

Civil Society Organizations: Non- Traditional Actors in the Process of Radicalization

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In the ongoing attempts to disaggregate and understand the complex array of factors contributing to the rise of terrorism, “radicalization” has become a generalized and often catch-all term in the aftermath of 9/11, denoting the process whereby individuals or groups decide to turn to terror.

Unsurprisingly, there is no agreed upon definition of radicalization, just as with terrorism. As pointed out by the European Commission Expert Group on Violent Radicalisation in 2008, “there is no uniform usage of the terms ‘radicalisation’ and ‘violent radicalisation’ in the social sciences and humanities literature.” As noted in this analysis, some argue that such activity “inherently involves concrete violent behaviour while others qualify the mere acceptance of certain ideas which condone or justify violence as an indicator of violent radicalisation.”²

Notwithstanding this lack of consensus, there seems to be broad agreement that civil society can and should play a key role in countering radicalization. Moreover, while other actors - such as religious communities, governments, and the media - are perceived as potential agents of both radicalization and deradicalization, this does not seem to apply to civil society, which is overwhelmingly considered a moderating force.

This paper examines ways that politicized local³ (as distinct from global) civil society organizations, as remarkably influential actors, can play a role in propagating and legitimizing radicalized narratives, particularly in the context of providing development aid. We argue that given the lack of careful and in-depth analysis of this aspect, policy makers and the international community overlook a significant impediment to deradicalization efforts. The first sections provide a concise theoretical background on radicalization and specifically on the potential role of civil society. The following analysis provides examples of radicalization within three different aid contexts, illustrating different possible trajectories. The paper draws significantly on research conducted by NGO Monitor in the context of the Arab-Israeli conflict. Additional case studies demonstrate that this process is not specific to one conflict, but rather, is indicative of structural issues in foreign aid broadly, across regions and policies.

² Rogelio Alonso et al, “Radicalisation Processes Leading to Acts of Terrorism” (report, European Commission, May 15, 2008), <https://biblio.ugent.be/publication/446365/file/6814706>.

³ Gerald M. Steinberg, *Israel Studies*, forthcoming

Radicalism and Radicalization

The term radical means different things in different settings, but is almost always juxtaposed against a perceived mainstream. As defined by Schmid, radicalism advocates “sweeping political change, based on a conviction that the status quo is unacceptable.”⁴ The means employed for achieving this change can be either “non-violent and democratic (through persuasion and reform) or violent and non-democratic (through coercion and revolution).”

In an attempt to delineate these distinctions and develop a more robust analytic framework, radicalism has been contrasted with activism. Thus, Moskalenko and McCauley “aim to expand understanding of political mobilization by measuring readiness to engage in legal and non-violent political action (activism) as well as readiness to engage in illegal and violent political action (radicalism).”⁵ This distinction places almost exclusive importance on the end means, rather than the ideas or ideology they are meant to serve, suggesting that activism for political goals similar to those of terrorist organizations “may be more a competitor than a conveyor-belt.” However, as the following demonstrates, rejectionist and discriminatory worldviews can be gradually legitimized and propagated by adopting “activist” and “non-violent” tactics, especially in the context of turbulent political environments. This does not automatically transform individual activists into terrorists. Rather, activism in this context can be complementary to terrorism, providing the intellectual framework and articulating the overall political narrative it serves. As some of the examples in this paper will show, activism is often conceived in this way by the advocates themselves.

It is therefore important not to confine radicalism to a static dimension, but rather to address the issue through a dynamic process whereby “in a situation of political polarisation, normal practices of dialogue, compromise and tolerance between political actors and groups with diverging interests are abandoned by

⁴ Alex. P. Schmid, “Radicalisation, De-Radicalisation, Counter-Radicalisation: A Conceptual Discussion and Literature Review,” (ICCT Research Paper, The Hague, March 2013), <https://www.icct.nl/download/file/ICCT-Schmid-Radicalisation-De-Radicalisation-Counter-Radicalisation-March-2013.pdf>.

⁵ Sophia Moskalenko and Clark McCauley, “Measuring Political Mobilisation: The Distinction Between Activism and Radicalism,” *Terrorism and Political Violence* 21 (2010): 240.

one or both sides in a conflict dyad in favour of a growing commitment to engage in confrontational tactics of conflict-waging.”⁶ The positioning of one group or set of ideas against another in the radicalization process is entirely consistent with polarization. In this respect, the reactionary process cannot be isolated from broader discursive and political developments. McCauley and Moskalenko stress the importance of “Focusing on the dynamics of conflict over time,” including political and social reactions *to* terrorism.⁷ Radicalization in this respect is a form of continued conceptual escalation, often taking place simultaneously in a number of societal dimensions.

In order to understand radicalization as a broad and a profound process with complex manifestations, it is important not to conflate it simplistically with extremism and/or terrorism. Understanding the complex link between radicalization and terrorism is further complicated by the lack of a clear definition for ‘terrorism’ - which is often referred to sweepingly as anti-state political violence, or repackaged as “resistance.”⁸ Conceptualizing radicalization as dynamic with multiple manifestations can therefore shed light on its impact in a more holistic way - from the erosion of pluralistic norms to the eruption of violence - and place terrorism in a broader context.

