

Helping the enemy? Why transnational Jewish philanthropic foundations donate to Palestinian NGOs in Israel

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ABSTRACT. This article asks why transnational Jewish donor organisations have been increasingly providing financial support to Palestinian social movements and NGOs in Israel when many of the main recipients are strong critics of the Jewish character of the state and act to promote Palestinian national claims within Israel. The article evaluates a number of plausible explanations, some generated by interest-centric theories while others are driven by ideational underpinnings. The study concludes that the donors do not view the interests of the Jewish state and the Palestinian Arab minority in Israel (PAI) in zero-sum terms. Having internalised liberal values of minority rights and pluralism in their countries of residence (mainly the United States), donating foundations believe that the development of the PAI is both normatively desirable and strengthens Israel as a whole because it facilitates the minority's integration into Israel's society and bolsters its civic culture, and therefore, it also contributes to the country's security. These findings are theoretically significant because they demonstrate how the interpretation of communal interest is strongly related to the normative social environment in which transnational activists operate.

KEYWORDS: civil society; diasporas; Jewish–Palestinian relations; majority–minority relations; transnational activism

In recent years, transnational Jewish donor organisations, based primarily in North America (both Canada and the US), have been increasingly providing financial support to Palestinian Arab NGOs and social movements in Israel (PAI NGOs). Several of the recipients are strong critics of the Jewish character of the state, its Zionist ideology, and its policies vis-à-vis its Palestinian citizens and the Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza. Many have been acting as advocates for the Palestinian national cause and promoting Palestinian national claims within Israel. Such NGO activism has been termed 'ethnic civil society', in that it functions as a mode of ethnic mobilisation and its aim is to empower the ethnic community (Haklai 2004: 157–68). By 2005, the total annual grants made by transnational Jewish philanthropies to PAI ethnic civil society was in excess of US\$3,000,000.¹ This phenomenon is particularly puzzling because it occurs during a period of

heightened Palestinian-Israeli tensions and while overall Jewish donations to Israel continue to decline (Chametsky 2001: 985). Moreover, the donations to PAI NGOs are being made by not only by esoteric family funds, but also by large organisations such as the New Israel Fund (NIF), the Moriah Fund, and the Abraham Fund Initiatives. Why are transnational Jewish funds donating to PAI NGOs? Are they 'helping the enemy', as some critics have suggested (NGO Monitor 2005; Steinberg 2006: 7)?

The relationships between transnational groups and their symbolic homelands have long been subject to extensive empirical and theoretical scrutiny. Many have been studying the involvement of dispersed ethnic groups in their host country's foreign policy on issues relating to their homeland. Some focus on trans-state networks that diasporas create to support their ethnic affiliates in the homeland. Most of the questions asked revolve around describing what these transnational groups do and how they do it. Much less attention is being paid to the question of why these activists do what they do. The underlying assumption in both the literatures on the international dimension of ethnic relations and on diaspora activism has typically been that diaspora communities mobilise on behalf of their homeland and in solidarity with their co-nationals (Guarnizo et al. 2003: 1211–48; Shain 1999: 1–11; Sheffer 1986a and 1986b: 1–3). Conventional theories are silent on the reasons why components of a diaspora would assist the 'other' during periods of tensions and antagonism.

Furthermore, notwithstanding important exceptions, the overwhelming tendency has been to assume that a diasporic community mobilises as a singular unit (Wald and Williams 2006: 206). Unitary mobilisation in solidarity of co-nationals has been attributed to nations that are viewed as having strong loyalties with a perceived shared destiny in particular. Having been subjected to significant security threats throughout its history, the Jewish nation is sometimes described as being a transnational community, expected to provide assistance to co-nationals in times of trouble (Sandler 2004: 301–12; Sheffer 1986a and 1986b: 258–93). Are the Jewish funds in question deviating from the standard expectations?

Whereas students of diaspora behaviour typically adopt assumptions of mobilisation spurred by ethnonational interest, existing research on non ethnicity-based trans-state (also frequently referred to as 'transnational') NGO political activism has conventionally relied on ideational-centric explanations. All structural constraints being equal, the desire to diffuse norms and ideas is seen as the driving force behind the burgeoning trans-state civil society mobilisation (Gal 1996; Khagram, Riker and Sikknik 2002; Price 2003; Tsutsui 2004). Thus, the literatures on diasporas and on trans-state civil society, which have thus far suffered from bifurcation, are divided over which factors best explain the motivations of, and forms of action undertaken by, transnational advocacy networks. Each of them lays the foundations for different potential explanations to the puzzle.

