IN-CONGRUENT CIVIL AGENCY AND NEO-LIBERAL RATIONALE: THE POLITICS OF SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY IN THE CASE OF LATET

By
Asa Maron

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Supervisors: Professor Alexandra Kowalski
Professor Dan Rabinowitz

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Abstract

This research uses *Latet's* case to explore the micro political dynamics of a civil organization which struggles to reestablish state responsibility over needy populations while it undertakes this responsibility itself. This contradiction produces a special type of organizational civil agency which is responsible and challenging concurrently. Such a phenomenon is important for understanding the politics of contemporary civil societies which operate in neo-liberal times, when governmental responsibilities drift away from the state.

I have identified two central mechanisms for the reconciliation of *Latet's* contradictory praxis. First, *Latet* (re)produces a discourse of responsibility toward the needy and their hunger, which engage its personnel and volunteers with the immediate needs of the poor. Second, *Latet* produces and promotes a technical mode of action which is focused on the "doing" itself, through which it bypasses political doubts and structural tensions.

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i. Introduction

Extensive scholarship and research of civil societies has been conducted for more then two decades now, yet the concept of civil society remains contested. Its definition, place and role in contemporary late-modern societies are still highly debatable. Different intellectual traditions vary in their perception of the relations between civil society, the nation-state[1] and the market[2]. In general, there are two prominent political roles for civil societies[3]: first, as a site of alternative politics which has the capacity to challenge the status-quo. Civil societies can invoke new publics and arguments that may propel social change. Second, civil society can be seen as a sphere "colonized" by social forces which disable political change. They are disciplined arenas[4] which regulates socio-political agency[5] and reproduces the status-quo.

Considering these conflicting tendencies, my working assumption is to envision civil societies as multifaceted entities which may perform opposite roles concurrently. If so, it seems possible that such binary potential will be embedded in a particular civil entity. This paper will examine this possibility on the empirical case of an Israeli non-governmental organization (NGO) called *Latet* (to give in Hebrew). My work will focus on the structural tensions which arise from its peculiar position vis-à-vis the state and the market: on the one hand, it struggles to reestablish state responsibility over needy populations – while it undertakes this responsibility itself. On the other hand, it is sponsored by corporations – while declaring a war on national poverty.

[1] For example, compare the (neo) Tocquevillian school (Tocqueville [1835-40]; Putnam [1994, 2000]; Edwards and Foley [1998, 2001]) and the Gramscian approach (Gramsci, [1921-6], Bobbio [1988]).
[2] See the Hegelian and the Marxist approaches to civil society.
[3] For similar conceptualizations of the different political roles of civil society, see: Taylor (1990), Cohen and Arato (1995) and Foley and Edwards (1996).
[4] See Hardt (1995).
[5] For example, see Riley (2005) for the complementary role of associational spheres in Fascist regimes, and Armony (2004) for other non-democratic interplays between states and civil societies.

The conflicting tendencies of civil society became the locus of both academic and popular debates in the last decades. This is the result of intensive contestations over the idea of civil society as the panacea for the many short comes of democratic-capitalistic regimes. Civil society's advocators perceive it as the very essence of democracy and economic progress. For Putnam, it is the place of associational life which creates social capital and trust (1994, 2000) which make "democracy work"[6]. Similarly, Fukuyama (1992, 2001) sees civil society as an integral part of the "end of history" constellation, which promotes progress through the production of social capital and trust.

Alternatively, civil society has also had its fair share of critique for a variety of reasons. Wood (1990) understands the preoccupation with civil society as an alibi for capitalism: "this versatile idea has become an all-purpose catchword for the left, embracing a wide range of emancipatory aspirations, as well - it must be said - as a whole set of excuses for political retreat" (p. 60). In his thesis of the "withering of civil society", Hardt (1995) deals with the discipline and exploitation embedded in civil societies, and raises fundamental doubts about its political desirability.

This research focuses on one type of civil entity: the non-governmental organization (NGO). Like civil society as a whole, NGO's too have ambiguous political role. While some consider NGO's as the forefront of the "global associational revolution" (Salamon, 1999) and praise their function in contemporary societies[7], they are often perceived as facilitators and agents of neo-liberal programs through their subsidiary role in the privatization of public social services (Anheier and DiMmagio, 1990; Clarke, 1998). Many accuse NGO's for serving capitalistic and imperialistic ends by providing instant, temporary and "Western" solution for indigenous problems. Ferguson (1990) for example, finds that NGO's

[6] For an inspiring critique of Putnam's work, especially his usage of the concept of social capital, see Defilippis (2001).

[7] For this conservative view on NGO's, see "The John Hopkins Comparative Nonprofit Sector Project" economical approach, which centers on the cooperation between the first and the third sectors in service's provision (Salamon, 1995; Salamon & Anheier, 1992, 1997).

interventions encourage "anti-political politics" which prevents substantial changes of social problems. Social issues are framed as projects and campaigns – using the "project-speak" (Sampson, 1996:123) – and are met with technical-practical apparatuses (Ferguson, 1990; Taylor, 1999). Instead of representing and serving the novel ends of social justice and equity, NGO's are analyzed as collaborators with corporative imperialism (Petras, 1997). Others have a less deterministic take on NGO's: Ungpakorn (2004) argues that although not revolutionary, NGO's should be seen as "reformists" which poses some potential for a social struggle against neo-liberalism. While many NGO's cooperate with corporations, for example, others confront them (Winston, 2002).

There are three predominant types of Israeli non-governmental organizations which are important for understanding *Latet's* uniqueness: firstly, organizations which promote post-material values; in the spirit of "new social movements", they shy away from the state and do not challenge its political supremacy (Ben-Eliezer, 1999; Melucci, 1989; Offe, 1985). Secondly, organizations which challenge the state yet remain distanced from it in order to preserve their role as exterior critics (e.g. Helman and Rapoport, 1997; Sasson-Levi and Rapoport, 2003; Tarrow, 1998). Thirdly, there are organizations which provide different social services under state regulation and funding, usually considered as 'third sector organizations' (Gidron et al., 2003b; Salamon & Anheier, 1992, 1997). Incorporated in the governmental apparatus, such organizations are subordinated to state apparatuses[8].

In contrast with the above described organizational types, *Latet's* position vis-à-vis the state is not easy to comprehend: it is a civil entity (privately sponsored with no state funding or regulation) which deals with the provision of social services (a governmental task). *Latet* is interesting for two reasons then: empirically, it introduces an innovative NGO structure to the Israeli civil society. Analytically, it challenges the artificial scholarly separation between the

[8] Although such organizations may sometimes affect state policy (Yishai, 1990; Gidron, 1997).

civil society, social movements and third sector literatures (see Hasenfeld and Gidron, 2005) by presenting a liminal, in-between case of a multifaceted civil organization.

Latet is a humanitarian business-supported NGO which mobilize thousands of volunteers via its food provision project, aimed at easing the distress of Israel's growing underclass. By distributing food to needy population *Latet* shoulders a function that was formerly with the state[9], by which it indirectly supports state retrenchment from social services. This notwithstanding, *Latet* also has a public campaign in which it calls on the Israeli government to acknowledge poverty and reclaim responsibility over its reduction.

This research uses *Latet's* case to explore the micro political dynamics of an organization which simultaneously assumes state responsibility (by aiding the needy), and struggles to shift it back to the state. These contradictions are producing a special type of organizational civil agency which is responsible and challenging concurrently. Such a phenomenon is important for understanding the politics of contemporary civil societies which operate in neo-liberal times, when many governmental responsibilities drift away from the state.

I will focus on the practices and social mechanisms by which civil actors manage and reconcile the tensions and contradictions which arise from their own proactive interventions, under the essential presupposition that such agency takes place within structural constraints (e.g. Giddens, 1984; Bourdieu, 1977). My research question is: what are the practices and social mechanisms through which *Latet* reconciles between contradicting aspects of its social praxis?

In order to answer this question a field research has been conducted, employing a variety of qualitative methods. I have conducted fifteen Semi-structured interviews with *Latet's* professional personnel and activists in order to comprehend their framing and resolution of the incongruence of the organizational apparatus. For this end, both frame (e.g. Snow et al.,

[9] Although the Israeli state has never directly participated in the provision of food for its needy population, the basic right for nutrition is encapsulated within the responsibilities of the welfare state.

1986) and discourse (e.g. Steinberg, 1999) analyses were utilized. Additionally, a short ethnography of various organizational activities and arenas of participation took place. I have also collected and analyzed a wide variety of artifacts such as organizational products, formal documents and news articles.

The structure of the thesis is as follows: I will start by reviewing four paradigmatic views about the autonomy of modern and late-modern civil societies. Then I will critically review the literature about the Israeli civil society in order to characterize my research field. The literature review will end with an account of the problematic relationship between civil society and capital. Next, I will discuss my methodology and account for my field methods and analysis. My analysis and results are presented in five chapters: I will start with an elaborated description of *Latet's* apparatus which will be followed by an analysis of *Latet's* relations with volunteers and voluntarism, on the one hand, and with the Israeli business sector, on the other. Chapter three will deal with the definitions of the Israeli state in *Latet's* discourse – as responsible and incompetent – and their implications. This chapter is followed with an analysis of the discourse of responsibility which is practiced by *Latet's*, and the technologies through which it is reproduced. Subsequently, chapter four analyzes *Latet's* form of apolitical politics. Finally, I will present my conclusions and propose a model for analyzing active citizenship in a neo-liberal era.

ii. Literature Review

1. An Autonomous sphere? A Critical Theoretical Examination of Civil Society in the Democratic-Capitalist Order

One of the predominant approaches[10] to the dynamics of states and civil societies is the normative oriented approach of the Neo- Tocquevillian School (e.g. Putnam, 1994, 2000; Edwards and Foley, 1998, 2001; Skocpol, 1999). Following Alexis De-Tocqueville's 19th century political thought (1835-40), civil society is considered as the locus of autonomy from state's coercion. When liberty is secured by the state – capitalistic-democracies' public spheres are envisioned as plural civic arenas in which associations between emancipated individuals and groups creates checks and balances to governmental power[11]. Additionally, civic association play an educational role by cultivating the "civic virtue" (cooperation, trust, reciprocity and self-responsibility), and inculcating "rightly understood self interest" which allows for collective, democratic social existence thereafter[12].

Jurgen Habermas' study of the 'Public Sphere' (1989a [1962]; 1989b [1973]; 1992; 1996) approach advances the utopian view of grassroots politics in liberal-democracies. The public sphere emerged in the 18th century as a result of the bourgeois struggle for an autonomous sphere segregated from the state, where individual liberties could be realized. The public sphere encompasses all human communicative interactions in various media (e.g. texts, conversations, associations), where a critical public opinion may be formed and practiced. It is important to note that Habermas' model was critiqued by many (Calhoun, 1992; Frazer, 1992; Benhabib, 1992; Hauser, 1998; Eisenstadt, 2001); these scholars have revisited and

[10] I will not consider here schools of thought which essentially incorporates the sphere of economics and labor within their concept of civil society, such as the Hegelian tradition. By that, I will be following Arato and Cohen (1995) conceptualization of civil society.

