deputy minister for International Cooperation.  

On the other hand, some local organizations that wished to carry on under the challenging financial and political circumstances, had to eliminate certain services or cut back and reduce the number of their employees for the purpose of survival. One example was Hatem Abu-Ghazala, Chairman of the Society for the Care of the Handicapped in Gaza who stated that he had to dismiss 180 staff and cut Early Intervention Program services to 2,500 Palestinian children due to a $1.5-million reduction in U.S. aid. These donations were then redirected towards the government of the PA. Also, the Culture and Free Thought Association in Gaza that managed a Centre for Children and Teens as well as a Cultural Centre, experienced a 60 percent loss in its budget ($200,000 a year) when European and international donors re-channeled funds to the PA following the peace process. Thirty Nine employees were without salaries for a considerable period of time. Furthermore, the popular committees, which coordinated civil society and political activities in the Intifada, gradually dissolved.

Joachim Zaucker summarizes clearly the financial implications for civil society in Palestine. He points out that international aid assistance to CSOs fell “from $170-240 million at its peak in the early 1990s to barely $100-120 million since the peace agreement [of 1993].”

Therefore, not only did this dramatic change in international funding in favour of the PA institutions during the Oslo process weaken the structures of the secular civil society but it

199 Ibid. p.93.
200 Ibid.p.100.
201 Ibid.p.100.
202 Quoted in J.Sullivan. Ibid. p. 96.
also impacted deeply on their existence and role in society. Furthermore, as Shakaki points out, this shift in Western priorities served to strengthen the ability of the PA to contain these local organizations.203

The third and final issue for secular and nationalist CSOs during the Oslo period is discussed in the next section. This issue is related to the evolving relationship between civil society and external donors.

4.6.3 Civil Society and External Donors:

As the priorities of the international community changed during the Oslo years of the 1990s and its focus was directed towards building a Palestinian authority that could negotiate with Israel and deliver on the security and political terms of the Oslo Agreement, an evolving relationship had been emerging around also the same time between secular CSOs and international donors. Integrating Palestinian civil society into the global strategies of free market and liberal democracy, promoting the “good governance agenda” of the 1990s, and creating what David Lewis calls the “virtuous circle” of state, market and civil society,204 seemed to have played a central role in the changing strategy of the Western donors towards Palestinian civil society organizations. Analyzing the transformation in civil society framework with active support from external donors in the 1990s, Benoit Challand describes these crucial developments in the Palestinian secular and nationalist sector of civil society as a phenomenon of “professionalization of politics”, whereby:

[Palestinian] NGOs gradually shifted from popular self-organization into a form of elite work funded by foreign donors. Put differently, many of these popular grassroots committees that were so essential to political factionalism [during the Intifada and before] turned into professional client-oriented and elitist development institutions during the Oslo years, thus drifting away from playing a more direct political role.205

203 Shakaki. op.cit., p.10.
204 Lewis. “Civil Society in non-Western Contexts: Reflections on the Usefulness of a Concept”, op.cit., p.3
Furthermore, Mufid Qassoum points out that Western efforts and external donors worked towards the “restructuring” of nationalist grassroots organizations in a direction harmonious and consistent with the emerging global economy. And the new shift from “mobilization to advocacy” came to “put an end to mass social movements, dismantle the triad affinity between the intellectual, the masses and the progressive and revolutionary ideas.” In the international arena, this meant that “de-mobilization, de-radicalization and de-politicization” were necessary components to maintain the emergence of the world neo-liberal order in civil and political spheres.206

In fact, some evidence from the Palestinian situation supports this interpretation and shows an anxious and active donors’ movement towards ‘liberalizing’ Palestinian civil society forces emerging out of the Intifada into the peace process and a new world agenda of the 1990s. A Palestinian social activist stated at that time:

Life is about politics. The separation of politics from other forms of action [i.e. popular and grassroots] is not right. [International] Donors try to encourage the separation of the political from the organization.207

Beyond the separation of social and political activities, according to some observers, what some international governments and their powerful funding agencies required during the Oslo peace process was the emergence of a Palestinian social movement which could replace the nationalist civil society discourse in Gaza and the West Bank and exclusively focus on other issues of democracy promotion and good governance agenda. Edward Said points out, for example, that one of the intended effects of Oslo is the “substitution of a short-range nationalism for a longer-range social movement.” This is, he observes, to “de-politicize Palestinian society and set it squarely within the main current American style of globalization, where the market is king, everything else irrelevant or marginal.”208


207 No page numbers given.


Examining Palestinian politics during the Oslo period, Benoit Challand remarks further that as a result of this changing framework between external donors and nationalist civil society, the relationship between major social players and local populations dramatically transformed. Professional and elite CSOs began to view grassroots constituencies more as clients and, in some cases, as a “political reservoir” rather than active participants in a political and mass struggle. Hence, many Palestinian secular organizations are still currently guided by the global “market principles” than by voluntary contributions and engagement in their activities.\textsuperscript{209}

In this evolving social and political context and the support of the international funders for a new civil society framework in the Palestinian territories, a new group of influential individuals emerged in the Palestinian secular sector of civil society. Palestinian researchers Sari Hanafi and Linda Tabar discuss the formation of this civil society “globalized elite.” The globalized elite “reflects the broader process out of which it has emerged, including the overarching national context of the peace process and the foreign assistance provided to support the transition to a post-conflict order.” Their shared characteristics, according to Hanafi and Tabar, have pointed to a continued opposition to the revival of civil society resistance in the Intifada and that their attitudes and approaches are informed by international interests other than a localized agenda.\textsuperscript{210}

It is clear from the previous examples that external donors and international funding agencies influenced the context and workings of many organizations in the secular and nationalist sector following the initiation of the Oslo process. As discussed above, this included a shift from popular and grassroots engagement to professionalism; depoliticization and separation of the social structures from political struggles; the formation of cliental-relationships and finally the emergence of a globalized elite in the secular civil society sphere.

The influences of external donors and the current impact of the depoliticization process on secular CSOs and their role in promoting peacebuilding in Gaza are examined further in Chapter 6 (Research Analysis).

\textsuperscript{209}Challand. op.cit.
\textsuperscript{210}Hanafi and Tabar. op.cit., pp.248-249.
4.7 Oslo Peace Process:

Finally, before the case study organizations are discussed in the next two chapters, it is important to contextualize the Israeli-Palestinian political situation in which CSOs have existed and functioned since the Oslo process in the 1990s.

The initial and indirect talks between Israel and the PLO under U.S. supervision were officially launched at the Middle East Peace Conference in Madrid in 1991. The indirect talks shifted to secret negotiations in Norway and led to the Oslo Peace Agreement of 1993 through which Israel recognized the PLO as a legitimate representative of Palestinian people and accepted the creation of a Palestinian authority in Gaza and the West Bank within a peace process framework. The PLO, in return, renounced the use of violence and recognized the right of Israel to exist in peace. The official launch and signing ceremony of the Oslo process took place at the White House in September 1993. Optimism increased and the majority of the public in Israel and Palestine declared their support for the peace deal as Jane Corbin who provided a detailed study of the Oslo negotiations points out.211

4.7.1 Oslo Terms

The Oslo accords consisted of the Declaration of Principles (DOP) and mutual recognition letters, focused on administrative and largely security issues in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The Palestinians were allowed to establish the PA and a self-rule government under Yaser Arafat and the Fatah/PLO leadership. According to the provisions of the Agreement, the PA would also set up a representative political and legal council (Palestinian Legislative Council) in the occupied territories. The DOP recognized that the jurisdiction of the Council would cover West Bank and Gaza Strip and possess the power to legislate.212 Furthermore, the Oslo Accords called for making “arrangements for a smooth and peaceful transfer of authority from the Israeli military government and its Civil Administration to the Palestinian representatives.”213

212The Declaration of Principles (DOP), for the complete text see: http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/1682727.stm
213Ibid. Article VI.
Israel also permitted the PA to establish a strong security force made up of 30,000 personnel in order to maintain the internal security in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank. However, Israel would have the ultimate military and security power over the Palestinian territories and Jewish settlements there. In his speech before the Knesset after signing the accords, Yitzhak Rabin, the Israeli prime minister at the time, said: "let me re-emphasize, the security of the settlements and Israelis, both, is in our hands." According to the Oslo terms, the occupied Palestinian territories were also divided into small units (A, B and C). Areas A are under the security and political control of the PA, areas B are joint Palestinian and Israeli administration and areas C (where large Israeli settlements are built) fall under complete Israeli military rule. Areas C consisted of 60 percent of the West Bank. As it will be discussed in the following section, this futile arrangement increased the territorial fragmentation of Gaza and the West Bank and allowed Israel to continue with its expansionist policies particularly in C areas.

The peace process collapsed and a second Palestinian Intifada erupted in September 2000 in response to continued military occupation and the injustices committed during the Oslo years. Israeli military invasions and Palestinian armed resistance dominated the scene in the second Intifada. The death toll and civilian losses were also significant especially on the Palestinian side. Thus, the question that should be addressed here is: why did the Oslo peace process fail and what were the causes of its failure? The following section responds to this crucial question.

4.7.2 Failure of Oslo Process:

The dysfunctional design of the Oslo Agreement contained the seeds of its own destruction. It ignored the origins and the core issues of the conflict and focused on minor practicalities such as the creation of a Palestinian authority and security forces to maintain 'law and order' in the occupied territories. Zionist massacres in 1948, the loss of Palestinian land and homes, the traumas of the 1948 Nakba, the fate of refugees inside and outside Palestine, Israeli military occupation, illegal settlements, status of Jerusalem and Palestinian national rights, were all left unresolved for future negotiations. This led to further dispossession and continued oppression. In practical terms, Oslo was never able to provide a real transformation and a just

solution because its original structures lacked any effective foundation for a genuine peace and justice. As the Israeli historian Ilan Pappe points out, the essence of the Oslo process was based on a Zionist concept which erased the Nakba and its fatal consequences. Hence, Oslo “buried the 1948 and its victims.”

Commenting on the futile negotiations during the Oslo process, Graham Usher elaborates:

 Israeli negotiators continually focused on the nature of the specifics of Palestinian self-government- such as the nature of an autonomous authority, its structure and legislative power- while avoiding any discussion of substantive issues such as the applicability of UN Security Council Resolution 242 to the process [which demanded Israeli withdrawal from the Palestinian occupied territories] or the idea of transition from the interim period of Palestinian self-government to a final status settlement.

In this context, according to Norman Finkelstein, on all critical issues- Jerusalem, reparations, security, land- the Palestinians have in reality gained nothing. Furthermore, as Robert Rothstein further points out, the failure of the peace process to address these central issues by postponing them to future negotiations “has created serious defects in the state-building process and deepened internal Palestinian divisions” concerning the legitimacy of the PA and the entire Palestinian political order.

In addition, Oslo represented a colonial solution to a colonial problem. It never facilitated self-determination and real independence for the aggrieved and dispossessed populations in Gaza and the West Bank. The Israeli historian and former Israeli minister Shlomo Ben Ami states that “in practice, the Oslo Agreements were founded on a neo-colonialist basis, on a life of dependence of one on the other forever.” John Pilger observes also that the Oslo peace process consisted of a “classical colonial fix” in which Arafat and his elite were given the trappings of power while the mass of the people continued to suffer. In this context, as the Palestinian novelist and respected human rights lawyer Raja Shehadeh points out, Israel related to Gaza and the West Bank not as an occupier but as a “colonial ruler whose security

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216 Usher. op.cit., p. 3.
forces (sometimes in co-operation with those of the colonised) kept the peace and quelled any resistance to the status quo. Therefore, all the privileges of colonial masters accrued to Israel. These included exploitation of the resources of land, water, archaeological sites and prohibiting any construction outside the land areas designated for the colonised population. Access in and out of the borders is also exclusively under full control and authority of Israel.

Hence the ‘peace’ of Oslo became equal to domination and elimination. Edward Said, who had also criticised the Oslo project from the beginning, writes:

It appeared to Palestinians that peace with Israel was a form of exterminism that left us [Palestinian people] without political existence: it meant accepting as definitive and unappealable the events of 1948, the loss of our society and homeland.

Another major factor to consider in relation to the Oslo process and subsequent failures was the powerful American and Israeli interests that embodied its creation. The U.S. was emerging from an imperial war in the Gulf against Iraq and the savagery killings and attacks committed there by American forces comprised its position in the Middle East and increased hostility towards its foreign policies in the region. Therefore, as Jonathan Cook elaborated, the “Americans needed a public relations coup in the Arab world” and Oslo provided the opportunity. The Israeli army, on the other hand, had been unable to suppress the Intifada and the growing popular protests in Gaza and the West Bank in the late 1980s. Therefore, from the perspective of the Israeli government, installing the PA and Arafat in the occupied territories to stop the uprising and act as a security contractor for Israel would be beneficial for the military occupation enterprise and its national interests.

On the other hand, the PLO leadership, being weak and isolated following the Gulf War and the Soviet Union collapse, had participated in this sorry state of affairs and built a Palestinian

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222 Ibid.
225 Ibid. p.146.
Authority that was corrupt, dictatorial and repressive towards the Palestinian population. Instead of countering Israeli oppression and creating alternatives, the PA wasted significant resources and funds on building security institutions and forces to serve Israeli security needs.

Moreover, Israeli expansionist policies escalated on the ground in Gaza and the West Bank throughout the 1990s and undermined the “peace” process in significant ways. The number of checkpoints was raised, illegal settlements expanded rapidly on confiscated lands in contrary to international law, home-evictions became more regular, bypass roads for settlers increased, and territorial divisions between Gaza and the West Bank deepened through a sophisticated system of military control. Closures and barriers choked also the Palestinian economy and made it more dependent on Israel, and raised unemployment in Palestinian society. As Tony Judt discusses in his criticism of Israeli policies, when the initial DOP was signed in 1993, there were 32,750 Jewish housing units in settlements in the West Bank and Gaza. By October 2001, there were 53,121 - this was an increase of 62 percent. In the course of the peace process, the settler population of the West Bank grew by 48 percent and that of Gaza by 61 percent. This “steady Israeli takeover of Palestinian land and resources hardly conformed to the spirit of the Oslo Declaration.” Also, it made the Oslo process an “agonizing exercise in slow strangulation”, transforming Gaza in particular into a virtual prison.

Thus, in this context, the peace process became a cover for the continued de-development of Palestinian areas, and a tool for the denial of national and economic rights. It also represented a major setback in the Palestinian political hopes and aspirations for self-determination and nationhood. The Oslo Agreement imposed some crucial precedents that reflected its ineffectiveness as well as Israel’s unwillingness to relinquish control and withdraw from the Palestinian territories. These involved the rejection of international law and the UN resolutions applicable to Israeli withdrawal from the occupied territories and the refugee issue. As Susan Akram illustrates in *International Law and the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict*, legal rights “have been deliberately excluded from the politically-driven agenda of the

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negotiations” in the Palestinian case. Therefore, when a rights approach is reintroduced, “a just and durable solution for the refugee problem may well be within reach.”

Moreover, as Sara Roy explains in *Failing Peace*, the fragmentation of Gaza and the West Bank into small and isolated islands allowed Israel to create “key facts” on the ground and expropriate more land. As a result, the Oslo peace process changed the political, economic and physical landscape of the Palestinian territories and increased rather than alleviated Palestinian dispossession, deprivation, and repression. Therefore, as Roy concludes, not only did the Oslo arrangements preclude a just political settlement to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict but they also “formalized and institutionalized the occupation” in Gaza and the West Bank.

In the present political situation, Hamas and Fatah are also divided. They have been engaged in a power struggle following the electoral victory of Hamas and the imposition of an Israeli blockade on Gaza in 2007. Hence, Palestinian political representation is currently split. Hamas has its own government structures in Gaza and Fatah is in charge of the PA government in the West Bank. This difficult reality has been complicated further by the launch of an Israeli major military assault on Gaza (also known as Operation Cast Lead) in December of 2009 and the subsequent massive number of civilian victims. This war against Gaza led to the death of more than 1,400 people and vast destruction.

This is the overall context in which Palestinian civil society currently exists and consequently many civil society organizations are working for real peace, justice and human rights.

**4.8 Final Conceptual Note:**

As discussed in Chapter 3, civil society can contribute to conflict transformation and positive change in conflict-torn societies. The contributions of civil society to peacebuilding in

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230 Ibid. pp. 234-236.

231 For more information on the 2009 military assault on Gaza, see Ilan Pappe and Noam Chomsky. *Gaza in Crisis: Reflections on Israel’s War Against the Palestinians*. op.cit.
conflict environments extend to significant areas including: elections monitoring; peace education; mediation; dialogue; youth leadership; human rights; protection of civilians in conflict; and documentation of war crimes. These significant areas also involve: trauma recovery; just peace; humanitarian assistance; capacity building and advocacy.

It is within this conceptual understanding of the role of civil society in promoting conflict transformation that the contributions of secular civil society organizations to peacebuilding in Gaza and the associated challenges are examined in this study through field research and the exploration of case studies.

Conclusion:

This chapter has addressed a crucial objective of this thesis: exploring the development of Palestinian civil society in recent history. In doing so, some significant conclusions have been reached and should be reiterated here.

The Palestinian social structures prior to 1948 had been characterised by the following: urban elitism; family status and landownership; patronage and client relationships; nationalism under the elites’ authority; power dynamics among social and national players; divisions among the elites. After 1948, Palestinians were shattered by the Nakba and became refugees inside and outside Palestine. They also seemed at that time to have disappeared from the political map of the world. However, a new nationalist leadership emerged in exile and organized political structures such as Fatah and the PLO in the 1960s as major political forces in the Palestinian struggle. This national movement had a significant impact on the growth and the role of secular and nationalist social organizations in the occupied territories.

Fatah and other smaller factions in the PLO permeated the social and institutional arena inside the occupied territories and sought allies in this important sphere in order to support their changing political framework of achieving statehood in Gaza and the West Bank. They also used this associational space for securing political influence and constituencies. Furthermore, some of the nationalist local organizations helped to protect resistance groups and provided them with analysis concerning the Israeli military strategies in Gaza and the West Bank. In the process, tensions and some conflictual relations developed between the political leadership on the outside (i.e. the PLO) and the national and social leadership inside
Gaza and the West Bank. Nonetheless, the nationalist grassroots organizations acted not only as service providers but also as engaged representatives of political resistance towards Israeli military occupation throughout the 1970s and the 1980s.

In this context, it has been also established that the active involvement of civil society in phases 1 and 2 (service provision and alternative national structures, and the Intifada struggle) conforms to the framework of CSII. Examples of challenging hegemony and countering state power by Palestinian social players and agencies have been provided. These include, for instance, the civil society strategy aimed at challenging the repressive Israeli state system in the occupied territories and resistance to its domination over society by engaging independently in community-building, providing crucial support to Palestinians living under Israeli military rule, and actively supporting the national movement in the 1970s and 1980s. Also, the grassroots measures and actions taken during the Intifada of 1987-1993 (e.g. formation of popular committees) aimed at contesting the existing regime and military control established by the Israeli State in the occupied territories. These actions by civil society players sought also to assert the political independence of the Palestinian people through popular resistance, social and political mobilization, and institution-building. As discussed previously, the role of secular and nationalist civil society organizations during phases 1 and 2 should be understood and interpreted within the framework of CSII.

This chapter has also discussed the context in which Islamic social networks emerged in Gaza and the West Bank in the 1980s, and played an active role in providing social welfare and essential services. The early strategy of the Muslim Brotherhood based on Islamic revival (Nahada) and reformation before political liberation represented the overall framework in which these Islamic community associations formed and operated during that period. It was also from these social structures and ideological foundations that Hamas, as a political and paramilitary movement, had eventually emerged during the 1987 Intifada in response to Israeli occupation,

Phase 3 (the Oslo peace process of 1993 and the creation of the PA) witnessed further transformation in the secular sphere of local organizations in Palestine, and presented changing political and social realities to secular CSOs and their nationalist components. Power struggles and conflicting relations between CSOs and the PA, and the impact of international policies and external donors during the 1990s, led to the separation between
grassroots organizations and the national movement. As discussed before, for reasons of influence and strong connections with Palestinian local communities during the Intifada and a successful history of challenging Israeli state power in the occupied territories, the PA saw these social structures in the occupied territories as a rival and threat to their authority. In this power struggle, the PA employed its security, financial and political assets to weaken and contain these strong civil society forces.

During the peace process of the 1990s, some observers suggested also that the nationalist and secular sector of civil society experienced depoliticization. It abandoned practices of popular resistance and politicized engagement and transformed into a social movement in a post-conflict style under the demands of external donors and their good governance agendas. In this situation, an elitist and cliental NGO culture developed also during the Oslo period in the secular grassroots sector.

This process of depoliticization and the influences of external donors on CSOs, particularly on those involved in peace and human rights work in Gaza presently, are examined further in the research analysis (Chapter 6).

This chapter also contextualizes the current political situation in which civil society groups are functioning in the Palestinian situation. The causes for the failures of the Oslo Agreement and the Israeli-Palestinian political process have been also discussed and examples provided. Drawing on Chapter 3, this chapter has ended by re-emphasizing the role of civil society in supporting peacebuilding and positive change in conflict torn-societies.

The next chapter outlines the data and information collected from the field research in Gaza and summarizes the interviews that were conducted. It also introduces the case study organizations selected for the field research process.
Chapter 5: Case Studies and Research Findings

Introduction:

The journey to conduct field research in Gaza was both unpredictable and significant. The unpredictability arose from the continued political instability in Gaza and the wider uprisings against dictatorships in the Middle East in these times. The significance was that this research, with all these uncertainties surrounding it, has afforded me a unique experience in terms of gaining access to information and material about secular civil society organizations and their role in promoting peace and human rights in Gaza. As stated previously in Chapter 4, the purpose of the field research was to hold interviews and gather data in order to complete this research process. The two case study organizations selected were the Gaza Community Mental Health Programme (GCMHP) and the Palestinian Centre for Human Rights (PCHR), both of which agreed to participate in the research process. In total, four representatives belonging to GCMHP and two staff members from PCHR were interviewed. The selected number of interviewees from each organization depended on staff availability and the length of the research trip.

Furthermore, four leaders from both the Islamic Resistance Movement (Hamas) and the Palestinian National Liberation Movement (Fatah) were interviewed in order to gain an insight into their political perspective on the workings of secular civil society and its socio-political engagement in Gaza. In addition, interviews with the representatives from Hamas and Fatah included enquiries about broader issues of conflict, peace and politics to assess the Israeli-Palestinian political context. The duration of the field research trip was approximately 6 weeks. It commenced on August 20 2011 and ended on October 4 2011.

A follow-up research visit to Gaza was made in August 2013 for the purpose of gathering more information and data on challenges to secular CSOs in Gaza and civil society engagement there. As this thesis developed, it became clear that the challenges encountered by secular social organizations in Gaza are complex and combine political, factional, institutional, international and national dimensions. In this context, conducting further investigation into these combined and evolving challenges was essential since it would strengthen the contribution to knowledge of this thesis.
Therefore, the Palestinian Centre for Democracy and Conflict Resolution (PCDCR) was selected as a third case study and the important element of the challenges has been added to the research hypothesis. Based on the learning and data collected from the two previous case studies in the year of 2011, the interviews with the PCDCR in 2013 pursued some particular issues, and hence approached the interviewees with a slightly different set of questions. These included, for example, the relationship between external donors and secular civil society organizations, the impact of depoliticization and factionalization on the functions and structures of secular civil society in Gaza, and also the resulting challenges within the wider Israeli-Palestinian context as a central theme and research question in this study. Similar to GCMHP and the PCHR, the selected number of interviewees from the PCDCR also depended on staff availability and the duration of the research visit.

To provide a more critical perspective concerning civil society and political dimensions, an interview was conducted with the prominent and respected Professor Ibrahim Ibrash from Al-Azhar University in Gaza. Professor Ibrash offered his helpful insights and academic views on Palestinian politics and the role of civil society organizations in Gaza, and associated challenges. The duration of the second field research trip was approximately 6 weeks and it started on August 10 2013 and ended on September 22 2013. The total number of interviews conducted during the two field research visits was 14. Individuals interviewed agreed to be identified by their names and professions.

As stated before, the purpose of this chapter is to present research findings. Hence, a description of the specific activities by the three case study organizations is provided. Also, this chapter summarizes the interviews which were conducted.

Before the interviewees are introduced, a summary of the three case study organizations is presented.

5.1 Summary of Case Studies:

5.1.1 Palestinian Centre for Human Rights

The Palestinian Centre for Human Rights (PCHR) is a nongovernmental organization based in Gaza City. The Centre is dedicated to protecting human rights, promoting the rule of law
and upholding democratic principles in Gaza and the West Bank. According to PCHR, their human rights and advocacy work is conducted through the “documentation and investigation of human rights violations, provision of legal aid and counselling for both individuals and groups, and preparation of research articles relevant to such issues as the human rights situation and the rule of law.” The Centre also emphasizes its participation in Palestinian political debates by asserting that it “provides comments on Palestinian Draft Laws and urges the adoption of legislation that incorporates international human rights standards and basic democratic principles.”

The PHRC has set out three objectives to achieve:

- To support all efforts aimed at enabling the Palestinian people to gain and exercise their rights in relation to self-determination and independence in accordance with international law and UN resolutions;
- To create and develop democratic institutions and an active civil society, while promoting democratic culture within the Palestinian society;
- To protect human rights and promote the rule of law in accordance with international standards

5.1.2 Gaza Community Mental Health Programme:

The Gaza Community Mental Health Programme (GCMHP) is a civil society group that professionally manages three community support centres based throughout the Gaza Strip. The group aims to establish a “Palestinian society that respects human rights and in which people can live in dignity, free of oppression, and feel their well-being is promoted.” Unlike the PCHR, GCMHP places a special emphasis on dealing with traumas and psychological impacts of organized violence and torture experienced in Gaza. Thus, they provide trauma recovery and counselling for vulnerable groups “such as children, women and victims of torture and human rights violations.”

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233 See GCMHP website online: [http://www.gcmhp.net/](http://www.gcmhp.net/).
According to GCMHP, the organization conducts its work and delivers community and psychological services through therapeutic approaches including mediation and school activities, counselling, psychological care and training, and women's empowerment projects to increase female participation in political processes. Other approaches offer mental health services and support for individuals to deal with war related affects as well as traumatic experiences of imprisonment and torture in Israeli prisons.  

In addition to addressing these broader issues, GCMHP and its three affiliated community centres seek to achieve the following objectives:

- Empower vulnerable groups in society i.e. women, children and torture survivors;
- Develop local human resources through mental health training programmes;
- Provide humane and high quality community-based mental health services;
- Combat the stigma attached to mental illness in Palestinian society.

5.1.3 The Palestinian Centre for Democracy and Conflict Resolution:

The Palestinian Centre for Democracy and Conflict Resolution (PCDCR) is a nongovernmental organization. The PCDCR evolved from the efforts of a group of Palestinian youth who volunteered to develop a Palestinian model institution to apply the ideas and principles of democracy and conflict resolution. The PCDCR is based in Gaza City with 5 branches stationed throughout Gaza and the West Bank cities of Ramallah, Nablus and Hebron. The Centre believes in the importance of “democratic behaviour of the community and the individuals.” Therefore, citizens are given awareness and supported in relation to democratic processes. This, according to the organization, helps the citizens to understand their “rights, duties and responsibilities to achieve justice, protection, and development.”

The programme work also provides educational workshops and practical skills for various groups and organizations in the area of conflict resolution. Further, it also facilitates dialogue initiatives, and much “needed psychological and emotional support to all segments of society.”

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234 Ibid.
235 Ibid.
236 More information is available on the PCDCR Website: http://www.pcdc.org/eng/index.php?page=AboutUs.
237 Ibid.
238 Ibid.
The PCDCR aims to achieve a number of goals including:

- Promoting social awareness about the importance of conflict resolution.
- Spreading social awareness about the concepts of democracy
- Providing a safe place to be used in solving family and community disputes.
- Support community members to play an active role in society
- Build partnership and reciprocity relations with informal and formal decision-making bodies so that they can respond effectively to the demands of an increasingly vibrant civil society.\textsuperscript{239}

5.1.4 Rationale for Selection:

This research project uses the specific workings and programmes of the PCHR, the GCMHP and the PCDCR to assess the contributions of secular civil society to peacebuilding in Gaza and the resulting political and local challenges. They have been selected for this task because the principles of peacebuilding and civil society connections with processes aimed at peacebuilding, explored in Chapter 2 and Chapter 3, conform to the goals and activities of these three case study organizations. For example, from their engagement in lobbying and advocacy which seek to challenge violence and human rights violations in Gaza, the PCHR works to prevent armed conflicts and contributes to a political framework of long-term peace. Most of these important components are recognized as significant aspects of peacebuilding in the definition provided previously by Jonathan Goodhand.

Another important reason for selecting the PCHR as a case study relates to their internal interactions with legal processes in Palestinian society. As stated in Chapter 3, Beatrice Pouligny points out that a central function of civil society peacebuilding is to support the establishment of the rule of law and the development of democratic processes such as free elections and public participation. Also, their engagement with Palestinian officials and political parties makes the PCHR a more useful case study to research and to investigate its impact on political issues in Gaza. This helps, for example, to address a major central research question concerning the influence of civil society activities on the broader Israeli-Palestinian political context.

\textsuperscript{239} Ibid.
On the other hand, through their focus on strengthening community development and capacity building, empowering vulnerable groups in society as a way of resisting repression and dealing with resulting individual and collective traumas of dispossession, the GCMHP attempts to address fundamental questions of justice, political oppression, and abuse of human rights, trauma recovery and healing. Most of these significant aspects are acknowledged in Nick Lewer’s theoretical definition as central elements of effective peacebuilding which was discussed in Chapter 2 (Principles of Peacebuilding).