This study assesses rival explanations generated by interest-centric and ideational theories. The first possibility is that donations to PAI NGOs are

intended to strengthen Israel and weaken the PAI, possibly through instigating PAI NGO dependence on donating patrons, in turn allowing for control of minority activism. An alternative account is ideational, positing norms and ideologies at the centre of analysis. It could be that the donors believe that liberal values should be bolstered in Israel, as opposed to existing strong communitarian and security-minded orientations.²

This article evaluates these explanations, reveals their weaknesses, acknowledges their contribution, and offers an account that integrates norms and interests. My core argument is that the donors do not view the relationship between the Jewish state and the PAI minority in zero-sum terms. Rather, the donors are motivated by both a liberal world-view, on the one hand, and a desire to preserve their external homeland and assist their co-nationals in Israel, on the other hand. Donating foundations believe that strengthening the PAI minority strengthens Israel as a whole and facilitates the construction of a better society in Israel. In addition to enhancing liberal-civic norms in Israel, the development of the PAI facilitates the minority's integration into Israel's society and provides the group with a democratic, non-violent channel for pursuing its communal interests. The underlying assumption, shared by many donating foundations, is that the development of the PAI is both normatively desirable and essential for Israel's stability and security. Strengthening the liberal side of Israel and assisting PAI development while also contributing to the well-being of Israel is compatible with the liberal values and ethnonational commitments that characterise many individuals in the Jewish community in North America. This tendency may be linked to larger identity questions that members of the Jewish community confront. Many have been trying to reconcile what may be seen as tension-laden orientations. Traditionally, many within the diaspora Jewish community, particularly in the United States, have had liberal social and political leanings. Yet world Jewry and the Jewish state also exhibit strong ethno-communitarian inclinations. Financial support of Palestinian NGOs, hence, is an attempt to reconcile the two.

The study of this atypical Jewish case is methodologically useful and can provide theoretical insight into the question of motivations driving transnational mobilisation. On the one hand, the Jewish diaspora is frequently cited as an archetype from which general lessons can be learned (Safran 1991). On the other hand, as an outlier, the case of Jewish philanthropy directed at PAI NGOs can help identify nuances in causal mechanisms. Indeed, to the extent that there have been case-level empirical analyses of ethnonational diaspora mobilization – according to Wald and Williams, 'there are remarkably few individual-level empirical analyses of diaspora mobilization' (2006: 206) – one of the methodological difficulties that has emerged is the almost uniform behaviour exhibited, or assumed, in investigated cases. Lost in the literature on the politics of diaspora mobilisation is 'the rigorous vetting of research against alternative accounts, which has become a methodological hallmark of persuasive scholarly work' (Price 2003: 600). Stated differently, variation in the dependent variable facilitates explanatory inference-making (King,

Keohane and Verba 1999: 129–32). It is precisely because the atypical behaviour of the Jewish foundations does not conform to expectations that this case is useful for providing theoretical nuance for diaspora mobilisation.

More concretely, the theoretical significance of the finding in the case of transnational Jewish donors to PAI NGOs is that they demonstrate the power of a social constructivist approach to ethnic attachments. Ethnonational interests are not identified by objective indicators. Rather, interests are strongly related to the normative social environment in which groups operate and their interpretation is bound by prevailing norms. Members of a diasporic community adopt values prevalent in their societal environment and come to believe that these values are best suited for their co-nationals in the symbolic homeland. They believe that Israel would have a better Jewish society if the minority were treated more fairly and equally. As a spin-off, the case further highlights that a diaspora is a differentiated and mutable category.

A variety of methodological techniques are integrated in the empirical investigation. Interviews and communications with donors and PAI NGO activists are combined with an examination of grantors' and grantees' platforms, publications, and reports. Documented communications between donors and local activists as well as an examination of the more general patterns of behaviour of the donating and recipient parties over time are also used for generating insight. One methodological shortcoming is the absence of access to protocols of board meetings of philanthropic organisations. Citing applicant confidentiality, donors were reluctant to share protocols (Paiss 2006). Nevertheless, taken together, the data collected provide a solid picture of the donors' overall agenda.

The article is organised as follows. The upcoming section provides background information about the grantees and the donors and presents the puzzle that emerges from their activism. The article then presents the hypotheses and specifies their logic. The discussion proceeds to evaluate the rival explanations, present the alternative account, and provide the empirical evidence in support of the argument. The theoretical implications of the findings are briefly outlined in the conclusion.

Grantees and donors

Major recipient PAI NGOs constitute what has been termed 'ethnic civil society' (Haklai 2004: 158–65). Ethnic civil society associations are a mode of *ethnic mobilisation*, targeting the *empowerment of an ethnic community*. As such, they are distinct from conventional civil society organisations that promote universal civil rights. Ethnic civil society associations borrow a variety of mobilisation strategies that are applied by 'classical' civil society associations, but their ends are parochial as they target institutional reform favourable to the ethnic community while raising political and communal consciousness among members of the group.

The list of such PAI associations that rely on donations from transnational Jewish foundations is long. Noteworthy grantees that have been receiving

annual grants worth over \$100,000 annually in the early and mid-2000s include: *Adalah* (Justice): The Legal Center for Arab Minority Rights in Israel; *Al-Auna* (Return): Regional Council for Unrecognised Negev Arab Villages; Arab Center for Alternative Planning (ACAP); and *Mossawa* (Equality): The Advocacy Center for Arab Citizens in Israel. PAI ethnic civil society associations that have been recently receiving over \$40,000 annually include: *Al-Ahali* (Community): Center for Community Development; the Arab Association for Human Rights (HRA); Follow Up Committee on Arab Education, and many others.

In total, PAI ethnic civil society associations received grants worth over \$3,000,000 from transnational Jewish donor funds in 2005. The largest donating agency, the New Israel Fund (NIF), made grants of between \$1,800,000 and \$1,900,000 to PAI ethnic NGOs in 2005. The Moriah Fund, the second largest grantor, provided close to three-quarters of a million American dollars in 2005.³ The Abraham Fund Initiatives donated approximately \$70,000. Other foundations normally contribute in the tens of thousands of American dollars.⁴ Examples of family foundations and grantors who have been contributing on a smaller scale or on a less regular basis in the early to mid-2000s include the Shefa Fund, the Richard and Rhoda Goldman Fund, the Alfred and Hanna Fromm Fund, and the Naomi and Nehemia Cohen Foundation.