The Role of Civil Society

In the context of foreign aid, support of civil society in the developing world is often perceived and presented as an effective tool for deradicalization. For example, Savun and Tirone argue that “foreign aid earmarked for good governance and civil society aid can reduce terrorism by improving the level of civil rights and liberties in a country, which affect both the participation in and support for terrorism.”⁹

The Radicalization Awareness Network (RAN) - an EU program with the objective of countering terrorism and violent extremism - is an important case study in examining the standard perception of the role of civil society in this dynamic. RAN includes a Civil Society Empowerment Programme to boost the resources

⁶ Schmid, 2013.

⁷ Clark McCauley and Sophia Moskalenko, *How Radicalization Happens to Them and Us* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 223.

⁸ Schmid, 2013.

⁹ Burcu Savun and Daniel C. Tirone, “Foreign Aid as a Counterterrorism Tool: More Liberty, Less Terror?,” *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, 62 no. 8 (2018): 1607-1635.

and capacity of civil society for the purpose of “providing alternative narratives and sharing moderate voices.”¹⁰ While the program recognizes different forms of extremism, including, for example, among environmentalists and/or animal rights activists, it does not recognize that civil society frameworks themselves can and are used as platforms for the propagation of extremist beliefs, as detailed below.

Some researchers, such as Bail, challenge this prevalent view, questioning “whether civil society organizations create cultural change by deploying mainstream discourses or if they become part of the mainstream because of their success.”¹¹ To the degree that the latter is the case, in some cases, civil society organizations (CSOs) are far from the positive forces for deradicalization that are often imagine.

For example, Bail describes a “fringe effect,” by which “angry and fearful fringe organizations not only exerted powerful influence on media discourse about Muslims in the aftermath of the September 11th attacks, but ultimately became some of the most influential mainstream groups in the field.” He attributes this effect to disproportionate media coverage and the resulting creation of social networks, which combine to redefine the “contours of the discursive field.” In this respect, the radicalizing impact of such CSOs is twofold - they serve as vehicles for extreme agendas among receptive audiences, while shifting the wider discourse and redefining its legitimate borders.

Furthermore, this process of radicalization and “pushing boundaries” via CSOs often triggers responses from opposing fringe groups. As a result, rather than serving to broaden the discourse, the result is a reactionary exchange between polarized extremes, diminishing the space for civil, evidence-based discussion and reinforcing ideological echo chambers.

In this research article, we focus on the specific issues related to CSOs that operate in the realms of international politics, including development aid, human rights, and international law. Many CSOs and donors link the three issues together, asserting that in conflict environments, in order for economic

¹⁰ “EU Internet Forum: Civil Society Empowerment Programme,” European Commission, https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/what-we-do/networks/radicalisation_awareness_network/civil-society-empowerment-programme_en.

¹¹ Christopher A. Bail, “The Fringe Effect: Civil Society Organizations and the Evolution of Media Discourse about Islam since the September 11th Attacks,” *American Sociological Review*, 77 no. 6 (2012): 885.

development to succeed, the process must deal with human rights abuses and violations of international law. In this sense, CSOs operating locally are given a central role in promoting these values and often dictate the discourse.

As will be demonstrated, radicalized and violent narratives are often promoted among CSOs within these contexts, and resonate with historical and geopolitical sensitivities. The result is that radicalized views are often promoted in the countries where they operate, through aid and human rights funding, or mainstreamed in donor countries through uncritical or biased narratives. Support for fringe groups also instills an increasingly monolithic discourse that legitimizes and ultimately facilitates different forms of violence, discrimination, and demonization from different actors in the political spectrum.

Internationalization of the Struggle – Examining Regional Spanish Funding Programs

For a number of historical and political reasons, various regions in Spain operate their own foreign policies, providing advocacy and financial support to radical CSOs in a number of conflict zones outside Europe. According to some analysts, regional political leaders use development cooperation frameworks as vehicles to gain support for their own agendas and, in the process, often amplify radicalized narratives elsewhere.

For example, far-left secessionists in Basque regions – including the autonomous community of Navarre – gain support by promoting and funding what they refer to as solidarity with other leftist-nationalist movements around the world. As stated by Basque separatist politician Arnaldo Otegi, a convicted ETA member (Euskadi Ta Askatasuna), “We have always recognised the importance of internationalism. We have discovered that struggles need to become more global in their nature.”¹²

¹² Denis Rogatyuk, “Basque Country: ‘We have always believed in internationalism,’” Green Left Weekly, January 27, 2017: <https://www.greenleft.org.au/content/basque-country-%E2%80%98we-have-always-believed-internationalism%E2%80%99>.

A strong example of fringe narratives that are drawn to one another is found in the Basque pro-independence party EH Bildu and its partnering with radical Palestinian CSOs, such as Addameer and the Palestinian Popular Struggle Coordination Committee.