The PCDCR also works to promote methods of conflict resolution. In addition, as stated previously, the Centre seeks to lobby decision-makers to facilitate democratic transformation in Palestinian society, and support a broader public participation in dialogue and conflict resolution processes. In this context, creating such safe spaces for dialogue and positive change, and connecting directly with the wider population at the grassroots level, is recognized as a vital contribution to peacebuilding, as Paul Van Tongeren pointed out. This is discussed in Chapter 3 (Civil Society and Connections with Peacebuilding).

Taken together, these three case studies are related to secular civil society organizations in Gaza. And therefore they meet a major objective of this study; that is investigating the contributions of this particular section of civil society to peacebuilding in Gaza and the challenges it encounters within the local and political context.

5.2 Introducing Interviewees:

While further information will be provided later in this chapter about the role of each participant and their profile, below is a brief introduction to each interviewee for the purpose of clarity.

The interviewees from the GCMHP included the following:

- **Dr. Eyad Sarraj**: Sarraj was the Director of GCMHP and a veteran psychologist. He also was a human rights and political activist in Gaza. Sarraj sadly died in late 2013 after a long battle with leukaemia.
• **Rawyea Hamam:** Hamam is a community mental health therapist who is working in the field of psychological support for children and families and she is also engaged in trauma recovery activities for victims of political violence.

• **Abed-Alhameed Miharb:** Miharb is a mental health specialist. He works for the Human Rights Committee of GCMHP and thus his main task is to support detainees and political prisoners whose human rights have been violated especially by the use of torture.

• **Dr. Yaser Abu-Jama:** Abu-Jama is the Manager of the Training and Research Unit of the GCMHP. He has been working with the organization since 2002.

The interviewees from the PCDCR were:

• **Abed-Elmanem Altahrawy:** Altahrawy is the Programmes Manager at the PCDCR and he is a senior member of the Management Committee of the Centre.

• **Deena Alanqar:** Alanqar is the Coordinator of the Child Protection Programme at the PCDCR.

• **Hanan Aldalou:** Aldalou is the Coordinator for the Social Peace and National Reconciliation project. She is also the Assistant Director for International Relations and Fundraising.

And from the PCHR, the interviewees were:

• **Eyad Alalmi:** Alalmi is the Director of the Legal Aid Unit of the PCHR and a co-founder of the organization.

• **Hamdi Shaqora:** Shaqora is the Coordinator of the Democracy Unit of the PCHR. He has been working in the area of human rights for the last twenty years.

The interviewed political leaders of Hamas and Fatah in Gaza were:
• **Ismael Alashqar:** Alashqar is senior political leader in Hamas and he is from the Jabaliya refugee camp in northern Gaza. He has been an elected member of parliament since 2006 and currently heads the Security, Interior and Local governance Unit at the Palestinian Legislative Council.

• **Dr. Ismael Radwan:** Radwan is a Minister in the Hamas government and a political leader in Hamas. He is also a Professor of Islamic Law at the Islamic University of Gaza.

• **Diab Allouh:** Allouh is the National Relations and Media Commissioner for Fatah in Gaza. He previously served as the Palestinian ambassador to China and he is currently a member of the High Leadership Committee and the Advisory Council of Fatah.

• **Hisham Abed-Alrazq:** Abed-Alrazq is an ex-minister for Detainees and Ex-prisoners in Israeli prisons and he is currently a senior member of the Fatah Revolutionary Council and the Fatah High Leadership Committee in Gaza.

And finally the interviewee from Al-Azhar University in Gaza was:

**Ibrahim Ibrash:** Ibrash is a Professor of political science at Al-Azhar University. He served as the Head of the Political Science and Sociology Department for a number of years and worked after as the Dean of Humanities and Arts Faculty. He has published 18 books on theories of political science and Palestinian politics. He is also well-known in Gaza as a leading political analyst and public intellectual.

Before a description of the activities of the case study organizations is provided, it is important to reiterate briefly the methodology for this research project and re-state the central research questions from which the subsequent interview questions and topics have been generated.

5.3 **Review of Methodology:**

The methodology employed for the field research involved interviews as a significant research method for gathering information and generating data. The specific approach to the
methodology used in the field research consisted of semi-structured interviews. These semi-structured interviews integrated a general structure and list of questions that had been prepared in advance but were enhanced by follow-up questions, explanations and clarifications which constituted an important element of the interview process. As stated in Chapter 1, this particular methodology followed Eric Drever’s framework of semi-structured interviews. It is important to recall the definition. According to Drever:

The name ‘semi-structured interviews’ means that the interviewer sets up a general structure by deciding in advance what ground is to be covered and what main questions are to be asked. This leaves the detailed structure to be worked out during the interview. The person interviewed can answer at some length in his or her own words, and the interviewer responds using prompts, probes and follow-up questions to get the interviewee to clarify or expand on the answers.\(^\text{240}\)

Drever suggests three main purposes of conducting semi-structured interviews with participants in research studies: first, they “gather factual information about people’s circumstances”; second, they “collect statements of their preferences and opinions”, and third they “explore in some depth their experiences, motivations and reasoning”, he states.\(^\text{241}\)

Based on this particular research method, and as it will be demonstrated later in this chapter, a general structure that reflected the framework of the research questions was prepared in advance and used during the field research process. The semi-structured interviews were conducted in Arabic and translated afterwards by this researcher into English. The translation was rendered in the words of the interviewees to support further accuracy. As stated in Chapter 1, the researcher’s language skills and the excellent command of both Arabic and English have proven crucial and useful in completing this research process. Furthermore, the fact that the interviewees had the choice to speak in their native Arabic provided them with greater freedom and confidence to explain their positions and opinions with more clarity. This also helped to avoid some misunderstandings that could have risen as a result of language barriers. In addition, the researcher’s existing contacts and working relationships with a range of Palestinian civil society groups, academics and political organizations in Gaza served the purpose of this research study well in terms of access and data collection.

\(^\text{240}\) Drever, op.cit., p.1.
\(^\text{241}\) Ibid. p.1.
5.4 Research Questions:

- What role do Palestinian secular civil society organizations play in promoting peacebuilding in Gaza?
- What is the relationship between secular civil society peacebuilding and the broader Israeli-Palestinian political context?
- What are the challenges to secular civil society organizations and their peacebuilding role in Gaza from both political and civil society perspectives?

In what follows, based on the information gathered through the field research and the interviews, a descriptive account of the specific activities generated from the three case study organizations (i.e. GCMHP, PCHR and PCDCR) is presented. Also, a summary of the interviews is provided. However, the analysis of these civil society activities and their contributions to peacebuilding, and associated challenges in Gaza, are addressed in the next chapter (Research Analysis).

5.5 GCMHP: Tasks and Activities

5.5.1 Trauma Recovery:

Trauma recovery and counselling support is central to GCMHP’s involvement in Gaza. Such important services are offered to individuals and groups who are affected by the continued conflict in Gaza. There are no strict selection criteria for beneficiaries. This means that affected persons could directly approach any of the three community centres managed by the organization and request help; or alternatively they could be identified through the field visits that GCMHP workers make to areas suffering violence and trauma.

This activity is facilitated through a number of approaches. Firstly, “expressive therapy” is widely used by GCMHP and it helps participants involved in healing processes to express their hurt and loss safely and freely. It is a form of story-telling that purifies emotions and acknowledges troubling experiences resulting from conflicts and socio-political instability. A second approach is “psychodrama”, by which victims of violence are assigned roles and encouraged to reconstruct what they had encountered through violent confrontations and that
which caused them trauma. The tools used here are dramatization techniques and stage-
theatre. Similarly, artistic and creative methods constitute important elements of this healing
approach. Thirdly, an additional civil society approach employed by GCMHP for counselling
and psychological support in Palestinian communities is “education and awareness of
trauma”. This is performed through home visits by counsellors and mental health therapists to
those experiencing suffering and lose, human or otherwise. This is to help them understand
what they are likely to encounter subsequently in terms of emotional and psychological
impacts and in the context of post-violence experiences.

For instance, the community mental health therapist and conflict resolution worker at
GCMHP Rawyea Hamam remembers a difficult moment when a civilian man immediately
following the 2009 massive Israeli military assault on Gaza shared with her and the visiting
team: “I have seen my son being burnt by white phosphorus and could not protect him...I am
pessimistic and fearful now; and don’t know if I will live longer to raise my [other] kids.”
Part of their task was then, according to Hamam, to advise and explain that “these feelings [of
hopelessness and guilt] and reactions are expected after going through unusual circumstances
and a brutal military attack”\textsuperscript{242} She also indicated that this type of community support has
been provided for people in Gaza for 11 years. According to Hamam, they have had to
intensify this community support on a larger scale for children and adults alike following the
Israeli major military assault on Gaza in December of 2009 and the destructive impact that it
has had on the fabric of the entire society. Many people in Gaza describe the 2009 tragic
events and period as the “war on Gaza”, as Hamam states.\textsuperscript{243}

Apart from their contributions to trauma recovery and healing, these educational and
professional approaches have an overall purpose and a structured objective that is related to
the goal of achieving solidarity and peace among affected community members. Eyad Sarraj
points out that a major success for their organization and counselling services is the reality
that many people in Gaza are given the opportunity to come to terms with personal tragic
events which they faced in the conflict and were supported to re-build their lives as active
participants in society.\textsuperscript{244}

\textsuperscript{242}Interview with Rawyea Hamam at GCMHP in Gaza on 12-09-2011.
\textsuperscript{243}Ibid.
\textsuperscript{244}Interview with Eyad Sarraj at the Summer Café of GCMHP in Gaza on 10-09-2011.
5.5.2 Peace Education:

Peace education initiatives are materialized through the “School Mediation Programme” that GCMHSP designed in 2005 and has been used in various schools in Gaza since then. The participants are male and female students from the age of 16 to 18. This programme involves teaching conflict resolution methods to senior students (18 years old) who for their part pass on the skills they have learned through training to junior students (16 years old). Afterwards, student mediators are given the opportunity to practise these skills and are provided with specific t-shirts to wear in the school environment in order to be identifiable and visible to other students if they wish to seek mediation support. The essence of the programme, according to Rawyea Hamam who is also a co-organizer and facilitator of the School Mediation Programme, is to emphasize the importance of nonviolence and dialogue and to stress these values at an early stage in life so they can be maintained by these young participants as they become adults. According to Hamam, the significance of this initiative lies in its ability “to promote the idea of using nonviolent means to resolve conflicts and disagreements.”245 This is achieved with the assistance from school teachers and the selection of participants also carries particular intended outcomes. Clarifying further the workings of the School Mediation Programme, Hamam explains:

We go to classrooms with the support of teachers and inform the students about the mediation project and then ask who would be interested. A good number of students usually nominate themselves but then we ask the rest of the class to vote and choose who they would like to see from their class working as a mediator; we do this also to reaffirm concepts of voting and election. So at the end of this selection process we would have about 20 students from different classes.246

Hamam goes on to illustrate that this is all constructed with the practical framework of training them to be “neutral mediators.” In this process, they would bring the two students in dispute face to face and give each one an equal chance to tell their story, and then help both parties to find a solution to the problem without imposing any solution. If successful, the mediator would write down what has been agreed upon and this forms the basis of an

245 Interview with Rawyea Hamam at GCMHP in Gaza on 12-09-2011.
246 Ibid.
agreement between the two parties to the dispute. Through a specialized trainer, the students also learn skills of effective communication, listening and dialogue.247

5.5.3 Prisoner Support:

The Human Rights Committee (HRC) of GCMHP constitutes another pillar of the activities undertaken by this civil society organization. A great amount of time and effort of the HRC is directed towards the issue of protecting human rights for political prisoners in Israeli and Palestinian jails. Violence, hurt, isolation, mental health support, torture and integration of prisoners are all central issues to the HRC and their task. A team of psychologists and field workers from the GCMHP make regular visits to various prisons and work to identify and address the problems mentioned above in relation to prisoner welfare and wellbeing. This support and treatment process takes two forms: the first involves direct engagement with prisoners and the second involves prison officers (mainly for Palestinians as Israel will not accept the involvement of its prison staff) in training and raising-awareness in the context of prisoners’ needs. A legal motivation for this effort is ensured by international laws being applied to prisoners so that their basic human rights are not violated.

Hence, Palestinian families in Gaza can approach the HRC directly for a family member who is in prison and request a professional visit and support. Prisoners themselves can also make representations and put their names forward to access assistance and mental health support from GCMHP. The HRC worker and mental health therapist Abed-Alhameed Miharb emphasizes that the next stage after they are notified of the case is significant. He states:

We look at the names given by the prisoners and the families and then go meet them in person inside the prison. Individual and confidential interviews are initially organized to identify what the issue is. Afterwards we agree together the prisoner and us about the type of treatment process required for their situation. It could be physiotherapy, psychotherapy, or counselling, whatever they need.248

A common approach to counselling by the HRC is group-therapy which includes a number of sessions for prisoners with similar difficulties, but Miharb is careful to point out that a prisoner’s background is taken into account. This means that prisoners with political

247 Ibid.
248 Interview with Abed-Alhameed Miharb at GCMHP in Gaza on 13-09-2011.
motivations are not mixed with those with “criminal records” in the sessions. According to Miharb, working with individuals who are imprisoned on criminal grounds is equally challenging. This is because it involves an associated “stigma” in society and the relationship between prisoners of this type and the family suffers as a result. Hence, isolation after release remains a problematic aspect for them.

Political prisoners, on the other hand, normally possess a special status and enjoy respect among both Palestinian factions and communities because of their defence and sacrifice for the national cause. Nonetheless, political and ordinary prisoners alike share many common problems such as isolation, hurt and loneliness. And with careful consideration, counselling, psychological debriefing, story-telling and relaxation activities continue to take place in the immediate prison environment.

If proven in medical terms and valid evidence existed, torture cases could be challenged through the court. The HRC would collect all related evidence and make a legal case in the courtroom against the prison authorities, calling on them to be held accountable and for the prisoner in question to be released for urgent medical and mental health attention. Miharb elaborates:

> We meet tortured individuals and hear what happened and then document their cases supported by medical reports from doctors. [After submissions] all this evidence might lead the court to authorize their release because it would be established that the detainee had been tortured.²⁴⁹

The HRC of GCMHP also addresses issues of political arrests made by militants and security forces of the Palestinian factions for reasons of infighting and power struggles. The “intervention is based on a professional basis” with the factions and demands that these detainees are treated within “the framework of human rights regardless of the prisoner’s political affiliation”, said Miharb. Coming into contact with the Hamas government in Gaza, has presented a dilemma for some civil society organizations in terms of receiving external funding from Western sources. Miharb, however, suggested that the GCMHP and the HRC have clarified to donors that they in the organization “professionally deal with prisoner...

²⁴⁹ Ibid.
groups and they are entitled to their rights in terms of support and treatment, so our main concern is not the Hamas government.\footnote{250}

GCMHP, through their specialized body of HRC, works to resolve another important issue that has a crucial impact on social harmony in society: post-prisoner release and its implications. Problems in this phase have proven to be as complicated and difficult as pre-release issues with reintegration into society and personal development as the main obstacle for prisoners who served a long sentence and for those who work to support them. Rejecting the changes that emerged in society and in their families during their time in prison could lead to social and psychological difficulties for some prisoners. Commenting from a professional capacity, Miharb points out:

We [in the HRC and the GCMHP] also visit ex-prisoners at their homes and offer assistance in the field in terms of the prison-stigma, torture in prison, reintegration immediately after release and [to avoid] difficulties involved. Some of those prisoners did not live in their home for 20 years and were disconnected from society dynamics; therefore, many of them experience a psychological shock [on their release] and we need to help them and their families to overcome these problems.\footnote{251}

Combating torture, supporting the wellbeing of prisoners and their mental health, providing social and professional services, and psychological support to prisoners and their families before and after their release are all examples of the engagement of the GCMHP in the particular area of prisoner support in Gaza.

**5.5.4 Capacity Building:**

The delivery of training and learning programmes to a range of civil society and official institutions in Gaza is one of the central functions of GCMHP. The head of the Training and Research Unit (TRU) at GCMHP Yaser Abu-Jama pointed out that capacity building from their perspective is aimed at three strands: organizational, institutional and educational. He explains this point further:

\footnotesize
\cite{250} Ibid.
\cite{251} Ibid.
Our capacity building role addresses three key areas: firstly, training staff and workers of the concerned civil society organizations in mental health and trauma recovery. Secondly, providing Palestinian institutions, relevant Ministries and Departments with the necessary skills and experiences for mental health supports. Thirdly, by working with teachers and students at schools and through workshops and training courses that promote nonviolence and conflict resolution. This is all organized with the objective of enhancing the capacity of all these local groups and institutions in their various positions.

At the civil society level, GCMHP has been offering an educational module since 1997 and the title is “Higher Diploma Programme.” This Programme is designed to “facilitate local qualified cadres of multi-disciplinary teams in comprehensive community mental health”, as Abu-Jama remarks. The Islamic University of Gaza and other regional and international institutions are supportive partners in this Diploma Programme. An important function of the Islamic University in the course delivery is to make academic expertise available and grant the required academic recognition of the Diploma qualification since GCMHP is not operating as a formal education institution.

Eyad Sarraj, however, suggests that the sector of mental health for people affected by conflict and violence in Gaza has been facing a complex problem because of a “low-level awareness” of this field and its role in cultural and academic terms: “studying mental health is not a central priority for Palestinian academic institutions because there is a lack of understanding at the cultural and social level of this science and its functions”, Sarraj points out. Nonetheless, in what seems to be a changing reality and perhaps promising progress in this direction, the manager of the TRU at GCMHP clarifies that over 162 candidates have graduated from the Higher Diploma Programme and are now in charge of mental health units at different governmental and nongovernmental organizations. “This is a significant part of our capacity building engagement”, Abu-Jama remarked encouragingly.

As for the second strand of this civil society training work, the GCMHP has been providing critical services and professional advice on policy issues to key official institutions. These include the Ministry of Detainees and Ex-prisoners and the Ministry of Health. According to

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252 Interview with Yaser Abu-Jama at GCMHP in Gaza on 15-9-2011.
253 Interview with Eyad Sarraj at the Summer Cafe of GCMHP in Gaza on 10-09-2011.
254 Interview with Yaser Abu-Jama at GCMHP in Gaza on 15-9-2011.
Abu-Jama, the TRU is intensively working with the employees of the Ministry of Health to integrate mental health provisions into their primary health care system and the broader services offered to the public. Also, the engagement with the Ministry of Detainees and Ex-prisoners is designed to train their concerned officers and prison advisors in approaches for psychological supports (e.g. expressive therapy, counselling methods mentioned above) for prisoners.

The third strand of the capacity building activity is related to informal education and conflict resolution training. This takes two forms in Palestinian schools: psycho-social guidance and mediation. The psychosocial guidance is designed and provided to “social supervisors” as they are called in Palestinian schools. In practical terms, their role involves supporting and monitoring students who develop social, emotional or behavioural difficulties in the school environment. Thus, isolation, bullying, aggression, fear and violence among some students are all examples of what a social supervisor would usually seek to address in a school-setting. Therefore, the TRU of GCMHP organizes educational workshops and programmes for social supervisors to enhance their awareness and understanding of “student counselling” practices. Skills for facilitating trust and effective communication between young students and their social supervisors and learning about better ways to identify the socio-psychological challenges facing many students, as a result of the blockade and instability in Gaza, constitute integral elements of the TRU’s efforts in this regard. The second aspect of this informal education and capacity building support to Palestinian schools is the mediation training workshops offered to students by the GCMHP, as explained previously.

5.5.5 Political Mediation:

Political mediation is based on occasional involvement in Palestinian politics when stalemate and power struggles and possibly armed confrontations emerge among Palestinian factions; namely Hamas and Fatah. Thus, the scope of this specific activity is limited and defined in Palestinian terms (i.e. internal processes in Gaza). It is also important to remember here that Hamas and Fatah have been locked in a power struggle since 2007. Therefore, Palestinian political representation is still divided. Fatah is currently in charge of the PA government in the West Bank and Hamas has its own government structures in Gaza.

255 Ibid.
To clarify this mediatory role further and its purpose, the former Director of GCMHP Eyad Sarraj explains that political mediation by civil society helped recently to find acceptable agreements to two critical difficulties between Hamas and Fatah: politically motivated arrests and national reconciliation.\textsuperscript{256} For reasons of political affiliation, the arrest and detention of Hamas activists or those belonging to Fatah by the security forces of each group has been associated with the division between the two movements and caused further frictions. Reporting this factional tension, a BBC news article in 2008 concludes:

\begin{quote}
Tit-for-tat arresting operations- by Hamas, in the Gaza Strip, and Fatah in the West Bank- have left hundreds in prison. It is one of the worst flare-ups of the conflict since last summer [of 2007] when fierce fighting led to dozens of deaths, and two rival administrations in Gaza and the West bank.... There remains intense mistrust between them and few can see how they would be able to work together, given recent history.\textsuperscript{257}
\end{quote}

However, with the mediation of the Egyptian government, Hamas and Fatah negotiated the National Reconciliation Agreement in May of 2011. It stated that the two parties would rejoin forces in their political and liberation struggle for Palestinian independence, hold general elections and form a unity government to represent the interests and national aspirations of all Palestinian people.

Eyad Sarraj, who worked along other civil society leaders to support national reconciliation between Hamas and Fatah, insists that the creation of back channel dialogues and trust-building measures between the two parties within Gaza prior to the Agreement in Cairo had been largely an outcome of civil society proposals and efforts. He cites the example of \textit{Lijnet Al-Wafaq wal Musalaha Al-watniya} (Consensus and National Reconciliation Committee). The members of this Committee included prominent academics and civil society representatives and it was led by Sarraj as the Director of GCMHP. They presented both creative solutions to those politically split and deeper discussions on ways of strengthening partnership in the Palestinian political system to avoid a relapse into internal conflicts. Sarraj recalls further:

\textsuperscript{256}Interview with Eyad Sarraj at the Summer Cafe of GCMHP in Gaza on 10-09-2011.
The Committee met with the Palestinian political leadership and Egyptian mediators and prepared documents on the terms for reconciliation, and the Palestinian civil society leaders went to Cairo and met also with the Egyptian Minister for Foreign Affairs, Nabeel El-Arabi. We discussed Palestinian unity together and handed over working papers to him to review in terms of our vision and perspective [on future cooperation and unity between political parties in Gaza and the West Bank]. These efforts and meetings continued and recently we saw Hamas and Fatah signing a reconciliation deal. Our role was helpful and facilitative.258

These facilitative processes require a workable and trusting relationship in order to be effective and produce fruitful results. Sarraj emphasizes that mutual respect between the GCMHP, represented by the Consensuses and National Reconciliation Committee, and the factions has been significant to both civil society participation and the support in this internal political dialogue.

The contributions to peacebuilding by the GCMHP and analyses of resulting challenges at the civil society and political level are presented in the next chapter.

The engagement of the Palestinian Centre for Human Rights (PCHR) in Gaza is now defined.

5.6 PCHR: Tasks and Activities

5.6.1 Democracy Promotion and Lobbying:

A central component of the PCHR’s work inside Gaza is to support democratic practices and legal accountability. This support is based on a number of approaches. First, at the governmental level, to ensure that newly debated laws do not undermine the basic principles of democracy, the Democracy Unit (DU) of the PCHR observes the workings of the Palestinian Legislative Council (PLC) and provides comments on draft laws and the PLC’s legal responsibilities. The two main objectives here are, (a) to “check whether the PLC is performing its duties in legislation and whether it is done in the right way”, and (b), “to assess to what extent the PLC is monitoring the Executive Authority”, as the Coordinator and Manager of the DU Hamdi Shaqora explains.259

258 Interview with Eyad Sarraj at the Summer Cafe of GCMHP in Gaza on 10-09-2011.
259 Interview with Hamdi Shaqora at PCHR in Gaza on 18-9-2011.
Failure of the PLC to meet these basic tasks and duties in upholding the rule of law leads to legal action taken by the PCHR. In 2004, the Palestinian Ministry for Justice, for instance, asked the PLC to grant the Ministry some controlling powers over the judiciary system which was supposed to be independent as stated by Palestinian law. Gaining more power over the justice system would mean that the government could intervene in court procedures and possibly affect the integrity of the law. In response to the pressure from the Executive, the PLC issued legislation that accommodated the request of the Justice Ministry. The DU reacted by initiating a successful counter legal action against the problematic change. According to Shaqora:

We immediately protested against this situation, [and] went to the High Court and challenged the constitutional legitimacy of the new law. The high court afterwards declared that this recently adopted legislation is null and void. This was a great victory; we regained the independence of the legal system. We were the only [civil society] organization that took on this case and we succeeded. It was a significant achievement.\footnote{Ibid.}

The second type of approach facilitated by the PCHR is the promotion of civil and political liberties. This includes, for example, freedom of expression, the right to peaceful protests and to civil association. The emphasis on these rights is reportedly generated from the fact that they constitute vital elements of any democratic society. Hence, the DU attempts to achieve this within the socio-political arena in Gaza through field observers, publishing regular reports, organizing advocacy activities, networking with media sources and strengthening good relations with other civil society groups.\footnote{Ibid.}

Third, supporting electoral processes is central to the programme work of the DU in particular and the PCHR in general. The last Palestinian general elections of 2006 in Gaza and the West Bank and the involvement of the PCHR before and during the polls offer an enlightening example in this regard. Prior to the elections, the DU engaged in a process in which human rights and legal experts arranged a series of private and public lectures to discuss the “Election Law”. The inclusivity of the Palestinian electoral mechanism was at the heart of both the DU’s concerns and efforts. Shaqora points out that they supported proportional-representation but it was not fully endorsed by legislators and politicians who
had been lobbied by the PCHR and, therefore, "the final agreement supported a mixed system of proportional and majority votes." This active role was extended and sustained throughout the delivery of the voting process itself. He recalls:

We had produced evaluation reports on the political environment and the running campaigns. During the election period, we organized 600 observers for monitoring, half of these were women. This is meant to promote women's role in society and politics as well. We trained them in election-monitoring and I'm still proud of all of our election teams, men and women. They did a wonderful job.

The elections and the way in which they were conducted were recognized nationally and internationally, as transparent and representative of all sections of Palestinian society: "we testify that it was the most free and fair election across the Arab world" states Shaqora confidently on behalf of his respected human rights organization and their local observers. The position of the international monitoring team led by the former American President Jimmy Carter in Gaza and the West Bank reflected a similar satisfaction: "it seemed obvious to us and other observers that the election was orderly and peaceful and there was a clear preference for Hamas candidates even in historically Fatah communities", as the Jimmy Carter Centre reported. This later issue of the Hamas victory and the subsequent developments of boycotting election results and imposing a siege on Gaza by Israel with active support from the U.S. government, created difficult challenges for the democracy initiatives of the PCHR. I will return to this issue in the analysis stage of the next chapter.

Finally, as part of their strategies to support the democratic processes inside Gaza and the West Bank, the PCHR protests formally and legally against unconstitutional decisions and steps that may be taken by the government or any of its affiliated agencies. For example, when the security forces of the PA initiated politically motivated arrests, the DU lodged a formal complaint and addressed the Office of al-Naib Alam (Attorney-General). When the Attorney-General failed to act upon or resolve this violation of law, then PCHR was forced to take this matter to the High Court as the ultimate judicial power. According to Shaqora:

262 Ibid.
263 Ibid.
264 Ibid.
We had dealings at the same time with the prosecution authorities [i.e. the Attorney-General Office] on the same issues, their answers were not only unconvincing but also reflected their lack of commitment to the law and inability to prevent illegal arrests.... we were the first nongovernmental organization to gain a legal order from the High Court prohibiting political arrests.266

Taking institutional positions on legal matters constitutes an additional and integral part of the PCHR’s commitment to supporting democratic principles and practices in Gaza.

5.6.2 Victim Representations:

The Legal Aid Unit (LAU) of the PCHR has been focused predominantly on representations and sustainable advocacy for the victims of human rights violations and violence inflicted by the Israeli authorities and army. The purpose of this work is to achieve justice and promote accountability and responsibility in conflict situations within the framework of international law and human rights. At a practical level, while intending to address internal Palestinian breaches of human rights, the head of the LAU Eyad Alalmi (a solicitor by profession and a veteran human rights advocate) acknowledges that since the Israeli-Palestinian conflict escalated violently during the recent Israeli war on Gaza in 2009, the Unit has been largely concerned with investigating cases of military oppression by the Israeli army in Gaza and achieving justice for victims involved. The need to challenge Israeli atrocities through legal routes in Israel was reinforced by both the horrific violence and killing that Gaza witnessed in 2009 and a moral commitment to changing repressive state policies from where they have been originating, i.e. the Israeli State. Establishing accountability stands at the heart of all these efforts: “I am aware as a solicitor of the dangerous consequences of not seeking accountability”, Alalmi stresses.267

In this sense and as discussed previously, the DU of the PHCR has dedicated their resources to promoting the rule of law and democratic practices in Gaza, while the LAU has been directing its efforts towards another task: advocacy and representation at the Israeli justice establishment for the Palestinian victims of violence associated with the Israeli army and military assaults. This process of representation, however, is voluntary and clients can request that their cases be debated and recognized before Israeli legal institutions with the LAU

266 Interview with Hamdi Shaqora at PCHR in Gaza on 18-9-2011.
267 Interview with Eyad Alalmi at PCHR in Gaza on 21-9-2011.
acting on their behalf: "victim families would normally come to us and ask for our assistance and we sign an agreement to represent them" as Alalmi clarifies. Examples of issues dealt with in Israeli courts have included; innocent civilians and loss of life, financial compensations for victims and reparation for physical or property damage caused by Israeli army personnel.268

This institutional and legal engagement is conducted in a professional manner. Cases are only taken by the LAU after a thorough and credible investigation has been conducted. The evidence required would include, for example, identifying the geographical location of the Israeli military attack, meeting the affected individuals or groups, taking pictures and also seeking expert military advice for determination reasons. This suggests that any case needs to involve careful examinations before the LAU agrees to bring it to the Israeli court system. Explaining further this important assessment process, Alalmi states:

It has to be established first that the victim is innocent and was not involved in any [armed] actions and then there must be evidence available that the Israel authorities have participated in the attack. We [in the LAU] investigate the situation and the surrounding environment to understand what happened and how it happened. We at times ask military experts to help us identify the type of weapon used in the attack and its size and origin. All these things would constitute elements of a case that could then be examined to determine its validity. Once we are convinced that it is a valid case, we then monitor what Israeli officials say in the media about the situation in order to document and provide further evidence [to the Israeli court].269

Two current cases from Gaza that the LAU have been pursuing for human rights violations and legal accountability concern the Al-Diaya family whose home was targeted by Israeli air-strikes and 21 members of the family killed with only one survivor. The second is in relation to the Al-Samouni family who were under siege at their home and targeted by rockets from the Israeli army. From the family 23 people were murdered and many others injured in addition to the destruction of their home.