Although PAI activists are not critically dependent on this support, these donations are important in an environment of intense competition for resources. For some PAI NGOs, Jewish donors are second in importance only to the Ford Foundation or a number of European-based donors. By the mid-2000s, grants made by transnational Jewish donor agencies constituted anywhere between 20 and 30 per cent of the total grants received by PAI NGOs.

At first glance, such donor activity seems to deviate from the historically strong Israel-Jewish diaspora relationship. Since its establishment in 1948, the State of Israel has always maintained a strong bond with the Jewish diaspora, recognising Jews as members of the core nation. This has been manifested in the Jewish state's Declaration of Independence, immigration laws, and various trans-state organisations like the Jewish Agency, the World Zionist Organization, and the United Jewish Appeal. World Jewry, in turn, notwithstanding some exceptions, has historically demonstrated solidarity with Israel. As Robin Cohen notes, 'Probably the most common response in the diaspora to the creation of Israel was a sense of pride and fulfilment, and perhaps a feeling of relief that the remnants of European Jewry had been saved' (1997: 119). Such reaction reflected the preceding sense of insecurity coupled by a strong communitarian bond characteristic of accomplished nationalism. Aside from the ultra-Orthodox anti-Zionists, only a small and usually unorganised portion of the diaspora Jews viewed the establishment of Israel through critical eyes (Cohen 1997: 120–5). For an important share of Jews in the diaspora, more than half of whom were concentrated in North America, France, and the UK, the relationship with Israel amounted to regular donations and occasional tourism.

American Jewry has always constituted the largest and most organised Jewish community outside Israel. Some have referred to their organisational life as a 'polity' (Elazar 1980: 30–1). Alongside the various religious associations, many organisations have been focusing on community development. Organisations such as the American Jewish Committee, the American Jewish Congress, B'nai Brith and others attempted to assume leadership roles. The Council of Jewish Federations has been acting as an overarching body of local organisations. Together with the United Jewish Appeal and the explicitly Zionist organisations, most of the mainstream Jewish groups expressed automatic solidarity with Israel in its conflict with its Arab neighbours and contributed generously (Shain and Sherman 2001: 22–5). As Jews in North America felt that Israel's existence was more secure, the financial commitment of many declined while others were willing to engage in more critical discussions of government policies. This trend began in the 1980s and continued well into the 1990s and the twenty-first century (Chametsky 2001: 985; Shain and Sherman, 2001: 25–7). At the same time, an important share of Jewish activists, albeit a minority, began to show interest in the PAI minority, a tendency that has been intensifying over the last decade.

This new route is intriguing. That global civil society facilitates and enhances ethnic mobilisation because it diffuses claims based on human-rights discourse has already been revealed (Tsutsui 2004). That PAI ethnic NGOs have tended to embed their claims in human rights rhetoric has also been demonstrated (Haklai 2004). Yet, the prevailing presupposition of those studying the mobilisation of an ethnic diaspora is that groups mobilise with their ethnic brethren's interests in mind. Robin Cohen has suggested that 'one of the common features of all diasporas is the idealization of the real or putative ancestral home and a collective commitment to its maintenance, restoration, safety, and prosperity' (1997: 106). Scholars such as William Safran concur (1991: 83–4). This has been the convention particularly with regard to a diaspora with a strong historical sentiment of being discriminated against and experiencing a forceful dispersion from a homeland, such as the Irish, Armenian, Sikh, Jewish, and Palestinian diasporas. Hence, at a time when Jewish-American financial contributions to Israel are declining, when Palestinian-Israeli tensions are peaking, when PAI elites, and NGOs in particular, are championing the Palestinian cause and working to enhance PAI national consciousness within Israel and strengthen cross-border Palestinian ties, why do Jewish-Americans provide financial aid to PAI ethnic civil society activism?

Addressing the puzzle

Majority utility hypothesis

At first glance, the behaviour of the relevant transnational Jewish funding agencies seems to deviate from conventional understanding of diaspora mobilisation. Yet, positing that transnational ethnic groups act to maximise group utility, rational-choice theorists could conceive a proposition that at the

root of financial support of the 'foe' is the intention to co-opt the recipients and thereby weaken them. By providing aid to PAI NGOs, the Jewish donors might be trying to create a relationship of patronage. The grantees, in turn become dependent on the donors and, subsequently, their activism is restrained, if not controlled, and their criticism of the Jewish state is silenced. Claims to this effect have been made by PAI national activists (Mofeed 2001).

The logic behind this hypothesis is that NGOs in general are reliant on the financial aid they receive from donors and, therefore, they are susceptible to external influence. Further, donors all over the world are increasingly shifting away from blanket support to project-specific funding, in turn increasing their control over the projects pursued by grantees. This worldwide trend results from increasing suspicions on the part of grant-making foundations of the ways in which their donations are being spent. There is growing global awareness that alongside legitimate NGOs pursuing social goals, an industry of 'cash-milking' organisations has emerged that exploits the willingness of outsiders to sponsor development projects.