In 2015, officials of EH Bildu called for the “immediate release of Khalida Jarrar,” described as a “long-time Palestinian political prisoners’ advocate.”¹³ Jarrar, then vice chairperson of Addameer, a Palestinian NGO that “offers legal aid to political prisoners,” is a senior official of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP).¹⁴ (Beyond the individual connections involving Jarrar and other officials, Addameer as an organization is linked directly to the PFLP.) She was indicted in April 2015 for a number of crimes, including active membership in a terrorist organization (PFLP) and incitement to violence through a call to kidnap Israeli soldiers. Jarrar accepted a plea bargain and was reportedly convicted on “one count of belonging to an illegal organization and another of incitement.”¹⁵

In another instance, in May 2016, the Basque Agency for Development Cooperation (AVCD) signed an agreement with Addameer, to “help Palestinian prisoners,” granting it €199,988.¹⁶ Concurrently, Addameer has also been collaborating closely with Basque NGO SoDePaz, for which specific purpose SoDePaz received €322,404 in 2015-2017 from the autonomous community of Navarre, also designated as development aid.¹⁷

Addameer in Spain and its resonance with regional actors and their political agendas reflects the ability of CSOs that promote extreme ideologies and historical revisionism to identify and cultivate European allies. Addameer’s director, Sahar Francis, spoke at a 2017 European Parliament event co-organized by the Spanish NGO Unadikum, a Malaga-based pro-Palestinian NGO supported by at least two Spanish

¹³ “Jarrar: On the 46th anniversary of the Naksa, the way forward is unity and resistance,” June 5, 2013: <http://pflp.ps/english/2013/06/05/jarrar-on-the-66th-anniversary-of-the-naksa-the-way-forward-is-unity-and-resistance/>.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Jack Khoury, “Military Court Hands Palestinian Lawmaker Khalida Jarrar 15-month Jail Sentence,” *Haaretz* (Israel), December 7, 2015: <https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/palestinian-mp-khalida-jarrar-gets-15-months-in-jail-1.5432851>.

¹⁶ “Otras Disposiciones,” Basque Government, May 27, 2016: <https://www.euskadi.eus/y22-bopv/es/bopv2/datos/2016/05/1602270a.pdf>.

¹⁷ “Projects for the country: Palestinian Territories,” Navarra, http://www.navarra.es/home_es/Temas/Asuntos+sociales/Cooperacion/Buscador+de+proyectos/?idp=410#res

municipalities (Rivas Vaciamadrid and Petrer). Sahar Francis was featured in the event under the caption - “Director of Addameer. Khalida Jarrar’s lawyer.” Leila Khaled, a PFLP terrorist who is well known for her participation in spectacular plane hijackings in the 1970s, also spoke at the event.¹⁸ During her talk, she declared that “what happened in Auschwitz during the Holocaust is also a Holocaust comparable to what is happening in Gaza today,” adding that “there cannot be peace while there is even one Zionist on the Palestinian territory.” Likely referring to a terror attack on the same day, in which three Israeli security guards were killed and in which the attacker also died, Khaled said, “Today we have had a martyr. Today the Zionist forces have shot at them and we have had a martyr. And we want the Zionist forces to feel threatened.” Sahar Francis said that it was an honor for her to sit “between Ahed [Tamimi]¹⁹ and Leila, the older and the younger generation... These are generations that have fought and continue to fight.”²⁰

Khaled and her CSO sponsors (Addameer and Unadikum) provide a striking example of extremist advocacy as complementary to other forms of radical political action. Whether or not their words are translated into violence or inspire it, the ideology Khaled advocates leaves no middle ground - “there cannot be peace while there is even one Zionist on the Palestinian territory.”

Indeed, the construction of categorical, non-negotiable enmity is central to radicalization and essential to the justification of ultimately violent measures. For this reason, it is often couched with libelous distortions that help entrench the image of an absolute, even demonic enemy. Illustratively, Unadikum describes the “Zionist entity, Israel” as the “the main instrument of imperialism in the Middle East” – the name is drawn from a poem written by the late Arab-Israeli politician Tawfiq Ziad, who, according to Unadikum “died in an accident (suspected product of the Mosad)” (authors’ translation).²¹ Ziad, who was a Knesset Member

¹⁸ Olga Deutsch, “Letter to MEPs Concerning PFLP Event at the European Parliament,” September 26, 2017: <https://www.ngo-monitor.org/27006/>.

¹⁹ In addition to incitement to terror, Ahed Tamimi gained notoriety in repeated and staged confrontations with Israelis, including an incident in which she slapped a soldier and was later arrested, tried and convicted. See details here: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/mar/21/palestinian-ahed-tamimi-accepts-plea-deal-to-serve-eight-months-in-jail>

²⁰ Alberto Hugo Rojas, “Conference: the role of women in the Palestinian popular struggle,” October 2, 2017: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SsOHxUj7BK4>.

²¹ “Qué significa ‘Unadikum’,” Unadikum, January 25, 2015: <https://asociacionunadikum.org/que-significa-palabra-unadikum/>; “Historia de Palestina,” Unadikum, August 2018: <https://www.asociacionunadikum.org/historia-de-palestina-2/>.

and mayor of Nazareth, had supported Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin's government, and was killed in a car accident in 1994.²²

In another example, Palestinian activists Manal Tamimi and Munther Amira, board members of the Palestinian Popular Struggle Coordination Committee (PSCC), are well-known within the Spanish NGO community. In January 2017, the two were invited to an event on "Nonviolent resistance and boycott of Israel (BDS) for Human Rights" in Madrid, sponsored by a number of Spanish NGOs, including the Basque SoDePaz, organization.²³ Earlier, Amira and Manal Tamimi spoke at a conference in Barcelona jointly funded by the European Union, the Catalan Agency for Development Cooperation, and the municipality of Barcelona. The conference, titled "Towards a New Paradigm, Preventing Violent Extremism," included the participation of two UN agencies and then Catalan Minister of Foreign Affairs, Institutional Relations and Transparency, Raul Romeva. It was organized by Catalan NGO Novact, a regular beneficiary of EU and Spanish federal government development aid funds.²⁴