[11] This aspect was studied and elaborated by political scientists such as Dahl, R. (1961).

[12] See Bellah et al. (1985).

elaborated Habermas' work by indicating on a multiplicity of public spheres and counterpublics (e.g. proletarian, nationalist, feminist).

During the 19th-20th centuries the bourgeois public sphere has been structurally transformed due to the penetration of the economic and bureaucratic (state) systems which dissolved its capacity for civil rational communication. The (civil) public sphere was "penetrated" by different forces (the emerging partisan system, the Keynesian welfare apparatus and televised mass media) which disabled its capacity for contentious politics, and sterilized the potential for critical political deliberations by engaged citizens. Such colonization is thus inherited in the capitalistic-democratic order of modern and late-modern societies; it is not the exceptional case of despotism, as perceived by the Tocquevillian School.

The Gramscian approach to civil societies (Gramsci, 1971; Bobbio, 1988; Chanin, 2001) can be taken as a critique of the liberal perception of civil society. Although often considered as fragmented and incoherent[13], Gramsci's analysis is essential in order to challenge liberal a-political images of civil society as a distinct social realm which exist beyond power and domination, class relations and political economy. For Gramsci, civil society is a central arena for the dynamics of Hegemony where domination is established through consent, rather then coercion. Domination is practiced by the 'Historical Bloc': a tentative constellation of elites which produces a flexible dominant ideology; this flexibility allows it to incorporate popular themes leading to the cooptation and subordination of the working class. Civil society and political society overlap to a large extent, and the liberal utopia where civil society functions as a sanctuary diminishes; as Gramsci himself asserts: "the state's goal is its own end, its own disappearance, in other words, the re-absorption of political society within civil society" (1971:253). The politics of the state, in other words, are omnipresent and are inherently

[13] On his ambiguous in regard to civil society's definition and boundaries vis-à-vis political society and the state, see Anderson (1976).

practiced at all the social domains, especially the cultural-political domain of grassroots association and mobilization; thus there is small potential for the emergent of subversive grassroots' challenges of the dominant political-culture.

A consideration of the state and civil society as undistinguished social entities is central to Michel Foucault's studies of 'Governmentality'. The Foucauldian analysis replaces the theoretical distinction between state and society by an intertwined perception of sovereignty and population (Foucault, 1991; Mitchell, 1991; Burchell, Gordon and Miller, 1991; Barry, Osborne and Rose, 1996). This approach illuminates an important aspect in the realignment of the modern state and its politics; such politics implement liberal and neo-liberal political rationales via methods of governance from a distance (Rose and Miller, 1992). Emphasizing the dispersed and capillary nature of disciplinary power[14], this approach advances the orthodox dichotomies of state\civil society, private\public and coercion\emancipation.

The perception of 'civil society' as a distinct entity which operates in a "government-free" space is misleading; alternatively, we ought to understand the intellectual, technological and moral mechanisms which established 'civil society' simultaneously as a distinguished sphere from that of authority – yet one which corresponds to its views and ends (Barry, Osborne and Rose, 1996; Rose and Miller, 1992). According to the governmental analysis, power is the "conduct of conduct" (e.g. Gordon, 1991): a mode of power which inherently presupposes agents and their capacity for agency for its operation. In the production of concerned self-managed citizens, a certain civic agency is invoked; 'civil society' appears as a realm of politics in which power is simultaneously imposed on subjects and works through them.

To conclude, the Foucauldian approach perceives civil society as the locus of political power beyond the state, where liberties are not protected but regulated within an apparatus of seductive, pastoral power. The boundaries between state and civil society are either imagined

[14] See Foucault (1979, 1980), about the "Panopticism", see Foucault (1979).

or irrelevant, since there is no social space which exists beyond power. In contrast with the former paradigms I have presented, this approach was never utilized in the analysis of the Israeli civil society. My research is a modest attempt to fill this gap. I will now turn to describe the specificities of the Israeli civil society.

2. The Israeli civil society: Between Etatism and Pluralism

Following Chanin (2001) argument about the need to understand civil societies as spheres 'in relations' (rather than autonomous) to the market and state spheres, this section begins with a short evaluation of the transformations of the Israeli market and the state in a globalized age. Afterwards, I will examine the prospect of civil society in Israel.

2.1 Contemporary Trends of the Israeli Society: Globalization, Neo-Liberalization and Inequality

The transformation of civil society in Israel should be considered in the context the advanced globalization process of the Israeli society since the 1990's: first, the transition into 'Post-Fordism' (Ram, 2005, 2004). Second, the commodification of the welfare state, privatization and deregulation of the market and other sectors (Shalev, 1999, 2004; Filc, 2004). Similar to other countries, the transformation from the fordist to the post-fordist capitalistic mode manifests in ostensive changes of the state, labor and capital and their interrelations (Ram, 2004). The state adopts global neo-liberalized standards which support the submission of the national-market to global uncontrolled competition which is governed by global corporations (Ram, 2004:17-8); this process intertwines with the retrenchment of the welfare state[15], privatization and contraction of public services (Chason, 2006; Peled and Shafir, 2005, Chap.10; Ajzenstadt and Rosenhek, 2000)

[15] See Rosenhek (2002) for a critique of the simplistic "welfare crisis" account; instead, Rosenhek suggest a comprehensive historical analysis of the politics of welfare policies in Israel.

Such forces dissolve local attempts to organize and resist the degradation of labor conditions and of social rights in general. These processes result in the extensive growth of inequality in Israel, which are also evident in the concomitant emergent of two new Israeli classes: a super-national class of professionals, managers and capitalists and respectively, a new Israeli underclass (Shalev, 1999; Ram, 2005).

2.2 Civil Society in Israel? A Critical Review

Being an ethno-national democracy (Samooha 1990, 1997), the Israeli state excludes non-Jews from its civic community; in the case of Israeli-Palestinians, who are formally equal citizens, the exclusion accrues de-facto, while in the case of non-Israeli Palestinians, who are non-citizens (subjects) of Israel, the exclusion is explicit and institutionalized. Primordial state identities as well as strong pre-state affiliations to national and religious groups are undermining the creation of an equal civic community in Israel, based on a liberal-democratic model of citizenship (Seligman, 1992:152-4). The dynamics of conflicting discourses of citizenship in Israel – republican, ethno-national and liberal (Peled and Shafir, 2005) – have created a fragmented civil community of unequal citizens with distinguished civic obligations and entitlements. This fractured community does not inhabit the same civil sphere, which is a prominent pre condition for civil and political membership and participation.

Unlike western liberal-democratic societies, the Israeli civil society did not emerge in a culture which emphasizes individualism and distrust in state apparatuses (Kramer, 1976; Ben-Eliezer, 1993). As Seligman simply notes, Israel's civil society faces the problem of the "yet-to-be-constituted private subject" (1992:155): unlike liberal traditions, Israel's political and jurisdictional cultures are not imbued with the blueprint of the autonomous individual. The Israeli state was established as the realization of the Zionist national movement and as the manifestation of the 'general good'; it was formed with the 'statist' (*mamlachtiut*) ideology which privileged state centralism and collective interests, at the expanse of non-state

institutions (Ben-Eliezer, 1993:404). The centralized Israeli state enjoyed a monopoly over various resources (ideological, cultural and material) which gave it enormous control over the mobilization of society. For three decades the Israeli state controlled the central recruitment and mobilization channels of its citizens through mandatory military service, and other regulated arenas of 'civil' participation (e.g. youth movements). Ben-Eliezer describes this mode of control as: "an effective form of hegemony that blurred any possible distinction between societal voluntarism on the one hand, and statist orders and formal coercion, on the other" (1998:389).

There is a general consensus among Israeli social researchers in regard to the structural changes undertaken by the Israeli civil society: from the pre-state era to its current constellation. A crucial element in this transformation is the shift toward a post-hegemonic era of state-society relations in Israel, in which the centralized role of the "nation-state-in-arms" declines (Ben-Eliezer, 2003:29). Until the end of the 1970's the civil society in Israel was subjected to the national-statist (collectivist) ambitions and mainly functioned as an extension of the state political system: it was a centralized arena for collective mobilization. The civil sphere was limited and homogenous, and encompassed few organizations (associations, movement, etc.) and activities (Yishai, 1998; Ben-Eliezer, 1999; Silber and Rosenhek, 1999; Gidron et al. 2003b; Peled, 2005).

At the end of the 1970's and during the 1980's, Israeli society went through processes of liberalization which dramatically affected its cultural, juridical, political and economical domains. The change entailed a long process of privatization in which different public services were removed from state's institutions to the non-profit sector[16] and private organizations (Gidron et al. 2003b; Peled, 2005). Such delegation of services to the non-profit

[16] The Israeli Center for Third sector Research (ICTR) has published many studies about the Israeli third (non-profit) sector, its historical development, structure and relations with the state; see for example, Silber and Rosenhek (1999), Gidron et al. (2003a), Gidron et al. (2003b).

sector[17] was, and still is, conducted under direct governmental supervision and is publicly funded[18] (Gidron et al. 2003:193-4; Ajzenstadt and Rosenhek, 2000). Unlike others, the Israeli case of welfare-state and non-profit sector relations implies subordination of the last to the first, rather than cooperation (Yishai, 1990; Gidron, 1997).

The economical change was a result of both global pressures[19], and intra-state demands raised by the Israeli middle class to "join the process of economic globalization on the side of the winners" (Peled, 2005:1); another vigorous demand was to create more space for a civil society. Peled clusters other changes around three titles: electoral reform, human-rights legislation, and the strengthening of professional, non-elected institutions (Peled, 2005:2; Peled and Shafir, 2005).

A prominent change in the landscape of the Israeli civil society was the proliferation of civil organizations, advocacy groups and movements at the beginning of the 1990's. Contrary to prior phases of state-civil society relations, contemporary Israel is characterized as a society of civil pluralism which is reflected in the proliferation of various civil non-profit organizations (Yishai, 1998; Ben-Eliezer, 1999; Silber and Rosenhek, 1999; Gidron et al. 2003; Peled, 2005). While in 1982 only 3,000 organizations were legally registered as non-profit organizations, at the beginning of 2000 more than 30,000 organizations were registered (Ben-Eliezer, 1999:54). Yishai (1998, 2003) argues that the proliferation of civil groups, movements and associations implies that the Israeli society is following western patterns of liberalization: the civil sphere is becoming autonomous from the state, where civic critique and opposition are practiced. In a similar notion, Gidron et al. (2003b) observe that the proliferation of civil entities has contributed to the creation of civil society and 'social capital' in Israel; such associational sphere encompass various voices, needs and interests of different

[17] For the 'division of labor' between the government and non-governmental organization in the provision of social services, see Schmid (2004).
[18] For an account of the "implicit" public policy in regard to governmental funding, see Gidron and Katz (2001).
[19] For example, pressures which are created by global organizations such as the World Trade Organization (WTO), World Bank, etc. (Ram, 2004:33).

communities and groups (p. 219-220). Such an analysis of the Israeli civil society corresponds to the Tocquevillian paradigm view of civil society as a distinguished arena of civic engagement which reflects different private interests.