PAI NGOs in particular face several additional constraints. Because Israel is identified as a developed country, many donating agencies that deal with development in the Third World have a policy of refraining from funding NGOs in Israel. Others, such as the Ford Foundation, the Heinrich Böll Foundation, and the European Commission do provide funding, but the proliferation of PAI NGOs over the last decade has increased competition over resources. PAI NGOs' activists and directors report that rivalries between NGOs whose mandates are overlapping have been intensifying in recent years (Author interviews 2005). Personnel responsible for resource management and international advocacy in PAI NGOs reveal that they frequently formulate grant applications and adopt projects that reflect donor priorities.

PAI NGOs that confront these constraints can search for alternatives. One option is to appeal to funding organisations with a more radical, anti-Israeli agenda. This path, however, entails a risk because many of the donors involved are illegal in Israel and there could be repercussions with domestic law enforcement authorities. The most notable example of such an instance is the case of the Northern Branch of the Islamic Movement.⁵ The Northern Islamists have been advocating a strong anti-Israeli stance while engaging in delegitimisation of the state and, at times, demonstrating sympathy with Hamas (State Commission of Inquiry 2003: 87–93). The movement was accused of having recruited financial support from external donors deemed illegal by Israeli laws. As a result, the leaders of the movement were sentenced to jail in 2004. While their activism should not be attributed exclusively to the priorities of the donors, it is not improbable that competition with the Southern branch over resources played a role (Sarsur 2005). Ultimately, unlawful fundraising entails risks for the minority and, coupled with competition for resources, creates incentives for PAI NGOs to enter into a binding relationship with Jewish donors for the sake of organisation survival.

Liberal values diffusion hypothesis

In a comparative study of ethnic diasporas in the United States, Yossi Shain has discovered that many immigrants to the United States act to promote American values, such as democracy, religious pluralism, human rights, and free market economies in their ancestral countries (Shain 1999). These ethnic communities arrive in the United States, absorb liberal values, and try to promote these values in their countries of origin or symbolic homeland. It is possible that the Jewish activists are also engaged in 'marketing the American creed' in Israel.

Stated differently, donors might believe that the Jewish state should adopt, or enhance, the liberal side of its character. Israel is sometimes described as an 'ethnic state' or an 'ethnic democracy' (Ghanem 1998; Rouhana 1997: 6–9; Shafir and Peled 2002: 30–2; Smooha 1990: 389–413). It combines democratic procedural characteristics, such as regular free and open elections, a multi-party political system, an independent and active judiciary, freedom of press, expression, and association, and the rule of law, with communitarian characteristics that give preferential access to public resources to the dominant ethnic community (Peled 1992). Others view Israel as a 'garrison state', meaning that security considerations have predominantly influenced decision-making and political developments (see Sheffer 1996). Tension has always existed between Israel's democratic characteristics and security-minded inclinations. Both the communitarian and garrison characteristics have had a particularly adverse impact on the Arab minority, a group whose loyalty has frequently been suspect in the eyes of the Jewish majority. The gap between formal status and actual social position has been a cause of great discomfort for liberal-minded Jews in Israel and outside. It could be that PAI marginalisation and social and economic underdevelopment prompted concerned transnational Jewish NGOs to act.

Evaluating the rival explanations

Having specified several hypotheses for the phenomenon under investigation, it is time to assess their explanatory power. In broad terms, both accounts have strengths and weaknesses, but the data suggest that explanations focusing on majority interests and liberal values are not mutually exclusive.

Evidence attesting to the strength of the majority utility hypothesis include, among other things, the requirement posed by the NIF that all of its grantees register with the Registrar of Non-Profit Organizations at Israel's Interior Ministry. Registration and approval by the Registrar, in turn, is contingent upon declaring commitment to state law. Moreover, the NIF's official position is that 'Only organizations that acknowledge the right of the State of Israel to exist are eligible for grants' (Paiss 2006).

Furthermore, the general grant-making activities of key Jewish donor organisations beyond PAI NGOs suggest that they share Zionist goals.

Notably, many, including the NIF and Moriah, have projects supporting Jewish 'ingathering' or immigration to Israel, a main Zionist objective. The Andrea and Charles Bronfman Philanthropies and the Richard and Rhoda Goldman Fund sponsor the Birthright Israel project, which funds educational trips to Israel for thousands of young Jewish adults. The purpose of the project is to strengthen trans-state Jewish bonds and enhance solidarity with Israel (Andrea and Charles Bronfman Philanthropies 2006).

Similarly, the Shefa Fund published a position paper, written by Rabbi Mordechai Liebling who is the Torah of Money Director at the Shefa Fund and who also serves on the executive committee of Rabbis for Human Rights-North America, in which the Fund expresses opposition to initiatives of divestment from Israel. Liebling questions the moral legitimacy of the divestment initiatives that are guilty of 'singling out one state. This is especially so when the destruction of that state has been routinely called for by nations that also have significant weaponry' (2005). Finally, the NIF, the Abraham Fund Initiatives, and many other foundations continuously cite Israel's Declaration of Independence as their source of core values of equality and justice. In sum, the donors endorse Israel's foundational principles.

There is also evidence to support the explanation emphasising liberal motivations. The donating agencies' platforms and more general practices focus on support for subaltern groups and development projects in Israel and elsewhere. The list of NIF grantees, for example, encompasses NGOs dealing with other marginalised groups and issues, including women, guest-workers, same-sex couples, migrants, rape victims, and disabled persons.