During a violent demonstration in December 2016, Amira told Israeli media platform Ynet: "We are here to protest and to say that the occupation and terror are two sides of the same coin. We want to tell the world that Palestinians deal with organized terror. We will continue to cope in order to struggle against the Nazi occupation."²⁵ Tamimi has promoted terrorism, violence, and antisemitism on her Twitter account. In September 2015, Tamimi tweeted, "Vampire zionist celebrating their Kebore day by drinking Palestinian bloods, yes our blood is pure & delicious but it will kill u at the end." In August 2015, Tamimi tweeted, "I do hate Israel ,i (sic) wish a thrid Intefada (sic) coming soon and people rais (sic) up and kill all these zionist settlers everywhere." Reminiscent of Khaled's statements at the European Parliament, in December 2015 Tamimi tweeted, "We will keep resisting until the last Zionist either got killed or leave palestine (sic)."²⁶

²² The Associated Press, "Tawfik Ziad, 65, Mayor of Nazareth," *New York Times* (New York, New York), July 6, 1994: <https://www.nytimes.com/1994/07/06/obituaries/tawfik-ziad-65-mayor-of-nazareth.html>.

²³ "Casa Arave canceled the act 'Non-violent resistance and boycott of Israel for human rights,'" BDS, January 26, 2017: <https://boicotisrael.net/bds/casa-arabe-cancela-acto-resistencia-no-violenta-boicot-israel-los-ddhh/>

²⁴ "Spanish Funding to NGOs Active in the Arab-Israeli Conflict," NGO Monitor, April 2017: http://www.ngo-monitor.org/nm/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/Spanish-Report-in-English_FINAL.pdf.

²⁵ Elior Levy, "In the Massacre of the Police: Santa Palestinian confronted the Border Police," *YNet* (Israel), December 24, 2016: <https://www.ynet.co.il/articles/0,7340,L-4897859,00.html>.

²⁶ "UN Changes Special Rapporteur Lynk's Report Following NGO Monitor Complaint," NGO Monitor, May 14, 2017: <https://www.ngo-monitor.org/press-releases/un-lynk-report-tamimi-ngo-monitor/>.

Most notable in this respect is that Tamimi featured as an expert at an NGO-led conference funded by the EU on “preventing violent extremism,” within the framework of foreign aid, alongside government officials. This demonstrates the effectiveness of a “re-packaging” strategy that cloaks extremist narratives in ostensible human rights and development rhetoric. Within the context of regional Spanish foreign aid (although also funded by the federal government), Palestinian, Spanish, and regional separatist agendas reinforce and amplify libelous, rejectionist, and violent elements. The frameworks of development aid and “preventing violent extremism” provides promoters of radical narratives with funds, legitimacy, and a public platform, espousing openly extremist ideologies as passionate activism and justice-seeking, or charitable work.

Radicalization away from Home – German Aid Officials

German foreign aid provides another example of the disconnect that can develop between policy-makers and on-the-ground delivery of development aid, including promoting democratic institutions and norms, within complex geopolitical contexts. This is particularly striking in relation to the German political foundations (Stiftungen), which constitute a unique framework in the realm of CSOs. The Stiftungen are funded by the Federal Ministry of the Interior, the Federal Foreign Office (FFA), and the Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) in direct proportion to the size of the parliamentary representation of the political parties affiliated with them. These funds are provided for three objectives – educating the public on democratic participation, encouraging academic achievements, and promoting democratic practices in foreign countries.

According to the German Federal Agency for Civic Education (BPB), “already in the early 1960’s the value of the Stiftungen as foreign policy instruments was recognized by the Federal Foreign Office, but only in recent years is the international work of the Stiftungen increasing in importance.”²⁷ Indeed, more than half of the Stiftungen’s current budget is provided by the BMZ for development-related projects. Each Stiftung has offices and permanent staff in many different countries around the world, where they support and collaborate with local institutions and NGOs. These organizations are important actors in the civil

²⁷ “Political foundations,” Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung, March 19, 2015:
<http://www.bpb.de/gesellschaft/bildung/politische-bildung/193401/politische-stiftungen?p=all>.

societies in which they operate and provide funding, and it is important to include them in an analysis of the connections between CSOs and radicalization.

Within the context of the Arab-Israeli conflict, there is a clear discrepancy between the official agendas endorsed and promoted by the Stiftungen in Germany, Europe, or Israel, in contrast to the projects supported in the West Bank and Gaza.

The Heinrich Böll Stiftung (HBS), affiliated with the German Green Party, provides an important illustration of this contrast between declared objectives and actual projects, including the radicalization dimension. On November 17, 2017, the Israeli newspaper *Makor Rishon* highlighted the activity of the HBS Ramallah office in co-sponsoring a conference, “The 1987 Intifada: History and Memory,” in commemoration of “the thirtieth Anniversary of the First Palestinian Uprising against the Israeli Occupation.” The conference, with sessions in Gaza on November 24-26 and in Beirut on November 28-30 2017, was scheduled to feature speakers that are former or current members of Hamas and the PFLP. Following further media coverage in Germany and significant public pressure, HBS withdrew its support of the conference.²⁸ Notably, Kerstin Mueller, director of HBS’s Tel-Aviv office, stated in a response that “the conferences... are being held without the knowledge of the Heinrich Boell Foundation in Israel. The foundation in Israel is looking into the details of the event, and further states that an event celebrating the Intifada is against the position of the foundation in Israel.”