Undertaking an investigation of these violations and seeking recognition through Israeli courts does not necessarily bring about total success or justice. The response from the Israeli justice authorities to most cases is: "these were military operations for military necessities

268 Ibid.
269 Ibid.
and therefore the State is not obliged to offer any compensation”, as Alalmi points out.\textsuperscript{270} The rationale for such a controversial justification (i.e. military necessities) is that Israel fears if it accepted responsibility for the consequences of the army actions in the Palestinian areas it would have to open up a criminal investigation. Subsequently, a criminal charge could be made against State security forces and state leaders, as Alalmi illustrates further through his knowledge and understanding of the legal representation process. Hence, when the court is pressured by undisputed evidence from the scene of the atrocity and the possibility of a criminal accusation arises, “they immediately resort to reaching a settlement on humanitarian grounds suggesting that mistakes are usually made in ‘war situations’,” and therefore appropriate to only offer financial compensation according to the Israeli justice system, Alalmi explains.\textsuperscript{271}

The activities of the PCHR and their contributions to peacebuilding, and subsequent challenges at the local and political level are analyzed in the next chapter. The engagement of the Palestinian Centre for Democracy and Conflict Resolution (PCDCR) in Gaza is identified in the following section.

5.7 PCDCR: Tasks and Activities

5.7.1 Psycho-Social Support:

The Child Protection Programme (CPP) at the PCDCR focuses mainly on issues of violence, trauma and psychological support for children and young people in Gaza. Unlike the GCMHP, the PCDCR is not a specialized institution in the field of psychology and trauma recovery with services available for all members of society. Rather, their engagement in this specific programme is only concerned with children and young students: “we work with children who experience violations, aggression and violence” states Deena Alanqar who manages the CPP. Explaining this point further, Alanqar states:

Most of the young people that we work with are affected by the conflict with Israel. They have come from bereaved families and lost their parents or loved ones in Israeli

\textsuperscript{270} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{271} Ibid.
attacks on Gaza. This also includes young people whose family home has been demolished, or their father is [serving time] in Israeli prison.²⁷²

The specialist programme team also involves the families of affected children in the process to ensure inclusive engagement and support. The concerned family is given guidance and advice about how they should deal with the child in question. Also, to help children cope with the challenges of instability in their surrounding environment, the CPP seeks to create a sense of normality and a safe space for affected young participants and engage them in various activities: “we also organize open days for children and the space is created for them to enjoy and have some fun”, Alanqar points out.²⁷³

Generally speaking, the CPP team employs a number of methods to achieve their task in the context of young people and trauma recovery. Group and individual counselling (i.e. working with one child alone or with a group of children together if needed) is used from a psychological point of view, and it is provided by specialist counsellors in this area. If the community counselling team notices that a child is not responding or improving in the context of group work, the child is then “referred to individual counselling” through which “a number of intensive sessions to identify the issue further and address it” are organized.²⁷⁴ Also, individual and group counselling is aided by some practical methods. These include: role-plays, games, storytelling and sharing, psychological ventilation, singing and theatre performance.

The organization reaches out to most vulnerable children through making home and field visits to areas which experienced a high level of violence by Israeli invasions and attacks. Alanqar clarifies further:

We survey all the areas that had been targeted [by Israeli forces] and identify most affected and traumatised children through speaking to them. Our collective support team tends to work with 12 young participants at a time. This is done to help those who critically need our help and will benefit from immediate access to our services in the context of Gaza and the conditions involved.²⁷⁵

²⁷² Interview with Deena Alanqar at PCDCR in Gaza on 15-8-2013.
²⁷³ Ibid.
²⁷⁴ Ibid.
²⁷⁵ Ibid.
Conducting urgent hospital visits and speaking with young people with physical injuries and organizing psychological support sessions for them following the completion of their medical treatment is another way used by the organization to connect with more affected children. Alanqar cites the example of the major Israeli military assault on Gaza in November of 2012 and the presence of their programme workers in the main hospital in Gaza alongside child victims: “we wanted to offer them solidarity in this critical crisis and help them to feel better through our psychological support and guidance.” Furthermore, the organization responded with an urgent initiative that allowed those children “to express themselves and tell their story and talk about what they have been through,” as Alanqar describes it.276

As well as involving the concerned families and children, the programme work seeks to include another two critical constituencies: schools and the wider community. The CPP of the PCDCR engaged a number of Palestinian schools in Gaza in activities aimed at psychological support for young students. The purpose was to connect psychological support activities with other school subjects so students would be familiar with such institutional services and access them if they needed. Explaining this process further, Alanqar states:

We worked on a long-term project with Palestinian schools that offered students educational and psycho-social support. It focused on combining both educational as well as psychological aspects. We hosted in our organization a group of 15 students over the two school terms. They received lessons in Math, Arabic language, and English, and also got involved after in activities aimed at psychological support…. [This meant that] we arranged for a specialist counsellor to be there for the second part of the workshop. The counsellor spoke to them, for example, about violence and behavioural issues, and organized relaxation sessions…. It was a combination of both [i.e. psychological help and education]. Their families were very happy about it.277

The second important constituency that this specific programme has sought to include is the wider community with the assistance of the Mosque. This is in order to help raise awareness among the local people in relation to the needs of children in the context of ongoing conflicts and instability. Alanqar illustrates further:

We have recently integrated another important dimension that focuses on co-operation with the Mosque. After prayers, we have a representative who speaks to the gathering attending the prayers about awareness and issues of support and violence in relation to

276 Ibid.
277 Ibid.
their children. Again the aim is to involve the community in this support process for young people with the help of the Mosque.

However, these activities and initiatives possess some strengths and some weaknesses. They also face difficult challenges in Gaza and the wider Israeli-Palestinian context. This is discussed in the next chapter.

5.7.2 Political Dialogue:

As the evidence from the field research suggests, the particular project of Social Peace and National Reconciliation (SPNR) has been initiated in response to continued factional disputes and a lack of national unity in Gaza, and the West Bank. Leaders of Hamas and Fatah signed a number of reconciliation agreements but the implementation of the agreement terms has proved problematic. Recognizing the inability of the top leadership to commit to national reconciliation, the SPNR programme of the PCDCR focuses on working with the student wings of Hamas and Fatah movements. This is for the purpose of starting first a dialogue with the young political leaders who can influence the senior leadership to engage in unity talks afterwards. The Fatah Shabiba (Youth for Fatah) and Al-Qutla El-Isalmiya (Islamic Block- Hamas’s youth wing) are the largest student political groups in Gaza and the West Bank representing the two central factions in various academic institutions. Access, influence and factionalization constituted important practical considerations in the decision to work with these youth political representatives. Explaining further this point, the Coordinator of the SPNR project Hanan Aldalou states:

It is difficult to reach top leaders but young politicians and youth groups have an influence on the senior leadership, because they enhance their position in society. Student bodies also have an influence on other youth society. We additionally cannot deny the factional issue that exists in Palestinian society. Politics is not only the property of formal institutions here but it is also played out on university campuses. We need to deal with this reality as well.278

There are two important approaches employed in this project. The first is dialogue and the second is training. The team of the SPNR works to organize and facilitate dialogue workshops which discuss issues of factionalism, unity, political cooperation, power struggles,

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278 Interview with Hanan Aldalou at PCDCR in Gaza on 26-8-2013.
youth leadership, national reconciliation and social peace. The training sessions, on the other hand, provide dispute resolution skills for participants from the youth political wings and develop their capacity to engage in effective conflict management processes. The overall purpose of this engagement and interaction is to support internal peace and build positive relationships among workshop participants, and provide alternatives to factional violence.

This dialogue work also integrates a policy dimension, which is "to come up with recommendations that can be submitted to policy-makers for consideration", as Aldalou remarks. In addition, a significant part of the PCDCR objective for this particular project is to address the resulting social effects of political divisions. These include intolerance, disharmony, exclusion, and dividing political affiliation in society. Hence, the connection between political reconciliation and social peace is strongly emphasized here.

The methods used by the SPNR staff to achieve the project objectives include: roundtable discussions, facilitated dialogue workshops, training sessions in conflict resolution, summer schools, university and college visits. Citing the example of the summer school, Aldalou clarifies further:

We brought together all of the student representatives of political parties for three full days, they slept and stayed at the same place and had to eat and interact with each other as well as discussing different issues together. What made this initiative more useful and successful was the attendance of senior political leaders from Hamas and Fatah. We have invited them to attend and participate in this youth political dialogue. The main thing was that we supported all the parties to discuss common grounds rather than differences of opinion and strategy.

However, these activities of the PCDCR (i.e. psycho-social support and political dialogue) and their contributions to peacebuilding in Gaza and associated challenges are discussed in the next chapter.

The second function of this chapter is addressed next: providing a summary of the interviews conducted during the field research process.

279 Ibid.
280 Ibid.
5.8 GCMHP Interviews: Question Samples and Summaries

The list of questions below generally guided the interview process and subsequent dialogues with the staff members of the GCMHP. However, it is important to point out here that some specific themes were also discussed in more detail since they are directly connected with the research questions.

Questions asked to the four interviewees from GCMHP included:

- Since GCMHP is a civil society organization that is committed to supporting healing and mental health in conflict-torn Gaza, how do you address recovery from tragic and traumatic experiences of war and violent conflict, and are there any specific methods you could share?
- How and on what basis are your initiatives designed and participants selected?
- Are there examples where civil society engagement by GCMHP has successfully helped individuals or groups to recover from traumas and reintegrate them into society? What is the available information?
- Is there any cooperation with Israeli groups undertaking similar work?
- Do you engage with Israeli organizations to support conflict transformation? What is the outcome?
- It is clear a vital component of your programme work is to provide education for various community and local groups in society, what specific courses do you offer? And do you also receive support from Palestinian official institutions in this regard?
- What types of initiatives do GCMHP run in schools in Gaza? And what are the intended outcomes as you see it?
- Do you also train teachers in counselling support for school children suffering from human losses and anxieties? How is this achieved?
- In what way does the continued military siege and attacks on Gaza present challenges to your programmes?
- What psychological and professional approaches are employed to support victims of torture and Palestinian political ex-prisoners during and after their time in Israeli prisons?
- Do you challenge the use of violence in Palestinian society, e.g. between political factions? Is there evidence of such involvement?
What is the nature of your relationship with the main Palestinian political forces, e.g. Hamas and Fatah? Do they approve of your work and cooperate for example?

From GCMHP experience, are there cases where the engagement of civil society has influenced political strategies by the Palestinian leadership?

Do you conduct an impact assessment of your peace and community work? If so, are there any major achievements and shortcomings to share in terms of the Palestinian situation and your engagement?

From GCMHP’s perspective, what are the internal and external challenges of civil society organizations working in the field of peace and human rights in the Palestinian context?

In the following section, the interviews with GCMHP are summarized in the order they occurred.

5.8.1 Dr. Eyad Sarraj:

Eyad Sarraj was the founder, and later the director, of the Gaza Community Mental Health Programme in 1990. The interview took place in September of 2011. He sadly died in December of 2013 after a long battle with leukaemia. A veteran psychologist and mental health specialist by profession, he had been engaged in this field over twenty years. He was also a prominent human rights defender and a strong critic of Israeli violations as well as the Palestinian leadership. His role and contributions have been recognized nationally and internationally. As the Guardian describes it, his deep knowledge and insights into traumas and the human cost of the occupation and conflict extended to “other societies in long-term violent crisis” beyond Palestine.281

Following our traditional Palestinian breakfast near the coast in Gaza, Sarraj began to explain to me that their services include women’s empowerment, conflict resolution in schools, mediation with Palestinian political parties, psychological support for prisoners and victims of torture and developing local capacity for trauma recovery. On the methods engaged for healing after traumatic experiences of violence and war, he asserts that the first approach is “listening” because normally individuals who have suffered emotionally and psychologically

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need someone “to hear them, need empathetic ears” and “listening is essential in identifying the type of therapy required.”

Sarraj points out also that the initial stage of the journey which was to demonstrate the relevance of mental health and trauma recovery to people in Gaza had been particularly difficult because many were unwilling to admit psychological and emotional problems. Persons availing of mental health services could be seen as crazy people haunted by evil and unforeseen forces and spirits. He states that, “years ago when we went to talk to a family that we knew needed mental health support, they would refuse to meet our field workers.” But, this stigma issue has dramatically transformed in recent times because of, according to Sarraj, “better education and the awareness that exists among people at the moment of the need for mental health support.”

In community development terms, Sarraj points out that a central element in sustaining the hope for peace and a better future stems from the work undertaken with vulnerable children and women. Enhancing the wellbeing of women is important because “they represent the base for building a good society” and in promoting women’s welfare “we support children and enhance society’s growth as a whole”, he illustrates.

Also, children are “the ultimate victims” and many of them are already traumatized or experiencing post-traumatic stress because of the Israeli war on Gaza. According to Sarraj, this reality requires helping children to “feel secure and stable, and strengthen their resilience so that they become capable of dealing with this tough life here.” The Israeli 2009 war on Gaza, combined with a continued military siege over the territory, has damaged all aspects of life there and created severe economic and social pressures on the entire society of Gaza. The lack of sufficient human and physical resources for civil society has made it professionally and logistically challenging to help address the massive needs of affected individuals and families. “The number of victims increased dramatically after the 2009 war.” Furthermore, Sarraj points out with obvious sorrow but also with determination to overcome, the economy in Gaza collapsed and this “has caused more social, psychological and political problems.”

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282 Interview with Eyad Sarraj at the Summer Cafe of GCMHP in Gaza on 10-09-2011.
Through his deep knowledge of human behaviour and political psychology, Sarraj remarks that bringing an end to the “victimization cycle” between Palestinians and Israelis is a central condition for just peace and coexistence. Explaining this point further in psychological and historical terms, Sarraj adds that the Jewish people had been victims of the holocaust and then “they themselves in 1948 directed this injustice and violence against the Palestinian people and created new victims called Palestinians, through killing and forcing them out of their homes and lands.” Because of this injustice endured by Palestinians, “Palestinian armed organizations for their part created new victims in countries they had been operating from, mainly Jordan and Lebanon.”

GCMHP is involved in partnerships with Israeli civil society organizations that lobby for Palestinian human rights despite the criticism that this reality might attract from some political groups who view the whole of Israel as an occupying and aggressive power. Sarraj disagrees calmly and confidently: “it is a joint struggle” and “the long-term agendas are about achieving equality, peace and justice.”

Recently, many civil society leaders have played a role in the internal politics of the Palestinian situation. The political split between Hamas and Fatah has affected Palestinian unity and created deadly power struggles between members and supporters of the two movements throughout Gaza and the West Bank since 2007. Hence it was crucial for a non-political third party to mediate and support the national reconciliation process. This mediation has largely been facilitated by independent and respected civil society leaders. Sarraj was active among those leaders: “I am the head of the Consensus and National Reconciliation Committee. It’s made up of a group of academics and national representatives who aim to bridge the division between Hamas and Fatah” he clarifies. Sarraj also suggests that the reason that he was chosen to lead the Committee is “the respect that the GCMHP enjoys in Gaza.”

Finally, measuring success, failure and the impact of local efforts in conflict situations is extremely challenging but because of the close relationship that GCMHP has with their own participants and the fact that they deal with cases on a face-to-face basis, Sarraj’s evidence indicates: “our major success is that we have helped many people to cope with their traumas. We are proud that we have supported hundreds and thousands to recover and transform. This is a significant achievement.” However, he openly cited a case of failure and acknowledged
that the GCMHP “failed to help some individuals and deal with their cases” because of either a lack of certain skills or cooperation.

5.8.2 Rawyea Hamam:

Rawyea Hamam is a community mental health therapist who has been working in the field of psychological support for children, families and trauma recovery for victims of political violence for 11 years. In the past two years her professional tasks have involved coordinating the “School Mediation Programme”; initiated by GCMHP to promote conflict resolution methods in schools in Gaza.

In her work with children affected by the realities of conflict and violence, Hamam seeks to identify issues that cause problems in the child’s behaviour and life and then focuses on two levels to address them: primary and secondary prevention. Primary prevention is directed towards community and family awareness of “child mental health and behavioural problems” and secondary prevention seeks to provide children themselves with psychotherapy for problems related to post-traumatic stress disorder, worries, and obsessive compulsive disorder. “The number of obsessive compulsive disorder cases has increased especially after the 2009 tragic events in Gaza”, Hamam explains. Another serious issue currently visible among many children from Gaza is “aggressive behaviour” towards friends or other children present in their immediate environment. Hamam points out using her psychological understanding of the situation that “this is because of the violence that children experience all around at the political level.”

The Israeli war of 2009 on Gaza constituted a major turning point not only for local people but also CSOs operating in the field of peace and human rights. Hamam recalls that the scale of human and physical destruction was beyond description as a result of Israel’s military assault and airstrikes which presented unprecedented challenges that they had to respond to: “we developed a strategy of crisis-supports. We entered the homes of bereaved families and talked about what happened to them and how they were managing and coping.” The purpose was to raise awareness with these families of war-related psychological shocks and

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283 Interview with Rawyea Hamam at GCMHP in Gaza on 12-09-2011.
symptoms. Also, a re-construction of painful experiences through drama and stage theatre has become a key method in the healing processes both with groups and individuals.

According to Hamam, the main objective is to give “an outlet to all these feelings, frustrations and facilitate emotional and psychological ventilations” and in this way psychodrama helped them to regain “a sense of control over their lives and immediate surroundings after feeling hopeless and powerless.” She illustrates further that their choice of trauma recovery approaches is not arbitrary. The Training and Research Unit, headed by Yaser Abu-Jama who was also interviewed afterwards, conducts studies on the most appropriate and effective tools for specific phases and cases. Therefore, community counsellors and therapists put the recommended “approach into practice.”

On the question of the nature and objective of the School Mediation Programme also coordinated by Hamam, she illustrates that it is a joint project with Palestinian schools in Gaza and the purpose is to:

- Provide students with training so as to help them solve their problems by themselves...We train them to be neutral mediators; bring the two students in dispute face to face and give each one an equal chance to tell their story and then help both parties to find a solution.

Hamam emphasizes that the idea of promoting mediation in schools is also inspired by the sulha process; meaning the Palestinian local mediation practice where community leaders facilitate an agreement between conflicting parties.

5.8.3 Abed-Alhameed Miharb:

Abed-Alhameed Miharb is a mental health specialist. He works for the Human Rights Committee (HRC) of the GCMHP and his main task is to support prisoners whose rights have been violated, especially through the use of violence or torture from inside Israeli and Palestinian prisons. After meeting the prisoners who need help, “I identify the problems they suffer from and provide these individuals with psychological treatment and mental health support”, he states.\textsuperscript{284} Miharb and another psychologist visit prisons together twice a week.

\textsuperscript{284} Interview with Abed-Alhameed Miharb at GCMHP in Gaza on 13-09-2011.
and inmates can go into the prison clinic and meet the team to avail of their services if they wish. The service offered includes physiotherapy, psychotherapy and counselling.

The counsellors have employed a range of professional approaches to achieve better psychological health for prisoners using the two main methods of group and individual therapy. “Group therapy is counselling sessions that bring a number of people who share common problems together and we do dialogues and story-telling.” The issues discussed, states Miharb, could be related to the loss of contact with the outside world, isolation, prison stigma and reintegration into society after release. Individual counselling, on the other hand, involves allowing prisoners to give a psychological debrief of what he/she is going through inside the prison. If the client is stressed out and under pressure they will organize a “relaxation session” to support this process.

Cooperation from Prison Service is crucial to this work. Miharb has indicated that prison officers in Gaza are appreciative and supportive. He gives an example from the GCMHP team who notice that some prisoners are suffering from severe stress, worry and anxiety so they ask the responsible staff to allow them to contact their families as soon as possible and they do organize a telephone conversation with the concerned family. Miharb also indicates that this functioning relationship is mutually beneficial because Prison Authorities sometimes, due to their limited resources in Gaza, seek assistance with equipment and facilities from CSOs. In addition, GCMHP continues to organize training courses for prison medical teams and officers in psychological support for prisoners.

Miharb and his team do not only visit ordinary prisoners with security or criminal convictions, they have also been visiting political prisoners detained by Israel. Political groups also make representations to civil society organizations involved in human rights and prisoner issues: “sometimes political factions would ask us if we could visit some of their political prisoners, we do not object to that”, he points out.

In clarifying ways of combating torture of prisoners, Miharb said that they first meet the individuals experiencing torture or violence in detention, document their cases along with reports from doctors and make submissions to the court. Afterwards, “all this evidence might lead the court to authorize their release” because it can be established that the detainee had been tortured. The support to prisoners extends also to the immediate period after release and
in the context of home visits and mental health support. This is carried out carefully especially for Palestinian political prisoners coming out of Israeli prisons after long-term sentences that can involve 10 or 20 years. Prisoners have the choice to continue to avail of community and clinical services provided by GCMHP following their release.

On the topic of shortcomings and success, Miharb recognizes that failure is a possibility. Some cases they thought were successful in recovery but they discovered at a later stage that the situation had deteriorated. Nonetheless, he remarks that they take pride in significant achievements and he personally has been encouraged by the trust built between their team and client prisoners.

5.8.4 Dr. Yaser Abu-Jama:

Dr. Yaser Abu-Jama is the Manager of Training and Research Unit (TRU) of the GCMHP and has worked with this organization since 2002. His senior position includes him taking responsibility for the achievement of two critical objectives on behalf of GCMHP: Firstly, the implementation of all agreed activities and projects by the TRU in accordance with the organization’s strategic plan, and secondly, the delivery of GCMHP’s Capacity Building Programme which is a crucial aspect of their civil society engagement.

Abu-Jama points out that capacity building from the perspective of GCMHP has aimed at three levels: organizational, institutional and educational. As a respected academic institution, the Islamic University of Gaza is a major partner with GCMHP alongside other partners from the Israeli Tel-Aviv University and Europe, in delivering the Higher Diploma Programme that has helped to develop indigenous trained cadres of multidisciplinary teams with a greater understanding of community mental health issues. Aside from academic institutions, the three main Palestinian governmental departments that engage and cooperate closely with the GCMHP are: (a) the Ministry of Detainees and Ex-prisoners which continues to receive professional advice on ways of offering Palestinian political prisoners in Israel support and psychological help; (b) the Ministry of Health with the GCMHP is working to integrate mental health services into their primary health care; (c) the Ministry of Education cooperates with GCMHP on training courses for students and teachers in mediation and conflict resolution. Abu-Jama has expressed his satisfaction with this joint effort and partnership: “we
enjoy good relations with Palestinian communities and also with government agencies”, he indicates.

Abu-Jama explains further that local skills were critically needed in their own field of mental health and trauma support to cope with the unprecedented number of victims of violence in war-torn Gaza in 2009. Therefore, the TRU responded positively to this challenge and trained 50 graduate volunteers to form extra teams and make field visits to bereaved families and affected areas for service provision and immediate psychological assistance. He recalls:

The teams were functioning as support units to our Programme’s counsellors and worked under their supervision.... The situation was critical and so our engagement too; some figures have suggested that over 5,000 homes were destroyed [during the Israeli war on Gaza in 2009].

When asked about the effectiveness of GCMHP’s engagement, Abu-Jama indicates that evaluation of civil society involvement requires a stable background against which outputs can then be measured. However, “Gaza has been lacking stability for a long time” he concludes.

5.9 PCHR interviews: Question Samples and Summaries

Similar to GCMHP, the list of questions below represents the general content of the interviews conducted with the PCHR team. Nonetheless, as the interview summary shows here, the discussions explored some specific themes such as democracy promotion and victim representations as activities of peacebuilding. Further, the connections between these civil society activities and the political context, and challenges, were all investigated in more detail. This helped to gather more data in relation to the three research questions in this thesis.

The interview questions posed to the two staff participants from PCHR were:

- What is the focus of your work? And what methods do you use to achieve the goals of your programmes?

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285 Interview with Yaser Abu-Jama at GCMHP in Gaza on 15-9-2011.
• Can you provide cases where human rights lobbying and advocacy has been promoted as alternatives to challenge oppression and denial of rights in the context of the Palestinian struggle?
• One of your central objectives is to protect the human rights of Palestinians living under military occupation, what approaches do you employ to achieve that? Also, is there available evidence that suggests these approaches are affective?
• What type of groups does the PCHR engage with?
• What does your process of victim and legal representation include? And what is the result of this process?
• With the last Israeli war on Gaza in 2009 and the obvious failure of regional and international governments to provide civilian and military protection for the people of Gaza, what impact did that have on your work in Gaza, and has it also changed your strategies for lobbying and protection?
• You attempt to support the democratic practices and accountability in Gaza and you also give comments and at times protest against unjust laws, so as a civil society organization what ways do you use for promoting democratic processes in Gaza?
• Are there available cases where initiates and strategies by your organization have been successful in changing problematic legislations and government practices in the Palestinian territories?
• Is it effective to promote democracy in the context of national liberation and struggle against military occupation?
• I understand from reading about your group that you also engage with political parties in Gaza. What type of engagement do you lead in the Palestinian political settings?
• Does the PCHR cooperate with similar Israeli peace and human rights groups? And has this led to any positive outcomes at civil society or political level in Israel or Palestine?
• Are there examples where civil society has failed to support human rights and peaceful change in Gaza?
• From the experience of the PCHR, does peace and human rights work led by civil society have an impact on the Israeli-Palestinian political context, how and what is the evidence?
• Do you evaluate your programmes? Are there results that you can share with us in terms of both major achievements and shortcomings?
• Finally, what are the challenges that face your organization?
5.9.1 Hamdi Shaqora:

Hamdi Shaqora is the Coordinator of the Democracy Unit (DU) of the PCHR. He has been working in the area of Human Rights for the last 20 years. The DU was originally created at the PCHR following the signing of the Oslo Peace Agreement and the establishment of the Palestinian Authority as a representative and governing body in Gaza and the West Bank. The primary concern of the DU was to support this transitional period and the newly created democratic process in Gaza and the West Bank. Describing the initial context of their work, Shaqora elaborates:

Though its mandate is limited by the [Israeli] occupation power, we saw that this is a [Palestinian] new political authority that should carry out its responsibilities in terms of human rights, and also encourage it to enter into a democratic transition. We therefore have supported the right of elections in the Palestinian territories.  

Democracy promotion, freedom of expression, promoting the right to peaceful protests and the right to civil association constitute some of the current elements of the DU activities. Some of the methods employed to achieve these tasks include for example, monitoring regular reports, workshops and training, advocacy and networking with media sources and civil society groups. In addition, participating in election processes is a key task for the DU. Shaqora gave the example of the last Palestinian general election held in 2006 and explained that they did not only play an important role in the pre-election public debate and discussions about Palestinian polling law but also their participation during the election period was noticeable: “we organized 600 observers for [election] monitoring.”

On their work in the Palestinian institutional context, he illustrates that the DU observes closely the workings of the PLC and provides comments on the draft legislations it prepares in order to ensure that law-makers are adhering to democratic practices and proposed legislations are not contradictory to the sovereignty of law and citizen rights. In 2004, the Palestinian Ministry for Justice, according to Shaqora, asked the PLC to grant the Ministry controlling powers over the judiciary system which was supposed to be independent as the law stated. Gaining more power over the justice system would mean that the government could intervene in court procedures and reduce legal independence. Under pressure from the

286 Interview with Hamdi Shaqora at PCHR in Gaza on 18-9-2011.
Executive, the PLC issued legislation that accepted the request of the Justice Ministry. Through the High Court, the DU initiated a successful counter-legal action against this problematic change in law.

Apart from actions and campaigns organized to support a stronger commitment to democratic principles at the official level, the DU has arranged and facilitated workshops and public meetings to raise awareness of democratic processes among young people in Gaza. The Unit intensified these activities especially after political problems started following the Palestinian elections of 2006 and the U.S. and Israeli boycott of Hamas’s victory in the general elections. Because of a Western failure to accept the results of one of the most free and transparent elections in the Middle East and the infighting between Hamas and Fatah afterwards, many young people and students “came to believe that this whole democratic process is just a catastrophic and brought about more disasters.” Therefore, the PCHR, according to Shaqora, had to respond to the political crisis and also increased these types of meetings and seminars with younger generations.

Asked if democracy promotion can be seen as contradictory to the concept of resistance in the context of liberation struggles such as the Palestinian situation, Shaqora seemed to disagree with this notion through his body language, before he answered confidently that democracy is a strength to the Palestinian people and “a prerequisite to complete the liberation process and that is why some external parties undermined democracy and fought against it in the Palestinian territories.”

