

Abstract

This study examines the transformation that has characterized the role and the mandate of Palestinian civil society organizations between the year 1967 until the present time. The study highlights the impact of social transformations including the widening of the urban middle class in the aftermath of the establishment of the Palestinian National Authority (PNA) in the year 1994 and the role of the most notable civil society organizations in bringing about new trends and responsibilities that have shaped the work of civil society elements. This academic study represents an attempt to contribute and add more significance to this cognitive arena.

The study employs a critical interpretive methodology taking into account the historical dimension and utilizing a qualitative research methodology with a focus on the case study. Hence, ten civil society organizations representing a diversity of sectors were chosen; organizations working in the areas of women, democracy and human rights, and other professional oriented organizations were scrutinized which also entailed holding a series of meetings and interviews with various levels of staff operating in these organizations and with a number of leaders of civil society and political parties.

The study arrived at a number of conclusions. The most decisive relates to the fact that the transformation in the role and the mandate of the Palestinian civil society organizations since the year

1990 can be attributed to the key role played by the elite among those organizations; a role that has also articulated the aspirations of the urban middle class after the establishment of the PNA in 1994. Furthermore, the historical background of such elite organizations indicates that middle class segments were the fundamental factor behind the establishment of these organizations. The study has also found that civil society organizations are increasingly embracing a neoliberal position to cope with universal perceptions as demonstrated by the urban middle class.