In addition, in the opening comments of its 2004 Annual Report, the NIF President of the Board of Directors, Peter Edelman, and executive directors, Larry Garber and Eliezer Yaari, state that NIF grants are intended 'to ensure that the voices of the disenfranchised are heard and that human and civil rights are respected'. The overview statement of the report states that the NIF's commitment is to 'promote freedom, justice, and equality for all Israel's citizens', and that its aims are 'closing the social and economic gaps in Israeli society and promoting tolerance and pluralism' (New Israel Fund 2004: 1–2).

Tracing the background of the NIF reveals its genuine concern for democracy and social justice in Israel. The NIF was established in 1979 following the 1977 rise to power of the Likud Party and against the backdrop of what were perceived as growing nationalist and right-wing trends in Israel. Over the years, the NIF has been involved with several projects concerned with issues such as civil and human rights, social and economic justice, religious pluralism and tolerance, women's rights, and immigrant absorption. The NIF's activities significantly extend beyond the Arab minority. It has invested more than \$130,000,000 in general community support over the years.

The NIF claims to be committed to improving the situation of Israel's Arab citizens through its own projects as well as through providing technical assistance and grant-making to other PAI-supporting organisations. In addition to its overarching statement of objectives, the NIF declares that

some of its missions are: to protect the Arab minority from discrimination; help the minority obtain equal access to social, cultural, economic, and educational rights; reduce the violation of Arabs' legal rights; achieve equality in land distribution; achieve equality in investment in housing and infrastructure of the Arab areas of mixed cities; and attain recognition and basic services for Bedouin villages that are unrecognised by the state as legal (New Israel Fund 2005a). The NIF sees its support for PAI NGOs, as it views support of other subaltern groups, as a means to achieve equal access to social, cultural, economic, and political rights for the minority.

In 1982, the NIF established Shatil as a support centre for civil society associations in Israel and to provide training, consultation services, and funding to NGOs. Shatil was created to complement NIF grant-making efforts and to provide capacity-building assistance to NIF grantee organisations. Soon after, Shatil opened its doors to a larger number of fledgling, grassroots organisations that did not receive direct NIF support, but which also needed help in capacity-building. Exclusive PAI associations were among the aided NGOs. Shatil was involved in independently targeting weak populations, identifying social issues, and initiating proactive measures to foster grassroots activism where none existed. Among other things, Shatil assisted the Negev Bedouin community in forming community organisations, addressing a range of issues from pre-school education to government recognition of Bedouin villages and water provision.

Likewise, Moriah, the second largest donator, supports many social projects, including Ethiopian immigrant projects, Physicians for Human Rights, peace movements, and NGOs working to protect the rights of guest-workers, women, and children in need. Moriah is also active outside Israel. It supports NGOs that fight poverty, work to protect the rights of, and empower, women, and deal with human development and environment issues in the United States, Guatemala, and elsewhere. By the beginning of the millennium, this foundation was contributing about \$12,000,000 annually to human development projects and NGOs all over the world. About three million are invested in Israel, a third of which is directed at the PAI community (Feit 2001).

Like the NIF and Moriah, most of the other donating agencies – the Shefa Fund, the Naomi and Nehemia Cohen Foundation, Richard and Rhoda Goldman Fund, and others also sponsor NGOs that deal with a wide range of subaltern groups and with human development and environment projects. Hence, donations to the PAI minority are a component of larger projects that assist marginalised groups and demonstrate general social awareness.

The majority utility and liberal values diffusion hypotheses also exhibit some weaknesses. For the majority utility account to be credible, co-optation strategies are expected to eventually change the behaviour of PAI NGOs and to yield a decline in criticism of Zionism and the Jewish state. Otherwise, we would expect donating agencies to terminate their financial support. With one notable exception, however, grant-making continues unabated despite ongoing stern, and often bolder, criticism of the state.⁶ Notably, the statement

submitted by the Local Preparatory Committee of Palestinian NGOs in Israel – many members of which are funded by transnational Jewish donating agencies – to the World Conference Against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia, and Related Intolerance, held in Durban in 2001, contains fierce criticism against the state and its Jewish character. The statement accuses Israel of racism and attributes the problem to the Jewish character of the state (Local Preparatory Committee of Palestinian NGOs in Israel 2001).⁷

Likewise, Adalah, one of the largest recipients of grants from transnational Jewish foundations, has been appearing in international forums critical of Israel: most notably in the UN Human Rights committee. It has a consultant NGO status that enables it to submit position papers. Recently, it has published a proposal for a constitution in Israel that practically rejects the Jewish character of the state and will recognise the ‘right of return’ of Palestinian refugees from the 1947–49 war (Adalah 2007).

Adalah was formed as a legal advocacy centre with the intent of focusing exclusively on the PAI. This NGO’s founder, Hasan Jabareen, initially worked for the Association of Civil Rights in Israel (ACRI) (also a popular grantee with the NIF, Moriah, and many others). A short while after completing his graduate degree in the United States and returning to Israel, Jabareen split from ACRI, claiming that Arabs must lead their own human rights organisation ‘independently without the pressure of the Zionist agenda’, as he perceived the case to be at ACRI (Jabareen 2005). He registered Adalah as an independent NGO in 1996. Jabareen maintains that an important part of the empowerment of a national minority is to have its exclusive NGOs and legal centers located in Arab residential vicinities. And yet, despite its increasing ‘nationalisation’ since the mid-1990s, Adalah has managed to significantly increase its financial support base from Jewish donors.