Shaqora recognizes that the bigger challenges facing Palestinian people and civil society are Israeli occupation and the lack of national unity between Palestinian parties.

5.9.2 Eyad Alalmi:

Eyad Alalmi is the Director of the Legal Aid Unit (LAU) of the PCHR and a co-founder of this centre. He is a solicitor by profession and has been generally working in the field of human rights and legal representations for the past 22 years. The PCHR has three branches spread throughout Gaza, specifically in Jabiliya Refugee camp and Rafah. The main office is located in Gaza City where this interview took place. The LAU is designed to function at both an Israeli and Palestinian level. For the Palestinian agenda, according to Alalmi, the Unit
focuses on investigating human rights breaches of the Palestinian government: “we document and report these violations and then seek solutions for victims from the concerned authorities”, he states.\(^{287}\)

The methods employed for defending human rights and legal advocacy by PCHR include writing official letters, conducting dialogues, meetings and representations at judicial courts. Alalmi points out further:

> We use legal methods and the justice system is a major route for us to establish the rule of law... We refused and protested also against politically motivated arrests [by Hamas and Fatah] and went to Palestinian courts to stop these illegal arrests... We also defended media and nongovernmental organizations when they had problems with the PA. We got an order from the court to re-open these closed associations and newspaper centres.

The political division between Fatah and Hamas since 2007 has, however, created complications for some civil society activities. Referring to the implications of factional politics and the creation of a Fatah-government in the West Bank and a Hamas-government in Gaza, he stresses with a sense of dissatisfaction that professionally “working with two [representing] bodies of authorities for one people has created a challenge for the Unit staff and proved tiring.”

As for the Israeli agenda, the LAU works to lobby Israeli courts and represent Palestinian legal cases. This representation is conducted with the aim of achieving justice for victims and compensations for the loss of their family members and properties as a result of the military actions of the Israeli army in Gaza. Responding to my enquiry about the procedures of taking on a victim’s case and attempting to seek justice from the Israeli court system, Alalmi clarifies that this process follows thorough investigations and examination. It is based on strong evidence collected from the scene of the attack: “it has to be established first that the victim is civilian and was not involved in any armed actions” and there also must be evidence obtained that the “Israel authorities have participated in the attack”, he explains.

In practical terms, difficulties and resistance to this civil society activity come from various powerful players in Israel. According to Alalmi, the Knesset (Israeli parliament) continues to

\(^{287}\)Interview with Eyad Alalmi at PCHR in Gaza on 21-9-2011.
make regulations that aim to prohibit Palestinians from the occupied territories challenging the Israeli justice system specifically in the context of the Israeli army. The Israeli government, on the other hand, has refused on many occasions to issue permits for Palestinian witnesses to enter Israel and testify in court. Additionally, the concerned courts raised the costs of legal hearings and consultations for Palestinian cases to discourage a civil society organization like the PCHR from creating legal and political challenges for the State within the framework of international law. Nonetheless, partnership and cooperation between the PCHR and some Israeli civil society groups exist and this working relationship is based on “high professional standards” which led before to joint statements and requests for Israeli partner organizations to make applications at Israeli courts on behalf of the PCHR if the Centre is unable to arrange it because of the logistical and governmental obstacles mentioned above.

When asked about the impact of this nonviolent legal action, Alalmi answered without hesitation that a basic benefit of this work is that “it allows ordinary Palestinian people to believe in human rights and see the advantages of this struggle.” Also, in his view, while immediate achievements might not seem crucial to the long term objective of revealing the complicity of the Israeli State in covering up war crimes and seeking to establish legal and moral responsibility within the context of international law, it will help to bring state violence to an end.

5.10 Political Representatives Interviews: Question Samples and Summaries

As stated before, the purpose for meeting with the main Palestinian political factions, Hamas and Fatah, was to gain an insight and critical understanding of their perspective on the main themes in this research: the role of secular civil society in supporting peace and conflict transformation in Gaza, the relationship between civil society engagement and the Israeli Palestinian political context, and the challenges to secular CSOs from their political point of view. These interviews also created the opportunity to enquire about broader issues in relation to Palestinian politics and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. This intended to generate further data and information about the wider political context in which secular civil society in Gaza is a part.

Specific questions asked to the four leaders from Fatah and Hamas include the following:
From the point of view of Hamas, what is your opinion on secular civil society organizations that are involved in human rights and peace work in Gaza?

Does Hamas see a difference between Islamic community associations and secular civil society organizations?

Recently there has been an engagement by civil society representatives to advance the national reconciliation process between Hamas and Fatah. In the light of this development how does Hamas/Fatah evaluate the increasing role that secular civil society has been playing directly in internal political issues in Gaza?

Does Fatah support Palestinian civil society organizations working in the field of peace and engaging with Israeli human rights and peace groups? And why so?

Given that Fatah has been conducting negotiations with Israel as a formula to end the conflict and achieve Palestinian national independence for two decades now, does the party see any influence of civil society work on the political context with Israel?

Can CSOs play an effective role in supporting political solutions to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict?

What are the problematic issues in terms of the civil society engagement in social and political processes in Gaza? Is there a need for an organizational change and improvement for example?

How do you evaluate generally your relationship with secular civil society organizations?

What are the challenges to secular civil society from your political perspective?

Broader questions presented to representatives from Hamas and Fatah about Palestinian politics and the Israeli-Palestinian political context involved the following:

How do you evaluate the current situation in Gaza in political and economic terms?

There seems to be difficulties in achieving Palestinian unity between Hamas and Fatah, what are the obstacles?

What is the political strategy of Hamas towards Israel?

Does Hamas have a political programme to challenge Israel?

How does Hamas/Fatah view political talks with Israel?

Are there lessons that can be drawn from international peace processes in Ireland and South Africa?
From Hamas, the interviewees included:

5.10.1 Ismael Alashqar:

Ismael Alashqar is a senior leader in Hamas and he is from Jabiliya refugee camp in northern Gaza. He has been an elected parliament member since 2006 and currently heads the Security, Interior and Local Governance Unit at the PLC.

On enquiring about how Hamas views secular and nationalist CSOs in Gaza, his initial reaction was positive. He states that Hamas considers them to be helpful and play an “important role” in defending Palestinian people and their rights. He went on to make some critical comments citing partiality in the form of external political influence and funding as serious issues. Hamas thinks that external donors with their agendas “have had an influence on the workings of some Palestinian organizations.”

Having obtained evidence through the field research that cooperation and working relationships are established between some civil society organizations in Gaza and Israeli local groups concerning peace and human rights issues, a question about the view of Hamas in relation to this institutional cooperation was put to Alashqar. His answer reflects both cautious acceptance and open disappointment at the same time:

We [in Hamas] consider the Israeli occupation to be responsible for the injustice and the oppression of Palestinian people....[And] these Israeli human rights organizations recognize for Israel the occupation of Palestinian territories and what I mean is that they do not declare that Israel is a repressive and oppressive state, a state above international law. And as long as this position is not taken, they constitute a part of the occupation system...However, if some Palestinian groups see benefits in working with similar Israeli groups we do not oppose it but our stated position as Hamas is clear.

On the growing role of civil society players and independent representatives in supporting internal processes of dialogue and national reconciliation between Hamas and Fatah, Alashqar points out that the engagement of social forces has been positive and constructive. Furthermore, the presence of functional civil society, according to Alashqar, has broader

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288 Interview with Ismael Alashqar at the Palestinian Legislative Council in Gaza on 23-09-2011.

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benefits and advantages for both official bodies and local populations in Gaza. Monitoring the behaviour of the government and representing urgent issues for many people are examples of such beneficial services. Therefore, Alashqar emphasizes that the Hamas government has been co-operative with civil society and human rights organizations in the secular sector and made it clear for them that: “we have no problem giving you full support and freedom to operate as long as credibility and transparency are observed.”

5.10.2 Dr. Ismael Radwan:

Ismael Radwan is the Minister of Awqaf (Endowments and Religious Affairs) in the Hamas government in Gaza and he is a senior political leader in the organization. He is also a Professor of Islamic Law at the Islamic University of Gaza, and a leading member of both the Media and National Relations Departments of Hamas.

Radwan had more time available for the interview than his colleague Ismael Alashqar. This provided me with the opportunity to ask questions about civil society as well as some wider political issues in relation to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Therefore, on the question of the current perspective of Hamas on the conflict with Israel, Radwan illustrates that Hamas’s problem is with the “Zionist enemy” and not with “Jews” as he describes it. This enemy, he explains further, has occupied Palestinian lands and forced Palestinians to live in refugee camps and in exile, while refusing to acknowledge Palestinians have legitimate rights. As a result, Palestinian people have continued to be “subjected to oppression, repression and assassination.” Radwan went on to state that Hamas’s hostility to Zionists in Israel is therefore “based on the fact that they are occupiers and occupation is terrorism not only against Palestinian people but also against humanity.”

On the topic of political solutions to the Palestinian issue from the point of view of Hamas, Radwan states:

Hamas’s programme is based on resistance and the Israeli occupation only understands the language of resistance but Hamas has also agreed with other Palestinian factions on the basis of a political solution to the conflict... This suggested solution requires the withdrawal of Israeli forces from the territories they occupied in 1967[i.e. Gaza, West Bank and East Jerusalem]; the release of all prisoners; the return

289 Interview with Ismael Radwan at the Government Media Department in Gaza on 25-9-2011.
of all refugees to the homes they were forced to leave; and the establishment of a
Palestinian independent and sovereign state. This all must be achieved without
undermining Palestinian rights.

The Israeli government has demanded that Hamas accepts the existence of the State of Israel
as a precondition for talks with the Movement but Hamas maintains that recognizing a state
that does not have defined borders and occupies Palestinian lands means giving up the right
of Palestinians to their historical homeland and agreeing to the Israeli occupation: “how come
Israel wants us to recognize it and at the same time it is occupying our land and confiscating
our resources”, responds Radwan.

The leaders of Hamas do not conceal their frustration and objection to the “futile talks”
between Israel and PLO/Fatah and indicate that the negotiations have been ineffective and
failed to achieve the Palestinian national aspirations of statehood and independence. Radwan
highlights in this context that Fatah tried negotiations with Israeli successive governments for
19 years but what they have received in return is “more Israeli settlements, further
Judaization of Jerusalem, and more Zionist Nos.” Hence it is clear that Israel “does not value
the language of peace and does not believe there are legitimate rights for Palestinian people.”

To gain a better insight in relation to secular civil society and its contributions to
peacebuilding at the local and political level in Gaza, I asked whether Hamas saw challenges
in terms of secular CSOs. Radwan focused on accountability and discipline issues, claiming
that the majority of non-Islamic organizations have lacked professional values and many of
them operated without following the Palestinian Association Law that regulates relations and
requirements for local associations.

Nonetheless, from a positive perspective, this political leader from Hamas recognizes that a
good number of non-Islamic civil society organizations continue to contribute to community
development in Gaza and provide good support by way of social and psychological services
and training. Radwan finally comments that Hamas also believes that women have an
important role to play in “social, political and economic fields.” He provides the example of
the 2006 general elections when Hamas put forward a quota of women’s candidates and the
fact that there have been elected female members of the PLC from Hamas.

From Fatah, the interviews featured:
5.10.3 Diab Allouh:

Diab Allouh is the National Relations and Media Commissioner for Fatah in Gaza. He served previously as the Palestinian Ambassador to China and is also currently a member of the High Leadership Committee and the Advisory Council of Fatah.

Allouh points out that the Israeli war on Gaza in 2009 has worsened further the social and humanitarian situation in Gaza. Approximately 5,000 Palestinian homes were demolished and 5,000 families made homeless during the military assault on Gaza. Allouh also expresses concerns and dismay that the reconstruction process has yet to start and political problems between the Israel and Palestinian parties continue to delay reconstruction in Gaza. In addition, the absence of any tangible progress in the past 19 years in the Israeli-Palestinian political context has contributed to the complexity of the situation. Allouh states that the Israeli policies of placing Gaza under siege; "confiscating more Palestinian land; building an apartheid wall; expanding settlements and separate roads; harassing Palestinians in Jerusalem and Judaizing the city by removing its Arab Palestinian identity" are dangerous and have caused the political talks to fail. Nonetheless, the leadership of Fatah has reasons to hold on to the negotiation strategy and peaceful means in dealing with Israel. According to Allouh:

Negotiations have constituted a political choice that carries a noble and clear message to the world and international community and to all those believers and supporters of freedom and peace, that Palestinian people support and work for peace and want to live in peace with all their neighbours and regional countries. This message also confirms that armed struggle is not our intention; our main objective has been to achieve legitimate Palestinian rights.... Nonviolent resistance is also a peaceful and legitimate choice to challenge the Israeli policies especially building the wall and more settlements in the West Bank.

On the question of the recent engagement of secular civil society representatives in Palestinian politics and the national reconciliation process, the response of this Fatah official is positive:

We think that the independent and local representatives have played a significant role in bridging internal differences and political division. They made good efforts and played big roles. And in Fatah we appreciate and value this civil society involvement.

290 Interview with Diab Allouh at his home in Gaza on 27-9-2011.
and we need it not only for restoring unity but also for supporting the broader national project of state-building.

At the institutional level, Allouh believes also that the presence of effective civil society groups strengthens democratic practices and accountability because of the “warning signs” these associations send to authorities in charge, especially when they issue a report and express professional views on legal and justice matters and violations of law by parties in government regardless of their background.

Concerning the power struggles and the conflictual relations between the Fatah-led PA and the nationalist and secular CSOs emerging from the first Intifada in the early 1990s, Allouh responds by suggesting that it was a new experience for Fatah to practise governance so “it was natural for misunderstandings to arise about the role of local organizations and their function.” However as he points out further, at a later stage a better awareness developed inside the PA about the nature and specific tasks of CSOs which “has resulted in cooperation on various issues.” According to Allouh, these good relations and cooperation projects are also supported by the current vision of Fatah that is “based on partnership between the private and public sectors because the public sector by itself cannot assume responsibility for the entire project of state-building and the Palestinian future state.” Also in a broader sense, to deal with the effects and implications of “more than 40 years of Israeli colonialism and exploitation and occupation is not an easy matter”, therefore, as he has proposed, it requires inclusive strategies to transform this challenging reality.

5.10.4 Hisham Abed-Alrazq:

Hisham Abed-Alrazq is a former Palestinian Minister for Detainees and Ex-prisoners and he is a member of the Revolutionary Council and the High Leadership Committee of Fatah. Abed-Alrazq spent 20 years in Israeli jails because of his previous involvement in the PLO and armed struggle against Israel throughout the 1970s and 1980s. His previous long sentence in Israeli prisons and leadership position within the national movement make him currently one of Fatah’s most prominent leaders in Gaza. He is also well-known for voicing criticism of some of Fatah’s policies, despite his strong affiliation with the Movement.
Abed-Alrazq believes also that the Israeli 2009 war on Gaza was a turning point in the history of the region. The political split between Hamas and Fatah deepened; the Israeli military siege on Gaza has become more damaging in social and economic terms; and the security situation has worsened because of continued assassination of Palestinian leaders by Israel. This has created a state of “permanent stress that Gaza’s population consequently feels.”

He emphasizes that a Palestinian unified strategy is central to dealing with all the above challenges: “Palestinian unity is key to political talks with Israel, key to re-building Gaza and the entire Palestinian political system, and key to reconstructing national and social relations.” Despite the official signing of the National Reconciliation Agreement between Fatah and Hamas in May of 2011 as a means of resolving factional differences and power struggles, the process towards unity is still facing increasing problems. Abed-Alrazq points out critically:

The obstacles [to political reconciliation between Hamas and Fatah] are internal, regional and international. The internal obstacles have included the emergence of a group from Hamas and Fatah that is benefiting and profiting from the lack of national unity; this group has become influential and they have no desire to abandon their powerful positions and interests. For the regional dimension, there are outside parties that support the continuation of the Palestinian division and Israel is on the top of this list. And then there are also international countries and their pressure; the U.S. is an obvious example when it has threatened publicly to cut international funding for the Fatah-Palestinian Authority if it worked for unity with Hamas.

On the issue of the talks with Israel, Abed-Alrazq believes that a credible and genuine political process with a clear time-table is needed to end the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. In this respect, Abed-Alrazq explains that there are useful lessons to be learned from international and effective peace processes in Ireland and South Africa. Firstly, the international support “provided the political, economic and security cover for such processes” and secondly the “sustainability” of peace and political processes in post-violence contexts has been a key to progress: “Northern Ireland is a perfect example of the continuation of talks and hard work to keep the state of peace while addressing remaining challenging problems”, he points out.

291 Interview with Hisham Abed-Alrazq at the Association of Christian Youth in Gaza on 2-10-2011.
Reflecting on the recent active participation of Palestinian civil society and community leaders from the secular sector in mediation and facilitation processes between Hamas and Fatah, Abed-Alrazq related the increasing popularity of this informal role to the traditional nature of the Palestinian society and the respect afforded to elders and national personalities among Palestinians especially in their search for resolutions of disputes among individuals and families. On the issue of extending this exclusive involvement in mediation approaches by civil society leaders to effective political engagement internally, he responds “social forces can play a significant role in Palestinian reconciliation or in influencing political groups, but they are not structured or well organized.”

Co-operation between Israeli and civil society groups in Gaza is viewed positively by Fatah because some of these peace and human rights organizations in Israel such as Physicians for Human Rights and B’T Selem, according to Abed-Alrazq, have worked from inside Israel to “address many cases of Israeli violations.” Therefore, joint work between Palestinian and Israeli organizations “serves the Palestinian cause.” In terms of the challenges that face secular civil society in Gaza, Abed-Alrazq illustrates, that there are some tensions between strong CSOs and some deprived communities in Gaza. Another critical challenge is the power dynamics between some major CSOs and local authorities in Gaza.

5.11 PCDCR interviews: Question Samples and Summaries

As stated before, following the learning and data collected from the two previous case studies in the year of 2011, the interviews with the PCDCR and Professor Ibrahim Ibrash in 2013 pursued some particular issues. Therefore, some additional and developing questions were asked of interviewees from the PCDCR. For example, the challenges to secular CSOs working in the field of peace and human rights in Gaza, the impact of the depoliticization process of Oslo and factionalization, the relationship between external donors and secular civil society organizations, have all been explored in some more depth. The aim here is to strengthen the examination of some important aspects in the main research questions. These included the relationship between civil society contributions to peacebuilding and the Israeli-Palestinian political context, and the resulting challenges in the wider context of Gaza and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.
The general framework of the interviews with the staff members and field workers from the PCDCR constituted of the following questions:

- What does your programme work involve and what groups do you engage?
- What do you aim to achieve at your Centre?
- What types of activities do you conduct?
- What particular methods do you use in your work?
- Are there particular aspects that you focus on in terms of conflict resolution?
- Who participates in your dialogue workshops and for what purpose?
- Do you engage Palestinian political parties?
- How do you evaluate your programmes and activities?
- Could you share examples of success and shortcomings in the context of your work?
- Are there practical outcomes of your work and engagement that you can share?
- How does the state of instability in Gaza undermine your community and dialogue work?
- Some talk about the challenge of external agendas being imposed on secular CSOs by international donors and that these donors have removed Palestinian social organizations from the national struggle arena? How do you respond?
- What is your view of the process of civil society depoliticization started during the Oslo process and the role of external donors in this process?
- Some also see that the relationship between Palestinian community and secular CSOs is weak, and that there is a disconnection between the two, how do you comment?
- What is the impact of Palestinian internal disputes and the power struggle between Hamas and Fatah on your organization and secular CSOs in general?
- Is it true that “civil society” does not exist in Gaza and Palestine in general because there are only local organizations associated with factions such as Hamas and Fatah, how do you comment?
- Are secular civil society organizations factionalized in Gaza?
- Does your organization cooperate with non-secular civil society groups in Gaza?
- How does your civil society role support peace in Gaza?
- Does your programme work and activities contribute to a political solution with Israel in the long term, and if so, in what way?
- And if not, what are the issues that prevent such a contribution?
• What are the challenges that face your work and organization in Gaza?
• What is the impact of these challenges on your function and role in society?

5.11.1 Deena Alanqar:

Deena Alanqar is the Coordinator of the Child Protection Programme (CPP) at the PCDCR. Her work is concerned with traumas and violence experienced by children in Gaza. She works with young people between the ages of 10-15 years. The families of affected children are also included in the programme: “we give the concerned family guidance and advice in relation to how they should deal with the child in question”, Alanqar states describing her professional engagement. She emphasizes that psychological support and trauma recovery for children are not facilitated in isolation. Involving the community members and schools is a key element to enhance success possibilities. On the particular methods employed in this work, she indicates that individual and group counselling is aided by some practical methods; which include, for example, role-plays and storytelling.

However, this type of work is not always conducted in an orderly fashion in the context of a volatile political environment such as Gaza. During the Israeli military attacks of November 2012, according to Alanqar, the programme team was forced to cancel scheduled sessions and conduct instead emergency visits to local hospitals to meet and speak with child victims. On the topic of the general problems that face young people in Gaza, Alanqar gives examples of psychological issues and generally a lack of a safe environment. However, “all these problems are connected to the existing state of instability in Gaza” she illustrates. As a result of this wider unstable situation, many children also develop behavioural issues in relation to being aggressive to people around them, and others simply become “fearful of everything that they come to encounter”, Alanqar points out.

When asked about impact assessment and how they measure the effectiveness of this sensitive work with young people, she states that there is a “technical supervisor” who monitors the activities involved and conducts evaluation on a regular basis. Questionnaires are also filled out by the participants before and after the project. Meetings with the families of the children who are benefiting from the programme work constitute another method of

292 Interview with Deena Alanqar at PCDCR in Gaza on 15-8-2013.
impact assessment and collecting information on effectiveness for the PCDCR. However, on the issue of failure and success, Alanqar makes the point of limitations clearly: “we live in a highly fragile and changing environment” and this situation “causes setbacks in some cases after progress has been made.”

Concerning political factions and civil society, Alanqar openly acknowledges that “factionalism is a serious issue” because some local groups work for a particular political agenda and it polarizes the civil society sector in Gaza. However, she points out that the PCDCR cooperates with all civil society players regardless of their political affiliation. Providing an example, Alanqar states that the PCDCR works with the Association of Young Muslim Women that belongs to Hamas: “we don’t object to that as long as they have participants who need our services.”

Discussing challenges in the context of Gaza and the wider conflict with Israel, Alanqar points out that there are critical challenges that represent serious obstacles to their programme work and activities. These include funding, the blockade on Gaza and the restrictions on freedom of movement, continued Israeli aggression, political divisions between Hamas and Fatah and the impact of their continued power struggle on CSOs.

5.11.2 Hanan Aldalou:

Hanan Aldalou is the Coordinator of the Social Peace and National Reconciliation project (SPNR) at the PCDCR. She also works as the Assistant Director for International Relations and Fundraising.

When asked about her understanding of social peace from an institutional point of view, Aldalou provided the following definition:

Social peace means focusing on the different aspects that connect society together. It’s concerned with the coexistence of different people with various affiliations and opinions, and through that the community also experiences a positive development and interaction, and participation. This is the idea of social peace.293

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293 Interview with Hanan Aldalou at PCDCR in Gaza on 26-8-2013.
The activities of the SPNR project mainly involve players and participants from the youth wings of political parties in Palestinian universities and colleges. Fatah Shabiba (Youth for Fatah) and Al-Quita El-Isalmiya (Islamic Block- Hamas’s Youth) are the central student political groups in Gaza and the West Bank. Aldalou illustrates that the decision of the organization to engage particularly youth political representatives came about for some practical reasons including difficult access to top-leadership and the role and the influence that these youth political groups have in and upon society.

The aim of this project, she points out, is to support Palestinian national reconciliation and dialogue processes. Official representatives from the Hamas government and Fatah leadership are invited to meet the participants and discuss the outcomes of their dialogue workshops. Aldalou emphasizes that the experience of the summer school is particularly positive in this context and demonstrates active engagement: “they slept and stayed at the same place and had to eat and interact with each other, as well as discussing different issues together.”

On the topic of impact, Aldalou recognizes that while complete success is not realistic in this challenging work, some promising achievements have been made and the PCDCR witnessed some positive signs of change in approach and thinking in relation to youth political leaders. However, this interviewee acknowledges that one of the greatest limitations on their work is the continued state of insecurity in Gaza. It creates setbacks and leads to cancellation of planned activities: “a sudden Israeli aggression can disrupt our programme work”, she states with clear frustration.

As the Assistant Director for Funding and International Relations, the issue of external donors and their influence was discussed in more detail with Aldalou. She openly criticizes the imposition of particular agendas on CSOs in Gaza by some international funding agencies: “these donors impose such unhelpful conditions on us and this undermines our work” she comments. Aldalou believes that this issue is connected with “certain political interests and politicized funders.”

Finally, Aldalou outlines further some of the major challenges that the PCDCR faces. These include a lack of training opportunities in some key areas, absence of political and national
unity, internal power struggle and factional interference in CSOs, instability and Israeli military policies.

5.11.3 Abed-Elmanem Altahrawy:

Abed-Elmanem Altahrawy is a senior staff member at the PCDCR. His professional position is Programmes Manager. Altahrawy speaks of three key challenges that present serious problems to their engagement. These are related to international donors and funding, the power struggle between Palestinian factions, and the security situation in Gaza. “Donors refuse to deal with the Hamas government. This practically creates big obstacles for CSOs on the ground”, he points out concerning current funding policies.294

Also, at the internal level, Palestinian factions continue their pressure and attempts to control CSOs which operate outside their influence. Therefore, according to this interviewee, threats of closure, the imposition of factional agendas, and setting up alternative institutions, represent problematic issues for secular civil society in Gaza. On the other hand, the Israeli siege and continued military attacks on Gaza create critical challenges for social organizations and their goals: “such a situation contradicts our vision and what we are trying to achieve”, explains Altahrawy about the complex challenges facing them as a CSO.

On the topic of factionalization, Altahrawy points out that although some independent civil society organizations exist, Palestinian civil society generally needs to develop its own identity and separate itself from the power of the factions. Nonetheless, he acknowledges the historical connection between these grassroots associations and factions in the Palestinian context. This historical relationship, Altahrawy remarks, has been transformed dramatically after the Oslo Agreement and that local organizations had to deal with a very complex question, that is: “do we as CSOs work on civil rights and issues or do we keep our focus on the Israeli occupation?.” In this context, he explains further that the international donor community and the Oslo project facilitated the depoliticization process of secular and nationalist civil society at the Israeli-Palestinian level.

294 Interview with Abed-Elmanem Altahrawy at PCDCR in Gaza on 7-9-2013.
As for the relationship between civil society engagement in peace and conflict issues and a future political solution with Israel, Altahrway believes that there are two important issues here. Firstly, their work and activities, along with other organizations, lay the foundations for a peaceful resolution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in the long term. Secondly, any influential role for CSOs in the political arena faces the power of the political factions.

Altahrway explains that there are a number of evaluation methods that the PCDCR employs to measure performance and effectiveness of their programmes and activities. The Centre has a Unit of Evaluation and Monitoring within its structures. The Unit “conducts evaluation before, during and after the project has been completed and the outcomes are then given to the project coordinator,” as he illustrates. Also, the donors ask at times for a particular programme to be evaluated and they arrange for an external consultant to perform this task and produce a report. From his perspective, evaluation is extremely significant for the PCDCR because:

Donors are given indicators in relation to the success of the project and achievements, and to what extent the objectives have been met. Also, it normally leads to the development of new projects. And finally, evaluation helps us as an organization to achieve our long-terms goals.

Summarizing these long-term goals, Altahrway states that the PCDCR is ultimately seeking to achieve a “democratic Palestine” through a number of civil society programmes and initiatives.

5.12 Al-Azhar University Interview: Question Samples and Summary

The interview process also included Professor Ibrahim Ibrash from Al-Azhar University in Gaza. The interview was divided into two parts. The first part addressed Palestinian political issue. Therefore, the questions concerning current issues in the Palestinian struggle and the impact of the uprisings across the Middle East on the Palestinian question sought to contextualize further the current political situation in which secular CSOs exist and operate in Gaza. Furthermore, based on the learning and data gathered from the previous case study organizations in 2011 and later the additional case study of PCDCR in 2013, the second part of the interview focused mainly on challenges of depoliticization, factionalization and external donors in the context of secular civil society in Gaza.
The general questions put to Ibrash included the following:

- Based on your last book and work, what are the current challenges that face the Palestinian national project of liberation?
- What is the impact of the uprisings against repressive regimes in the region on Palestinian politics and the situation CSOs are part of?
- How do you evaluate the role of secular CSOs in Gaza?
- How do you analyze the impact of Oslo process on secular and nationalist civil society?
- What are the current challenges and weaknesses from your point of view?
- How does factional affiliation affect these CSOs in Gaza and what is the impact of factionalism on civil society?
- It seems that the relationship that was established between nationalist and secular local organizations and the Palestinian national movement in the 1960s and the 1970s continues to exist in various forms. How do you assess this relationship today?
- Do you think that external and powerful donors impose their own agendas on secular CSOs in Gaza?
- Some Palestinians and political actors consider some major CSOs to be agents for external parties and their interests, how do you comment?
- Finally, from your experience, do Palestinian academics and intellectuals have an influence on the civil society and political discourse in Gaza and the West bank?

5.12.1 Professor Ibrahim Ibrash:

Professor Ibrahim Ibrash teaches political science at Al-Azhar University of Gaza. Beside his teaching role, he is well-known in Gaza as a prominent intellectual and political thinker. His courage and criticism of factions and other powerful parties in the Palestinian situation had led to personal attacks on him. "I was harassed before and my office was attacked", he states. He has held a number of senior positions at the University. These include the Head of the Department of Political Science and Sociology and the Dean of the Humanities and Arts Faculty. Ibrash also served as an independent Minister for Culture in the Fatah-led government between 2007 and 2008. Feeling compromised in terms of his principles and protesting the continued incompetence of the PA and factional disputes, he resigned and

\[295\] Interview with Professor Ibrahim Ibrash at the Laternia Hotel and Restaurant in Gaza on 17-9-2013.
returned to his teaching work at Al-Azhar: “I could not be in power and be intellectual at the same time, difficult to combine”, he recalls.