However, quantitative change does not necessarily signal a qualitative one. According to Ben-Eliezer (1999) the newly emerged civil entities mainly dealt with the promotion of post-material values, following the spirit of the 'new social movements' (for example, Offe, 1985b). Such civil organization do not challenge the social-economical-political order since they are invested in individualized 'identity politics' (contrary to 'instrumental politics' which aims at altering the political 'center'), they shy away from the state and are not interested in establishing interrelations with other organizations; respectively, they do not contribute to the prosperity of public civil dynamics and public discourse (Ben-Eliezer, 1999).

Despite its pluralism and its (self) image as democratized multi-vocal arena, the Israeli society has turned "from a political society into a society of citizens, rather than a civil society" (Ben-Eliezer, 1999:88). The political implications of this change are the fragmentation and neutralization of the civil sphere, which remains incompetent to propel substantive social-political change. In this account, Ben-Eliezer maintains his Gramscian approach (see Ben-Eliezer, 1998) for the analysis of state-civil society interplay in Israel. The dispersed Hegemonic structure of the Israeli state absorbs grassroots innovations, shape their meaning and mitigate their revolutionary potential.

So far, we have seen the contribution of both the Tocquevillian and the Gramscian approaches to the analysis of the Israeli civil society. These perceptions, however, fail to capture and comprehend *Latet's* incongruent civil agency; which is autonomous and proactive on one hand, yet correspond to the political rationale of neo-liberalism.

2.3 In-Between State and Society: Political Cultures, Grassroots Politics and Active Citizenship

Much was written about the Israeli 'political culture'[20] (e.g. Kimmerling, 1993; Ben-Eliezer, 1993, 2003; Ram, 1998, 2003; Resnik, 2003). Some agree that the post hegemonic era brought about further polarization of the notorious division between the Israeli "left" (perceived as the "pro-peace") and "right" ("nationalist - religious") political camps (Ben-Eliezer, 2003; Resnik, 2003; Ram, 2003, 1998). Such polarization manifests in the creation of two new identities which are formed vis-à-vis the declining Israeli collectivism: the military and the civil sub-cultures (Ben-Eliezer, 2003; Resnik, 2003)[21]. Both these sub-cultures challenge the political consensus by radical actions (some illegal) from both ends of the political spectrum in Israel: military-activism in the case of the "Jewish underground militia", and consciousness objection and refusal to serve in the occupied territories or the Israeli army altogether.

These phenomena are relevant to my discussion since political and civil societies are interrelated through a matrix of cultural means and ends, of arguments and counter-arguments, and of hegemony and counter-hegemonic practices (Chanin, 2002). While only one of the abovementioned forms of activism will (usually) be considered civil, both should be considered as modes of active citizenship[22]: instances of civil agency which challenge the formal and informal contracts between citizens and states. Such forms are illuminated when contrasted to Ben-Eliezer's idea of "critical compliance" (1993:403): a mode of political engagement in which participators raise verbal critique and discontent (before their leadership), but abstain from actualizing them[23]. Such "non-influential practices of political participation" (Ben-Eliezer, 1993:408) have endured from the pre-state era to contemporary

[20] Although it has some relevancy for the existence of civil society in Israel, I will not elaborate on this debate.
[21] For a similar conceptualization, see Neo-Zionism versus Post-Zionism (Ram, 1998).
[22] This aspect is, however, unacknowledged by the researchers cited.
[23] Such discoursive dynamics hardly corresponds with Habermas' ideas of communicative rationality and deliberative democracy.

protest movements which continue reproducing them; they are derived from Israel's political culture as a collectivist democracy, in which active individuals participate in the fulfillment of collective goals without agency; a type of "active conformism". When the collectivist ethos and the mode of engagement it entails grow weaker, however, the basis for political\civil collective actions may also be reformed.

Active citizenship, 'civic agency' (Dahlgern, 1995, 2006) or 'insurgent citizenship' (Friedmann, 2002:77-8)[24], refer to a variety of beliefs, orientations, claims and practices through which citizens are empowered to confront and challenge their institutionalized frame of rights and obligations with the nations state. Active citizenship derives its agentic capacity from two main cultural-political sources[25], first, the state sphere, which is still the sole barrier of citizenship rights (Janoski, 1998:17); the state provides the general framework of rights and obligations, setting the stage for further debates and challenges about the nature of the contract with the citizens (e.g. what are the responsibilities of each "side", what is the right ratio between rights and obligations). The second source is civil society and the public sphere, as the locus of a variety of voices, new claims and arguments, which provide citizens with an agenda and a public stage to put forward their discontent with the state and challenge it monopoly over the relations.

With the exception of Helman's (1999) analysis of active citizenship in the case of consciousness objection, studies of active citizenship are rare in Israeli scholarship. In this paper I argue that welfare retrenchment has an important effect on contemporary forms of active citizenship by triggering civil agency and channeling it into complacent first aid tasks. Unlike other forms of Israeli civil agency, this agency is not constructed vis-à-vis the declining Israeli collectivism. It is mostly affected by the global trends of neo-liberalism.

[24] See Isin for his also relevant definitions of citizenship as "being political" (Isin, 2002) and as identity (Isin and Wood, 1999).
[25] Other sources are the media, and global civil society (global movements which introduces new ideologies, for example).

3. Businesses, Corporations and Civil Society: the Political Aspects of Monetary Support

In the scholarship of civil society presented in the first section I have outlined various paradigms which do not consider the economical/market sphere (of labor, exchange, and so forth) as an integral, normative part of civil society[26].However, as Janoski (1998:16) points out, it is often the state which is considered to be the main threat to civil society, while the market sphere may also pose great threats to democracy and societal welfare. Thus, although I am not considering the market sphere as an integral part of civil society – I find it essential for understanding its interplay with and effect on civil societies.

The market sphere is situated in between the private and the public realms: it is based on the private rights for capital and property, yet it has an enormous effect on public life – especially when considered as an un-natural entity, i.e. a political phenomenon (for example, Polanyi, 1957). James Coleman (1990:451) analyzes the disparity between corporate actors' individual rights (considered as private entities), and their uneven "civil" power- and its effect on public-good issues. Such inherent inequality between citizens and corporations, which is inherited to capitalistic system, is obscured through various social mechanisms.

In what follows I will account for such mechanisms, by which capitalist entities "give back" to society: I will focus on the phenomena of philanthropy and corporate social responsibility (CSR), which are highly relevant for my research case.

Simply defined by Martin (1994), Philanthropy is voluntary giving for public ends. It encapsulates various practices of contributing private resources[27] for different public ends, which are often related to social needs[28], as philanthropy is usually practiced by the "haves" toward the "have-nots". Although philanthropy is imbedded in the liberal tradition and is

[26] By that I am following Arato and Cohen (1995) conceptualization of civil society.
[27] Martin, for example, considers the participation in volunteer work and other kinds of civil activism as philanthropic practices (Martin, 1994:14).
[28] Although philanthropy is also conducted in many other arenas, such as sports, academics, etc.

often considered as a (bourgeois) virtue, it is far from being a Western phenomenon. Nevertheless, there are many controversies over philanthropy, its causes and effects, its moral value[29] and its political implications. Such implications become especially important in contemporary times, where state-regulation and welfare apparatuses are replaced by systems of unregulated "redistribution" based on voluntary good will of private entities, rather than obligatory dues; responsibility, it seems, has shifted from states to corporations (Shamir, 2002:3).

Corporative philanthropy once considered by some as a kind of "enlightened self-interest" which benefits both companies and communities; such a perception has changed in the last few decades: companies give less and are not as responsive and obligated to the community as they used to (Eisenberg, 2005:95-6). Practices of businesses' social involvement have become more rationalized as companies and corporations consciously and explicitly give because it is "good for business", in addition to its social value (Castro, 1996; Burlingame, 1998). For relatively low costs, corporations can increase employees' productivity and earn consumer recognition and support (Eisenberg, 2005:96). This type of corporate behavior is known as Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) through which corporations acquire different social responsibilities, provoke and sponsor various societal projects, enjoy cheap public relations and replenish their moral legitimacy (Shamir, 2002, 2005). CSR can thus be easily seen as part of the neo-liberal political rational which promotes a shift of responsibility from governments to civil society (Chimni, 2000).

A relevant NGO form for this research is the Market-Non-Governmental Organization (MaNGOs) which is "directly and indirectly sponsored by business executives … MaNGOs work to associate corporations with the voluntary and altruistic attributes of civil society" (Shamir, 2002:10).

[29] See the famous Nietzschian critique for example.

iii. Methodology

Latet's case was chosen since it provides a prism for examining the theoretically intriguing form of incongruent civil agency within a single empirical unit, that is, *Latet's* organizational structure. My findings are based on an interpretative analysis of fifteen semi-structured interviews[30] which were conducted with *Latet's* personnel and "committed" volunteers, whom I have reached using the 'snowball strategy'. In addition to that, I have conducted a short ethnography through which I have engaged as a "participant observer" (Bernard, 1998, Chap.7; Cook and Crang, 1995, Chap.4) in various organizational activities (volunteer activities, meetings), and had informal talks with volunteers and personnel[31]. I have also collected and analyzed different artifacts, such as organizational texts (journal, website, reports and announcements) and different articles which dealt with *Latet* in the media.

The interviews lasted between 45-90 minutes and followed a preplanned "interview guide" (Bernard, 1998:208) which encompassed a list of topics and thematic questions (slightly adjusted to the different roles and positions of my interviewees). These topics were discussed randomly throughout the interviews, in order to keep the natural flow of the conversation intact. The questions reflected my analytical interest in *Latet*, namely, the discrepancies between *Latet's* participation in the governmental task of immediate interventions, on the one hand, and long term goals of reestablishing state responsibility, on the other.

In order to interpret *Latet's* relations with the state and the business sector, I have focused on interviewees' understanding of *Latet's* ambivalent political orientation in the context of the socio-politics in Israel 2007. For that end I have drawn on social movement organization (SMO) literature, which deals extensively with processes of cognitive, cultural and political realization of social reality by engaged actors. There are two central analytical "toolkits" for

[30] For practical definitions, see Mishler (1986), Kvale (1996) and Bernard (1998).
[31] All inreviewees are presented here with pseudeonames.

such an analysis: first, the 'Frame alignment' approach (Snow et al., 1986; Snow and Benford, 1988) which focus on activists' usage of organizational mental resources (e.g. knowledge, metaphors, interpretations, ideology) in order to understand and contextualize their activities, make them meaningful and incorporate them in a wider interpretation of social justice and individual responsibilities. Frames are analyzed as dynamic interfaces between activists' cognitive schemes and the organizational apparatus and agenda.