Mueller’s statement highlights the differences between the Stiftungen offices operating in conflict ridden areas, and the contrasting approaches to and awareness of radicalization issues.

In the activities of the Friedrich Ebert Stiftung (FES), affiliated with the Social Democratic Party (SPD), this schism appears to be even deeper. FES’s Israel office collaborates with a wide range of Israeli partners, a large proportion of which are university centers, research institutes, as well as social democratic movements and organizations. In the context of the conflict, FES’s Israel office aims to “strengthen political, economic, social and cultural ties between Israel and its neighbors,” and to “develop sustainable

²⁸ “Pressure Works: Heinrich Boell Foundation Withdraws from Conference Featuring Member of Hamas,” NGO Monitor, November 23, 2017: <https://www.ngo-monitor.org/pressure-works-heinrich-boell-foundation-withdraws-conference-featuring-member-hamas/>.

solutions together with our Israeli, Palestinian and European partners, and to contribute to a public discussion which supports a two-state solution for the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.”²⁹

FES’s Palestinian office (Fespal) in Ramallah adopts an altogether different approach. While it is not explicit about its position on the conflict and its resolution, Fespal’s publications and collaborations attest to the adoption of a markedly radicalized narrative. One of Fespal’s most prominent and longstanding Palestinian partners is the Palestinian Academic Society for the Study of international Affairs (PASSIA). PASSIA’s publications are featured on Fespal’s website, and the two organizations regularly co-host events and conferences.³⁰ A 2015 PASSIA publication funded by Fespal and authored by PASSIA’s founder and director, Dr. Mahdi Abdul Hadi, who regularly meets with Fespal officials, describes a wave of stabbing attacks and shootings that began in October 2015 as a “youth uprising” that exhibited “Survival and resistance with self-confidence, courage and accepting the consequences of their actions against Israelis with a smile!” The same publication refers to “Palestinian martyr, Baha Eleyan” – who was one of two terrorists to board a bus in Jerusalem in October 2015 armed with a gun and a knife, murdering three and injuring seven.³¹

This publication is consistent with PASSIA’s overall message and agenda. In another report, PASSIA refers to Lina Jarbuni, convicted for assisting Hamas to carry out an attack during the second intifada, as “The currently longest serving Palestinian woman prisoner... who is serving a 17-year sentence since 2002 for ‘aiding the enemy’ – Palestinian resistance.”³²

PASSIA’s political agenda is reinforced by religious argumentation, particularly in vehemently denying any historical Jewish connection to holy sites in Jerusalem, such as claiming that “Zionists could not present

²⁹ “Peace and Security Dialogue,” Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, <http://www.fes.org.il/peace-security-dialogue>.

³⁰ “Passia,” Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, <http://fespal.org/category/publications/>; “7th Annual Palestinian Diaspora Conference - Panel: ‘Countering Negative Practices in Jerusalem and the American Stand on Jerusalem: Local, Regional, and International Responses,’” Passia, July 14, 2018: <http://www.passia.org/meetings/55>.

³¹ Mahdi Abdul Hadi, “Reviewing the Palestinian Political Scene 2015,” http://passia.org/media/filer_public/be/1c/be1ca4de-9bd3-41ef-80ea-d549743ada57/passia_bulletin-en.pdf; Nir Hason, “The homes of two East Jerusalem terrorists who carried out attacks in the city were demolished,” July 4, 2016: <https://www.haaretz.co.il/news/politics/1.2813892>.

³² “Palestinian Academic Society for the Study of International Affairs,” NGO Monitor, February 22, 2017: https://www.ngo-monitor.org/ngos/palestinian_academic_society_for_the_study_of_international_affairs_passia/.

any documentary evidence of Jewish claims to the [Western] Wall.”³³ A 2016 publication authored by Hadi accuses Israel of “exploiting Biblical myths about Palestine, particularly related to Jerusalem and its holy places,” and a 2017 report on Jerusalem’s holy places further alleges a “threatening (of) the ‘status quo’ of the Islamic and Christian holy sites in Jerusalem,” as well as “Israeli means and attempts aimed at distorting and falsifying the historical narrative of the city and its holy places.”³⁴ By providing a religious explanation in an already toxic and overly politicized narrative, this rhetoric further fuels the conflict and encourages hate.