His expertise includes political sociology, political theory, Palestinian society and politics, and research methods in social sciences. He has published 18 books during his academic career and they have dealt with various issues in the areas of political theory and Palestinian politics. *Palestinian National Liberation and Statehood* is his latest book. It was published in 2012.296

The interview with Professor Ibrash was conducted following the conclusion of all interviews with both civil society organizations and also political leaders from Hamas and Fatah. His perspective is valuable since he was able to offer a broader and more independent view on secular civil society organizations in Gaza and the challenges which they have been encountering. Also, of equal importance, he shared his critical understanding of the relationship between civil society and factionalism in the Palestinian context.

The interview started with an overview given by Ibrash about the Palestinian situation and the challenges of the national struggle. He states that the Oslo Agreement has posed a great challenge to the Palestinian cause and undermined the political struggle for liberation: “Oslo committed the Palestinian leadership to security agreements with Israel” and also to “futile negotiations for about 20 years which achieved very little and de-stabilized the national project.” Major consequences of the Oslo process have included the continuation of Israeli military occupation and settlements building, and the emergence of Palestinian internal divisions among supporters and opponents of Oslo, as he clarifies. Furthermore, according to Ibrash, one of the greatest internal challenges in the Palestinian struggle was the formation of Hamas and the unresolved political differences between national and Islamic forces in Palestine. He explains further:

Hamas presented itself in Islamic terms and emerged as an alternative to the secular and nationalist PLO. This was a major threat, and all attempts to reconcile the differences of Hamas and Fatah and form a united front since the dialogues of 1992 in Sudan and other capitals have not been successful. Therefore, because of all these

296Ibrash’s work is available online: [www.palnation.org](http://www.palnation.org)
issues and major challenges, the national liberation project has almost reached a dead-end and the impasse is clear.

Ibrash points out further that an important part of the current Israeli policy towards Gaza is focused on maintaining the situation of territorial and political fragmentations: “Israel has created the Palestinian divide and as long as it serves Israeli interests it will work to maintain this divide and prevent any attempt to reunite Gaza with West Bank.”

On the issue of wider instability in the region and the impact of the uprisings across the Middle East, Ibrash illustrates that the regional changes and uncertainties left the Palestinian situation in a “state of waiting.” This is because “political Islam is rising and failing and the Arab world is changing, and Hamas is taking a wait and see approach.” Fatah is also “waiting for the international circumstances to change and hence perhaps stronger pressure may be applied to Israel in their favour and enhancing their power and position”, Ibrash explains.

Concerning the issue of secular civil society in Gaza, Ibrash illustrates that the role of secular and national local organizations has evolved over the last two decades. The Oslo phase of the 1990s transformed their resistance and political engagement against Israeli military occupation. He adds that most of these organizations are currently “weak and fragile.” The reasons for these weaknesses are related to a lack of training in the field of civil society, and also the dependency of CSOs on external funding. This “holds them hostage to the interests of donors.” According to Ibrash, political affiliation and factional politics place further “constraints on their independence.” In addition, the narrow interests of some local actors guided their organizational approach and, in the process, they turned civil society institutions into a “private property and focused their attention on global constituencies in the world at the expense of their internal role.”

Ibrash clarifies that informal associations are not expected to be politically isolated but they also should not be part of a larger political structure because it contradicts the principles of civil society and their independent role: “when CSOs are ideologized and factionalized, they lose their ability to deliver on their basic functions and roles in society.” Therefore, Ibrash suggests civil society organizations generally need to develop their own separate entity outside the factional domain and address the issue of their dependency on external funding.
Furthermore, he explains that factional power has also had an impact on Palestinian intellectuals and independent voices. Prior to Oslo, the Palestinian intellectual was part of the national movement but following the creation of the PA, the political division between the main Palestinian actors deepened and it "has now reached the intellectual circle" with Hamas and Fatah having their own separate intellectuals. This, he points out, represents the wider and general state of intellectuals in the Arab world who continue to deal with the "problematic relationship with authority" and are under pressure from the oppressive state. The state's control of all sources of income and economy creates financial constraints and makes their "independence from authority almost impossible." Therefore, in the Middle East case, the space in which independent intellectuals can manoeuvre and influence is limited and "their opposition to power and authority is weak for either financial considerations or because of a lack of freedoms", Ibrash points out.

**Conclusion:**

These interviews were conducted with individuals and representatives who come from various political, social and academic backgrounds. However, the issues of peace and conflict, human rights, healing, coexistence, knowledge, colonialism, military occupation, religious beliefs and factional affiliation, have all influenced their human experiences, stated positions and opinions.

The field research process, which included 14 interviews in the course of two field trips over two years, has presented some key themes. These include: the engagement of secular civil society in peace and human rights issues in Gaza; social organizations and their complex relationship with factional structures; funding and donors' agendas; the impact of civil society on the wider political context with Israel; and also challenges encountered by secular civil society organizations in Gaza.

The research questions in this thesis aim to provide a critical and deeper examination of all these significant themes and issues. Therefore, the information and material shared above in relation to the three case studies are employed in the next chapter (Research Analysis) to respond to the research questions.
Chapter 6: Research Analysis

Introduction:

Chapter 5 shared significant data from the research findings collected through the interviews and the two field trips to Gaza. Also, it presented a descriptive account of the three case study organizations (GCMHP, PCHR, and PCDCR) and their work. The rationale for selecting these case studies was also clarified. As discussed previously in Chapter 5, in the development of this thesis and during the field research process, it became clear that the challenges faced by secular civil society organizations in Gaza are complex and combine political, factional, institutional, national and international dimensions within the wider conflict situation in Gaza. Hence, conducting further investigations of these combined and evolving challenges was essential since it would strengthen the contribution to knowledge in this thesis. Therefore, this chapter (Research Analysis) expands particularly on the theme of challenges and provides a deeper analysis of the data and material collected in this context.

Chapter 4 discussed the origins and development of Palestinian civil society in recent history. The chapter explored the Palestinian social structures and characteristics before the creation of the State of Israel in Palestine in 1948. In addition, the three phases of (1) service provision and alternative national structures of the 1970s; (2) the Intifada struggle and resistance of the 1980s; (3) the Oslo Agreement and peace process of the 1990s, were examined. This chapter also analyzed and defined the relationship between the local organizations and the Palestinian national movement in phase 1 and 2 outlined above. The emergence of Islamic grassroots associations in the 1980s was explored as well.

The discussions of phase 3 critically examined the changing role of secular civil society following the signing of the Oslo Peace Agreement of 1993 and analyzed the relationship between the PA and CSOs and also the impact of external donors on the nationalist civil society organizations particularly during the Oslo period. Furthermore, Chapter 4 discussed the failure of the Oslo peace process and contextualized the current political situation of CSOs in Gaza.

Chapters 2 and 3 have provided a clear conceptual understanding of the two central themes in this thesis: civil society and peacebuilding. It is important to reiterate here that the process of
developing the complementary approach in this research study involved three stages: (a) presenting and critiquing liberal peacebuilding; (b) providing an alternative complementary approach to peacebuilding; (c) clarifying and establishing the role of civil society in peacebuilding processes. The first and second stages were addressed in Chapter 2, and the final third stage was discussed in Chapter 3. To enhance further the complementary approach, Chapter 3 focused also on the role of CSOs in conflict situations and their contributions to peacebuilding in environments where conflicts and violence are a constant reality. This was especially important because the case study organizations in this research are operating and involved in peacebuilding activities within the context of the continuing Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Furthermore, this chapter included a critique of the role of civil society in peacebuilding. The discussion of challenges to CSOs in Gaza benefits from this important critique.

As illustrated before in Chapter 2, in the context of the complementary approach as the main conceptual model to employ in this research study, varied and relevant aspects of peacebuilding and the suggested role of civil society in processes and initiatives aimed at peacebuilding (as proposed by John Paul Lederach, Jonathan Goodhand, Nick Lewer, Johan Galtung, Luc Reychler, Herbert Kelman, Beatrice Pouligny, Catherine Barnes, Martina Fischer, Paul Van Tongeren in Chapters 2 and 3) are applied here and used in the examination of the peacebuilding activities facilitated by the case study organizations in Gaza. This is the conceptual and complementary approach that is utilized in the assessment below, specifically in the context of responding to the first research question concerning the role of secular civil society in promoting peacebuilding in Gaza.

This chapter (Research Analysis) deals with the remaining aspect of this thesis: addressing the three research questions stated in Chapter 1 and employing the research findings and the theories of civil society and peacebuilding in Chapters 2 and 3. Afterwards, the Conclusion summarizes the research outcomes and responds also to the research hypothesis on secular civil society and its role in peacebuilding at the local and political level and the challenges encountered.
6.1 Research Questions Analysis:

6.1.1 What role do secular civil society organizations play in promoting peacebuilding in Gaza?

To answer this research question fully, a critical analysis of the peacebuilding engagement and contributions by the GCMHP (i.e. trauma recovery, peace education, prisoner support, capacity building, and political mediation) is provided below. The contributions to peacebuilding of the PCHR (i.e. democracy promotion and lobbying, victim representations) and the PCDCR (i.e. psycho-social support and political dialogue) will be examined afterwards. The following discussions also identify the limits to these specific peacebuilding activities in the context of Gaza. The third research question will expand on these limits and discuss broader challenges to secular civil society organizations in Gaza.

In what follows, the programme work and activities of the GCMHP are examined in the same chronological order in which they were described in Chapter 5.

6.1.2 Examining The Role of GCMHP in Peacebuilding:

6.1.3 Trauma Recovery and Peace Education:

Although they contribute significantly to providing supports for healing from violent experiences and facilitate conflict resolution processes, the “Trauma Recovery” and “Peace Education” activities of the GCMHP suffer weaknesses. This is because of the continuation of violence and the general state of instability in the wider political situation in Gaza, both of which present limitations for the processes to realize their intended outcomes. Furthermore, denials of basic human rights are also seen as a fundamental obstruction. The community mental health therapist and Coordinator of School Mediation Programme Rawyea Hamam makes this point:

We cannot separate out human rights and mental or psychological health, and as long as human rights are denied, psychological health cannot be completely achieved. It is like someone suffering from a flu infection and you just give them pain-killers and because you do not deal with the infection itself, the flu will not go away and will come back again. This applies to our work, we initiate and run conflict resolution and
trauma recovery activities that reduce the effects of symptoms and make the pain numb but it does not resolve the root of the main problem [i.e. a lack of human rights].  

There is, however, the understanding that while this engagement by civil society may not entirely be the answer to the conflicting situation there since “the root of the main problem” is not addressed, helping to protect members of society from the deadly consequences of this conflict and supporting individuals and groups to cope with resulting repression may constitute a legitimate contribution. In this context, Eyad Sarraj emphasizes that working with young people and students in Gaza has been significant because “we need to help them feel secure and stable and strengthen their resilience so that they become able to deal with this tough life here.” His conclusion also reflects a sense of urgency: “many of them are already traumatized or experiencing post-traumatic stress because of the recent war on Gaza.”

Hence, turning victims into active participants to prevent further victimization and improve their surrounding circumstances are central elements in these civil society strategies. Also, another useful way to engage affected people in conflict resolution and trauma recovery processes in the Gaza situation has been to create the opportunity by which the anger and frustration of victims of violence is positively managed. Otherwise, the alternative is to avenge through a paramilitary organization, and possibly an active acceptance of their militant strategies. These political and armed organizations (e.g. Hamas) maybe able to also encourage recruitment among people in Gaza, especially if such peaceful alternatives by civil society organizations are not promoted locally and made available.

Theoretically speaking, as discussed in Chapter 2 (Principles of Peacebuilding), Johan Galtung suggests here that while the mere “absence of violence” may provide a cessation of armed and violent confrontations in fragile conflict situations, it does not ultimately lead to “positive peace”. Galtung maintains that positive peace is a significant component of any effective process aimed at comprehensive and sustainable peace because it seeks to build genuine foundations for equality, human rights and coexistence for all communities involved.

297 Interview with Rawyea Hamam at GCMHP in Gaza on 12-09-2011.
298 Interview with Eyad Sarraj at the Summer Cafe of GCMHP in Gaza on 10-09-2011.
299 Ibid.
in the conflict. Accordingly, a fundamental requirement for achieving positive peace involves dealing with community dialogue, trauma and healing.\(^{300}\)

To apply Galtung’s theory, working towards “positive peace” can also be seen in two ways in terms of the involvement of GCMHP in Gaza. Firstly, this civil society organization has worked with many individuals and groups to help them deal with horrific experiences of violence and human loss. In this context, Eyad Sarraj states that a major success for GCMHP is that it has “helped hundreds and thousands to heal and recover from their traumas.”\(^{301}\)

Secondly, interactions with Palestinian schools through peace education and mediation strengthen important aspects of the community dialogue that Galtung has recognized as significant to encouraging public participation in peacebuilding processes in the context of positive peace. The Manager of the Training and Research Unit at GCMHP Yaser Abu-Jama points out that seeking to open up opportunities for dialogue in society and challenging the cycle of violence is at the heart of their counselling and community activities: “we work to cultivate the hope that these children and other members of society will live free from Israeli intimidations and violations without having to enter into the cycle of violence and revenge.”\(^{302}\)

Addressing all these specific elements supports the possibilities of promoting positive peace where issues of hurt, revenge, trauma, community dialogue and local participation are all constructively dealt with beyond the notion of the mere absence of violence (i.e. negative peace).

6.1.4 Prisoner Support:

Although social and reintegration services during and after prison sentences are acknowledged as valuable to all prisoners in general, the issue of political prisoners in particular remains significant in Palestinian society. Therefore it will continue to present dilemmas and challenges for those who seek to provide assistance and attempt to engage with this group. This is for two reasons: firstly, within the Palestinian context, detention and


\(^{301}\) Interview with Eyad Sarraj at the Summer Cafe of GCMHP in Gaza on 10-09-2011.

\(^{302}\) Interview with Yaser Abu-Jama at GCMHP in Gaza on 15-9-2012.
arrests on political grounds are still widely used and accepted by the main Palestinian factions, Fatah and Hamas, to intimidate the oppositional voice despite their current attempts to commit to the terms of the National Reconciliation Agreement reached in May of 2011. Secondly, at the Israeli-Palestinian level, Israel will continue to use Palestinian political prisoners as a bargaining chip in negotiations with the Palestinian parties to enhance its position and achieve certain political gains.\(^{303}\)

Nonetheless, although delicate and politically sensitive, the engagement of GCMHP with Palestinian political prisoners in Israel and ex-prisoners has a critical impact on opportunities and issues of peace in Gaza and Palestine in general. For instance, Palestinian political prisoners in Israeli jails played a crucial role in brokering a comprehensive ceasefire between the Palestinian militant factions and the Israeli army in 2003. This ceasefire agreement created the opportunity for re-launching political talks between the Israeli and Palestinian leadership. Marwan Barghouti, the Secretary General of Fatah in the West Bank and a political prisoner, mediated the ceasefire terms with other prisoner leaders from inside Israeli jails. The Haaretz Palestinian Affairs Editor, Danny Rubinstein, comments:

The \textit{hudna} [ceasefire] came about on three planes: there were negotiations between Abu Mazen [Palestinian leader Mahmoud Abbas] and the Palestinian organizations; there were negotiations between Barghouti and these organizations; and there were talks between groups of prisoners in the jails.\(^{304}\)

Haaretz concludes that “Barghouti and his fellow prisoners have been credited with the lion’s share of work in forging a halt to violence.”\(^{305}\) Furthermore, beyond ceasefire agreements, releasing political prisoners and ensuring their participation in political processes is a workable confidence-building measure in most peace processes as observed in Northern Ireland and South Africa.\(^{306}\)

This role for prisoner groups may represent an effective contribution and demonstrate the usefulness of their inclusion in peacebuilding activities.

\(^{303}\)Interview with Abed-Alhammed Mihatbar at GCMHP in Gaza on 13-09-2011.


6.1.5 Capacity Building:

In terms of the “Capacity Building” activity and training partnership between GCMHP and government departments in Gaza (e.g. the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Education), this suggests that a civil society organization like GCMHP has the ability not only to enhance institutional performance, but also to create the conditions for a structural change at the policy level. For example, according to the GCMHP team, the Palestinian Ministry for Health has integrated mental health into their primary health care structure to support victims of violence and trauma recovery approaches in Gaza. The Ministry of Education, on the other hand, has included the School Mediation Programme as an integral part of the curriculum activities in many local schools. Further, these official institutions continue to seek training and advice. This shows also the interaction and dynamic between Track One (i.e. government) and Track Two (i.e. civil society). In addition, these policy and structural changes, which have been encouraged by civil society efforts, bring about stronger legitimacy for the existence and the function of Track Two (e.g. GCMHP).

This strand of training is also recognized by Jonathan Goodhand as an indirect involvement to support peacebuilding in conflict situations. As explained further in Chapter 3 (Theories of Civil Society and Connections with Peacebuilding), Goodhand argues that strengthening the capacity of national institutions to improve services and sustain programmes in conflict environments has an impact on future transformation possibilities. According to Goodhand, this developmental and capacity building activity may not have explicit peacebuilding objectives but will have an effect on the overall context in which future “negotiations and talks are conducted.” Goodhand, op.cit., pp. 12-13. Hence, this institutional involvement by GCMHP contributes to the creation of conditions by which a genuine and negotiated solution to the conflict could emerge in Israeli-Palestinian situation.

6.1.6 Political Mediation:

“Political Mediation” is another activity of peacebuilding performed by the GCMHP with Palestinian parties. This particular engagement invites a number of observations. Political mediation by civil society players seems to be initiated in response to arising internal
conflicts and crises among political leadership in Gaza and the West Bank. In other words, this mediation approach is reactive and not proactive and therefore it is not structured into a practical programme with physical and human resources in place.

The GCMHP would be, for example, able to make a more valuable contribution than leading the Consensuses and National Reconciliation Committee, mentioned in Chapter 5, and participating only in the Committee’s mediation initiatives for a short period of time when the need for mediation simply arises. This active engagement could be achieved by integrating political mediation into the formal workings at the organizational level and this would help a civil society organization such as GCMHP to move from merely reacting to political crises to helping prevent them. As discussed in Chapter 2 (Principles of Peacebuilding), Lederach considers that conflict transformation processes prove more effective if the response which they present is extended from “fire-fighting” to “fire-prevention.” This analogy is helpful in clarifying this point here. Also, Goodhand adds that civil society peacebuilding would be more effective it involved a “visible framework” to support “non-official mediation” in the political arena.

Also, organization and coherence seem to be problematic for achieving the full potential of political mediation. In this respect, the Fatah leader and former Minister, Hisham Abed-Alrazq, points out that civil society players have enjoyed a “large presence” in Gaza but these social forces would have a greater influence on the internal political processes if they were more “structured and organized.”

Despite these critical issues about structure and organization, the leaders from Hamas and Fatah have still recognized a significant merit in the current involvement of local and civil society representatives and their facilitative approaches for promoting consensus among political parties in Gaza. In his interview, the Hamas official Ismael Alashqar points to the support that civil society players have demonstrated for achieving Palestinian national and political reconciliation: “they made good efforts and their efforts have been complementary to the main parties.” On the other hand, the National Relations and Media Commissioner for Fatah, Diab Allouh, has encouraged a stronger civil society mediation and engagement in

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308 Lederach. Preparing for Peace. op.cit., p.78.
310 Interview with Hisham Abed-Alrazq at the Association of Christian Youth in Gaza on 2-10-2011.
311 Interview with Ismael Alashqar at the Palestinian Legislative Council in Gaza on 23-09-2011.
the process of political unity inside Gaza and the West Bank. Moving beyond short-term responses to internal national crises and supporting agreed strategies for the management of the national and liberation struggle is central to his proposal. He comments further:

Each Palestinian faction and party has their own strategies and philosophies [concerning the Palestinian cause] but there is a Palestinian national project that requires common ground. And I think these social forces can contribute significantly to the promotion of these common and shared grounds between different political parties. 

In conclusion, the progression of this facilitative and mediatory role needs to be developed and supported if it is to sustain its relevance in the political arena in Gaza. The respect and the legitimacy that many civil society players and their mediation role earned in the process of Palestinian national reconciliation are crucial for the development of this useful and successful activity of peacebuilding. Addressing issues of stronger coherence, structure, organization and coordinated strategies are vitally key factors in this evolving situation to ensure both further effectiveness and sustainability. Furthermore, the enhancement of political mediation should include broadening out engagement approaches and strengthening their proactive nature to support conflict prevention, instead of exclusively responding to political crises and divisions inside Gaza.

As said before, this could involve designing and running structured dialogue programmes to support sustainable contact, communication, relationship-building and trust between the political parties who are leading the Palestinian national project for an independent Palestinian state. The fact that Palestinians are still seeking statehood and searching for ways to achieve their national independence means that obstacles and difficult factional disagreements are likely to continue to emerge. It is precisely here that as well as working on important issues of trauma recovery, political prisoners, peace education in schools, capacity building for government and nongovernmental agencies, GCMHP can also make more effective contributions to both political unity and peaceful cooperation within the Palestinian struggle.

^312 Interview with Diab Allouh at his home in Gaza on 27-9-2011.
However, as well as these limits to their specific peacebuilding activities, GCMHP also faces critical challenges in the context of Gaza. As stated previously, this is illustrated further in the final discussions concerning the third research question and civil society challenges.

In the following section, the activities of the PCHR (i.e. democracy promotion and victim representations) and their contributions to peacebuilding in Gaza are discussed.

6.1.7 Examining The Role of PCHR in Peacebuilding:

6.1.8 Democracy Promotion and Lobbying:

Through the “Democracy Promotion and Lobbying” activities of the Democracy Unit (DU) and the continued monitoring of both the official institutions and the policies of the Palestinian government locally and nationally, the PCHR is creating the conditions by which two objectives can be achieved. These involve enhancing democratic and open decision-making processes and putting in place the necessary procedures for strengthening legal accountability at the governmental level. In this respect, as discussed in Chapter 3, Luc Reychler describes local actors in these critical conflict situations as “field diplomats” who work to set up and maintain “early warning-systems” for rising conflicts, and support “legitimate structures” in conflict situations.  

The participation of the PCHR in the Palestinian elections is another example of the democratic change that this organization is seeking to make in Gaza. The PCHR actively participated in the general Palestinian elections of 2006 by offering legal consultations and expert advice on the election law and system (i.e. proportional or majority vote). Also, during the pre-election phase, the DU organized public conferences and seminars on issues of voting and polling campaigns. This was followed by designing and delivering training for 600 local observers, males and females, who monitored the election process.

As discussed in Chapter 3, emphasizing the association between democratization and peacebuilding processes in the context of indigenous groups, Beatrice Pouligny concludes:

313 Reychler and Paffenholz. op.cit., p.169.
Local civil societies, through monitoring and lobbying activists, may push the local state into fulfilling its responsibility for implementing the rule of law. They are often seen to carry the best hopes for a genuine democratic counterweight to the power-brokers, economic exploiters and warlords who tend to predominate in conflict-ridden weak or failed states, and may even capture electoral processes.\textsuperscript{315}

Nonetheless, this strong engagement by the PCHR in promoting the rule of law and democracy experienced a setback and all these civil society efforts to support and build on the momentum of this democratic election process were undermined because of the political failure of the U.S. and the Israeli government to recognize the valid results of the elections and accept Hamas’s electoral victory. Therefore, there are many people who have subsequently become disillusioned with the political crisis which emerged afterwards and the punishment measures taken against the Palestinian people for electing the ‘wrong’ party. These included withholding funding for the PA and imposing a blockade on Gaza and ended with an Israeli massive military assault on the impoverished territory in 2009. Furthermore, the major Palestinian factions of Hamas and Fatah became divided and engaged in a power struggle following the election crisis.

In response, the PCHR developed a counter strategy at grassroots level which has been focusing on opening up a dialogue within the youth section in society in order to revive their involvement and restore their trust in democratic processes. According to the Coordinator of the DU Hamdi Shaqora:

Many young people came to believe that this whole democratic experience [of the elections] is just catastrophic and brought about new disasters. Hence it is important that we work to help them regain trust in the democratic process and its true meaning through opening up the space of expression for opinions and ideas.\textsuperscript{316}

However, to what extent these activities undertaken by the PCHR for addressing issues of peace and democracy have been effective and successful in contributing to building a peaceful and democratic change remains unclear. In addition, the reality that many civil society organizations are either specialized in a particular area or it is integrated as part of their general functions is also a factor. Shaqora states that producing concrete results is

\textsuperscript{315} Pouligny. op.cit., pp.497-498.
\textsuperscript{316} Interview with Hamdi Shaqor at PCHR in Gaza on 18-9-2011.
challenging "because we are not the only players in this field" and there are sometimes "overlaps in terms of civil society activities and different groups." This is not to rule out that progress has been made or to question the usefulness of such important tasks and achievements in Gaza. Instead, it is meant to acknowledge that dilemmas exist in identifying the specific impact and effectiveness of civil society contributions to peacebuilding.

6.1.9 Victim Representations:

This task of “victim representations” conforms to peacebuilding principles and therefore is significant in a number of ways. Firstly, while it could be considered a form of civil society protection for people affected by armed conflicts and the military operations of the Israeli army, representation is essentially about acknowledging and dealing practically with the hurt and the physical (e.g. property destruction) and human loss that victims of violence have had to endure. In other words, the assistance and the support that the Legal Aid Unit (LAU) offers to bereaved families and groups by representing their cases and facilitating recognition, may help them to develop a sense of healing and closure into the future. As discussed in Chapter 3, David Bloomfield illustrates further that the significance of local endeavours in conflict environments exists in their ability to encourage interactions through which “grievances” are “defined and negotiated.”

Secondly, the LAU contributes to the search for peaceful alternatives that joint Palestinian/Israeli peace groups promote also in the region. In other words, debating cases of Palestinian victims in Israeli courts and in wider Israeli circles and challenging violence, reducing the social and psychological distance between Israeli and Palestinian societies, all constitute important steps towards genuine peace. As discussed in Chapter 3, Martin Shaw suggests that distance does not only exist but it also evolves according to political and media reactions to conflict situations: “distance is complex and relative and is constantly established, undermined and negotiated in our responses.” Thus, to address this challenge in conflict situations, Shaw stresses that there has to be a “direct representation” of victims as well as combatants. In this context, it is interesting to notice that this form of direct

317 Interview with Hamdi Shaqora at PCHR in Gaza on 18-9-2011.
319 Shaw. op. cit., p 12.
representation is observed through the responses and engagement of the LAU in the Israeli legal system and accountability for victims of violence.

Thirdly, advocacy, which is an essential method for this specific activity by the PCHR, encourages conflict transformation not only at the societal level but also at the policy level. Within the framework of human rights and international law, pressurizing the Israeli government through judicial and justice authorities to re-examine their military strategies in relation to the conflict with the Palestinians may force Israeli policy makers to re-consider the effectiveness of these military ‘solutions’ and accept a new constructive approach. This includes genuine peace and an inclusive political process with all the parties to the conflict.

As discussed further in Chapter 3, here Jonathan Goodhand proposes that one of the valid approaches to peacebuilding is “advocacy” which lobbies and influences policy making representatives to “engender changes at the macro level.” The engagement of the PCHR in representation and advocacy seems to make important contributions to this process at the “macro level.” Furthermore, challenging and influencing the policy of governments in the context of ongoing conflict situations leads to a better understanding of the conflict issues and the dangerous consequences involved. Hence, as Martina Fischer points out, local civil society organizations raise also “public awareness of the needs of war-torn societies” through lobbying and advocacy activities.

Fourthly, this litigation by the LAU is ultimately a nonviolent action aimed at demonstrating opposition to state violence. Protesting atrocities and initiating effective strategies through peaceful and legal methods constitute critical elements of this nonviolent action which is designed and facilitated by civil society players. This particular peacebuilding activity of opposing state injustices and representing victims attempts to deal also with the central issues of violence, victimization, oppression, just peace and abuse of human rights in Gaza. All of which are major components of peacebuilding processes as Nick Lewer stresses in his analysis of nongovernmental organizations and conflict resolution, which is discussed further in Chapter 2. As illustrated in Chapter 3, Catherine Barnes also points out here that

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320 Goodhand. op.cit., pp.12-16.
322 Lewer.op.cit., p.13.
the powers of civil society to “resist oppressive forces” and “expose oppression” play an
effective role in facilitating positive change and building peace in conflict situations.^^233

However, there are limitations to the activity of “Victim Representations” by the PCHR. For
example, as this research found, being exclusively a bottom-up approach and without
supporting efforts from or coordination with the Palestinian senior political leadership may
indicate that the impact of this approach will remain limited. This particular point validates
Thania Paffenholz’s criticism of some peacebuilding frameworks which assume direct
connections between civil society and political activities. As discussed in Chapter 2,
Paffenholz emphasizes here that the coordination aspects between civil society approaches
and political processes require further clarity and a deeper understanding, especially given the
increasing gap between formal and informal politics.^^234 Therefore, as long as these linkages
and coordination aspects are not addressed in institutional and political terms by the PCHR,
their involvement here will continue to encounter weaknesses and lack a sustainable impact.