Similarly, Mossawa declares that informing the international community of the PAI predicament is one of its main goals. It has taken foreign diplomats on tours in Israel to see the lack of ‘basic human rights’ of the PAI (Mossawa Center 2005a: 1). It has also accused the state of sanctioning violence against the minority (Mossawa Center 2005b: 50).

Other examples of such grantees include the Arab Association for Human Rights (HRA) and Al-Ahali. The HRA has been a recipient of Moriah grants and is eligible for donor-advised grants from the NIF despite submitting reports to various UN committees and in other international forums which aim at ‘holding Israel accountable’ for what the HRA has been classifying as state violation of international law in its treatment of the PAI minority (Arab Association for Human Rights 2004: 1–4). In the NGO forum of the Durban Conference Against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia, and Related Intolerance in 2001, Al-Ahali registered its country of origin as the Occupied Palestinian Territories even though its centre is in Nazareth, internationally recognised as part of Israel proper. Thus, it expressed its strong Palestinian ethnonational inclinations and its resentment toward Israel.

The greatest contributions made by the NIF in 2005 were to five ethnonational PAI NGOs in particular: The Arab Center for Alternative Planning (ACAP) (\$330,000), the Mossawa Center (\$280,269), Regional Council for Unrecognized Negev Arab Villages: Al-Auna (\$120,000), Follow Up Committee for Arab Education (\$85,000), and Adalah (\$72,444) (New Israel Fund 2005b: 7–11).

ACAP challenges the state's norms and practices of land distribution. The organisation's 'objective is to get the PAI involved in the planning and building process by gaining proportionate representation of the Arab minority on the planning and building councils' (Haklai 2004: 160). The Follow Up Committee advocates equal distribution of educational resources to PAI education facilities, and develops curricula and programs for PAI schools to suit the minority's particular needs and promote its distinct national identity. Al-Auna deals with distribution of land in the Negev. It acts through advocacy aimed at policy-makers, through alternative planning, and through community organisation.

Of all the major grantees, Adalah presents the most intriguing case. Whereas most of the other NGOs are mainly policy oriented, Adalah most explicitly targets the institutional order. Adalah identifies the roots of unequal distribution of resources in the Zionist character of the state and the firm embedding of Jewish nationalism within the state, and it is this problem that this NGO is trying to address. This is not say that other associations disagree with this assessment, but their activism is oriented toward integration into the Israeli system, whereas Adalah's agenda is more explicitly ethnonationalist, as demonstrated by its proposal for a new constitution, the secession from ACRI, and by the areas of litigation on which it focuses (Haklai 2004, 163–5).

Thus, the explanation focusing on minority control is weakened by the continuation of financial aid. If the objective was to co-opt and silence PAI ethnonational elites, termination of grant-making would have been expected given the lack of success. Instead, most of these NGOs have benefited from increases in financial support from Jewish donors. It should be acknowledged that only decade-long practices are available to verify this hypothesis. It is possible that Jewish foundations do not hasten to withhold donations out of fear that such a strategy will yield further radicalisation whereas financial ties will engender moderation in the long run. Nevertheless, considering the plurality of funding sources and the lack of co-ordination between the various donor agencies, it would be naïve of any single donor agency to assume that its contributions alone could create submissive dependence in the first place.

As with the majority utility explanation, an account that assumes that donors are exclusively driven by the desire to promote liberal values is not flawless either. A major difficulty with this explanation is that many of the grantees themselves are not liberal but ethnonational. For some, ethnonational considerations override liberal ideas. An example that best demonstrates how particularistic ends overpower more universal liberal objectives is Adalah's position on personal status laws in Israel. When amendments to the

personal status laws in Israel were debated and intensely advocated for by other civil rights organisations, Adalah's General Director, Hasan Jabareen, opposed them even though the proposed amendments would have provided PAI women with access to civil courts by lifting the exclusive jurisdiction of religious courts on some personal status matters. Jabareen reasoned that he could not in principle support state intervention in the traditional practices of the PAI minority even if these practices infringed on women's equality (El-Taji 2006; Jabareen 2005).

Funding, if more modest, is provided to other PAI NGOs whose activity is guided primarily by ethnonational objectives. Al-Ahali, for example, received grants worth \$30,000 from the NIF and \$25,000 from Moriah in 2005 as well as in previous years. This NGO is ideologically close to the Balad political party, headed by the outspoken pan-Arab nationalist, Azmi Bishara. The party is the most outspoken PAI political party that champions Palestinian Arab nationalism in Israel. The NGO's previous Director General, Jamal Zahalka, is currently a Member of Knesset on Balad's behalf. Zahalka delivered accusatory keynote speeches in the 2007 'Israel Apartheid Week' held across university campuses in Canada. The Al-Ahali NGO itself, as mentioned earlier, registered its country of origin as the Occupied Palestinian Territories in the 2001 Durban conference against racism.