In addition to its elaborate collaboration with, and financial support of PASSIA, Fespal has also continued its longstanding cooperation with another Palestinian NGO, Women’s Affairs Technical Committee (WATC), after it had inaugurated a youth center named after the terrorist Dalal Mughrabi, who carried out the coastal road massacre, killing 38 civilians, including 13 children, in 1978.³⁵ Fespal maintained the relationship despite widespread condemnation of WATC, and following the termination of support by multiple other donors, including Norway, Denmark, and the UN.³⁶ In addition to implementing a “Young Leaders Programme” together with WATC, Fespal posted on its Facebook page in June 2017, two months after the inauguration of the youth center, that “The Junior Guest Researchers of FES Palestine and FES Israel recently welcomed each other at their respective offices for a two day exchange... During the stay at FES Palestine they went on a Tour through East Jerusalem, met a representative of WATC طاقم شؤون المرأة and visited the recently opened متحف ياسر عرفات Yasser Arafat Museum.”³⁷

Concurrently, Fespal held a series of workshops with the Palestinian NGO Network (PNGO), of which WATC is a member. In June 2017, PNGO issued a statement condemning Norway for withdrawing funding from the Mughrabi Youth Center, and referring to Mughrabi as a “Palestinian Woman Freedom Fighter.” Oddly, PNGO’s statement implies a degree of ownership over the naming of the center, as it “reiterates their

³³ “Al-Aqsa Mosque Compound Targetted Lurking Dangers between Politics and Prophecies,” PASSIA, April 2015: http://www.passia.org/media/filer_public/74/17/7417cc82-d6ae-424e-8ab5-e432fef33873/web_aqsamosque_targetted6.pdf.

³⁴ “Bab Ar-Rahmeh-A Venue for a Short Historical Review and Portraying The Current Situation 2017,” PASSIA, December 1, 2017, <http://passia.org/publications/277>.

³⁵ “Young Leaders Program ‘New Generation’ (YLP III),” Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, June 15, 2017: <http://fespal.org/ylp3-en/>.

³⁶ “Correspondence with Dutch Minister of Foreign Affairs on Funding to Palestinian NGOs,” NGO Monitor, August 9, 2017: <https://www.ngo-monitor.org/correspondence-dutch-minister-foreign-affairs-funding-palestinian-ngos/>

³⁷ Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung Ost-Jerusalem, June 15, 2017, <https://www.facebook.com/fespal.org/posts/10154882200786225>.

total refusal of changing the Martyr Dalal Mughrabi Center that was established in Burqa Village.”³⁸ In all of these examples, it is clear that the activities of this German political foundation grant legitimacy to legitimizing radicalization within Palestinian civil society is clear.

Going beyond FES and HBS, the Rosa Luxemburg Stiftung (RLS), affiliated with the party Die Linke, appears to have adopted a generalized strategy of support for radicalized narratives in relation to the Arab-Israeli conflict. In a December 2017 interview conducted by RLS and featured prominently on its main website, RLS liaison lecturer Helga Baumgarten belittles and normalizes the 2015 Palestinian terror wave - which included stabbing attacks and shootings against civilians across Israel - as “isolated Palestinian teenagers, almost children, who, in individual actions as a result of their desperation over their personal circumstances resorted to resistance in the form of stabbing attacks against Israeli soldiers and settlers.” In the same interview, Baumgarten argues that “a political demand that has become increasingly prevalent in Palestinian society in recent years could develop into the only seemingly feasible political strategy: ONE state in historical Palestine.”³⁹ Similarly, Tsafir Cohen, head of RLS’s Israel office, stated in a June 2017 interview that “Processes of colonization usually end through resistance of the colonized against the colonizers. We are not seeing this now... The Palestinians are tired after two uprisings.”⁴⁰

A 2014 RLS article about the Palestinian left titled “Resistance means existence” articulates this concept of “resistance” and its relationship to activism. Authored by Katja Hermann, at the time head of the RLS Palestine Office and later appointed head of the Middle East/Asia Unit, the article explains,

“From the point of view of the Palestinian Left, the context of the occupation legitimizes the right for self-defense and resistance, which includes militant resistance against Israel as an effective means in the liberation struggle. In this respect, armed struggle is not viewed as an end in and of itself or as the only correct way, but **as one of many possibilities that compliments other forms of resistance, such as non-violent protest – against the wall [separation barrier] and land expropriation, or boycott. Militant resistance thus strengthens other forms of resistance - according to the activists** – never before has the boycott movement been so strong, and since the second intifada

³⁸ “PNGO Condemns Norway demanding PA return funds for Center Named after Dala Mughrabi,” PNGO, <https://web.archive.org/web/20170706100619/http://www.pngo.net/pngo-condemns-norway-demanding-pa-return-funds-for-center-named-after-dalal-mughrabi/>.

³⁹ “Enough. Pulls off. We want our freedom,” Rosa Luxemburg Stiftung, December 8, 2017: <https://www.rosalux.de/news/id/38160/es-reicht-zieht-ab-wir-wollen-unsere-freiheit/>.

⁴⁰ “Not secular anymore,” Medico International, June 28, 2017: <https://www.medico.de/nicht-mehr-saekular-16798/>.

(2000-2005) there have not been so many people participating in demonstrations as during this year's escalation [the Gaza war 2014]." (authors' translation, emphasis added).

Interestingly, the RLS rhetoric on the conflict and its echo of Palestinian radicalization appears to go beyond the official policy of Die Linke, the party with which it is affiliated - which formally supports the two-state formula, "condemns any use of force by the parties involved," and maintains that "a solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is not to be achieved with military means, but only through earnest and sincere negotiations between all those involved." Die Linke further recognizes Germany's "special responsibility towards Jewish life in Germany and the State of Israel."⁴¹ The contrasting language indicates that in cooperation with local groups and disassociated from broader political considerations and debate, the Stiftung have wide latitude to determine their own agendas, without checks and balances. Specifically in the case of RLS, this escalation is not restricted to a local setting, but adopted broadly, as reflected in the domestic German political discourse and resonating in a specifically German context.