In the Israeli context, combined obstacles face this type of work and also hinder full success.
As the Director of the LAU Eyad Alalmi acknowledges clearly:

At the parliamentarian level in Israel, legislators there always attempt aggressively to
issue or amend laws that would make it impossible to seek reparations and
compensations for Palestinian victims. [Then]Israeli authorities agreed to give
Palestinians the opportunity to make submissions if they wish and the judge would
have to study and examine the case and then decide whether to accept and proceed or
not. But this came with huge financial costs and deposits for legal consultations and
processes; this has also complicated the issue of achieving justice... There are also
problems created by the Executive in this regard; they would not facilitate witnesses
to make statements in courts by not issuing permits for them to travel to Israel from
the Palestinian areas....We are talking about a whole complex system that works
against us and is trying hard to make our job of seeking justice and following legal
cases of human rights violations difficult.^^235

Another critical factor that presents also difficulties here is the impartiality and the bias
shown by the court representatives in dealing with Palestinian cases. When Israeli judges are
pressured by undisputed visual and valid evidence from the scene of the atrocity and a
possibility of a criminal accusation arises, “they immediately resort to reaching a settlement

^^235 Interview with Eyad Alalmi at PCHR in Gaza on 21-9-2011.
on humanitarian grounds suggesting that mistakes are usually made in war situations”,\textsuperscript{326} Alalmi elaborates from his active participation in these deliberations. This is carried out with the intention of providing immunity for the army and state leaders responsible for the atrocities in question.

To sum up, the activity of “victim representations” achieves the following in the context of peacebuilding: (a) it challenges and resists Israeli state violence in Gaza; (b) it encourages policy change; (c) it promotes awareness and understanding of needs of conflict-torn societies; (d) it supports nonviolent alternatives to military repression; (e) it seeks reparation and recognition for victims; (f) it helps to break down barriers and bridge psychological and social distance between Palestinians and Israelis in the conflict. But a lack of political and civil society coordination in this area, and obstacles at the Israeli state and legal levels present limits to this particular activity and its contribution to peacebuilding.

As said before, broader challenges facing the PCHR and secular civil society organizations in Gaza are illustrated further in the final discussions concerning the third research question and civil society challenges.

In what follows, the activities of the PCDCR (i.e. psycho-social support and political dialogue) and their contributions to peacebuilding in Gaza are discussed.

6.1.10 Examining The Role of PCDCR in Peacebuilding:

6.1.11 Psycho-Social Support:

The psycho-social support of the PCDCR contributes to peacebuilding in two ways. The first is concerned with providing traumatised and vulnerable young people with counselling and helping them overcome their trauma through story-telling and other therapeutic approaches as explained in the previous chapter. Involving the families of affected children and the wider community is key to this process. The Mosque, as a place of social solidarity and spiritual support, hosts meetings between members of the local community and the PCDCR who work to address traumatic experiences. In this context, the Mosque plays an important role in this

\textsuperscript{326} Ibid.
organizational and local engagement and contributes to its success. Emphasizing this point, the Coordinator of the Child Protection Programme (CPP) Deena Alanqar states that “the aim is to include the community in this support process for young people with the help of the Mosque.”

Second, the PCDCR works to offer a safe space where young people can feel secure away from realities of conflict and constant tensions: “we organize open days for children and the space is created for them to enjoy and have some fun”, Alanqar explains. Hence, taken together, the psycho-social activities of the PCDCR essentially promote trauma recovery and healing, and attempt also to facilitate a sense of safety for young people affected by conflict and violence in Gaza.

As discussed in Chapter 3, Martina Fischer illustrates here that protecting civilians and dealing with trauma by providing psycho-social help for conflict victims, constitutes a valid contribution to peacebuilding in war-torn societies. Therefore, the engagement of the PCDCR in this critical area supports peacebuilding in the context of Gaza and the ongoing conflict situation there.

However, available evidence indicates that this particular involvement has some critical limitations. Similar to the trauma recovery work conducted by GCMHP, the continuation of violence and conflict in Gaza presents obstacles to the complete success of such activities and their intended outcomes of recovery and healing. Hence, while it is certain that the PCDCR plays an important role in dealing with issues of trauma for young people in Gaza, it is clear that the achievements of this role are limited. In this context, the Coordinator of the CPP Deena Alanqar states:

There are cases in which significant improvement and progress has been made but it’s important to remember that we [in Gaza] live in a highly volatile and changing environment and this political situation may cause setbacks in some situations after progress is made.

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327 Interview with Deena Alanqar at PCDCR in Gaza on 15-8-2013.
328 Ibid.
329 Fischer, op. cit., pp.6-7.
330 Interview with Deena Alanqar at PCDCR in Gaza on 15-8-2013.

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Another connected issue here is the instability that this situation produces in Gaza and how it impacts on activities aimed at promoting peace and trauma recovery, and reverses successful results in some cases. The violent events of 2009 and 2012 serve as an example here. According to Alanqar:

Following the Israeli war on Gaza in 2009, the PCDCR began to work with a number of children to support recovery from that traumatic experience but in 2012 we have experienced another major military attack on Gaza. This caused serious problems to our previous work and achievements.... The lack of stability is generally a problem for what we are trying to do and achieve.  

Nonetheless, despite these limiting factors and conditions, the attempts at psycho-social support and trauma recovery are seen as vital and necessary in situations of violence and oppression. From this perspective, being in solidarity with the victims of violence, providing affected individuals with the space and opportunity to “tell their story and talk about what they have been through”, and helping them to gain a sense of safety and protection, demonstrate the relevance of this work in the context of injustice in Gaza. Hence, Alanqar emphasizes here that for traumatised young people to feel that the organization and the programme team recognize their hurt and “offer solidarity in this critical crisis” is significant. Therefore, despite the unavoidable weaknesses of psycho-social activities by the PCDCR in Gaza (i.e. continuation of conflict and violence, and consequences of instability) this particular civil society engagement continues to provide a valuable contribution to peacebuilding in the overall context of facilitating trauma recovery and supporting traumatised young people in Gaza.

6.1.12 Political Dialogue:

Political Dialogue is another civil society activity performed by the PCDCR. It promotes peacebuilding in Gaza in political as well as social terms. At the internal political level in Gaza, political dialogue seeks to challenge actions of violence between the main two factions in Gaza (i.e. Hamas and Fatah) and promote negotiations and conflict management methods as an alternative to factional disputes. In achieving this task, the PCDCR employs training and dialogue workshops as means of providing practical skills to political representatives and
enhancing national unity. What is significant about this approach is its strategic focus on young political leaders and future leadership. Emphasizing this point further, the Coordinator of the respective project Social Peace and National Reconciliation (SPNR) Hanan Aldalou states that what makes the engagement of political youth organizations central in this dialogue process is “the influence that they have on the top leaders, because they enhance their position in society, and the strong connections that they enjoy with other core groups of youth and students.”334

Therefore, working to facilitate peaceful and positive relationships between political parties involved in power struggles and infighting, and supporting political cooperation and conflict management methods as an alternative to factional violence, constitute an important peacebuilding role and activity by the PCDCR in Gaza. As discussed in Chapter 2, Herbert Kelman suggests that improving relations and communication within and between political parties in conflict situations is crucial for the success of any conflict resolution effort at the political level. Kelman suggests further that conflict resolution should, in essence, be viewed as “an attempt to change the relationship between the conflicting parties.”335 Furthermore, Paul Van Tongeren emphasizes here that CSOs play a significant role in peacebuilding through their ability to create “safe spaces” for individuals and groups experiencing conflict situations and enable them to make change based on “justice and the rule of law.”336

In social terms, the impact of political dialogue extends also beyond the official arena and parties in conflict. Dealing constructively with the problems of exclusion and intolerance at the political level reflects positively on community relations and helps to address social divisions caused by political frictions. In this context, the relationship between political reconciliation and societal peace becomes essential and interconnected. Therefore, political dialogue supports essentially social peace through which “the coexistence of different people with various affiliations and opinions” becomes possible and the local community subsequently “experiences a positive development and interaction, and participation”, as Aldalou also points out.337

334 Interview with Hanan Aldalou at PCDCR in Gaza on 26-8-2013.
335 Kelman. op. cit., p.108.
336 Van Tongeren, Verhoeven and Wake. op. cit, p.84.
337 Interview with Hanan Aldalou at PCDCR in Gaza on 26-8-2013.
Another crucial point here is that the initiatives of political dialogue receive active support from the senior leaders of the Hamas and Fatah factions, and that the dialogue workshops are conducted with their agreement. In this context, through his longstanding experience in political negotiations between various parties, the former Fatah Minister, Hisham Abed-Alrazq, points out that what has made this transformative role significant is the capacity of these civil society actors to “influence political groupings” in Gaza with “the agreement of the central political organizations.” This suggests two promising realities. The first is that major political representatives in Gaza are willing to provide the freedom and space for civil society groups to play a non-official facilitative role and they actively agree to it. Second, since this acceptance is articulated, the engagement of civil society in political dynamics and disputes will continue to grow and develop in terms of both impact and practice in Palestinian society.

However, similar to the political mediation initiative by GCMHP, the political dialogue of PCDCR is initiated only in response to factional disputes and is not integrated as a part of the organization’s core tasks and functions. This makes its contribution weak and occasional and lacking an organizational structure. Political dialogue work could, therefore, be enhanced by a more sustainable involvement and assisted further by facilitating regular dialogue workshops to allow political representatives to explore potential difficulties in internal political processes, and strengthen their working relationship. Embarking on this activity would also promote better relations between civil society groups as agents of change and peace and political actors in Gaza.

As well as these limits to their specific peacebuilding activities, PCDCR also confronts critical challenges in the context of Gaza. This is illustrated further in the final discussions concerning the third research question and civil society challenges.

To conclude, based on the research findings provided in Chapter 5 and also the theoretical frameworks in Chapters 2 and 3, the analysis and discussions above have responded to the first research question which is concerned with examining the role of secular civil society organizations in peacebuilding and analysing their contributions to peacebuilding in Gaza. In doing so, despite their limitations, it has become clear that the activities of the GCMHP

338 Interview with Hisham Abed-Alrazq at the Association of Christian Youth in Gaza on 2-10-2011.
continue to promote civil society processes of trauma recovery, healing, peace education and conflict resolution in schools, capacity building, and mediation in the context of the conflict in Gaza. Similarly, the second part of the discussion demonstrated that the activities undertaken by the PCHR (aiming at democracy promotion and victim representations) facilitate processes of human rights, democratic transparency, structural reforms, nonviolence and policy change, exposure of state oppression, which all essentially contribute to peacebuilding in Gaza in significant ways. Also, the previous discussions examined the role of the PCDCR in peacebuilding. Providing psycho-social support to traumatised young people in the context of Gaza and leading dialogue workshops among factions to support peace and positive relationships in social and political terms demonstrated clear examples of this role and its achievements. This has been recognized without underestimating the critical limitations and weaknesses involved for the PCHR, the GCMHP, and the PCDCR in terms of their specific peacebuilding activities and impact on peace and conflict issues. The third research question will also discuss broader challenges to secular and nationalist civil society organizations in Gaza.

6.1.13 Usefulness of Complementary Approach to Peacebuilding:

The framework of a complementary approach to peacebuilding has been applied systematically in the previous examination of civil society and peacebuilding in the context of Gaza. A number of theories, which have been explored and discussed in Chapters 2 and 3, were employed in the analyses of the data gathered in the field research concerning the three case study organizations and their contributions to peacebuilding in Gaza. Therefore, the complementary approach in this study enhanced some critical characteristics of peacebuilding. It has emphasized, for instance, the root causes of conflict and subsequent socio-political and economic grievances involved. Hence, structural and institutional transformation, equal rights, trauma recovery, community building, public participation, civil society mediation and political dialogue, were all established as key issues and themes in the complementary approach.

Furthermore, not only did the complementary approach function as a useful and central conceptual model in the previous discussions but it also enhanced and deepened the analysis process of the role of secular civil society organizations in supporting peacebuilding in Gaza. Some examples are discussed below.
On one hand, Johan Galtung's model of positive peace conforms strongly, for instance, to local engagement and trauma recovery activities which GCMHP has been leading in Palestinian schools and communities. On the other hand, Jonathan Goodhand's assertion in his theory of the importance of advocacy to "engender changes at the macro level" in the context of political conflicts corresponds well with the PCHR legal representations and lobbying in the Israeli and Palestinian situations. While Galtung has not placed a strong emphasis on "advocacy", and Goodhand has not suggested a comprehensive framework for "positive peace" in conflict transformation, both theories complement each other in the peacebuilding contexts of the GCMHP and the PCHR, and help to clarify the validity of both practices in the two different but related arenas.

In this sense, using Galtung's conceptual framework alone to interpret the engagement of the PCHR in peacebuilding would have proved problematic because using advocacy as a way to influence policy and change is not included in his theory. Similarly, employing Goodhand's model to exclusively analyse the grassroots engagement of GCMHP in healing and community dialogue would have been equally inconclusive because, unlike the framework of positive peace, these vital grassroots elements are not emphasized by Goodhand. But taken together, Goodhand has helped to clarify the function of civil society advocacy and lobbying in relation to issues of peace and conflict in Gaza and Galtung has provided much needed theoretical foundations in relation to the role of Palestinian local players in promoting peacebuilding at the grassroots level. Therefore, together they engender conceptual legitimacy and valid reasons for examining these various but connected activities by the GCMHP and the PCHR.

The same principle also applies to other theoretical strands considered here. Take Herbert Kelman and Beatrice Pouligny as another example of the usefulness of complementarity in peacebuilding, as it has been demonstrated in the response to the first research question. Kelman has stressed the need for a conflict resolution process that changes power imbalances and builds relationships and effective communication channels between major political representatives with the support of civil society players. His theory of civil society engagement with political parties and relationship-building has been helpful in understanding the significance of political dialogue by the PCDCR with Fatah and Hamas in Gaza.
On the other hand, Pouligny, has advocated the need to support the rule of law as an important function of civil society efforts aimed at peacebuilding. While Pouligny’s theory of peacebuilding could not explain the merit of facilitating political dialogues, her understanding of democratic processes and civil society engagement has informed the analysis of the role that the PCHR has been playing in promoting democracy and elections in Gaza, and how these tasks may influence peacebuilding contributions there.

Hence, supported by evidence from the field and examples from the research analysis, the achievements of the complementary approach in this study have been significant. Firstly, the complementary approach has broadened the understanding of processes aimed at achieving just peace in a fragile conflict situation such as Gaza. Therefore, it has suggested clearly that interpreting complex dynamics of various peacebuilding activities and employing one exclusive theory is limiting and unhelpful.

Secondly, the complementary approach has demonstrated its validity and importance especially when some conceptual elements failed to explain on their own certain aspects of peacebuilding by civil society organizations in Gaza. In this context, the complementary approach has provided the context for achieving a unifying and thorough analysis of practical peacebuilding activities based on complementary components of peacebuilding. These complementary aspects supported a comprehensive examination of peacebuilding processes in volatile conflict situations and their dynamics. In short, this comprehensive model has successfully applied specific characteristics from a number of peace theories to specific elements of the three case study organizations and, in the process, emphasized the usefulness of complementary efforts aimed at promoting peace and conflict transformation.

Thirdly, the application of a complementary approach in the context of an ongoing conflict situation like Gaza has provided an alternative to the rigid use of peacebuilding as an activity that can only take place in a “post-conflict setting” as advocated by liberal peacebuilding. Hence, it demonstrates that initiatives designed to transform conflict and build peace should not have a precise beginning or end and they can be facilitated in the absence of a political settlement (e.g. in the Israeli-Palestinian context).

The second research question is answered in the following section.
6.2 What is the relationship between secular civil society peacebuilding in Gaza and the broader Israeli-Palestinian political context?

Recognizing the failure of the Oslo peace process as explained in Chapter 4, this research question is concerned with exploring the possibility of extending the peacebuilding contributions made by civil society organizations (i.e. GCMHP, PCHR, PCDCR as discussed above) to include an active role in promoting a genuine solution to the conflict at the broader political level. In other words, do secular civil society organizations in Gaza have the capacity and abilities to support political efforts seeking a just settlement to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict? If so, in what ways can civil society players and their activities influence the political context given its current weaknesses? And if not, what are the factors that prevent effective civil society involvement in the Israeli-Palestinian political arena? These are the issues that this research question aims to explore below.

The interviewees from the case studies emphasized that while they are not central players at the Israeli and Palestinian political level, their activities have an influence on the political dynamics and the broader struggle for peace and justice in a number of ways. For example, the nonviolent legal struggle and litigation that the PCHR and local organizations have been actively supporting and leading to challenge injustices in the context of international law has helped the government of the Palestinian Authority to endorse this route as a major political strategy. As the Director of the Legal Aid Unit of the PCHR, Eyad Alalmi points out:

This legal action and its tools at the strategic levels are effective but Palestinians should utilize this struggle more and think about the conflict from this perspective. We see today that the Palestinian leadership is using the UN and international law as a platform to achieve Palestinian rights; despite the little experience and the lack of skills in this field [on the side of the Palestinian Authority] it is a good indication.\(^\text{339}\)

Some evidence supports Alalmi’s point about promoting strategies in the context of international law as a basis for a negotiated solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. There is currently a better awareness among Palestinian leaders of the effectiveness of this legal struggle and its power. Palestinian President Mahmood Abbas and his party Fatah, for instance, have been seeking recognition from the UN for an independent Palestinian state in

\(^{339}\)Interview with Eyad Alalmi at PCHR in Gaza on 21-9-2011.
the occupied territories of Gaza and the West Bank and East Jerusalem, since the official negotiations have failed to end the Israeli military occupation and achieve Palestinian independence. This Palestinian quest has been informed by the framework of legal standards and the UN Charter that support the right of nations and peoples to self-determination and sovereignty. The significance of this current political strategy is not only related to Palestinian statehood but it could also create new possibilities of ending the conflict with the support of internationally agreed and legitimate mechanisms. Valentina Azarov from the International Law Observer makes this point:

This [recognition of a Palestinian state by the UN and international governments] would allow Palestine to stand on an equal footing with Israel and other states. And open new avenues for Palestinians to gain access to international justice and accountability mechanisms for violations of international law, which is in many ways a condition sine qua non for bringing to an end and resolving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Another example of how civil society engagement is able to influence the political context is by promoting public confidence and hope for a peaceful future despite the failing political process. In this case, some civil society organizations work to open up the space for discussions between a range of community and youth groups and political representatives. This also ensures that the senior leadership, which is involved in the political developments, is in dialogue with their fellow citizens and that their concerns and suggestions are heard: “we discuss issues of civil society, peace in Palestine, elections, democracy”, as Hamdi Shaqora from the PCHR explains.

Furthermore, partnership and co-operation between secular civil society organizations in Gaza and Israeli local groups in the area of peace and human rights challenges the repeated failure of the official negotiations and promotes peaceful alternatives based on equality and justice. Eyad Sarraj points out that GCMHP has been working in partnership with a number of prominent CSOs in Israel. These include Physicians for Human Rights, B’t- Selem Human Rights organization, Gisha Legal Centre for Freedom of Movement, and the Israeli Campaign

\[340\text{See the UN Resolution 1514(XV) and Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples. Available online at: http://www.un.org/en/decolonization/declaration.shtml.}\]


\[342\text{Interview with Hamdi Shaqora at PCHR in Gaza on 18-9-2011.}\]
against Torture. Explaining the significance of this co-operation in practical terms, Sarraj states:

First of all, these organizations practically assist some Palestinians who suffered from human rights violations in accessing medical treatment and services in Israel. Second, our joint work aims to expose the Israeli violations of human rights and that’s why these groups and individuals are important partners. Third, professionally, we also share and exchange experiences and skills...Our long-term agendas are about achieving equality, peace and justice. It’s a joint struggle.\(^{343}\) (Emphasis added)

As discussed in Chapter 3, Mathijs Van Leeuwen points out that the search for peace and justice is now guided largely by civil society players and their “comparative advantage of local knowledge and contextual understandings of barriers and opportunities” to making and sustaining peace at the local and national level.\(^{344}\) Discussing these opportunities in the interview, the Programmes Manager at the PCDCR Abed-Elmanem Altahrawy illustrates that civil society activities in the Palestinian context ultimately “prepare and lay the basic foundation for a political solution” with Israel. However, in order to be influential, this “foundation needs to be utilized in the right way by the political leadership.”\(^{345}\)

Nonetheless, the transformational capacity of this civil society role and its contributions are limited at the Israel-Palestinian political level. The reasons for this are intertwined and involve political and civil society considerations. Some of these dynamics and complexities are addressed below.

6.2.1 Political and Civil Society Considerations:

A major factor that causes this limitation in civil society activities and their contributions to political solutions at the Israeli-Palestinian level is related to the failure of the Israeli-Palestinian political process. This reality facilitates a weakness in the role of civil society in peace and conflict issues. Illustrating further, the Fatah leader Hisham Abed-Alrazq stresses:

\(^{343}\) Interview with Eyad Sarraj at the Summer Cafe of GCMHP in Gaza on 10-09-2011.
\(^{344}\) Van Leeuwen, op.cit., p. 38.
\(^{345}\) Interview with Abed-Elmanem Altahrawy at PCDCR in Gaza on 7-9-2013.
If progress is made in the political process, the [civil society] voice of peace becomes stronger....But in a violent conflict situation, the voice of peace becomes weaker and its influence gets reduced despite the fact that it continues to exist.\textsuperscript{346} 

In the Israeli context, a discouraging reality for Palestinian civil society organizations is the pressure that the Israeli government puts on their Israeli counterparts and the measures taken to restrict both their influence and capacity to act on Palestinian related issues. Yaser Abu-Jama from the GCMHP states, for example, from his experience in the field of training and conflict resolution that the Israeli government has “decreased” the space for groups in Israel to take major protesting actions against military policies in Gaza and the West Bank.\textsuperscript{347} 

Secondly, many CSOs in Gaza are concerned about a reprisal from the Israeli authorities if they decide that a Palestinian local group or its affiliates have reached an unacceptable stage in challenging the policies of the Israeli government. Abu-Jama recalls cases when restrictions on their “freedom of movement” as a form of punishment were imposed by the government of Israel because of what they perceived as a threat to their actions in the Palestinian territories.\textsuperscript{348} Similarly, Eyad Alalmi from the PCHR points out that his organization and many civil society groups in Gaza have been facing “a whole complex system” in Israel that, undermines their efforts and make their work difficult.\textsuperscript{349} 

In the Palestinian context, a greater involvement at the Israeli-Palestinian political level seems to be undermined also by some internal considerations for civil society organizations in Gaza. The lack of civil society unity weakens the potential of this engagement: “CSOs will be influential on the political front with Israel if they form a united lobby”, Altaharwy from the PCDCR argues.\textsuperscript{350} Also, the possibility of political manipulation within the context of Israeli-Palestinian affairs represents a serious concern for civil society actors in Gaza: “CSOs can be used by the political elites for particular ends depending on the political circumstances involved.”\textsuperscript{351} Therefore, as a result of these Israeli and Palestinian factors, civil society engagement at the Israeli-Palestinian political level remains limited.

\textsuperscript{346} Interview with Hisham Abed-Alrazq at the Association of Christian Youth in Gaza on 2-10-2011. 
\textsuperscript{347} Interview with Yaser Abu-Jama at GCMHP in Gaza on 15-9-2011. 
\textsuperscript{348} Ibid. 
\textsuperscript{349} Interview with Eyad Alalmi in at PCHR in Gaza on 21-9-2011. 
\textsuperscript{350} Interview with Abed-Elmanem Altahrawy at PCDCR in Gaza on 7-9-2013. 
\textsuperscript{351} Ibid. 

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To conclude, the second research question concerning the relationship between civil society peacebuilding activities in Gaza and the broader Israeli-Palestinian political context has some significant dimensions. In the Palestinian situation, the PCHR, the GCMHP and the PCDCR suggest that some of their activities concerning conflict resolution, human rights and democracy inform and aid future political solutions in direct and indirect ways. However, based on the data gathered in the field research and the information presented in Chapter 5, the analysis above establishes that the engagement of secular civil society at the Israeli-Palestinian political level contains weaknesses. Therefore, the influence of civil society peacebuilding activities is not significant in terms of impact on the Israeli-Palestinian political context.

The reasons for this limited influence are, as discussed previously, related to both Palestinian and Israeli structures at the political and civil society levels. The failure of the Israeli-Palestinian political process, and the subsequent weakening of the civil society voice of peace, is a major issue. Furthermore, the pressure of the Israeli government on both Palestinian and Israeli civil society players, a lack of civil society unity in the Palestinian situation, fears of political manipulation of CSOs, all are critical issues that contribute to this limited role played by civil society at the Israeli-Palestinian level. These are also major factors undermining the capacity of local civil society organizations to lead a greater role in the wider Israel-Palestinian situation and provide alternatives to political failures.

Therefore, to offer a direct answer to the second research question, the relationship between the Israeli-Palestinian political context and civil society engagement in peacebuilding in Gaza is one of limited interaction. However, this situation of limited interaction requires a further critical examination, particularly concerning the issue of depoliticization of secular and nationalist civil society organizations and its current impact on the role of civil society at the Israeli-Palestinian level.

6.2.2 Depoliticization of Civil Society:

As discussed in Chapter 3, Civil Society II (CSII) aims to enable grassroots groups and citizens to challenge state power and repression. Antonio Gramsci’s notion of national struggles against the hegemony of the existing system, and popular uprisings in South America and Eastern Europe and now in the Middle East against oppressive regimes, are
central to this strong approach. On the other hand, Civil Society I (CSI) has emerged with the Western good governance agenda of the 1990s. Hence, unlike CSII and Gramsci’s theory of political and popular struggles against state injustices, cooperation between the state and civil society is deemed an essential and central component in this liberal approach of CSI. Furthermore, as Mufid Qassoum points out, depoliticization of grassroots and social forces has been equally a necessary component to maintain the neo-liberal order in the civil and political sphere.352

This research found that the CSI strategy of depoliticization has succeeded in disconnecting Palestinian local organizations from the Palestinian national project and hence weakened their active role at the Israeli-Palestinian level. Subsequently, the impact of civil society peacebuilding on the Israeli-Palestinian political context is presently limited.

As discussed in Chapter 4, social agencies played a significant role in the Palestinian struggle during the first and second phases of civil society development of the 1970s and the 1980s. This included institutional formations and national structures, and later civil society resistance and mobilization in support of the Palestinian national movement in the 1987 Intifada. The Intifada produced a process of politicization in which local organizations had challenged the oppressive policies of the Israeli government in Gaza and the West Bank. The strategies of civil society at that time sought to undermine the Israeli system of military rule in the occupied territories and resist its domination. Therefore, as discussed in Chapter 4, the actions and the activities of secular and nationalist civil society in these two phases conform to the framework of CSII and its resistance practices.

However, this research found that the participation of secular and nationalist civil society in Israeli-Palestinian political sphere as had been the case during the Intifada, and playing the dual role of social and political actors in the Israeli-Palestinian situation, experienced crucial transformation in the course of the Oslo peace process during the 1990s. In the Palestinian social context, depoliticization means the changing role of secular and nationalist civil society organizations in the Israeli-Palestinian political arena following the Oslo Agreement, and their subsequent focus on various issues within the internal Palestinian context from the 1990s onwards. Hence, promoting democracy, good governance, advocating women’s and

352 Qassoum. op. cit., no page numbers given.
child rights, capacity building and training, dialogue and mediation practices, enhancing youth participation in social change and community development, are all examples of this civil society shift from the politically motivated framework of Israeli-Palestinian politics to internal processes within the Palestinian context.

Describing this dramatic transformation in the secular and nationalist sector of civil society and associated changes, the Programmes Manager of the PCDCR Abed-Elmanem Altahrawy points out:

[During the 1987 Intifada] CSOs had a clear mandate which focused on achieving two tasks: providing relief and essential services, and second maintaining the Palestinian identity and supporting the national project of independence. This was the role that civil society played prior to Oslo. In post Oslo phase, we have come to face a very problematic situation that is: do we as CSOs work on civil rights and social issues within Palestine or do we keep our main focus on the Israeli occupation. In other words, would you prioritize civic engagement in terms of rights and community development or would you leave this task until national liberation is achieved? This is an ongoing problem among the [secular and nationalist] organizations, and it has not been resolved yet.  

Furthermore, this research found that external donors have driven this separation between social and political work in the realm of secular and nationalist civil society in Palestine since Oslo. Hence, they contributed to the creation of a new depoliticized framework for civil society, which has led to the weakened impact of civil society engagement in Gaza on the Israeli-Palestinian political context. Available evidence from the research supports this analysis. For instance, Hanan Aldalou from the PCDCR, who also works as the Assistant Director for International Relations and Funding within the organization, states that some external donors have made it clear that “they are interested in funding activities that only deal with [internal] social and civil issues, and are not interested in Israeli-Palestinian political issues.” She views this situation as irreconcilable. The idea of separation between social and political areas in Palestine is “not realistic because they both are part of a wider and complex conflict situation and politicized reality.”

Not only did the Oslo phase of the 1990s provide the context for this depoliticization process but it also introduced new institutional and civil society priorities outside the Israeli-

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353 Interview with Abed-Elmanem Altahrawy at PCDCR in Gaza on 7-9-2013.
354 Interview with Hanan Aldalou at PCDCR in Gaza on 26-8-2013.
Palestinian political arena. These were mainly concerned with the institutionalization and good governance agenda of CSI within the internal situation in Palestine. Altahrawy explains further:

> The culture of Oslo was based on the state-building project and nonviolence so, in this case, the attention of [secular and nationalist] CSOs turned to institution-building, civil work and also to, as understood in international jargons, good governance.\(^{355}\)

Therefore, secular civil society was first disconnected from the national movement and then, in line with CSI and depoliticization agendas, its direct role in Israeli-Palestinian political dynamics was re-structured into an informal and depoliticized engagement within the Palestinian situation according to the changing international strategies and good governance agenda. Hence, civil, social, legal and institutional issues became largely the main focus for secular grassroots organizations within the internal context since the Oslo process and onwards.