Second, is the 'Discursive approach' (Steinberg, 1998, 1999), which supplement the earlier with an analysis of power relations in and between social movements. It advances the catalogue-like orientation of the "frame alignment" approach, by adding important structural dimension to the analysis of grassroots interpretation, mobilization and agency. This approach focuses on the role of discourse in framing processes, through which the micro-macro relations can be better understood. Using a categorization method I have extracted meaningful themes from my transcriptions and aggregated them in order to construct the organizational discourse. *Latet's* organizational discourse provided me with an analytical lens for the inquiry of the interplay between individual participators and relevant institutions (mainly the state and the market).

My interest in *Latet* situated me in a problematic position vis-à-vis my subjects, since the interviews evolved, to a large extent, around the "incoherency" of their actions. In order to reconcile this ethical/methodological tension, I have stressed my genuine appreciation of their enterprise and emphasized my affinity with civil activism in general. I will return this research to *Latet* in order share my findings and discuss its relevancy for *Latet's* praxis.

My conclusions will be based on a method of 'analytical generalization' (Kvale, 1996:233) which rests on theoretical similarities between *Latet's* case and other cases. A 'statistical generalization' of my findings is not possible due to a nature of my sample which is small and in-random.

iv. Analysis and Results

Chapter 1. Unfolding Latet

Latet was founded by Gilles Darmon, a Jewish immigrant from France, on the first of January 1996. It was established as a branch of the International humanitarian organization (NGO) *EquiLibre*, later gaining independence under the name *Latet* – which means to give in Hebrew. After collaborating with *EquiLibre*, Darmon felt that an apolitical, non-governmental, non-profit, grassroots humanitarian aid organization should be established in Israel[32]. Up until December 2006, *Latet* has initiated 18 relief delegations to different countries worldwide, provided first aid (food, equipment and medical help) to stressed communities, and indeed, introduced the Israeli society into the global humanitarian field.

While *Latet* remains faithful to its global humanitarian goals (it is initiating another delegation to Congo as these lines are written in May 2007), its main focus since 2000 has been work with the poor within Israel. For *Latet*, the reason for that focal shift is the growing needs within the Israeli society, needs which are not answered by the Israeli state or by the limited capacities of the Israeli civil society. The problem of poverty in Israel has become *Latet's* raison d'être. *Latet's* core project for the last years has been "Food for Life" for that very reason. By distributing food through a comprehensive infrastructure of 114 local associations throughout the country, *Latet* supports tens of thousands of poor all year long.

Latet emphasizes it independency from the state by refusing to accept public funds. Its main funding source is the market - Israeli business which provide over three quarters of its total income, part in cash and part in kind in the form of food donations[33]. The greatest donator is "*Hapoalim Bank*" (the largest banking group in the Israeli banking arena), which is

[32] "EquiLibre Israel Established Later Known as Latet Organization", Israel, 1996 http://www.israaid.org.il/story_page.asp?id=643

[33] Based on an interview with Anat, *Latet's* fund- raising manager.

followed by five big corporations: *Shufersal* (owners and operators of seven food chains nationwide), *Osem*, *Strauss Elite*, Unilever (three huge food corporations which dominant the Israeli market) and Orange (a big cell-communication company).

A number of corruption cases discovered in Israeli voluntary bodies in recent years bred a certain amount of suspicion towards NGO's. *Latet* strives to distinguish itself from other voluntary associations in Israel by stressing a commitment to organizational "third sector" professionalism, transparency and an expressed emphasize on food – rather than money – donations. The reason for that is simple: "how much tradeoffs and corruption can you do with rice (?!)"[34].

A secondary source of donations, accounting for about a quarter of its turnover, is the Israeli public, which, like the business sector, donates both in cash and in kind predominantly during *Latet's* four seasonal countrywide food collection operations. These events, which take place on the eves of major Jewish holidays[35] and are accompanied by intensive media messaging, have become *Latet's* trade-mark[36]. They are, in essence, direct appeal campaigns lasting three to five days. During such operations, volunteers establish themselves at exit tills in branches of *Shufersal* (Israel's biggest supermarket chain), approach customers, before or during their grocery shopping for the coming holiday, hand leaflets with short explanations about poverty in Israel and *Latet's* mission, and solicit food donations to be transferred from the customer's trolley to *Latet's* depot.

With an annual turnover (in cash and food) of almost 40 million NIS ($10 m.), *Latet* employs only 18 (!) paid personnel members[37] and thousands of volunteers. There are about five thousands volunteers who participate every year in *Latet's* projects; 46% of the volunteers

[34] From an interview with Na'ama – a regular volunteer (as a supermarket coordinator).
[35] The biggest events take place before the Jewish new-year (*Rosh-Hashana*) and Passover (*Pessach*).
[36] See the survey on *Latet's* website in regard to the public perception of *Latet's* endeavors.
[37] This leads to the truly exceptional overhead of only 6% per year.

are between 20-29 years old, 71% are females and almost 20% are students[38]. 700 volunteers have a permanent position in the organization (as local coordinators, educational instructors and "branch-coordinators"). All other volunteers are either "regulars", who usually attend the big projects, or "temps" who occasionally participate (either in supermarkets or in the warehouses[39]); this last category comprehends most of *Latet's* volunteers.

An important type of volunteers in *Latet* is the "scholarship-volunteers" (*milgaiim*). 500 of *Latet's* volunteers are students who receive scholarships (from various foundations and organizations) in return for their engagement in the organization[40].

The *"impacists"* is the most dominant group of "scholarship-volunteers" in *Latet*. They receive a scholarship from the "Impact foundation" in reward to 130 annual hours of "voluntary" work in the community. There are about 1500 *imapcists* in Israel, 400 of them engage in *Latet*. The *impacists* are young university students who have just finished their mandatory military service as combatant soldiers. The *Impacists* represent an interesting type of engagement in *Latet* with which I will deal in the next chapter.

Since 2000, *Latet* has been operating additional satellite projects to supplement its food collections and distributions. These additional projects, which are also based primarily on volunteers, include *"Latet* (to give) health (2005)", "I am for you (2001)" and "the face of poverty (2004)". The latter two in fact are youth educational projects in which participants learn about poverty, collective responsibility and civic competence, with the aim of empowering and encouraging them to establish autonomous projects.

Latet personnel are responsible for a number of advocacy enterprises. One is the "alternative poverty report" (2003), which raises awareness about poverty in Israel by providing alternative independent data on the phenomenon which often challenges data

[38] All the data is taken from latet.
[39] See Appendix for photographs of latet's various volunteer arenas.
[40] Such arrangements are common in Israel; often, foundation will list different organizations in which the "volunteer work" can be practiced.

categories produced by government. Another advocacy project is "the convention for eradicating poverty" (2005). Designed primarily to raise public awareness, it is, in essence, a direct appeal to the government to (a) acknowledge the urgency and magnitude of the problem of poverty and (b) take responsibility for eliminating it, primarily by establishing a comprehensive poverty eradication program. Within this context, in February 2007 *Latet* appealed against the government to Israel's supreme court of justice, demanding that the government assumes full responsibility for allocating food for the needy[41], based on the basic right for minimal nutrition.

By supplementing its main endeavor of food allocation with the above described advocacy activities, *Latet* engages in contradictory civil tasks: objection to the withdrawal of the state from social responsibilities, on the one hand, and cooperation with such withdrawal by providing first aid to stressed citizens, on the other. *Latet* demands governmental responsibility over poverty – while it assumes such responsibility itself at one and the same time.

Let me move now to a more detailed analysis of this organizational apparatus, leading to a review of how it is represented, explained and reflected on by *Latet's* personnel and volunteers.

[41] This apparatus is exclusively managed by non-governmental entities today.

Chapter 2. Professional Voluntarism: Idealism Meets the Market

"... We are here in order to encourage voluntarism in the community. when we are looking at the Israeli society today we see a society who contributes, gives and volunteers... it's a society which wants to give – but doesn't necessarily know how..." (from an interview with Dan – a senior coordinator)

Remarkably, *Latet's* huge operational apparatus is based almost entirely on volunteers. Volunteers are an important resource for *Latet* as they contribute both symbolically and materially to the organizational enterprise. *Latet* attempts to fortify values of mutual and personal responsibility, and altruistic giving in Israel as part of its general program for social change. The organization makes voluntary participation more accessible (by offering a variety of volunteering niches) and publishes its volunteer achievements in the national media, reproducing and encouraging Israeli voluntarism.

For *Latet*, its contribution to the Israeli society exceeds food distribution. By offering the Israeli public handy and accessible routes of volunteering it "gives people the opportunity to give", as many personnel have told me. This is an important aspect in *Latet's* discourse about voluntarism in Israel: you have to cultivate it and you must nurture it, otherwise this fragile phenomenon will wither. Making volunteers' work accessible, easy, appealing and rewarding was emphasized by many coordinators; some presented a parental approach and explained how they protect volunteers from being called upon too often and stressed the importance of being both a "mother and a father", taking care of volunteers' needs and problems and introducing volunteers into *Latet's* "family". The volunteering act is perceived as an individual act of free will and belief. *Latet* promotes a new type of Israeli voluntarism which diverges from old centralized patterns of "collective voluntarism" (Silber and Rosenhek, 1999; Gidron et al. 2003), to create a new "community of committed citizens".

In its very existence *Latet* struggles to demonstrate the vividness of voluntarism and altruism in contemporary Israel; still, we must not forget its material infrastructure which frames *Latet's* manifestations of solidarity within a model of "corporate social responsibility".

2.1 Producing Business's Legitimacy

One of the most prominent characteristics of advanced capitalism is extreme inequality. It is the hegemonic capacities of late capitalism, namely, its ability to absorb and neutralize resistance, which allow for the reproduction of this polarization. By giving Israeli capital a conspicuous opportunity to practice social responsibility, *Latet's* functions as a mechanism of cooptation, which attribute social legitimacy to Israeli businesses (see Shamir, 2002:7).

As I have already described, *Latet's* sponsors donate both money and food products for *Latet's* enterprise, in quantities which exceed the financial capacities of most individuals (for example, "*Hapoalim Bank*" has donated one million shekels last year in 2006). *Latet's* biggest project is "food for life" which consumes 85% of its budget; 50% of the food is contributed in kind by the abovementioned food juggernauts – and the rest of it is purchased from them[42]. Even individuals who donate food products for the needy via *Latet's* projects support the food industry which cooperates with *Latet*. The irony here is rather explicit: corporations who exploit employees and consumers buy their legitimacy back through *Latet's* food project.

Latet employs a few personnel members who deal with the organization's marketing and fund raising. In an interview with Anat, *Latet's* fund- raising manager, I have received a very realistic account for *Latet's* relations with the business world. Unlike other employees I have interviewed, this conversation was very businesslike and I was asked not to record it.

> All the big businesses and corporations are looking today for the most trademarked (*memutag*) organization in order to sponsor it (…) they are in search after the sexiest issues – the ones that sells – such as: children, poverty and poor people

[42] Based on an interview with Anat, *Latet's* fund- raising manager.