Another example of radicalization among German foreign aid officials is seen in the German Society for International Cooperation (GIZ), a federally owned agency. A number of GIZ officials in charge of aid programs in the Middle East have posted highly biased politicized statements (in contrast to the ostensible political neutrality expected of aid organizations) on social media, causing a minor scandal in Germany and Israel in March 2018. Some of these posts tacitly or explicitly endorse violence, or employ antisemitic rhetoric and imagery.

One of the GIZ officials was Henner Kirchner, head of a program commissioned by the BMZ that aims to enhance opportunities for higher education for young Syrians and Jordanians.⁴² Referring to Hamas rocket attacks, Kirchner commented on Facebook, "everyone - dictatorial or not - living under such conditions has the right to resist. On the other side: There is no right of self-defense of the occupier against the occupied." Similarly, Luke McBain, head of GIZ's "Civil Society Programme Palestine" and of the program for "Strengthening Women in Decision-Making in the Middle East," referred to the 2014 Gaza War in response to a Quora query, alleging that "Responding to violence originating from a territory which you

⁴¹ "Middle East conflict: Thematic papers of the group," Die Linke, <https://www.linksfraktion.de/themen/az/detailansicht/nahostkonflikt/>.

⁴² "Education opens up Perspectives," GIZ, <https://www.giz.de/en/worldwide/37925.html>.

occupy is not self-defense.”⁴³ Following media exposure and criticism of these statements, Macbain’s comment was deleted from Quora.

While these comments employ legalistic jargon and postcolonial rhetoric, they betray a thinly veiled sympathy for indiscriminate violence as a legitimate means of furthering political goals, and repeat the Palestinian narrative that portrays Israel as an absolute aggressor, irrespective of context. Another GIZ official, Mohammed Al-Mutawakel, former project manager in Jordan who moved on to work at GIZ’s headquarters in Germany, went even further, posting an image of the Israeli flag with a Swastika, as well as a cartoon depicting Israel as a two-headed monster. In 2014, Al-Mutawakel addressed Israel in Arabic, “May the curse of Allah be upon you. Your days are numbered.”⁴⁴

These and other examples do not constitute cases of individuals who were actively involved in terror. They do, however, resonate within a polarized environment and reflect a growing tolerance for violence, as well as a diminishing tolerance for dialogue or compromise. Potently illustrating this atmosphere within the wider German foreign aid community is Werner Ruf, professor emeritus for international relations and foreign policy at Kassel University and a member of the Round Table for Peace and Security Policy of the RLS. Ruf served as a consultant on development aid for the European Commission, BMZ, the German Federal Foreign Office, and GIZ.⁴⁵ In an interview with the Russian government-owned news agency Sputnik, Ruf hinted at an Israeli blood-thirsty conspiracy in the context of the May 2018 Gaza protests: “If the reports are correct, that the live ammunition was of a very special kind that explodes only when it hits the body, which might also warrant an international investigation, than this is a deliberate escalation... What is the political intention? ...it is difficult to interpret. When you do that, you immediately become a conspiracy theorist.”⁴⁶

Double Façade – Local Radicalization “Europeanized”

⁴³ “German Government’s Aid Workers Spread Antisemitism and Anti-Israel Propaganda on Facebook,” NGO Monitor, March 27, 2018: <https://www.ngo-monitor.org/reports/german-government-aid-workers-spread-antisemitism-and-anti-israel-propaganda/>.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Werner Ruf, “About the Person,” <http://www.werner-ruf.net/vita.html>.

⁴⁶ “Expert: The same Islamist gangs are fighting in East Ghuta as in Aleppo,” March 2, 2018, <https://de.sputniknews.com/politik/20180302319773152-ost-ghuta-experte/>

In expanding the analysis further, Palestinian NGO beneficiaries of foreign aid demonstrate another dimension, wherein locally radicalized narratives are repackaged to fit with donor countries' declared values and objectives, often according to thematic emphases such as gender equality, youth development, or education.⁴⁷ Tellingly, the Palestinian NGO Code of Conduct, drafted in 2008, requires of NGOs to "be in line with the national agenda without any normalization activities with the occupier, neither at the political-security nor the cultural or developmental levels" - relegating any human rights and humanitarian concerns to a nationalist political agenda.

This is strikingly apparent in the utilization of European-funded cultural programs for the propagation of rejectionist and violent ideologies, often with children and youth as target audiences. Commonly framed as a form of "cultural resistance," these activities are not conceived as a non-violent alternative, but rather as a "tool in the liberation battle." As described by one group, "cultural resistance" is defined as "not a substitute for any other form of resistance; it is a complement. Various forms of resistance can be described as a large mosaic where each stone represents a different form."⁴⁸ This again demonstrates the image of political activism as complementary to other measures, including terrorism.