An argument can be made that donors could be misguided by the framing of demands in liberal and human rights rhetoric by ethnic civil society organisations. Such a claim assumes a certain degree of gullibility on the part of the giving party. Communications with donors suggest that, in most cases, donor interpretations of events and PAI NGO activism are more complex. Interviews with PAI NGOs and donors do not reveal whether the NIF was aware of Al-Ahali's registration in the Durban conference. A few years down the road, retroactive punitive action appears to donors to be no longer appropriate. More generally, the NIF, like others, would like to see its activism enhance Jewish-Arab co-operation (New Israel Fund 2006a and 2006b; Paiss 2006). Indeed, Al-Ahali's biggest grant in 2005 was project-specific and was meant to assist in the formation of an Arab farmers' interest group within the larger farmers union in Israel. The project aims to provide Arab farmers with training and capacity to lobby as a collective within the union in a similar fashion to other organised interest groups. This project can be viewed as integrationist because the alternative for PAI farmers is to break away and form a separate, albeit less powerful, Arab farmers union. Thus, grants to an NGO like Al-Ahali can achieve two goals: first, the project promotes social equality and a development project of interest. Second, an otherwise outspoken ethnonationalist NGO becomes involved in a project that is oriented towards integration.

Explaining Jewish aid to PAI NGOs

In line with this interpretation of the continued assistance to Al-Ahali, the emerging explanation for why transnational Jewish donors are willing to

donate to PAI ethnic civil society and non-liberal causes is that they view PAI development and integration into Israeli society as conducive to better Jewish-PAI and state-minority relations and, therefore, as important to the Jewish state as a whole. Donors are committed not only to assisting in the empowerment of disadvantaged groups, but also to Israel. As such, they view their grant-making activism as contributing to a better Jewish state.

Evidence that donors would like to help PAI human and social development because they view it as desirable for Israel as a whole can be found in a number of written documents. Many donors cite Israel's Declaration of Independence as their source of core values of equality and justice and they see themselves as promoting the appropriate values of Israel. Further, the NIF Director of Communication writes that although

... much of the work that sets up encounter groups between Israelis and Palestinians ... falls outside our grant guidelines ... we certainly believe that our work with Palestinian NGOs fosters communication and coordination between the two sides in the ongoing conflict and that, indeed, the only secure Israel is a just Israel that resolves its internal issues with its most important minority group. Thus, we do fund Palestinian NGOs that may not immediately contribute to the 'peace and co-existence agenda', although we believe that every grantee we have, in strengthening the rights of the Palestinian minority, over time contributes to the furtherance of that goal (Paiss 2006).

The mission and vision statement of the Abraham Fund Initiatives is even more explicit:

The Abraham Fund Initiatives works to advance coexistence, equality and cooperation among Israel's Jews and Arab citizens ... The Abraham Fund Initiatives sees civic equality for Israel's Jewish and Arab citizens as a moral and pragmatic imperative, whereby individual rights and the political, cultural and religious character of the Arab minority must be clearly and unambiguously recognized and respected ... the enhancement of Jewish/Arab coexistence and equality in Israel is vital to the future of the state of Israel, its security and stability, and the welfare of its Jewish and Arab citizens (Abraham Fund Initiatives 2005a).

Furthermore, the societal characteristics of the personnel involved in the NIF and others in the Jewish donor community to PAI NGOs are of liberals who value Israel and wish to invest in the liberal side of the Jewish state. Annual surveys of American-Jewish opinions conducted by the American Jewish Committee (AJC) reveal ongoing attachment to Israel coupled with a strong political identification with the Democratic Party (2006). Although the surveys do not identify donors in particular, it is safe to assume that the general tendencies are at least equally as pronounced among the donor community.

The desire to assist Israel as a whole, along with genuine liberal motivations, provides evidence in support of the social constructivist approach in international relations. The constructivist perspective claims that ideational factors, most importantly prevalent beliefs and norms, construct the identities and the interpretation of interests of purposive actors (Finnemore and Sikkink 2001). The ethnic donor community not only adopts American ideals such as pluralism and minority rights, but also works to reinforce and

strengthen these values in the symbolic homeland. Such is the commitment to these values that the donors have come to believe that it is in the best interest of their co-nationals to adhere to the same norms. Shain and Sherman refer to financial flows driven by such motivations as 'identity oriented flows' because the donors' intention is to influence the national identity of the homeland so that it will be more congruent with the donors' image of themselves (2001: 9–22).

And yet, Israel is often perceived by liberals as displaying strong ethno-communitarian tendencies. Thus a potential discord has resulted from these concomitant commitments. The tension between liberal and ethnonational identities is best conveyed in the Canadian Jewish author Mordecai Richler's *This year in Jerusalem*. Richler describes how during the Suez Canal crisis in 1956, he marched with his left-wing friends in London against the 'imperialist' aggression, yet, at the same time, he claims to have felt much pride in Israel's power and ability to act forcefully to protect its interests (1994: 43). Contemporary aid to Palestinian NGOs is an attempt to reconcile two contemporaneous tendencies: identification with civic rights, on the one hand, and commitment to a particularistic national Jewish identity, on the other hand. The congruence is reflected in the belief that the promotion of ideals such as pluralism and minority rights is not only normatively desirable but also in Israel's best interest.