In this context, Edward Said’s assessment is accurate. He maintained that one of the intended effects of Oslo was the “substitution of a short-range nationalism for a longer-range social movement.” This is in order to “depoliticize Palestinian [civil] society and set it squarely within the main current American style of globalization, where the market is king, everything else irrelevant or marginal.”\(^{356}\) Also, as discussed in Chapter 4, Benoit Challand describes these crucial developments in the Palestinian secular and nationalist civil society sector as a phenomenon of “professionalization of politics”; whereby this sector “turned into professional client-oriented and elitist development institutions during the Oslo years, thus drifting away from playing a more direct political role.”\(^{357}\) According to Professor Ibrahim Ibrash, not only did the Oslo process change this direct political role by civil society players at the Israeli-Palestinian level, but it has also “de-stabilized the Palestinian national project and undermined its historical foundations.”\(^{358}\)

This process of civil society depoliticization was not only driven by Western donors and CSI forces; other internal factors also enhanced its framework. As discussed in Chapter 4, the interests of the PA, to govern strongly and exercise its power over resources and funding in

\(^{355}\) Interview with Abed-Elmanem Altahrawy at PCDCR in Gaza on 7-9-2013.


\(^{357}\) Challand. op.cit. no page numbers given

\(^{358}\) Interview with Professor Ibrahim Ibrash at the Laternia Hotel and Restaurant in Gaza on 17-9-2013.
Palestinian society post Oslo and the resulting conflicts with local organizations had contributed to this outcome. Power struggles and tensions escalated dramatically during the Oslo period between CSOs and the PA; as the latter according to Khalil Shakaki worked to "emasculate" the strong and nationalist civil society organizations coming out of the Intifada.\(^{359}\)

Moreover, in *The Emergence of a Palestinian Globalized Elite: Donors, International Organizations and Local NGOs*, Sari Hanafi and Linda Tabar provide evidence that a group of Palestinian "globalized elite" in the NGO community has supported the emergence of a depoliticized framework at the civil society level in Palestine. As Hanafi and Tabar explain, their shared characteristics have pointed to a continued opposition to the revival of civil society resistance in the Intifada and that their attitudes and approaches are informed by the international sector of civil society other than a localized agenda.\(^{360}\)

Crucially, as this research has demonstrated, a major result of this powerful process of civil society depoliticization is the current weak impact of civil society peacebuilding on the Israeli-Palestinian political context. In other words, this long process of restructuring the direct involvement of civil society in the Israeli-Palestinian political arena and the Palestinian national project has precluded a strong civil society role in peacebuilding at the Israeli-Palestinian political level.

However, while the depoliticization of civil society progressed *at the Israeli-Palestinian level*, repoliticization of secular civil society has increased in the form of factionalization at the *internal Palestinian level*. Following the Oslo Agreement in 1993, the factional competition for influence and political divisions between supporters and opponents of Oslo deepened. Civil society became a major tool and space for gaining support and seeking allies in response to the Oslo challenge and changing political landscapes. This also presents a critical challenge to civil society and its role in peacebuilding at the Israeli-Palestinian level. This is illustrated further in the following discussions concerning civil society challenges.

In the next section, the third research question is addressed.

\(^{359}\) Shakaki. op.cit., p.10.

\(^{360}\) Hanafi and Tabar. op.cit., pp.248-249.
6.3 What are the challenges to secular civil society organizations and their role in peacebuilding in Gaza from both political and civil society perspectives?

This research question seeks to build on the previous discussions in relation to the first and second research questions. Therefore, expanding on the limits to the specific peacebuilding activities undertaken by the three case study organizations as discussed before, the purpose here is to identify and analyze the challenges that face secular civil society organizations and their peacebuilding contributions in Gaza in the context of both local and political realities. This will help in understanding that while these civil society activities are important, critical challenges continue to exist and present unavoidable implications for civil society and its role in peace and human rights issues. These implications are also significant in either developing or decreasing the effectiveness of civil society approaches in Gaza. Of importance is that the following discussion draws on the criticisms of CSOs and their role in conflict situations, which have been discussed in Chapter 3.

In consideration of the data and information gathered in the field research and highlighted previously in Chapter 5 (Research Findings), the first section below focuses on identifying challenges for secular civil society organizations as seen from the point view of Hamas and Fatah leadership, and the second part explores these challenges from the perspective of civil society organizations themselves (i.e. GCMHP, PCHR, PCDCR as case studies).

6.3.1 Political Challenges:

Interviewed leaders from Hamas and Fatah have similarly emphasized and praised the growing role of secular civil society organizations in society and in internal processes aimed at national unity and conflict resolution among political parties. Senior official of Hamas, Ismael Alashqar, states clearly that civil society representatives “have made good efforts in Palestinian reconciliation” and that “Hamas considers their role to be supportive.” This applies, according to Alashqar, to also defending Palestinian rights. The opinion of Fatah leaders, on the other hand, has been more forthcoming on this issue. Diab Allouh from the High Leadership Committee of Fatah in Gaza points out that Fatah does not only appreciate and value civil society efforts but his party has also been interested in a stronger involvement

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361 Interview with Ismael Alashqar at the Palestinian Legislative Council in Gaza on 23-09-2011.

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of civil society that goes beyond “restoring national unity” and includes “the national project of [Palestinian] state-building.” According to Allouh, this is because dealing with the implications of over forty years of “Israeli colonialism and military occupation requires inclusive strategies and programmes to transform it.”

This position reflects further confidence in the role and capabilities of this nationalist and secular sector which has been acquired through the different phases of the Palestinian liberation struggle, in which local and popular organizations have been an active player in various forms. Chapter 4, which examines the evolution of Palestinian civil society, provides further illustrations of this role.

However, there are challenging aspects which major political parties in Gaza suggest and discuss openly. Hamas starts its assessment of challenges by making comments on the performance of some civil society associations from a secular and nationalist origin. Hence, Minster in the Hamas government and political leader, Ismael Radwan, urges them to commit to a better system of legal and institutional accountability. In Radwan’s own words:

Hamas and its government give complete freedom to all civil society groups and associations as long as they operate within the framework of law and order. The problem arises when the law is not followed and then some sources come and claim that we [in Hamas] are interfering with these organizations; this is not true at all and these allegations are meant to both wrong Hamas and allow these organizations to carry on without accountability and misuse of public funds... We have documented and dealt with some cases of associations from a secular and national background, and they proved guilty in a legal and professional sense; [it is related to] corruption and financial mismanagement, etc.

This interesting reference made by Radwan to corruption issues and organizational background (i.e. secular and national) sheds light on the internal division in the Palestinian civil society sector, that is discussed further in Chapters 1 and 4. Thus, one can regard Radwan’s statement as mere allegations and argue that Hamas could also be trying to

362 Interview with Diab Allouh at his home in Gaza on 27-9-2011.
363 Interview with Ismael Radwan at the Government Media Department in Gaza on 25-9-2011.
364 In short, there are civil society players and groups who are informed by secular and nationalist ideology, and thus traditionally seen as close to Fatah and other leftist factions of the PLO such as the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine and the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine. And there are also Islamic networks and social institutions which are mainly associated with Hamas and its Islamic and political framework.
promote its sector of grassroots and community groups as an alternative and a ‘good model’ at the expense of the more secular organizations in Gaza. But, Hamas has stated clearly that it is prepared to bring the details of these investigations and corruption cases into the public domain if it is necessary. Furthermore, when challenged as to whether or not the same problems existed in the Islamic sector of civil associations, Radwan dismissed this notion altogether: “there is a clear difference for us in relation to discipline and behaving in a disciplined way and in terms of observing organization and accountability.” He went on to add: “especially in financial and administrative terms.”

Some interviewees from the case studies believe, however, that Hamas uses some individual cases of financial mismanagement to “criminalize the whole nationalist and secular civil society”, as Altahrawy from the PCDCR maintains. Also, Professor Ibrahim Ibrash points out here that these accusations of corruption are sustained by the self-interests that guide some civil secular society representatives and their organizational approach: “they are not effective and work for their own interests, and some of them turned their institutions and centres into a private property.”

While there is no evidence of actual cases of corruption to discuss beyond the statements of Hamas and responses from other interviewees, the continuation of these perceptions of underperformance and mismanagement preclude the development of a stronger and more effective role for secular CSOs in society and also in peace and conflict issues. As this research demonstrates, these allegations bring about questions of credibility in political and academic circles and this subsequently undermine the position of secular civil society players and their impact on political and social processes. Ensuring better transparency standards in the institutional sphere will, therefore, help to address this crucial challenge and support a more successful and credible role for secular civil society in the context of Gaza.

Another important example where social and political dynamics overlap and present a critical challenge to civil society organizations is the resources and the international support which they access. According to the Fatah leader, Hisham Abed-Alrazq, major secular CSOs enjoy good assets and funding, which they receive from international agencies and donors. This has

365 This is confirmed to me by Radwan during the interview.
366 Ibid.
367 Interview with Abed-Elmanem Altahrawy at PCDCR in Gaza on 7-9-2013.
368 Interview with Professor Ibrahim Ibrash at the Latemia Hotel and Restaurant in Gaza on 17-9-2013.
resulted in tension between these well-resourced organizations and some local communities and groups who are “deprived, poor and lack basic survival needs.” At the heart of this tense relationship is the perceived ability of civil society to provide assistance at all times especially when hardship is widespread: “the expectations of the local people towards CSOs are particularly high when they are facing crises and suffering”, Altahrawy from the PCDCR points out.

Furthermore, this situation leads to a bigger conflict which involves local authorities and these well-resourced CSOs. The reason for this is the professional capabilities and powerful international monies and support which well-established civil society organizations in Gaza such as the GCMHP, the PCHR and the PCDCR have continued to access. Power struggles, hence, arise and add further intensity. Emphasizing this situation with its political and localized dimensions, Abed-Alrazq elaborates further:

Sometimes these strong [civil society] organizations are viewed as only helpful to those inside their structure and not to society; this is again because there is much suffering existing and poor people and groups see the employees of these associations receive high salaries in a weak and poor society...[ And because] these associations receive huge monies from abroad and have a specific role to play in social development etc., this creates also a conflict of interests and power struggles with the official authorities in the area, whether in the West Bank or Gaza.

As well as this conflict of interests, the outcome of this combined tension (governmental and local) with strong secular civil society organizations in Gaza is arousing suspicion and mistrust. Owing to Western support and the reality that civil society players are not in a position to respond to all urgent humanitarian needs in society, the suspicion that some of these informal organizations are essentially Western agents providing knowledge and data on the Palestinian situation fuels further hostility and resentment. Abed-Alrazq argues that “some Palestinians feel that these NGOs are Western tools that serve Western interests and that they only give reports and information to their Western masters so no respect should be given to them.” As he illustrates further, the origin of this tension and suspicion is “the big

369 Interview with Hisham Abed-Alrazq at the Association of Christian Youth in Gaza on 2-10-2011.
370 Interview with Abed-Elmanem Altahrawy at PCDCR in Gaza on 7-9-2013.
371 Interview with Hisham Abed-Alrazq at the Association of Christian Youth in Gaza on 2-10-2011.
amounts of Western funding granted to some of these organizations in contrast with poverty and huge needs in Palestinian society.\textsuperscript{372}

This particular challenge does not only raise the question of the ability of secular social organizations to effectively involve local and government actors in human rights and peacebuilding initiatives given these perceived frictions but it also highlights the weaknesses in civil society-government relations and links with communities in the wider conflict context of Gaza. These weak connections at the local and governmental level can affect the degree of participation and engagement in civil society activities and determine success possibilities. Achieving change in situations of conflict requires inclusive involvement and active cooperation with local society and its political representatives. Therefore, secular civil society organizations need to address these suspicions about their role in society and strengthen their relationship and dialogue with the Palestinian populations in Gaza.

The lack of independence and external political influence is also seen as a serious challenge to secular civil society from the political point of Hamas. For example, Ismael Alashqar from Hamas, has demanded the "prioritization of Palestinian interests" from all groups of civil society. Alashqar, points out that representatives of Hamas have seen that "external donors and their agendas have an influence on the workings of some Palestinian local organizations and that they accept funders' agendas and play along."\textsuperscript{373} He cites the example of the Israeli soldier Gilad Shalit who was captured by the military wing of Hamas and the public statement that the PCHR issued in June 2011 with a number of Israeli and international human rights organizations in relation to this matter. This joint statement called on Hamas and Palestinian armed groups to ensure the soldier is being treated according to international law and that he had the right to be visited by the International Committee of the Red Cross.\textsuperscript{374}

Hamas has viewed this example, first, as concrete evidence for an action that has been motivated by pressure from some international donors who are associated with external political interests and advancing a certain political position in Palestinian society. And second, Hamas considers it to also be a clear demonstration of the influence that outside

\textsuperscript{372} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{373} Interview with Ismael Alashqar at the Palestinian Legislative Council in Gaza on 23-09-2011.
funders have on some secular CSOs in Gaza: “this leads to a condemnation of their act because we are under occupation and there is the suffering of seven thousand Palestinian prisoners in Israeli prisons, why did [the PCHR and the signatories of the statement] they not talk about it?”, Alashqar asks.\(^\text{375}\)

The PCHR, on the other hand, suggests that Hamas and some factions in Gaza misunderstood their position concerning the Shalit case and saw it from a conspiratorial point of view. Hence, they initiated a polarized campaign against the organization. “The propaganda was that the PCHR is demanding the release of the captured soldier, it is not true we only talked about the importance of international law in dealing with him”, the Director of the PCHR Legal Unit maintains.\(^\text{376}\) The particular question of visiting the soldier also made Hamas and their militants suspicious of a conspiracy that involved the support of some civil society actors in order to, as they saw it, locate the captured soldier and help the Israeli army release him. The situation became tense following that statement and the strong protest of Hamas: “all our staff felt challenged and that they were in a dangerous situation but thankfully it [i.e. the crisis] passed without any major problems”, Alalmi recalls.\(^\text{377}\)

However, confirming external political influence as a critical challenge for civil society independence, some representatives from the secular civil society sector stated in their interviews that certain Western donors have imposed their own political agendas on civil society organizations in Gaza. The boycott of Hamas and its government is an important case in point. For example, USAID as a powerful donor agency, made funding to CSOs in Gaza conditional upon their commitment to boycotting Hamas and isolating the political leadership of the movement. “USAID has a no-contact policy in relation to the Hamas government in Gaza. They have put a clear condition to CSOs that dealing with the political leaders of Hamas is not allowed”, Altahrawy from the PCDCR points out.\(^\text{378}\)

Hanan Adalou from the PCDCR illustrates this point further:

\(^{\text{375}}\) Ibid.
\(^{\text{376}}\) Interview with Eyad Alalmi at PCHR in Gaza on 21-9-2011.
\(^{\text{377}}\) Ibid.
\(^{\text{378}}\) Interview with Abed-Elmanem Altahrawy at PCDCR in Gaza on 7-9-2013.
Some donors impose their own policy on our work. Certain funding agencies refuse to recognize Hamas government and thus they want us to boycott it as well. This causes problems for us because how can we provide support to prisoners without coming into contact with the government agencies [of Hamas] or promote the law without involving the government officials and institutions? Therefore, these donors impose such unhelpful conditions on us and it undermines our work. This [also] creates trust issues for many organizations here in society. Some people [for example] would refuse to deal with a particular civil society association because it follows, as it is said, foreign agendas.  

This situation produces serious consequences. Feeling threatened and challenged by these “foreign agendas”, Hamas and other factions may react by intensifying their attempts to emasculate and control secular civil society institutions. Furthermore, making funding conditional upon the isolation of major players discourages stronger future involvement by civil society organizations in politically-oriented processes inside Gaza. Ultimately, it weakens the interest of Palestinian social groups in the internal political context. Furthermore, this example involving Hamas and USAID validates the critique that civil society is currently used as another area for policy intervention as discussed in Chapter 3. Since 2006, the U.S. and Israel refused to accept the election victory of Hamas and have attempted to weaken the government of Hamas by imposing a blockade on Gaza and dividing Palestinian factions and territories. This policy has also been brought into the civil society domain to ensure implementation at all levels.

In addition, this research found that there are two central issues concerning the challenge of external interference and lack of civil society independence. The first is that Palestinian civil society structures lack protection and support in the context of a sovereign and independent state, and this contributes significantly to their vulnerability to external influence and intervention. “The fact that we don’t have a free country and independent government [in Palestine] that can protect its social structures and fund its own civil society, opens the door for external interventions and donors to impose their agenda,” Professor Ibrash points out. These donors are aided by their power and financial resources.

And second, maintaining their strength and presence is a critical concern for major secular civil society organizations within the volatile and conflicting context of Gaza. Hence,

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379 Interview with Hanan Aldalou at PCDCR in Gaza on 26-8-2013.
380 Interview with Professor Ibrahim Ibrash at the Laternia Hotel and Restaurant in Gaza on 17-9-2013.
international funders and donors represent a key asset in this process. Therefore, civil society
dependence on international funding “makes them hostage to the interests of outside donors
since most NGOs are concerned with their own existence” as Professor Ibrash elaborates
further. As a result of this funding dependency and absence of state protection, external
intervention in civil society workings becomes possible and undermines its stance in the local
situation and role in political processes. It also precludes some possibilities of civil support
for peacebuilding and conflict transformation as discussed before. This remains a critical
challenge for secular CSOs in Gaza.

Taken together, allegations of corruption and impact on civil society credibility, tensions with
local and deprived communities, weak relations and power struggles with local authorities,
suspicions of playing a foreign role and trust issues, lack of civil society independence,
political influence and intervention by external donors, all reflect the challenges to secular
civil society as identified by political representatives from Hamas and Fatah in Gaza. As
discussed earlier, all these challenges have a negative impact on the role of civil society and
its contributions to peacebuilding in various ways in Gaza.

The remaining challenges to CSOs and their peacebuilding activities from the point of view
of the three case studies in Gaza are identified and analyzed in the following section.

6.3.2 Civil Society Challenges:

Staff members and field workers from the GCMHP, the PCHR and the PCDCR have agreed
jointly that the continued insecurity and violence and the Israeli military siege on Gaza
remains at the heart of the challenges which affect their engagement in peace and human
rights issues. The Coordinator of the GCMHP School Mediation Programme Rawya Hamam
points out that their work of trauma recovery and conflict resolution helps essentially to
support peace efforts at the local level but it does not resolve the fundamental problem of
human rights denial and injustice in Gaza. Relying on her long experience in the field of
community mental health and therapy, Hamam explains further:

It is true that we provide support and work with young people but if they continue to
live with military siege, unemployment and bad economic situation, sounds of

381 Ibid.
military airplanes from the sky, all these represent continued fears and make young people fearful and think of the need of protecting and defending themselves...Therefore they cannot think of peace under these conditions but if justice is achieved then a comprehensive peace could be possible.\(^{382}\)

This negative impact of military occupation and continuation of violence on peoples’ lives and their basic human needs extends to the wider societal and economic arenas, which then reflects on the capacity of civil society groups and their support for peace and human rights.

There have been challenging aspects to this unstable situation. From a psycho-economic point of view, poverty and unemployment caused by the blockade and the collapse of the national economy “contribute also to psychological problems” among the local populations in Gaza.\(^{383}\) This relationship between psychological problems and conflict situations is explained further by the former Director of GCMHP Eyad Sarraj. Through his knowledge of human behaviour and political psychology, Sarraj points out that Israeli military policies and the absence of economic opportunities have had dangerous affects not only on adults but also on younger generations and their potential engagement in acts of politically motivated violence: “young kids turn away in this case to Hamas and their militants, powerful people with guns.”\(^{384}\) This has made the civil society search and struggle for peace and justice more elusive.

Israeli state violence against Gaza is also considered to be a challenge to civil society engagement as well as a cause for traumas in Gaza. The Coordinator of the Child Protection Programme Deena Alanqar from the PCDCR points out that “the continued Israeli aggression is a big obstacle for our particular involvement with children, and it is the main reason for the children’s psychological problems here.”\(^{385}\)

What makes Israeli military policies more problematic and destructive is the support that the Israeli government has been receiving from the U.S. and other key international players. This reality creates not only a culture of militancy but also isolation and extremism in both thinking and action among some groups and individuals in Gaza society. In addition to poverty and unemployment, “these things in essence are a pretext for the creation of an ideal

\(^{382}\) Interview with Rawya Hamam at GCMHP in Gaza on 12-09-2011.

\(^{383}\) Interview with Yaser Abu-Jama at GCMHP in Gaza on 15-9-2011.

\(^{384}\) Interview with Eyad Sarraj at the Summer Cafe of GCMHP in Gaza on 10-09-2011.

\(^{385}\) Interview with Deena Alanqar at PCDCR in Gaza on 15-8-2013.
environment for radicalization." Essentially, such damaging results contradict civil society approaches to peace and democracy.

Elaborating further on these critical dilemmas in the context of Israel and civil society in Gaza, the Programmes Manager of PCDCR Abed-Elmanem Altahrawy states:

> Israeli occupation of Palestinian land and the Israeli war on Gaza always disrupt our work and force us as well to change our agendas, and come up with emergency work plans to meet the arising and immediate needs of the people. This includes victims of violence, demolished homes, injured and homeless people, more traumatised children, and so on. Such a situation [of conflict and military occupation] *contradicts our vision and what we are trying to achieve* because we cannot work on democracy and mobilization issues while people are suffering and their homes are being destroyed. [For the same reason] *I cannot go to an area that has 300 houses demolished and talk to the local people there about peace and human rights*, while I see that their basic human rights are not respected. *(Emphasis added)*

Furthermore, Israeli restrictions on freedom of movement and travel cause serious problems for the professional contact between staff in Gaza and their organizational counterparts in the West Bank and prevent also opportunities for training outside Gaza, which would help to develop their approaches and programmes. “We lack further training in some particular areas such as more skills and capacity building”, argues Hanan Aldalou of the PCDCR. “We have a branch in the West Bank and for the last six years we have not been able to meet face to face”, adds Altahrawy from the PCDCR. All this creates further challenges for civil society and undermines the possibility of institutional progress and development in Gaza.

Field workers and employees of the PCHR, the PCDCR and the GCMHP recognize also a significant challenge to their organizations and their involvement within the internal political context of Gaza. This is related to the political attempts by Hamas and Fatah and other smaller parties to factionalize civil society and contain it. As discussed in response to the second research question, while the process of depoliticization of civil society progressed at the Israeli-Palestinian level following the initiation of the Oslo project, repoliticization of civil society has increased in the form of factionalization at the internal Palestinian level. This

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386 Interview with Hamdi Shaqora at PCHR in Gaza on 18-9-2011.
387 Interview with Abed-Elmanem Altahrawy at PCDCR in Gaza on 7-9-2013.
388 Interview with Hanan Aldalou at PCDCR in Gaza on 26-8-2013.
389 Interview with Abed-Elmanem Altahrawy at PCDCR in Gaza on 7-9-2013.
particular challenge of factionalism and the impact on secular civil society and its peacebuilding role in Gaza is discussed in the following section.

6.3.3 Factionalization of Civil Society:

There have been repeated attempts by forces from Hamas and Fatah to extend their dominance to include secular civil society organizations and institutions in Gaza for containment reasons and narrow political gains: “both factions have been trying to control civil society groups in political terms”, as Eyad Sarraj remarks. Some various measures are employed by the two factions to use their power and authority in Palestinian society to achieve this goal. Closing NGO facilities, reducing the room for freedom of expression and creating alternative social structures are examples of these controlling measures. Not only the intervention of militant and political factions is intimidating to the social organizations but it has also resulted in a radical restructuring at the institutional and leadership level in certain cases. According to Hanan Aldalou from the PCDCR, “some associations have experienced a major change in their structure and management because of factional interference. This is part of their containment efforts towards civil society organizations.”

The historical relationship between the political factions and social structures in the Palestinian situation, and the fact that some leaders and staff in these local organizations came from a political and nationalist background, help to interpret further this challenge of civil society factionalization. As discussed in Chapter 4, the PLO and other major national factions supported actively the creation of social institutions in the occupied territories of Gaza and the West Bank during the 1970s. This strong support for institutional growth came about as a result of the changing political framework of the PLO and its acceptance of building a national authority and a future Palestinian state in the occupied territories. Service provisions to the occupied population and leading popular resistance against Israeli military occupation, mobilizing for the national liberation struggle under the leadership of the PLO, and gaining factional influence were also important goals in this historical process of institution-building.

390 Interview with Eyad Sarraj at the Summer Cafe of GCMHP in Gaza on 10-09-2011.
391 Ibid.
392 Interview with Hanan Aldalou at PCDCR in Gaza on 26-8-2013.
However, following the signing of the Oslo Agreement in 1993, the factional competition for influence and political divisions between supporters and opponents of Oslo have radically increased. Civil society structures came to represent a major tool and space for enhancing support and seeking allies in response to the Oslo challenge and changing political conditions. In this context, Professor Ibrash views the historical association between the social groupings and political factions before Oslo as a critical weakness, and it helps in understanding the current factional and civil society issues in Gaza. According to Ibrash:

When the PA was created after the Oslo Agreement and Palestinian political differences deepened, the functional role of these [secular and nationalist] local organizations had changed and they also turned into a contested space for factional disputes and competition over influence. [As a result] a large number of their staff is former members of political parties. In fact, the historical relationship between these informal groups and factions, and their direct connections today, represent weaknesses in these social organizations and this is a central point.... [i.e.] when CSOs are ideologized and factionalized, they lose their ability to deliver on their basic functions and roles in society, and their independence and ability to work with larger constituencies also diminish.  

In this situation of challenges to secular civil society and its contributions to peacebuilding in Gaza, this research has led to some significant conclusions. While the depoliticization of nationalist and secular civil society progressed at the Israeli-Palestinian level following the Oslo process as previously discussed, repoliticization of civil society has increased in the form of factionalization at the internal Palestinian level. What is particularly important here is the impact that this process of civil society factionalization has on the role of secular civil society in peacebuilding at the Israeli-Palestinian level.

The research has found that the factionalization of the social organizations and the power of the factions in the institutional sphere prevent an independent role for secular civil society in conflict transformation at the Israeli-Palestinian level. Although some civil society organizations lead peacebuilding and human rights activities, a large number of these organizations are agents for political groups more than being CSOs in a practical sense. Because of the integration of the social strand into the factions’ structures in order to support

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393 Interview with Professor Ibrahim Ibrash at the Laternia Hotel and Restaurant in Gaza on 17-9-2013.

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their political strategies, "civil society has come to serve factional agendas more than community interests."\textsuperscript{394}

Furthermore, because the Palestinian national struggle has historically been led by political factions, the main point of reference in terms of issues of peace and conflict with Israel will continue to be in the hands of the Palestinian factions. In other words, civil society players lack the ability to facilitate and take major actions within the wider Israeli-Palestinian political context without the agreement of the political factions. The following statement by the interviewed Fatah leader Hisham Abed-Alrazq elaborates further:

\begin{quote}
We are not functioning in a state in the Palestinian context and we [Palestinians] are still engaged in a national liberation struggle led by Palestinian political and military factions; hence, civil society organizations cannot gain a stronger role or stronger presence in the Israeli-Palestinian political situation, or even bypass these factions because they represent the leadership of the national liberation struggle.\textsuperscript{395}
\end{quote}

In this context, not only civil society players lack the "political will" to develop an alternative horizon at the broader political level with Israel but Palestinian factions are not also "providing civil society with the support it needs to do so."\textsuperscript{396} Furthermore, civil society will remain less influential in the political arena of Israeli-Palestinian issues as long as the "power of factionalism over civil society organizations" continues to rule and dominate.\textsuperscript{397} Therefore, in addition to depoliticization, the capacity of secular CSOs in Gaza to lead an independent and strong role in peacebuilding at the Israeli-Palestinian level is undermined by the factionalization of civil society.

As a result, the identity of secular and nationalist civil society in Gaza will continue to evolve according to the politics of factionalization in the social arena. In other words, it does not possess its own distinctive and separate identity. Hence, the sphere of secular and nationalist civil society appears to be a reproduction of the political society and the factional agents who founded the social agencies during the liberation struggle for national and political reasons.\textsuperscript{398}

\textsuperscript{394}Interview with Abed-Elmanem Altahrawy at PCDCR in Gaza on 7-9-2013.
\textsuperscript{395}Interview with Hisham Abed-Alrazq at the Association of Christian Youth in Gaza on 2-10-2011.
\textsuperscript{396}Interview with Yaser Abu-Jama at GCMHP in Gaza on 15-9-2011.
\textsuperscript{397}Interview with Abed-Elmanem Altahrawy at PCDCR in Gaza on 7-9-2013.
\textsuperscript{398}This point was also highlighted by Professor Ibrahim Ibrash during the interview at the Laternia Hotel and Restaurant in Gaza on 17-9-2013.
It reflects factional tensions, competition for influence, survival needs, lack of unity and power struggles within its own structures.

Finally, some major points should be emphasized and reiterated here before this discussion concerning the third research question is concluded.

From a political perspective, while Hamas and Fatah have acknowledged clearly and openly that the various functions and roles of civil society groups are supportive and valuable, they also made some critical observations on certain aspects. As discussed before, Hamas’s allegations of corruption in the secular sector of civil society bring about questions of credibility and this, as a result, undermines the position of civil society players and their impact on internal political and social issues. Ensuring better transparency standards in the institutional sphere will, therefore, help to support a more credible role for civil society in Gaza.