As an example, the Popular Art Center (PAC), an arts NGO that was part of an EU-funded "Cultural Diplomacy" program meant to promote EU "core values," co-organized an April 2017 children's festival on the topic of "the 30 year Palestinian uprising." One dance routine publicized by PAC was titled "Songs of the Intifada." Another was captioned "Brother, point the gun." In February 2016, PAC organized a ceremony in honor of "Palestinian martyrs" whose homes were demolished, featuring the "father of the martyr Baha Eleyan" as a speaker (see previous section for additional details on Eleyan). The same ceremony featured a musical performance captioned: "No to laying down guns" (ibid).

Palestinian women's organization have likewise proven a vehicle for rejectionist and extremist agendas, often to the detriment of gender equality and/or women empowerment. Political constraints and requirements imposed within Palestinian civil society further radicalize women's groups, leading to

⁴⁷ "The Exploitation of Palestinian Women's Rights NGOs," NGO Monitor, April 10, 2018: <https://www.ngo-monitor.org/reports/exploitation-palestinian-womens-rights-ngos/>

⁴⁸ European Funding for Palestinian 'Cultural Resistance,'" NGO Monitor, June 10, 2018: <https://www.ngo-monitor.org/reports/european-funding-palestinian-cultural-resistance/>

instances of incitement to and glorification of violence. Accordingly, women terrorists are often promoted as role models.

For example, the Community Action Center (CAC) at Al-Quds University participated as an implementing partner in a project led by the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC) that received over \$4.5 million from the governments of the United Kingdom and Spain. CAC employee Ilham Shaheen, a community organizer, espouses extremist ideologies that support violence and terrorism on social media. One image of a young woman wearing a checkered black and white headscarf and carrying an assault rifle was emblazoned with the text “I love the revolution! All the beautiful girls who join will be the noblest!”⁴⁹

A more blatant abuse of foreign aid came in the form of the inauguration of a youth center funded by Norway and the UN. The center, inaugurated by Palestinian women’s NGO WATC, was named after the terrorist Dalal Mughrabi (see previous discussion for details). Demonstrating the extent to which radicalization is pervasive among Palestinian development NGOs, the PNGO network vehemently defended the center’s naming. (PNGO is also one of the drafters of the Palestinian NGO Code of Conduct and is a regular beneficiary of European aid funds, and largely considered as a representative of Palestinian civil society.)

Conclusion

The examples detailed above highlight the intersection of two pressing global challenges - international development aid and deradicalization. Both issues are characterized by controversy, geopolitical sensitivities, and a lack of academic consensus, and both generate passionate responses. The combination of complexity, diversity of views, and intensity of debate has obscured the practical implications of this intersection, and prevented the development of pragmatic policies.

The context of international aid, especially in conflict-ridden areas, introduces an intricate constellation in which contradictory policies, narratives, and interests co-exist. Our preliminary research in the civil society realm shows that fringe and/or radical narratives often find their way into the development discourse.

⁴⁹ “The Exploitation of Palestinian Women’s Rights NGOs,” NGO Monitor, April 10, 2018: <https://www.ngo-monitor.org/reports/exploitation-palestinian-womens-rights-ngos/>

The way that donor countries engage with the civil society in the context of the Arab-Israeli conflict serves as an important case study, given the international attention this issue generates.

In order to avoid including radical views in the context of development, we suggest that in considering policies and funding in this policy arena, the international donor community ensure that it has considered the full range of factors, including the potential for radicalization, in selecting aid partners.

As established in the theoretical sections of this paper, radicalization does not take place in a vacuum, nor is it restricted to isolated conceptual pockets. Foreign aid touches on issues subject to passionate debate—human rights and distribution of resources. Inadvertent or deliberate support of any particular political narrative, whether extremist or not, is liable to fuel heated reactions and thus fertilize an overall, self-perpetuating process of radicalization. This is all the more pertinent when foreign aid provides a platform for openly extremist and inflammatory agendas, as shown in the case studies.

As with every complex conflict situation, there is no obvious formula for addressing the entangled intersection between radicalization and foreign aid channeled through civil society organizations. But as a first step, demystifying the role of civil society is pivotal.

In light of our findings, we suggest that a reevaluation and de-romanticization of civil society funding is needed to take into account this sector's agency, both in radicalization and in deradicalization. Practically, this necessitates due diligence regarding the full activities of any CSO involved in the process. In addition, funding agencies would be expected to introduce and implement clear red lines in the selection of beneficiaries - prohibiting incitement, antisemitism, and other forms of bigotry, and the glorification of violence. The process of defining such red lines along with an applicable set of criteria is politically precarious and logistically difficult, but it is imperative to addressing the problem.

From a more positive perspective, foreign aid in conflict-ridden areas, and particularly peacebuilding programs, would be best geared towards engagement across conflicting narratives. This, too, however, requires deep consideration going beyond hopeful idealizations.

Ultimately, the provision of development aid involving civil society groups, especially within the context of a protracted ethno-national and religious conflict, entails navigating a highly volatile terrain which can feed or, in some cases, defuse the process of radicalization.

ABOUT THE ICT

Founded in 1996, the International Institute for Counter-Terrorism (ICT) is one of the leading academic institutes for counter-terrorism in the world, facilitating international cooperation in the global struggle against terrorism. ICT is an independent think tank providing expertise in terrorism, counter-terrorism, homeland security, threat vulnerability and risk assessment, intelligence analysis and national security and defense policy. ICT is a non-profit organization located at the Interdisciplinary Center (IDC), Herzliya, Israel.

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