After *Latet* has made its big TV breakthrough in 2004 with its televised campaign "to give with love" (in congruent with the biggest food operation), it has become an excellent option for businesses: *Latet* gained popularity for its food project and has become a "trademark" in the business world. It is an organization everyone would like to be linked with, since it "pushes the right buttons". *Latet* on its part is "playing the game" to use Anat's words; its part of the exchange is clear: to maintain his fine consensual reputation and to make sure that the right company names and logos will be presented in all of *Latet's* project and public events.

Anat described how the American model of socially responsible businesses has recently become a norm in Israel. One of the reasons for that is an NGO called *Maala* (virtue) which promotes this agenda in Israel by producing an index of the contributing businesses in Israel[43] (interestingly, four out of six of the abovementioned companies have earned the 1st, 4th, 10th and 24th positions). *Latet* can thus be seen as a type of MaNGO (Shamir, 2002:10) which is mostly sponsored by businesses yet practically conducted by thousands of volunteers.

2.2 Bypassing Structural Tensions

Although no one conceals the fact that *Latet* is sponsored almost exclusively by Israeli corporations, business companies and businessman, no one emphasize this point either. Despite the visibility of corporate names and logos, the underlying pattern of financing remains vague. *Latet's* website gives comprehensive data about many budgetary issues: it indicates that 95% of the donations originate from the Israeli society and business sector, yet refrains from differentiating between the two. I have inquired about the exact ratio between donations made by businesses and individual citizens in many occasions, nevertheless, I have not received any answers from *Latet*.

Latet is not explicit about its funding sources; it over stresses individual – civil donations while it conceals its almost total reliance on businesses' support. In contrast to this, *Latet*

[43] For details, see: http://www.maala.org.il

expresses its antagonism toward dubious sources of support; for example, in a televised interview[44], *Latet's* former national volunteer coordinator was asked if *Latet* has tried to recruit Arcadi Gaidamac for its enterprise. Gaidamac is a Russian Jewish philanthropist who contributes millions to different projects in Israel while there are serious doubts about the legality of his wealth. *Latet's* coordinator chose to answer by avoiding the direct question, and stressed *Latet's* source of legitimacy: "we aren't asking the public for money. Simply, come to the *shufersal* branches where you'll find volunteers, give them rice, flour (…) we are working through the citizens, through the simple people, like me – like you, who are capable of doing". *Latet* is stressing individual civil contribution as part of its wider campaign of mobilizing the Israeli civil society and empowering civil proactiveness. Often such emphasis removes the focus from *Latet's* main source of income in favor of the symbolic value represented by individual voluntary efforts.

The vast majority of *Latet's* personnel and volunteers were indifferent to the organization's funding sources and were not concerned that capitalistic interests will bind their activities. On the contrary, many saw *Latet's* cooperation with the business sector as natural and obvious, and even expressed a very pragmatic view toward the interests of the donators: "as long as they do it – we don't care". Corporation's support allows for *Latet's* extended aid to the needy – and that counts the most at the end of the day.

This is what Dan, a 26 years old law student who is one of *Latet's* most central coordinator (employee), told me:

> The problem is that when we are sponsored by business companies we can't allow ourselves certain kinds of protestations … if, today, you are an organization which supports 60,000 families you can't permit yourself to burn tires because it will harm the financial assistance you receive for these families. There are families who rely on Latet today

Both volunteers and personnel participation in *Latet* is confined: they can not take part in strategic decision making, effect organizational agenda or pursue anything which diverge

[44] Conducted on the "Knesset (Israeli parliament) channel" on the19.9.06, 14:54.

from the organizational mainstream. *Latet's* cooperation with the business world tames its activity and its political creativity, confining its actions within a consensual framework where civil resistance and insurgency are out of the question.

A clear example of volunteers' inability to affect strategic decision took place in an organizational conference[45] for food project's coordinators in which I have participated. Many coordinators expressed their discontent (for different reasons) about the cooperation with the *shufersal* chain. Dan, who conducted the debate discharge these comments altogether and moved on. The reason for that is simple: *shufersal* donates a lot to the organizational efforts; this relation cannot be terminated. Volunteers' grievance about *shufersal* imperialistic character is considered irrelevant. The organizational responsibility to the poor, a prominent theme in *Latet* which will be dealt with in chapter 4, is an important mechanism which bridges the gap between the ideal and reality. There is an urgent need for immediate help – and as Shani told me: "beggars can't be selective".

2.3 Instrumentalism vs. Idealism

Many tensions arise from *Latet's* reliance on volunteer work. These tensions can be traced back to the organizational core: the contradiction between the ideal and the real, that is, the attempt to catalyze a macro social change versus the need to provide instant aid to the needy. In the case of *Latet's* volunteers this tension arises between volunteers' function (as man-power) and volunteers' potential (as agents for social change).

The greatest task for local and branch coordinators is recruiting volunteers for a food operation. Very few volunteers are gathered from *Latet's* database (of volunteers who participated in past events) while the vast majority comes from co-operations with schools and youth movements. On the one hand, this arrangement is effective since it provides plenty of man-power and allows coordinators to accomplish their main goal – collecting as much

[45] Which took place on the 26.4.07 at "Rabin Center", Tel-Aviv.

food as possible, as Nadav – a senior coordinator (volunteer) who is responsible over a locality of supermarkets during food projects – described it. On the other hand, volunteer work is not only instrumental as it has additional long term goals.

Many personnel members told me, "even if we'll have endless funds (money) we still want people to volunteer". For *Latet*, the voluntary act is embedded with the organization long term goals; raising awareness manifest through the exposure to *Latet's* values and the involvement in its activities. Such activities have vital importance in the organizational socialization practices: they serve as central arena were volunteers (and personnel) "grow responsibility". I will deal with this essential point when I will discuss "practicing responsibility" in chapter 4.

Ideally, *Latet's* volunteers are individuals who come from their own free will. This "type" of voluntarism is contrasted with two other patterns: first, "forced voluntarism", which occurs when pupils or members of youth group are being compelled to volunteer; second, "collective voluntarism", an oxymoron which refers to the Israeli and Jewish collectivism (Silber and Rosenhek, 1999). The contribution and value of "genuine" voluntarism is essentially different; such virtuous acts will express and promote normative change, by introducing new individuals into *Latet's* enterprise. Collective or forced voluntarism have no such value.

This tension between the instrumental and normative aspects of voluntarism in *Latet* is stressed in the case of the *impacists*, whom I have described in the first chapter. In one of my first interviews I was told that the *impacists* are *Latet's* "ideal volunteers", since they are professionals who are familiar with the work and know how to get it done. Concurrently, however, they are considered as uncommitted volunteers in the long term: they are temporarily engaged in *Latet's* activities and in many cases they are "in it for the funding".

During my volunteering experience in *Latet*, which was part of the field work for this research, I have had many "small-talks" with *impacists* in different arenas of participation. The impacists are aware of their problematic "voluntarism" and describe their participation as

"working in *Latet*". Most of them conduct their hours in *Latet's* warehouses as laborers, during food projects as branch coordinators and in *Latet's* offices doing administrative work. They are only generally familiar with *Latet's* agenda, and confining themselves to their specific working niche. As Ezra, an *impacist* who works in *Latet's* biggest food warehouse in *Kanot* (central Israel), told me:

> 'Doing your hours' in Latet is very convenient. Here you work with boxes instead of people – it's much easier! (unlike other volunteering options impacists have A.M). The shifts are flexible and you can adjust them according to your studies' schedule".

Having discussed *Latet's* voluntarism, and its relations with its capitalistic sponsors, I will now turn to the analysis of the organizational discourse. I will start with the role of the Israeli state in Latet's discursive frame.

Chapter 3. The State in Latet's Organizational Discourse: Responsible or Incompetent State?

The Israeli state plays a dominant role in *Latet's* organizational consciousness. The state and the government are explicitly mentioned, petitioned and criticized in many organizational projects, public announcements and in the discourse of *Latet's* personnel and volunteers. What can be derived from such statements?

The state is an elusive concept in sociological theory, yet it is an indispensable one as it is suggested by the ongoing debates about its essence and role in contemporary societies, as well as in academic research (for example, Nettal, 1968; Abrams, 1988; Mitchell, 1991; Steinmetz, 1999). Despite some substantial changes in the state's technologies of governance (Rose and Miller, 1992; Rose, 1996), monopoly and adaptability (for example, Shaw, 1997; Weiss, 1997), its political significance is exceptionally contested. In order to examine the effect of the state over social actors who operate in its territory I will focus on its linguistic, hermeneutic and discursive aspects[46] (Steinmetz, 1999:2).

When *Latet's* members were explaining the rational for their enterprise, namely, confronting the tension between short term goals (first aid) and long term goals (making the state responsible), they articulated the state's role and function. The manner in which the state is represented, perceived and understood is vital for the analysis of *Latet's* action frame.

Seeing the State as the Welfare Guarantor is one of the more dominant images of the state in *Latet*, as it expresses one of *Latet's* most basic arguments. The next assertion, lucidly articulated by Dan, has returned with little variations in many interviews and official announcements:

> Latet was established with an intention to come apart. We are not an organization who believes that it should exist in the state of Israel 2006. There is no reason that a civil

[46] Thus, my analysis will follow the 'cultural turn' in state studies (Steinmetz, 1999) .

> entity will provide food for sixty thousand families per year. No reason. The government must take responsibility over it

This existential oxymoron of *Latet* is a main element in the organization's awareness campaign, the "convention for eradicating poverty". The convention calls for state's responsibility over national poverty and suggests a general blueprint for its eradication. In another petition, *Latet* enlists 93 voluntary organizations which currently provide food to 200,000 needy individuals in Israel. Representing the "voluntary food sector" in Israel, *Latet* proclaims:

> The government of Israel: the problem poverty is your problem too! ... the state of Israel is responsible to care for its poor citizens. Via this appeal we are returning the responsibility to the Israeli government

Demands for state responsibility were usually accompanied by a reciprocal commitment by citizens, as Uri, a coordinator of an educational project (volunteer), describes it:

> It is easy to blame "the state", but what is it? Who should we blame – the Menorah? (one of the state symbols A.M), I mean, who should we turn to? This state belongs to all of us, so OK the government is responsible for that, but it's also each and every one of us who has to undertake this burden ... we are all stuck in this state together: the government, the rich, the poor and us. So I guess the state is all that, and we are part of the state

According to this functional perception, only a co-operation between responsible civil competency and government will make a change. However, citizens' cooperation can be conceived in many different ways: in the liberal tradition, for example, citizens are required to vote and to pay taxes in return for some services and benefits (Habermas, 1996:498).