Highlighting another significant challenge, Fatah has spoken of the issue of support from Western funding agencies and the governmental and local tensions it creates for secular civil society. Also, the international financial aid for strong civil society organizations in Gaza leads to a bigger power struggle with the authorities in local areas, who view these well-resourced organizations and their international allies as competitors and alternatives to their power base. This has facilitated suspicions, critical questions about external donors’ priorities and Western interests, and providing information and playing dual roles set by outside powers. Therefore, to support effectiveness and success in peacebuilding and other areas in Gaza, civil society organizations need to address these suspicions about their role in society and strengthen their link and dialogue with the Palestinian populations, and also develop a more workable relationship with local authorities in Gaza.

The challenge of civil society dependency on external funding has been analyzed further in the context of intervention and external political influence. Isolating Hamas and its government with the participation of civil society organizations was discussed as a significant example of this intervention by international governments and donors. As explained before, making funding conditional upon the isolation of major political players discourages increased involvement by civil society organizations in politically oriented processes inside
Gaza. Hence, it weakens the interest of secular social groups in the internal political context, and eventually undermines possibilities of political change and peacebuilding.

Civil society dependency on external funding and resulting consequences have been analyzed further in terms of the absence of state protection for civil society and also the main interest of many CSOs in Gaza in maintaining their survival and existence, and how this reality makes them more vulnerable to external influence and intervention.

From a civil society perspective, the GCMHP, the PCDCR and the PCHR have agreed jointly that the continued blockade by Israel and subsequent instability present significant challenges to their peacebuilding and human rights engagement in Gaza. The GCMHP has explained, for example, that their trauma recovery activities and peace education in schools can have a limited effect if peace and justice are not promoted in the Palestinian context. They also pointed to the relationship between the psychological problems, sustained through the blockade on Gaza and a lack of freedom of movement, and stronger participation by young people in politically motivated violence. This reality has created tangible challenges and difficulties for sustaining a positive long-term impact and enhancing the engagement of youth groups in civil society processes.

Also, the military policies and measures by the Israeli occupation, supported by the U.S. and other international powers, lead to radicalization and extremism which undermines and fundamentally contradicts the peaceful and democratic approaches promoted by civil society organizations. Furthermore, Israeli restrictions on freedom of movement and travel prevent institutional development and effective communication between civil society organizations in Gaza and their counterparts in the West Bank.

Finally, to connect the challenges articulated by political leaders from Hamas and Fatah and the challenges discussed by representatives from the PCHR, the PCDCR and the GCMHP within the internal context in Gaza, the previous discussions interpreted further the process of civil society factionalization in its current and historical forms. As discussed before, while the process of depoliticization of civil society progressed at the Israeli-Palestinian level following the initiation of the Oslo project, repoliticization of civil society has increased in the form of factionalization at the internal Palestinian level. This research has presented some revealing conclusions in relation to the impact of this process on the role of secular civil society in
peacebuilding at the Israeli-Palestinian level. These conclusions have suggested that the factionalization of the social organizations and the power of factionalism over the social agencies in the internal Palestinian situation preclude an independent role for secular civil society in conflict transformation in the Israeli-Palestinian political context. As discussed before, the depoliticization of civil society during the Oslo years has been also found as another major factor in this situation. These important research outcomes are outlined together in the following final section.

Conclusion:

This chapter is concerned with a significant function which has mainly involved answering the three research questions stated in Chapter 1, and using the research findings and the theories of civil society and peacebuilding explored in Chapters 2 and 3 for analytical purposes. In responding to the research questions, some major research outcomes have come to light. These are summarized below.

The first research question (i.e. identifying the role that secular civil society organizations have been playing in promoting peacebuilding in Gaza) has established that the activities of the GCMHP, the PCDCR and the PCHR continue to contribute to the following civil society processes: trauma recovery; conflict resolution; dialogue and mediation; capacity building; representations of victims; advocacy and lobbying in the framework of human rights; democratic practices; structural reforms; and policy change at the governmental level. All these processes essentially contribute to peacebuilding in Gaza in significant and various ways. Equally important, limits to these specific peacebuilding activities undertaken by the three case study organizations, have been identified and analysed. For example, these include: continuation of violence; lack of human rights; instability in Gaza; and Israeli obstacles.

Crucially, the first research question also applied the complementary approach to peacebuilding and demonstrated its validity and usefulness, employing the case of Gaza as a guiding example. Specific conceptual aspects of theories (by John Paul Lederach, Jonathan Goodhand, Nick Lever, Johan Galtung, Catherine Barnes, Martina Fischer, Paul Van Tongeren, Luc Reychler, Herbert Kelman and Beatrice Pouligny) have been all applied to peacebuilding activities by the GCMHP, the PCHR and the PCDCR. Therefore, the theme of
complementarity in peacebuilding strengthened and unified the analysis of the three case study organizations. In this context, a complementary approach to peacebuilding has been found to be instrumental in understanding and analyzing peacebuilding processes in a complex conflict situation like Gaza. This is the first research outcome.

In discussing the second research question (i.e. the relationship between secular civil society peacebuilding in Gaza and the Israeli-Palestinian political context) two significant and revealing conclusions have been established. Firstly, the influence of civil society activities on the Israeli-Palestinian context is limited. Secondly, there is a range of reasons for this reduced influence, and they are related to both Palestinian and Israeli realities. These include, for example, the failure of the Israeli-Palestinian political process and Israeli policies and imposed restrictions on both Palestinian and Israeli civil society players involved in human rights and peace issues.

This weakened relationship between civil society engagement and the Israeli-Palestinian political context has been analyzed further within wider theoretical and empirical considerations. It has been found that the Oslo process constituted the overall context and roots of the depoliticization of the nationalist civil society organizations in Gaza and the West Bank. In other words, the culture of Oslo provided the content and background in which secular civil society experienced dramatic transformation in terms of its national and political role in the previous years. Therefore, as this research demonstrates, this process of depoliticizing and restructuring the direct involvement of civil society in the Israeli-Palestinian political arena and the Palestinian national project has also precluded a strong civil society role in peacebuilding at the Israeli-Palestinian political level.

In answering the last research question (i.e. challenges to secular civil society organizations and their peacebuilding role in Gaza from political and civil society perspectives) and expanding on the limits to specific peacebuilding activities undertaken by the three case study organizations as discussed in the first and second research questions, the research has established that CSOs and their contributions to peacebuilding face significant dilemmas. The challenges are complex and they involve a combination of political, national, external, and factional dimensions.
To summarize, the critical challenges facing secular civil society at the internal Palestinian level in Gaza include: (a) allegations of mismanagement and corruption; (b) tensions with local and deprived communities; (c) power struggles with local authorities; (d) civil society dependency on international funding; (e) suspicions and trust issues; (f) external political influence and the imposition of conditions and political agendas by some international donors; (g) lack of state protection and survival needs; (h) factionalization and the negative impacts on social structures. At the Israeli level, the challenges confronting secular civil society in Gaza involve: (a) Israeli military occupation; (b) Israeli blockade on Gaza and the negative implications on civil society approaches to lasting peace and human rights; (c) Israeli restrictions on freedom of movement and their critical effect on institutional development and cooperation.

As analyzed before, while the process of depoliticization of civil society advanced at the Israeli-Palestinian level following the initiation of the Oslo process, repoliticization of secular civil society has increased in the form of factionalization at the internal Palestinian level. Therefore, as this research demonstrates, the factionalization of civil society and the power of the political factions over CSOs have prevented an independent role for secular civil society in conflict transformation in the wider Israeli-Palestinian political context. This is the third research outcome.

These research outcomes reveal a crucial re-consideration of the research hypothesis in this thesis. Originally, the hypothesis claimed that "secular and nationalist civil society organizations have played an active role in peacebuilding in Gaza at both local and political levels, and encountered complex challenges." Given the investigations of this research study and the research outcomes, it is necessary to revise this hypothesis. This means that the thesis has demonstrated that secular civil society organizations like GCMHP, PCHR and PCDCR have played an active role in local peacebuilding activities in Gaza and a less effective role at the broader Israeli-Palestinian political level for reasons of depoliticization and factionalization, and also other factors as previously discussed. Therefore, it is accurate to revise this hypothesis and conclude instead that: secular and nationalist civil society organizations have played an active and leading role in peacebuilding at the local level in Gaza and a less influential and effective role at the political level, and continue to encounter complex challenges at both levels.
The last chapter reviews the research process and summarizes the final conclusions.
Chapter 7: Final Conclusions

7.1 Objectives of The Thesis:

The tragedy of Palestine has been evolving ever since 1948 and it has taken many different forms. These are historical, geographical, national, revolutionary, political, military, peaceful, violent and also that of fundamental denial. The history of the region is also deeply embedded in the European colonial enterprise in the Middle East during the era of the First and Second World Wars. In November 1917, the Balfour Declaration of the British government came to promise the Jewish Zionist movement a homeland in Palestine. Demonstrating a strong commitment to the Zionist quest for the colonialisation of Palestine, the Declaration stated:

His Majesty's government view with favour the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people, and will use their best endeavours to facilitate the achievement of this object.\(^9\)

This Declaration “changed the course of Middle East history forever” as the Israeli historian Avi Shlaim describes it.\(^{400}\) According to the official Israeli narrative, Zionist militias and the Israeli army won the 1948 War for independence and created the State of Israel. This State represents, as the narrative suggests, a national homeland for Jewish people who suffered discrimination and existential threats in Europe. No formal acknowledgment is offered for refugees expelled in 1948 and in 1967, Palestinian loss of land, torture, killing, military occupation, and resulting deaths. However, as the powerful book *The Ethnic Cleansing of Palestine* shows, some Israeli New Historians like Ilan Pappe have challenged the official account of the creation of Israel and re-written it. Hence, this has presented a positive academic and historical contribution towards the acknowledgment of the dispossession and brutalization of uprooted Palestinians.\(^{401}\)

For Palestinian people, the establishment of Israel in 1948 has always meant the tragic loss of their beloved land of Palestine, irrespective of their leadership shortcomings and failures of

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Arab leaders to effectively challenge the Zionist colonial project in the region. The fall of Palestine has led to the persisting Nakba. Therefore, from one generation to another, it brings about painful memories of massacres and forced exile, and exodus of 700,000 Palestinians caused by Israeli military forces. In her critique of Zionism, Judith Butler emphasizes that any future coexistence between Palestinians and Israelis "can only begin with the dismantling of political Zionism" which has been maintained by state violence and caused "the massive disposessions of Palestinians in 1948, the appropriation of land in 1967, and the recurrent confiscations of Palestinians lands."^402

If put in a rigid sense, the Israeli and Palestine narratives seem to be irreconcilable and dividing but human suffering is central to both experiences. However, the unconditional support of the U.S. for Israel and injustices in Palestine serves to deepen this irreconcilability today. Further, there is the inaccurate Orientalist perspective that presents the Palestinian issue in Western discourse as a conflict between Jews and "violent" Muslims who want to liquidate Israel and drive Jewish people into the sea. Also, as Edward Said’s Orientalism demonstrates, another misrepresentation promoted by Orientalists associated with Western power and colonialism is that Arab Palestinians and Jewish Israelis are part of a wider front for the continuation of the “battle” between Islam and the West.^403 Therefore, displacement and self-determination as the essence of the Palestinian tragedy are overlooked and ignored. Drawing attention to a gripping contradiction in Jewish suffering in the past and current Israeli repression against Palestinians, Said concludes that Palestinians became “the victims of the victims, the refugees of the refugees.”^404 Furthermore, the British intellectual and novelist John Berger points out that what has been happening to Palestinians is a “careful destruction of a people and a promised nation. And around this destruction there are small words and evasive silence.”^405

In this thesis, the failure of international powers and political leaders in Israel and Palestine to generate alternatives to this destruction and conflict sparked a strong interest in civil society. In other words, looking at the secular social sector as a supporting case, exploring the role of civil society organizations in peacebuilding in Gaza and associated challenges became the


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main focus of the thesis. The overall purpose for this thesis has also been concerned with providing knowledge about secular and nationalist civil society organizations in Gaza and their contributions to peacebuilding at the local and political level.

This purpose translated into a research proposal, which formulated central research questions and objectives for this study. The research questions that this thesis has aimed to address were:

- What role do Palestinian secular civil society organizations play in promoting peacebuilding in Gaza?
- What is the relationship between secular civil society peacebuilding and the broader Israeli-Palestinian political context?
- What are the challenges to secular civil society organizations and their peacebuilding role in Gaza from both political and civil society perspectives?

The research objectives for this thesis have also focused on:

- Studying the development of Palestinian civil society and its role in the Palestinian struggle.
- Exploring ways in which Palestinian secular civil society in Gaza can contribute to peacebuilding.
- Investigating the influence of Palestinian secular civil society organizations and their engagement in peace and conflict issues on the Israeli-Palestinian political context.
- Identifying the challenges that secular civil society organizations face in Gaza, especially those concerning issues of conflict, violence, military occupation, external donors, factionalism and politics.

7.2 Review of Research Process:

As explained in Chapter 1 (Thesis Introduction), a general research proposal was constructed in the initial stage of this research project. It asserted that the primary goal of this thesis was concerned with exploring the contributions of secular civil society organizations to peacebuilding in Gaza at a political and local level, and the resulting challenges that they
have faced in both arenas. Therefore, to respond to this goal, the research proposal also developed the following concepts: (a) purpose of the research; (b) brief introduction to the relationship between civil society and peacebuilding; (c) research hypothesis; (d) central research questions; (e) research objectives; (f) case studies; (g) general methodology; (h) field research.

To deal with the research questions, consulting literature in terms of civil society and peacebuilding conceptualizations became also essential in the initial phase. This materialized in Chapter 2 (Principles of Peacebuilding) and Chapter 3 (Theories of Civil society and Connections with Peacebuilding). These two chapters have provided a clear theoretical understanding of the two central themes in this thesis: civil society and peacebuilding. They also introduced the main conceptual model (i.e. complementary approach) used in this research study. As Chapters 2 and 3 demonstrated, the theoretical process in this study consisted of three stages: (a) presenting and critiquing the liberal peacebuilding framework; (b) providing an alternative complementary approach to peacebuilding; (c) clarifying and establishing the role of civil society in peacebuilding processes.

Employing the peacebuilding literature, the discussions also emphasized the role of civil society players in conflict transformation in the context of ongoing conflict situations and war-torn societies. This particular emphasis on conflict situations was important because the civil society organizations examined as case studies in this research have been operating and involved in peacebuilding activities within the context of the ongoing Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Furthermore, Chapter 3 provided a critique of civil society and its negative aspects (e.g. contributions to neoliberal agendas, policy interventions, authoritarianism, conflict escalation, competition for funding, and undemocratic practices in some Western and non-Western cases). All these significant conceptualizations have proved very useful for the analysis of peacebuilding activities by the three case studies of the GCMHP, the PCHR and the PCDCR.

Nonetheless, to generate further coherence, the developing thesis needed strong foundations by means of background and knowledge of Palestinian civil society and its evolution. Chapter 4 (Origins and Development of Palestinian Civil Society) addressed this important aspect. The chapter introduced the main features of Palestinian social structures prior to 1948, and discussed phases 1, 2 and 3 of Palestinian social agencies in Gaza and the West Bank from
the late 1960s to the 1990s when the Oslo Peace Agreement was signed. The relationship between the Palestinian national movement, represented by the political factions under the PLO leadership, and nationalist social organizations was discussed in some detail. This discussion was helpful in understanding the politicized nature of secular grassroots associations and interpreting their role at the time in the context of the Gramscian philosophy of CSII. CSII aims to enable grassroots groups and citizens to challenge state power and repression. On the other hand, CSI has emerged with the Western good governance agenda of the 1990s. Unlike CSII and Gramsci’s theory of political and popular struggles against state hegemony, depoliticization of the social organizations and cooperation between the state and civil society is deemed an essential and central component in this liberal approach of CSI.

Chapter 4 also examined the transformation of Palestinian civil society post-Oslo Agreement (i.e. phase 3) and the impact of external donors and their liberal and depoliticization agendas of CSI on the nationalist civil society organizations in the Palestinian situation. To provide a more comprehensive perspective, Chapter 4 explored the emergence of Islamic community associations and their historical association with the Muslim Brotherhood and Hamas in the Palestinian situation, and discussed also the failure of the Oslo peace process. This was useful in contextualizing the social and political situation in which secular civil society in Gaza is functioning and facing critical challenges.

After laying out these theoretical and practical foundations in Chapters 2, 3 and 4, it became equally necessary to plan the field research. Initially, two case studies were selected (the GCMHP and the PCHR) and the rationale for selecting these two organizations was clarified in Chapters 1 and 5. To briefly reiterate, the main reason for selecting these case studies was because the principles of peacebuilding and civil society connections with processes aimed at supporting conflict transformation, explored in Chapter 2 and Chapter 3, conformed to some of the goals and activities of these case study organizations. More specifically and as explained in Chapter 1, the decision to focus solely on the secular sector of civil society was taken for some important reasons. These included the realities that Islamic social institutions work mostly to address significant social and humanitarian needs of Palestinian society in Gaza. Hence, they are not engaged in peacebuilding activities such as official and non-official mediation, political dialogue and joint projects with Israeli organizations in the field of peace and human rights.
On the other hand, secular civil society organizations have been leading processes in these areas and facilitating broader activities of conflict transformation. Therefore, they met a major objective of this research project that sought to explore civil society contributions to peacebuilding in the Palestinian context of Gaza. The engagement of secular civil society associations in political issues met also a significant objective of this study which was concerned with examining the relationship between civil society peacebuilding and the wider Israeli-Palestinian political context, and the resulting challenges at both levels.

As explained further in Chapter 5 (Case Studies and Research Findings), the first field research trip to Gaza conducted in August 2011 lasted 6 weeks and the journey to undertake field research included unpredictable and significant dimensions. The unpredictability was represented in the ongoing instability in political and security terms in Gaza and in the wider situation of uprisings against repressive regimes and dictators in the Middle East, who have been supported by the U.S. and some Western powers for decades. The significance came from the fact that this field research had provided me with unique access to information and material in relation to the topics of this research study.

As the field research progressed, it became clear that the challenges encountered by secular civil society organizations in Gaza are complex and they involve political, factional, institutional, external and national dimensions. Therefore, investigating deeper these multidimensional challenges became essential since it would strengthen the contribution to knowledge in this thesis. Therefore, the Palestinian Centre for Democracy and Conflict Resolution (PCDCR) was selected as a third case study and the important element of the challenges was also added to the research hypothesis. Similar to the PCHR and the GCMHP, the PCDCR is a secular civil society organization and it has been leading civil society activities in the field of peace, conflict resolution and human rights.

Seeking to gather more information and enhance the research analysis, a follow-up research visit to Gaza was made in August 2013 and based on the learning and data collected from the two previous case studies in the year of 2011, the interviews with the PCDCR in 2013 pursued and focused on some particular issues. These included, for instance, the relationship between external donors and secular civil society, and the impact of depoliticization and factionalization on the secular civil society sector in Gaza and its peacebuilding role. Furthermore, to provide a more critical perspective on civil society and political issues in
Gaza, an interview was conducted with the prominent Professor Ibrahim Ibrash from Al-
Azhar University in Gaza. Professor Ibrash provided his helpful insights and academic views
on Palestinian politics and the secular civil society organizations, and challenges. The total
number of interviews conducted during the two field research trips was 14.

The methodology employed for this thesis proved crucial to the task of collecting and
generating data. Prior to the field research, further planning and considerations were given to
methodology and its utilization. Therefore, the research process included an intensive
consultation on methodological issues. Views and proposed research methods of
distinguished academics were studied and assessed. As explained further in Chapter 1, these
included Eric Drever, Fritz Strack, Leonard Martin, William Foddy and Maria Smyth. Fritz
Strack and Leonard Martin suggest, for example, that the use of questionnaires and surveys
could be problematic especially if instability was involved in the place where field research is
undertaken. Revisiting and contacting the respondent for further explanations is “typically not
available” and it “may even be discouraged for the sake of standardization.” Therefore,
with their flexibility and better clarification possibilities, semi-structured interviews were
employed as a primary research method for this thesis and Eric Drever’s framework was
adopted as a central approach to methodology.

The following definition by Drever was very helpful in understanding the precise meaning of
interviewing in research processes and subsequent components:

The interview is a dialogue between two people, and its structure is shaped by the
process of interaction: the interplay of question and answer, taking turns in
speaking, both of you knowing what has been already discussed as you progress
through a series of topics...The processes of analysis and interpretation involve
dismantling this natural structure and reconstituting the material. This needs to be
done in a disciplined way that can be explained and justified.

Furthermore, according to Drever, semi-structured interviews in particular mean that the
“interviewer sets up a general structure by deciding in advance what ground is to be covered
and what main questions are to be asked.” Therefore, the “detailed structure” is left to be
worked out during the interview. In this context, Drever suggests that the three specific

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406 Strack and Martin, op.cit., p.127.
advantages in conducting semi-structured interviews with participants in research studies include gathering actual information about people’s circumstances, collecting statements of their preferences and views, and exploring in some depth “their experiences, motivations and reasoning.”

Hence, the semi-structured interviews conducted in the field in Gaza gathered factual information, collected statements and opinions, and explored deeply the motivations and opinions of the interviewees from the three intended categories: civil society, political and academic. This methodological framework of general structure and flexibility was particularly useful and more conducive to the part of the interview which involved an exploration of civil society engagement in delicate and complex political processes among Palestinian parties. Furthermore, it allowed for the relaxation of the process which generated deeper and more substantial content.

In addition, William Foddy’s helpful understanding of specific methodological issues involved in interviewing situations added further clarity to this research process. Foddy states:

> It is wrong to treat respondents as if they are passive players reacting only to the researcher’s demands. It is more fruitful to see respondents as active agents engaged in the task of trying to make sense of the questions that are put to them. They should be also seen as active agents who are constantly trying to exercise some control over the situations in which they find themselves.

In practical terms, this was accurate particularly in the case of Hamas and Fatah leaders during the interviews. They were not passive interviewees. Instead, they actively sought to present their position on a range of issues, and advocated it strongly in the context of answering the interview questions. For instance, when asked about their evaluation of nationalist and secular civil society organizations in Gaza and their role in promoting peace and human rights, the leaders of Hamas not only responded to the question but they also defended Islamic social organizations and considered them to be more transparent and effective at the grassroots level. Similarly, when the subject of the power struggle between Fatah-dominated Palestinian Authority and civil society during the 1990s came up in the

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408 Ibid. p.1.
409 Foddy. op.cit., p.189.
interviews, the leaders from Fatah spoke of the misunderstandings which arose in that period as well as sharing their current perspective for partnership with civil society in the Palestinian national project of state-building. Hence, in the course of the interview process, political and civil society representatives alike attempted to assert their evolving strategies and re-gain control over past and present situations.

Maria Smyth’s *Researching Violently Divided Societies, Ethical and Methodological Issues*, was also instrumental in broadening my understanding of ethical dimensions involved in researching a conflict situation like Gaza. Smyth’s emphasis that inside researchers (i.e. researchers who are studying their own society) should avoid imposing personal values and attitudes on their study was a significant reminder throughout the data collection process and analysis stage afterwards. In addition, her assertion of the insider’s unique access to information, which is unavailable to outsiders,\(^\text{410}\) manifested itself in the field research in Gaza.

This excellent access was enhanced by two additional factors: (1) my language skills and good command of English and fluent native Arabic were of great significance. This allowed greater freedom and clarity for interviewees to speak in their own native language of Arabic. It also led to a direct dialogue between me (i.e. the researcher) and the respondent as Drever advised previously in relation to interviewing methodology; (2) my existing contacts with Palestinian civil society organizations, political parties, and academic institutions in Gaza were central in meeting the objectives of this thesis. This facilitated, for instance, interviews with senior figures in the Hamas and Fatah leadership ranks and prominent academics and leading political analysts in Gaza like Professor Ibrahim Ibrash.

Overall, the research process was successful and achieved the desired outcome of generating data and gathering information in relation to the central topic of this thesis: the role of secular civil society organizations in promoting peacebuilding in Gaza at the local and political level and the challenges they have subsequently encountered. Therefore, based on the research findings from the field research, Chapter 5 presented a descriptive account of the specific peacebuilding activities led by the GCMHP, the PCHR and the PCDCR. It also provided a summary of the conducted interviews. The task of transcribing and translating the interview

\(^{410}\) Smyth, op. cit., p.8.
material was, challenging and time-consuming during this stage of the research process. Providing accurate translated accounts as much as possible was an integral part of this challenge. Thus, the translation was rendered in the words of the interviewees to support further accuracy.

7.3 Research Process Constraints:

The long research process faced, however, critical constraints and these were mainly concerned with gaining access to enter and depart from Gaza, and issues of internal instability. Entry to Gaza via the Jordan-West Bank crossing was not possible because of the Israeli military restrictions and control of the border. Palestinians with international and European passports, including myself, encounter the same Israeli restrictions on freedom of movement within Palestine based on our national affiliation and Palestinian origin. Using the Rafah crossing point on the Egyptian-Gaza border seemed, therefore, the only available option for entering Gaza and conducting the research. This was not without obstacles.

After a long and risky trip via troubled Sinai from Cairo airport to the Gaza border, I was faced by long queues and thousands of stranded Palestinians who were attempting to enter or leave Gaza. Adding to this difficult situation, the Rafah crossing point could be declared closed by Egyptian officials at any time and without any convincing reason. Security issues, not holding proper documentation, and that the computer system is not currently functioning, are most of the time given as excuses by the Egyptian authorities for the continued closure of the Gaza-Egypt border. As a result, individuals and groups who wish to leave or enter Gaza have to wait in the distant border area, which lack basic facilities such as running water and food outlets, for long days and weeks at times. This closure policy was also a serious problem for my return journey and departure from Gaza, especially during the second research trip in August 2013 and following the military coup in Egypt in July of the same year.

Therefore, Mourid Barghouti’s description of the Rafah crossing experience as “the ugliest embodiment of the ruthlessness of Egyptian official policy and the cruelty with which the regime treats the ordinary Palestinian citizen” was accurate. Not only regime cruelty but

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some also see it as official complicity on the side of Egypt in maintaining the illegal Israeli blockade imposed on Gaza.

Another connected constraint to the research process was the fragile security situation inside Gaza, and the constant possibility of disruption to the programmes work of various organizations and institutions in the society. Power cuts, fuel shortages and lack of freedom of movement have generally represented serious problems for the people of Gaza and impacted on their ability to lead a functional and productive life.

Furthermore, the limited duration of the research visit (e.g. having to leave through Rafah on a certain and predetermined date) and work pressure constituted a challenge during the research process. The PCHR and the PCDCR could not, for example, make more staff available for interviews because of their work commitments during that period.

Nonetheless, the research process progressed with all challenges and constraints involved and it successfully produced the required data and research findings, which were analyzed in Chapter 6 (Research Analysis). The final conclusions of this thesis are outlined in the following section.

7.4 Final Conclusions:

The Research Analysis Chapter responded to the central research questions as well as the research hypothesis. In the subsequent examinations of the research questions, some major research outcomes came to light in terms of the role of secular civil society in peacebuilding in Gaza and the challenges it encounters. They represent an important contribution to knowledge. By way of final conclusions, these research outcomes are summarized below.

Firstly, in the response to the first research question (i.e. examining the role that secular civil society organizations have been playing in promoting peacebuilding in Gaza), it has been established that interpreting practical peacebuilding processes in a complex conflict environment like Gaza by using merely one exclusive theory is limiting and unhelpful. Therefore, various peacebuilding activities and civil society processes (e.g. trauma recovery, mediation, democracy promotion, victim representations, psycho-social support and political
dialogue) in the present situation of Gaza are best understood in terms of a complementary approach. This is the first research outcome.

Secondly, in discussing the second research question (i.e. the relationship between secular civil society peacebuilding in Gaza and the Israeli-Palestinian political context) this research has crucially demonstrated that the Oslo process constituted the overall context and roots of the depoliticization of nationalist civil society organizations. Therefore, this process of depoliticizing and restructuring the direct engagement of secular civil society in the Israeli-Palestinian political arena and reproducing it in internal social and civil terms, has prevented a strong and influential civil society role in peacebuilding at the Israeli-Palestinian political level. This represents the second research outcome.

Thirdly, in answering the last research question (i.e. challenges to secular civil society organizations and their peacebuilding role in Gaza from a political and civil society perspective) the research has found that civil society organizations and their contributions to peacebuilding are faced by complex challenges. For example, these have included: (a) external political influence and dependency on international funding; (b) the imposition of conditions and political agendas by some external donors on civil society; (c) Israeli military occupation and blockade on Gaza; (d) factional dominance.

Crucially, this research demonstrated that while the process of depoliticization of civil society advanced at the Israeli-Palestinian level following the initiation of the Oslo process, repoliticization of secular civil society has increased in the form of factionalization at the internal Palestinian level. Therefore, the research found that the factionalization of civil society and the power of the political factions over civil society organizations in Gaza preclude an independent role for secular civil society in conflict transformation in the Israeli-Palestinian political context. This is the third and concluding research outcome.

Finally, these significant research outcomes have led to a critical re-consideration of the research hypothesis in this thesis. Initially, the original hypothesis claimed that: “secular and nationalist civil society organizations have played an active role in peacebuilding in Gaza at both local and political levels, and encountered complex challenges” but it was essential to revise this hypothesis following the analysis process and research outcomes. Hence, the revised conclusion has suggested instead that: secular and nationalist civil society
organizations have played an active and leading role in peacebuilding at the local level in Gaza and a less influential and effective role at the political level, and have encountered complex challenges in both arenas.

The struggle to achieve genuine peace, justice and equality represents a moral challenge to oppression. It is also an extremely courageous choice for people who particularly have lived through the horrific experience of war and violent conflict, where violence has been a constant reality in their lives. Nonetheless, they continuously search for alternatives and work to sustain the hope for a better future. I include myself in this category. Seeking human dignity, inclusive national rights and self-determination for Palestinians and Israelis constitutes nonviolent means of resistance and liberation for these dedicated individuals and groups.
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