Thus, while financial aid for those PAI ethnic civil society associations whose values are communitarian initially appears inconsistent with the donors' dual commitment to Israel's well-being and the promotion of liberal values, the donors see their activities as advancing pluralism and integrationist PAI behaviour. Indeed, donors are softening, although not controlling, some potential PAI ethnonationalism by providing incentives for integrationist activism. Many PAI NGOs are trying to find balance between their communitarian tendencies and organisational interests. Although NGOs across the board categorically refuse to admit the influence of funding agencies, many grant-writers have admitted in private conversations that they sometimes tailor their grant applications to donor priorities. Organisations such as Mossawa and ACAP are encouraged to pursue projects with Jewish organisations, or with a 'co-existence' theme. Mossawa, for example, collaborated with academics at the University of Haifa on a project dealing with broadcasting programmes in Arabic on Israel's commercial television channel. ACAP, similarly, received a grant from the Abraham Fund Initiatives for a 'national dialogue project' (NDP) for building Jewish – PAI trust. The project included a number of workshops in which Arab planners and engineers, representatives of the government, and Jewish urban planners from local councils exchanged ideas and came up with a list of recommendations for cooperation. The objective was to raise the awareness of Jewish policy-makers and planners and foster cooperation.

In sum, donors believe that the relationship between the PAI minority, on the one hand, and the Jewish majority and the state, on the other hand, does

not amount to a zero sum game. Internalising civic ideals such as minority rights, donors attempt to influence the lines of exclusion because they view it as valuable for their co-nationals in Israel as well and for building a better Jewish society in Israel.

Conclusion

Traditionally, studies of transnational mobilisation focus on describing what groups do and how they do it. There is very little research on why transnational activists do what they do because the underlying assumption has typically been that they are mobilising in solidarity with their co-nationals. The case of transnational Jewish donors to PAI NGOs is thus useful for evaluating this conventional assumption.

The analysis presented in this article suggests that the main transnational Jewish donors are driven by genuine normative concerns, liberal motivations, and a desire to assist in PAI development, coupled with strong commitment to Israel. The donors view minority development as a goal in its own right, as contributing to a better Israel, and as useful for promoting coexistence by improving Jewish-PAI relations in Israel, something essential for Israel's security. There is awareness that not all grantees are equally committed to universal, liberal values, and hold communitarian leanings. As long as these grant recipients do not cross to the path to militancy against Israel, transnational Jewish donors are generally willing to tolerate PAI ethnonational activism, at least partly because they believe that PAI development discourages political radicalisation. At the root of transnational Jewish donor activism, therefore, is a hybrid approach combining concern for, and commitment to, the Jewish state, on the one hand, with a normative commitment to balance the 'ethnic' and 'garrison' sides of Israel with increased liberal leanings, on the other hand.

These findings indicate that the interpretation of ethnonational interests is constructed by the normative social environment in which groups operate. Jewish donors in Western countries, primarily North America, have internalised local identities and values such as minority rights and pluralism. Their commitment to these values is such that it guides their understanding of Israel's interest, shapes their objectives, and influences their mobilisation strategy.

Notes

1 All monetary references are in US dollars unless otherwise stated.

2 Another proposition that deserves mentioning is that donating agencies provide support to those with whom they sympathise. It could be that just as there are Jewish members of the International Solidarity Movement, also known as the Palestine Solidarity Movement, the Jewish donors investigated here are anti-Zionists who provide financial backing to the minority with whom they share objectives. As Tamar Hermann notes, from the outset, there have been Jewish

individuals and organisations who have been opposing Zionism (Hermann 2005). As demonstrated in the rest of the article, however, the evidence clearly demonstrates that the donating agencies do not share an anti-Zionist vision and, therefore, this proposition is not considered with equal weight in this article.

3 The sum attributed to Moriah does not include grants made through the NIF-sponsored Shatil for a project entitled 'the Palestinian Initiative'. Some of the grants may have been directed to PAI NGOs.

4 The computation of these estimates is based on data made available through donors' annual reports and through acknowledgements by grantees (Abraham Fund Initiatives 2000–2004, 2005b, 2006; The Moriah Fund 2000–2006; Naomi and Nehemia Cohen Foundation 2001, 2002, 2003, 2004, 2005, 2006; New Israel Fund 2000, 2001, 2002, 2003, 2004, 2005b; Richard and Rhoda Goldman Fund 2003, 2004, 2005, 2006; Shefa Fund 2001, 2002, 2003, 2005). Several methodological problems were encountered. In a small number of instances, not all the data were made available. Some of the smaller foundations were unwilling to reveal all the information. This is not surprising given the criticism levelled at them by sceptics. Furthermore, some of the donations are project-specific and thus do not reflect an ongoing commitment. Finally, the ethnic civil status of a negligible number of recipients is fuzzy. The criterion used to evaluate a recipient is the objectives and activities of the association (Haklai 2004: 158–9).

5 For several reasons beyond the scope of this paper, the Islamists split into two movements in the mid-1990s with the Southern branch asserting a more reconciliatory stance towards the state.

6 The single known exception is that of Ittijah, which was removed from the NIF's donor-approved list after it signed up to an anti-Israel declaration in advance of the World Conference against Racism in Durban, 2001. The European Commission also terminated its support for Ittijah following the NGO's statements opposing normalisation with Israel in the Cairo Institute for Human Rights Studies (CIHRS) conference in 2002 (Chevallard 2002).

7 The NGO Forum alongside the Durban conference is a particularly useful test case because it was perceived by Israel and many Jewish organisations as particularly hostile to Israel while singling it out and accusing it of genocidal acts, ethnic cleansing, and other atrocities.

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