In *Latet's* case, in contrast, the cooperation with the state is undertaken by the citizens, since the state is considered as an impotent institution. *Latet* is compelled to intervene due to the impotency of the state; the state – understood as governmental apparatus and administration – is perceived as incompetent of providing the needs of the population. This is the way Tali, a senior coordinator in *Latet* (employee), expressed her grievance toward the welfare state:

> But there is nothing today. Nothing was done (!) we have waited for a year, for two years, we have waited that they [the state] will do and they did nothing – so we should just hold

> still? It is our time to do, since you as a minister don't do, and I have the power, even if it is minor, then I do (!) because you the big ones do nothing and it hurts me to see that

This perception is embedded in *Latet's* ethos: the state is not fulfilling its historical role, therefore, responsible civil actors must step in. This perception of the state dominates the organizational memory of the war in Lebanon, as I will describe in the following section.

The way *Latet* interpret the state reflects an approach of tentative trust towards the state. It is the result of the tension between the ideal of a caring welfare state, on the one hand, and its current dysfunction and irresponsibility, on the other. Na'ama – a supermarket branch coordinator who has been volunteering for years with *Latet* – describes this problem very clearly:

> The way the state functions … the state which supposes to supply the needs, I can't say I'm optimistic. That is why I think these operations (food gathering A.M) are so vital, because I can't see how we solve these problems ... I believe this state is so deep in the mud … but it doesn't mean we should stop protesting

By analyzing the organizational discourse I have identified two intertwined definitions of the state: "the state as the welfare guarantor" and "the incapable state". These two definitions represent an ambivalent action frame, which corresponds to *Latet's* contradicting practices: on the one hand, the state is the legitimate welfare guardian, thus, *Latet* should return the responsibility to the state. On the other hand, the state is incompetent of taking this responsibility, thus, *Latet* is compelled to support the state and be responsible itself.

Eventually, this perception of the state implies that the responsibility has shifted form the premises of the state; it is now a civil duty to restore order, either by direct emergency aid or by advocacy. Civil actors are now empowered by the abandonment of the state and the crises it produces. The next section will examine this point through *Latet's* narrative about the second Lebanon War, 2006.

3.1 The Abandoned Home-Front and the Incompetent State: Latet's Story of the Second Lebanon War

"...We found ourselves distributing bags of food to the ill, the infirm and the old ... People told us that no government office approached them or offered help. There were days when even mayors asked us to distribute water to residents. I saw terrible scenes. Each time truckloads of food arrived, people swarmed on them like in countries in Africa ... I had the sense that this was the end of the state ... as if there were no more state ... Everything collapsed..." (Gilles Darmon, Latet's founder and president[47])

The second Lebanon War (2006) did not provoke poverty in Israel, although for many it has illuminated how serious the situation is. Tens of thousands of Israeli citizens who were unable to leave the northern cities and settlements faced a new situation of uncertainty and stress when even the most basic resources such as food, water and hygiene products were inaccessible. Those who were "left behind" unable to escape were, unsurprisingly, the poor, elderly people and physically handicapped people who are not mobile and independent[48].

The burden of the home-front during the war, so to say, was undertaken by civil actors who quickly adjusted to the circumstances, mobilized resources and provided different services during the war (Katz et al., 2007). *Latet* was a central non-governmental force during the war, spending a third of its annual budget on operation "Rescue-Rope" by organizing daily delegations to 22 northern settings, mobilizing around 1500 volunteers, and distributing 250,000 care packages (including hygiene products, toys and books) and 230 tons of food[49].

The story *Latet* has to tell about the war is one which delineates its position in the Israeli society, and accounts for some of the major structural tensions which underlie its activity. In the interview with Dan, who had a prominent role throughout the war, he articulated *Latet's* strategy vis-à-vis the state during the first week:

> Not only that the state didn't allocate the food – it didn't know how. During the first week we sat quietly and waited. The 'Home Front Command' [pikud haoref] should know how to supply help. After a week we had a meeting at the director general of the welfare

[47] Cited in Daniel Ben-Simon's "Betrayed by the State", Haaretz, 5.9.06 http://www.haaretz.com/hasen/spages/758205.html
[48] See "The Privatization of Risk" (Calhoun, 2006) for the similar case of "Hurricane Katrina ".
[49] *Latet* (journal), No. 8, November 2006, p. 15.

> ministry who said he doesn't know how to give the help. It was at that point that we said: "we are getting involved". If the government doesn't know how to give, we are entering the 'action mode'"

On the one hand, the state manifests as an incapable of supplying the basic needs of its people; it is fragile, disoriented and untrustworthy. On the other hand, the state still has the monopoly and responsibility over the situation: voluntary civil actors poses a supplementary role and should wait for its orders and directions. It is only when the state proves its incapacity or unwillingness to act, only when it is beyond doubt, that *Latet* initiates action and engages in national problem solving. *Latet's* interventions were independent; at some point during the war, the government offered *Latet* to distribute food on its behalf: the state will provide the funds and *Latet* will provide the infrastructure for the allocation. *Latet* refused: it would undermine its autonomy and hamper its critical capacity[50].

The absence of the state during the war is a synecdoche for the end of social-citizenship and perhaps the end of citizenship in general (since only the subordination to the state has remaind) and a return to a form of subjecthood (Peled, 2007). In addition to the decline of social-citizenship, however, the retrenching state triggers another aspect of active and responsible citizenry. Facing the catastrophes of the "end of the state", civil actors are compelled to supplement basic needs and support distressed citizens. These circumstances are socializing civil actors to be responsible, thus forcing them into a complaisant mode of accountability – rather then a subversive mode of insurgency (Holston, 1998), as Dan stated:

> We believe that first of all aid must be supplied, since "sitting in the corner" and raising social claims or triggering a societal uprising, is not enough. Someone must take action. It's like we were "sitting in the corner" during the war, and continue to raise claims versus the government. It's not enough. Things must be done concurrently

Responsibility has shifted from the premises of the state to the civil society. Civil actors are now empowered by the absence of the state, instead of being confronted by its presence. The next chapter will explore the organizational discourse and practice of responsibility. Through these technologies responsibility becomes the driving force behind *Latet's* civil agency.

[50] Based on an interview with Yaron – who was a senior coordinator during the war.

Chapter 4. The Politics and Technologies of Responsibility

"...You hear it all the time: people that don't want to volunteer saying that our volunteer efforts are only perpetuating this situation (the stagnation of the state A.M). The problem is that there are poor. In every given moment there are people who need. Take the students' strike for example ... I can cope with it ... I can recover the knowledge I have lost ... I will be alright... the question is can you allow yourself 'not to act' in any field? What will happen to the poor in this period of time? If we'll not help and we'll not give and we'll just strike..." (from an interview with Nadav – a local coordinator)

Responsibility is commonly defined as "the social force that binds you to your obligations and the courses of action demanded by that force"[51]. Responsibility is an important element in *Latet's* organizational culture. *Latet* attempts to make the government responsible for the people and their stress once again; concomitantly, *Latet* encourages the individual responsibility of Israeli citizens, through its various routes of volunteer activities.

However, *Latet* is not only "passing the responsibility forward": *Latet* is a "responsible civil actor" itself, responsibility which manifests through organizational mundane practices and daily conduct. *Latet* produces and reproduces a discourse and practice of "self-responsibility", through which the organization creates and institutionalizes its moral obligations toward the poor it serves. In many interviews, *Latet's* responsibility toward the needy was introduced to the conversation when the contradiction between *Latet's* short term goals (providing first aid) and long term goals (shifting this responsibility to the state), were discussed. When interviewees were confronted with the popular critique of *Latet's* enterprise (as a facilitator of state retrenchment) they used their responsibility in order to rationalize and reconcile *Latet's* ambivalent social praxis.

Despite the capacity of these agents to "maneuver among repertoires" (Emirbayer and Mische, 1998:980)(i.e. their strategic responses), it is important to note that responsibility is not only produced by *Latet* - since *Latet* also reproduces preexisting discourses of welfare and

[51] Taken from the free-dictionary:
http://www.thefreedictionary.com/responsibility

wellbeing. Such discourses can be traced back to the emergent of welfare apparatus and its disciplinary mode of control over modern subject and societies. This discursive field is the legacy of the declining welfare state for civil agency in a neo-liberal era.

Latet responsibility is multifaceted and there were a few variations of its meaning. I will now turn to describe and analyzed these discourses of responsibility. In the last section of the chapter I will deal with the practices through which such responsibility is produced and re-produced.

4.1 Responsibility as a Commitment to the Community

Responsibility is taken here as a general debt one owes to society – which receives here the moral virtue of a community. This is the explanation I have received from David – a project coordinator and an undergraduate law student – for the importance of his project despite the ambiguity which surrounds its consequences: "regardless of the question is there anyone else who suppose to be doing that or not. You live within a certain community, you need to help, you need to be apart of it". Governmental duties aside, David centers on the ideal of communal solidarity and the idea of the self-sufficient community. Later in our conversation he would actually reproduce Putnam's narrative of "Bowling Alone" (2000) where the decline of associational and communal life hampers the ideal of the "good society". Here is the motive for such actions:

> Just creating some kind of a force which does for-, because it's important to do. Not because it's important to help people who have no food. It's also important to help orphans. It's also important to help holocaust survivors who have no money. Because it's important to be a part of the community you live in

Latet short term activities are an end for themselves: helping the needy is a communitarian obligation of the eligible members of the community. Responsibility here is for society at large, which just happens to take the image of the poor.

4.2 Responsibility as Parental Care

Responsibility here is considered as deep concerns to the distresses of the needy, which are mainly depicted as hungry children. These articulations are derived form a humanitarian discourse which aims to primordial solidarity and empathy. Na'ama agreed with the many critics of *Latet*:

> The basic critique you keep hearing is that the state is supposed to be doing it. I agree with that very much … there is always this tough conflict: are we reducing the responsibility of the state by distributing food for the needy? … maybe … but for the baby that doesn't have his baby-food today – it doesn't matter (!) he doesn't care about the political implications of who's responsible. There are emergencies and it (the food A.M) must get there, what can you do? The state is not doing it as for now

The tension which is produced as a result of Na'ama's contemplation is dissolved by her commitment to the troubles of the other. Her realization, that her short term actions in *Latet* may jeopardize her long term efforts to make the state responsible again, does create an emotional response: she is upset at the state and of the incoherency which may arise from her actions. Concomitantly, her commitment and responsibility help her maintain her practice.

Shani, a graduate student in 'social work' studies, is another supermarket branch coordinator. She gave a similar example when we were discussing the common critique of *Latet's* food enterprise; she explicated:

> Right now you've got a five year old girl in sderot (a poor town in south Israel A.M) who wants lunch, can you give her a long explanation about the dis-functioning of her welfare state? … She cannot go the ballot-box right now, she's hungry, OK?

Long term solution, as the name imply, takes time, while basic immediate needs cannot bear political contestations; they must be satisfied immediately. For Shani this is not a case of contradiction, but rather a case of recognition: "I just don't see it as a contradiction, I think it's just about recognizing how things really are out-there. I think you cannot document poverty and yet turn your back on it".

David told me a short story which demonstrates why *Latet* must be responsible: in one of the monthly rounds of food allocation there was a shortage in volunteers and some of the

deliveries were delayed. Eventually, he had to do it himself: "when I got to these families, you should have seen the happiness slash tears in their eyes. One family after the other told me: we can't believe that you have come. We were almost certain that you wouldn't come".

David raised the issue of accountability. Here there is a clear overlap between being responsible and reliable for the ones depended on you – and supporting the retrenchment of the state. The organization wants to nurture and help those who are in need, yet does not want to turn into a formal agency which replaces the state[52]. Like many others, David differentiates between long and short terms:

> We are trying to move the responsibility for food provision and for the treatment of poor to the state, and to concentrate on our educational projects … as far as short terms are concerned (in regard to food provision A.M) – our responsibility is total … I can't cancel a round of food distribution … these are not luxuries we are talking about here. There are people who are waiting for us, and we are responsible for them

The bottom line is that *Latet* is responsible – and responsibility is demanding. Most importantly, the unbearable crises of poverty and hunger are translated as an urgent need to act for-, rather than act on behalf of-.

4.3 Professional Responsibility to the Needy

Many of *Latet's* personnel mentioned how hard it is for them to disengage, quite literally, from *Latet's* administrative duties. Apart from the (relatively) low salaries and the non-profit attitude, *Latet's* informal norms of conduct resemble these of a Hi-Tech enterprise. *Latet's* headquarters in Tel-Aviv are always busy, especially during food operations, when the place swarms with commotion and the office is being referred to as a military "operations room". During these operations employees are hardly ever home as work-hours linger and often extend from eight am until two am. This tremendous commitment becomes comprehensible when one realizes the responsibility *Latet's* personnel bears: "when you know that another

[52] *Latet's* "coming-apart" project encapsulates this tension very well. See Dan's statement on p.33.

hour of work will feed more people – it just takes a hold on your life so easily … it's a disaster, I mean, what can you say? Fine, I'll just go home? There are hungry people".

Latet employees have become committed to their calling as a result of poor circumstances; these have made them accountable for the miseries of the new Israeli underclass. It is a professional commitment toward the people who are neglected by the apparatus of the state. Yaron, formerly a senior coordinator in *Latet*, told me how this commitment is developed:

> You realize that if you stay for two more hours you can recruit ten more volunteers for a supermarket in Hertzelia (a city near Tel-Aviv A.M) … if every one will get 4 food packages it means that you have 40 more packages – that's 40 more families (!) … So, you can help 40 more families in two hours. Wouldn't you do it? Of course you will … you have certain goals you want to achieve – can you change them? right, sure [giggles] lets not help... Let's only help 100,000 people and not 200,000 people

Acknowledging their importance as the last resort for many were abandoned by state-welfare, *Latet's* personnel undertake the responsibility of helping the poor, a responsibility which is mediated by their profession a civil saviors and its emerging ethics. This is the response Shani gave to my relentless inquiry about the contradiction between the short and the long term goals of *Latet*:

> In the academy we have the privilege to think and analyze which strategy is the most efficient … I don't think we have the moral, social and political right to take this decision (i.e. not to act A.M) … I understand the rational and I think we need to put more pressure on the state, but I don't think it's the way … coherently you can't act and represent a population and disentitle it simultaneously if you can help her

Such disciplinary discourse and practice of commitment is produced via the organizational socialization. In addition to the meticulous study of facts and figures about poverty in Israel, such socialization is established through practice.

4.4 Practicing Responsibility

In addition to the direct aid itself, *Latet* activities serve as central socialization platforms. Many coordinators were very enthusiastic when they described the manifold effects of volunteer activities. Whether this activity takes place in a supermarket, in a disenfranchised

neighborhood[53], in a food warehouse or even in *Latet's* headquarters, the act of doing is perceived as a preliminary "real" encounter with the problem of poverty in Israel. Throughout these activities members realize the need and importance of their enterprise and respectively build further commitment to *Latet's* enterprise (as well as for volunteer activism in general).

First of all, activities are perceived as micro settings where citizens are exposed to social problems on a tangible level; people encounter the manifestation of the problem (poor) or the solution (food), instead of some abstract data about poverty. David told me that: "the most important thing about it (the project A.M) is that it unveils, it exposes people to the circumstances and demonstrates to them that they can help and how they can help". Such interactions with the "circumstances" enable people to actively take part in the collective endeavor of assisting the poor. Volunteers are empowered by the direct and unmediated feedback they receive, even when this feedback is embedded in 20 full packages of food after a long day in the supermarket. Coordinators told me that there is something about this experience of gathering food which, as Shani described it:

> Makes people feel that they have done something. Raping-up twenty food packages and telling yourself that you have done something … its an inner change of consciousness, which implies: I can do, and I'm worthy, and I really should because It's really a rewarding and empowering experience, for many people

The practice of doing in the world - is also a practice on the self; *Latet's* technologies of responsibility are an interface between the "technologies of the self" (e.g. Foucault, 1980) – where subjects willingly undertake moral obligations and govern themselves – and the technologies of "governance from a distance" (Rose and Miller, 1992) where citizens undertake governmental tasks through the conduct of themselves and of others.

Many coordinators agreed that volunteer participation, even when it is simple and not demanding, is a key step toward further involvement, commitment and social responsibility. A common metaphor I encountered was the transformation "from passive to active doing"; the

[53] In the "wondering truck" project: the only project in which *Latet* distributes food directly to the needy.

interpretation of such phrases is that by doing, rather than hearing or discussing, one enters into a circle of escalating civil responsibility. For Shani, *Latet's* activities are than: "a combination of public opinion and a dynamic recruiting circulation of new volunteers … a kind of activity which constantly recruits social activists". Not only *Latet's* volunteers are involved in this active participation, but also the consumers who donate food:

> just by being actively involved, not passively, in an action, you don't just stand and hear someone lecture about poverty, you are actively involved and doing in order to reduce suffering or poverty or whatever, it makes you a little more involved and attached to Latet, you know what it is, you are a part of- … it's not a big deal but it's more than most modes we have got today

By engaging in the public sphere, *Latet* members create a civil public around the social problem of poverty in Israel. In Habermas' public sphere (1989, 1996), it is the duty of active citizens to realize their political potential by raising problems and plausible means for their resolution. Through problematizing practices and dramatization, civil society and its citizens can affect public opinion and public policy (Habermas, 1996:359). *Latet's* actions are a form of deliberation through which the public sphere of poverty is enacted. These tangible acts of doing in the world constitute an inter-subjective space for public engagement with poverty.

The discourses and practices of responsibility I have described above are important technologies through which *Latet* reconciles the tensions that are inherited in its praxis. Via unmediated interactions with poverty in its various manifestations, activists are exposed to the distress of the poor; such micro mechanisms take place in different arenas of members' participation in *Latet*. The moral obligations of responsibility are undertaken through mundane practices where abstract knowledge about poverty is being converted into tangible realities – realities which demands immediate interventions. Assuming responsibility is an important force behind *Latet's* "active" mode of engagement, as I have demonstrated in this chapter. Nevertheless, this mode of participation embodies other aspects of *Latet's* political identity. These political implications will be explored in the next chapter.

Chapter 5. Doing (A)Political Politics?

"...OK, it's a popular opinion (the critique of Latet's interventions A.M) not only among teenagers, it's popular among adults and I even hear it from my closer circle. Seating back at home and constantly griping (lekater) it's what most of us do and it's the easiest thing in the world. I gripe and gripe and gripe ... OK and what do I do? What do I do in order to make a change? Just seating here and saying that the government sucks? There is nothing new in that (!) It has been like that for 59 years (the establishment of Israel A.M) and it will probably be the same for next 59 years ... I really believe in doing ... I really, really believe in the doing itself ... even if it is small..." (from an interview with Tali – a senior coordinator)

"...more than anything else, impotency makes me crazy ... people who are frustrated but do nothing in order to change and they have the ability to ... it's the most basic thing..." (from an interview with Na'ama – a branch coordinator)

Through the constitutive myths of the pioneers (*halutzim*) who "built the state" and the Israeli natives (*sabra*) who "protect the borders" (see, Eisenstadt, 1989), the Israeli ethos has always privileged the "act of doing" over the "act of talking". Acting is an indicator of potency and vitality, and is often a source of legitimacy for political agency. Nevertheless, "doing" has another facet, since being the only one who acts can make one a "sucker" (*frayer*) who acts alone for the benefit of the collective which thrives on his efforts (Roniger and Feige, 1990).

In the excerpt above, Tali refers to the Israeli "gripping ritual" (Katriel, 1999): a verbal pattern of communication which centers on raising discontents and complains about public issues. Her criticism toward such passive, verbal reactions is quite explicit: Problems must be acted upon rather than discussed. This assertion is fundamental to *Latet's* ethos: "to do instead of dwelling on … it's about giving to the ones in need and to provide an instant solution", as Na'ama passionately argued. Moreover, it is almost illegitimate to engage in political contestation without taking "real" action.

Textually, *Latet's* political claim toward the state is clear and simple: the state should retake responsibility over welfare affairs. However, according to the rules of political

legitimacy, such critique cannot be stated by itself. See how Dan presented *Latet* action model:

> We are basically working with a three phase model: the basis is action, first of all action. We believe that taking action is obligatory for any entity which comes and expresses its opinion (publicly A.M) this is what Latet has been doing for many years. Just doing … when the action phase is full field you have actually earned the right to raise awareness, which is the second phase … [and then advocacy]

Staking claims in the public sphere can only be legitimate when accompanied by action. On that regard, *Latet* (re)produces the "Israeli" ethos: it introduces a civil, non-centralized collective endeavor (in contrast to military conscription, for example) as the basis for political agency. However, what is the nature of such political agency?

Following Kimmerling's definition (1995) I consider as "political" anything which has an effect on collective interests, collective priorities and collective principles of redistribution of resources. *Latet* is thus a political entity which promotes a certain model of collective good and affects the existing model of redistribution in Israel.

Notwithstanding, what is political for *Latet*? There is a general confusion in Hebrew between "political" and "partisan", a point that kept returning throughout my research. The political is associated with private and sectorial interests, rater than public issues in general, and thus is negatively tagged. This point is expressed very well in Shani's explanation:

> Being a-political is a strategic decision of Latet's management. Again, not only out of consensual reasons – once you choose to be political you also prevent aid from certain strata of the population, as an aid organization, strata which aren't in your political sector. A left-wing organization cannot technically and practically provide help to the "disengagement" (from Gaza strip in 2005 A.M) needy…it comes from seeing every man as a human-being

Being responsible, in this case, means being apolitical; by having no partisan or particular affiliation, and by basically identifying with no one - you can assist everyone. The "humanitarian lexicon" which has already been adopted by *Latet* (see *Latet's* formal mission-statement[54]) attributes to *Latet's* consensual approach. By focusing on the image of the

[54] As it presented on different mediums, for example *Latet's* official website http://latet.org.il

universal human, many tensions can be resolved; class, nation, and other categories becomes transparent and irrelevant. "Humanitarian organizations do not deal with their own countries", Yaron told me when I asked about humanitarian aid in the occupied territories; since *Latet* primarily deals with the Israeli society, what he meant was that they do not engage in controversial issues in order to receive the support of "the people".

When I participated in *Latet's* events I have sometimes raised questions about the occupied territories; carefully, I suggested that it seems reasonable to give a humanitarian aid in your "backyard" rather then send delegations as far as Sri-Lanka. The answer I have received was that it is true, and they do have debates about this issue; however, is important for them to "talk to the Israeli society as a whole" and create a consensus-like solidarity behind the problem of poverty.

The Israeli society, for that matter, excludes its non-Jewish members: efforts to subside the left-right turmoil end in the reproduction of collective boundaries (see, Yanai and Lifschitz-Oron, 2003). These efforts are not dialogical in any way: the left-right tension is left unspoken; consensus it achieved through the repression of pressing issues, rather than confronting them in a deliberative manner. It seems that the "dialogical space" (Habermas, 1996:358-9) which *Latet's* constitutes pushes away one common concern – for another.

Latet gives Israeli (Jewish) citizens the opportunity to do, to feel engaged and to be a part of a campaign which struggles to remain consensual. It bypasses the over-loaded political culture in Israel by focusing on "doing" – rather then debating. The next statement, given by Shani, gives a realist overlook at this point:

> When suddenly you feel that you want to do something … Latet is really an easy option. I mean, what's easier than this image of collecting food for the poor? It doesn't necessitate ideology, it doesn't necessitate political identification … it doesn't necessitate that you'll take a stance toward the government, toward anything really … you don't need to protest … you only know that there are poor people in the world, some of them live in your country and you just want to feed them (!)

It is not only the "left and right" conflict which is bypassed: the focus on the "doing" itself makes it possible to avoid consideration of the consequences of your actions. Shani expressed the ambivalence which underlies such notion of a-political interventions: "Latet promotes a model of a-political social change … this is an artificial differentiation, I can't understand how you can detach it, although I know people who actually make it work". You can detach it – however such detachment is a political technology by itself. The prism of "poverty" and "needs" which is created by *Latet* stresses particular aspects of the problem; it treats poverty as a technical problem which calls for a technical solution. As Ram (2004) articulates it: "dealing with poverty has become dealing with the poor, based on the assumption that income has a "natural" distribution curve which is dictated by the "natural laws" of the market" (p.26). Through the constitution of such a selective prism, *Latet* obscures the important fact that the very basis of political life is at stakes here. An urging decision between two models of societal existence: the model of "freedom for" (based on negative liberties, mainly the emancipation from state coercion) and the model of "freedom from" (from hunger, stress and hardship). When such political issues are left opaque, un-noticed and under-debated – the political aftermath would be reproduction of the structure of injustice.

In the next section I will analyze the fascinating case of *Latet's* appeal, where *Latet's* technical solution for the political problem of poverty was translated into a governmental policy.

5.1 A New Model of State Responsibility?

As a part of the "convention for eradicating poverty" campaign, *Latet* has appealed (28.2.07) against the government to Israel's supreme court of justice, demanding that the government assumes full responsibility for allocating food for the needy, based on the basic right for minimal nutrition. It is extremely interesting, however, that the Israeli food distribution enterprise has always been managed exclusively by non-governmental entities. In other words, through this appeal *Latet* redefines the responsibility of the state and introduces a new model of welfare to the public debate in Israel.

Latet offers the Israeli state a comprehensive solution for the national problem of poverty via a model of cooperation between the state, the business and the third sector. Not only providing immediate substitution to the state, *Latet* offers here a model for institutionalizing of a decentralized division of labor between state and non-state actors. The role-model for this plan is the "American Food Bank". This model implies a minimal un-accountable state intervention. The state purchase food spillovers from farmers and producers and distribute it with the help of NGO's.

This petition is a bricolage of "social rights discourse" and "needy discourse". The first is based on de-commodification of human-beings; the welfare state which guarantees citizens well-being independent of the market (Esping-Andersen, 2000). The second is based on charity rather then rights: the state is only required to supervise a national charity apparatus of food distribution. In this petition *Latet* calls for a very limited model of state responsibility.

The "convention for eradicating poverty" campaign has started with a declaration of war on poverty and ended with a demand from the state to form an Israeli "food-bank". In this case, *Latet* performs as a "calculating agency" in a process of political translation. A calculating agency has the capacity to articulate a desired state (i.e. condition) – defined by a list of goods and actors – and to mobilize different actors toward its realization (Callon,

1998:4). Through its grassroots interventions *Latet* has accumulated data about poverty in Israel[55], and established itself as a legitimate spokesman of poverty. As such, *Latet* is entitled to raise "field specific" claims about this phenomenon, define it and translate the needs and voices of many others in the process, namely, the Israeli poor[56].

Latet's translation did not end with an impotent advocacy campaign or a representative appeal: Yitzhak Herzog, the first Israeli minister of welfare has announced that *Latet's* raises a serious problem to which the government must provide a solution[57]. For the first time in the history of the state, the Israeli government considers to provide direct aid in the form of food, instead of stipends and provision of public services.

Latet's role in the establishment of such resolution for poverty is enormous: the state, following *Latet's* blueprint, focuses on the syndromes rather than the essence of the problem. The management of fragmented needs will neither reduce the enormous inequality of the Israeli society, nor will it mitigate poverty. The word "needy" and "poor" appears thirty times in the appeal, while the word "inequality" is completely absent[58] – indicating that the focus here are the poor themselves – rather than the system which (re)produces the phenomenon of poverty.

From the interviews I have conducted, it seems that *Latet's* personnel and volunteers are not aware to prospects of this plan. Most of them perceive this appeal literally, that is, as a demand from the state to reclaim responsibility over the needy, without going into the details. This has to do, again, with the organizational division of labor between management and members, when the later focus on their confined role without a comprehensive understanding of *Latet's* apparatus.

[55] See the "Alternative poverty report" project for details.
[56] For the process of "translation", see Callon and Latour (1981) and Callon (1986).
[57] Ruty Sinai "Herzog forms a national food allocation program for the needy", Haretz, 28.5.07.
[58] See *Latet's* website for the full petition. For an abstract in English, see:
http://www.latet.org.il/english/Index.asp?CategoryID=84&ArticleID=234

v. Conclusions

This research used *Latet's* case in order to explore the micro political dynamics of an incongruent civil agency, in which responsibility and opposition are conflated. I argue that the tensions I have studied in *Latet* and the manner in which they are mitigated are in-particular: they arise from the structural constraints of civil activism in a neo-liberal social constellation. Under such circumstances, involved civil actors are predisposed to engage in contradictory civil tasks: objection to the withdrawal of the state from social responsibilities, on the one hand, and cooperation with such withdrawal by providing first aid to stressed citizens, on the other.

I have identified two central mechanisms for the reconciliation of *Latet's* contradictory praxis. First, *Latet* (re)produces a discourse of responsibility toward the needy and their hunger, which engage its personnel and volunteers with the immediate needs of the poor. Despite its noticeable retrenchment, the welfare state has remained an important point of reference for civil grievance, but also for "civil modeling" in which voluntary actors undertake former governmental tasks. *Latet's* responsibility to the needy did not emerge in a political vacuum: it is constituted on the legacy of the welfare state and its discourse of societal wellbeing, collective solidarity and mutual responsibility (Donzelot, 1991); despite the absence of the state, its ethics and rationale still govern the conduct of its citizens. This mediated effect of the state represents a wider social-political transformation in the nature of government in advanced liberalism, which is based on governing from a distance (Rose, 1996; Miller and Rose, 1992).

Second, *Latet* produces and promotes a technical mode of action which is focuses on the "doing" itself. Consequentially, this sort of agency leads to the obfuscation of *Latet's* political effects and consequences, namely, its inability to change inequality; the question and definition of Israeli social citizenship and its future are left beyond consideration. In addition

to that, framing social problems with the instrumental language of "projects" (Taylor, 1999) leads to solutions which are centered on superficial interventions, rather then a substantive change. The result of such short-sighted interventions is the reproduction of the structure of inequality and the fortification of its hegemonic capacities by dissolving collective resentment toward the injustice it bears.

The practice of "apolitical-ness" is also the result of *Latet's* cooperation with capital: *Latet's* civil agency is confined due to the commodified support of Israeli businesses. *Latet's* dependency on Israeli capital is posing significant limitation for the organization's political imagination and practical capabilities. This dependency must be considered, however, in regard to the funding difficulties of non-governmental organizations (Katz and Yogev, 2007). Due to the privatization of social services and risks (Calhoun, 2006) such entities are often forced to depend on private and corporate capital.

Using the case of *Latet's* incongruent civil agency I purpose a general model through which contemporary “post-welfare” civil agency should to be considered. There are two important phenomena that are relevant here: the retrenching state and the replenishing market, which are often considered as complementary trends of neo-liberalism (e.g. Peck and Tickell, 2002). These two trends can be perceived as constraining as well as facilitating emerging forms of active citizenship. Further research should envision civil society as an interface between grassroots activism and these trends of neo-liberalism, and focus on the analysis of their interrelation through which civil agency is constructed.

The civil sphere cannot be analyzed as an independent entity which operates in a socio-political vacuum, since it encapsulates the same social forces and power relations as society at large. However, such colonization is not necessarily incompatible with agency and social change. Modern power works on subjects but also through them (Foucault, 1980). The potential for agentic resistance, 'strategic reversibility', or 'counter-conduct' practices (Gordon,

1991:5) is thus inherited in power relations and should be considered as an integral part of the dynamics of civil societies.

Despite my critique above, it is wrong to discharge *Latet* as just another product of neo-liberal political rationale, as many tend to do; it is not impossible that *Latet's* public initiatives will trigger social change. Despite its consensual character, *Latet* embodies and invokes civil agency in contemporary Israel: many citizens invest in *Latet's* enterprise via various forms of voluntary participation. Here, I carefully agree with the personnel and committed volunteers I have interviewed: an initial inactive mode of doing may become proactive in the course of micro-mobilization processes. *Latet* raises the pressing issue of poverty and its effects in the Israeli public sphere through direct civil engagement, public awareness, advocacy and educational projects; consider these interventions it is possible that *Latet* cultivates the prospects for a more involved civil agency in years to come.

vi. Appendix

Illustrating *Latet* in Photographs[59]

Figure 1Young volunteers during their shift in one of the food collection operations

Figure 2 Israeli Scouts (Ha'Zofim) participating in Latet's food collection operation

[59] Photographs 1-2 by Latet, photographs 3-6 by Asa Halperin.

Figure 3 Temporary volunteers (students) packaging food in Kanot warehouse following a big food operation (passover 2007)

Figure 4 Kanot warehouse after a long day of packaging (April 2007)

Figure 5 An "Impacist" in action - Kanot Warehouse (April 2007)

Figure 6 Delivering food to the Israeli north during the second Lebanon War 2006

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