FACULTY OF POLITICAL AND SOCIAL SCIENCES

The Politics of Shrinking Civil Space

Dynamics of civil society and resistance in Jordan

Word count: 21,672

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Academic Dissertation

A dissertation submitted to Ghent University in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Science in Conflict and Development Studies

Academic year: 2023-2024

GHENT UNIVERSITY

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ABSTRACT

This master's dissertation explores the politics of shrinking civil space, and the impacts on resistance and political (un)consciousness within Jordanian society. I argue to move beyond state-centred approaches by looking at how development and securitisation discourses reinforce the Jordanian state's restrictions. Based on a three-week fieldwork research, these dynamics are empirically examined through mechanisms of administrative restrictions, co-optation, divide-and-rule and identity politics, with a particular focus on women's issues. The findings reveal that the politics of shrinking civil space have triggered subtle forms of resistance, both within and outside CSOs, which challenges liberal assumptions of civil society. The research suggests that understanding civil society as a constantly reinventing process provides a more nuanced perspective, emphasising that power and resistance are mutually constitutive, each adapting and reshaping in response to the other. Additionally, the study identifies discrepancies between empirical observations of resistance and perceptions of political unconsciousness of those engaged in it. This may stem from entrenched liberal assumptions of political action. The dissertation concludes that resistance within Jordanian society, driven by several motives rather than solely liberal democratic assumptions, necessitates a re-evaluation of how civil society and resistance are traditionally conceptualised in semi-authoritarian contexts such as Jordan.

ACKNOWLEDGES

Returning to university to pursue a second master's degree after working for a while was not always an easy decision. The challenges of balancing academic responsibilities with personal and professional commitments were significant. Yet, I do not regret it for a moment, as it provided me with extensive knowledge, made me reflect upon the world more deeply, and inspired me further to pursue a just world. The encouragement and support from several key individuals made this journal possible and worthwhile.

First and foremost, I would like to express my deepest gratitude to my thesis supervisor prof. Dr. Parker for his unwavering support, invaluable guidance and insightful feedback during this dissertation process. Without his expertise and encouragement, I would not have been able to successfully complete this dissertation.

I am profoundly thankful to all participants who opened up to me and shared their sometimes difficult but resilient stories. Without their stories and openness, this dissertation would not have been possible. Moreover, the way people cleared their busy and important schedules, and the warm hospitality of all the Jordanians I encountered, will remind me of a fruitful and inspiring fieldwork opportunity. This would not have been possible without the support of the American Centre Of Research (ACOR) in Amman, their staff, and the research fellows at ACOR. They offered me a home in Jordan and, through breakfast conversations and napkin ideas, they helped me reflect more deeply on my research questions.

I am also grateful to the department of Conflict and Development Studies for providing me with a stimulating and supportive academic environment. I have been immensely inspired by the lecturers and am grateful for the knowledge they shared. Similarly, I thank my fellow graduate students for their camaraderie, discussions, and collaboration. The collective knowledge, moral support and personal stories from peers of diverse backgrounds have been inspirational and motivational. This academic environment reminded me that I am never done learning.

On a personal note, I wish to acknowledge the love and encouragement of my family and friends. To my parents, for their endless support, opportunities and belief in my abilities, often more than I believed in myself; to my sister and brother, for the much-needed laughter and encouragement; to my grandparents, for inspiring me to follow their footsteps into development work; and to my dear long-lasting friends and my boyfriend, for their patience, appreciation and acknowledgment during this challenging journey.

Finally, I want to dedicate this thesis to all people who continue to struggle for a better life in a just world, often in the toughest conditions. Their creativity and resilience inspire me to use my privilege to strive for the same.

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

CSO = Civil society organization

MENA = Middel East and North Africa

AWO = Arab Women Organization

USAID = United States Agency for International Development

GIZ = Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit / German Agency for International Cooperation

NPA = New Policy Agenda

NGO = non-governmental organisation

ICNL = International Center for Not-for-Profit Law

IMF = International Monetary Fund

NGO = non-governmental organisations

INGO = International non-governmental organisation

SAP = Structural Adjustment Programme

PLO = Palestine Liberation Organization

GMEI = the Greater Middle East Initiative

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Concerns of shrinking civil space

> The problem of "Shrinking Civic Space", also known as "Closing Space" for civil society, has reached a worldwide scale. In recent years, legislation limiting the freedoms of association, assembly, and expression has grown, while financial options for civil society organizations (CSOs) have declined. In the context of the MENA region, shrinking civic space is occurring to varied degrees, which has diverse consequences on civil society (p.10).

This quote is an excerpt of the policy report published in 2023 by the Arab Women Organization (AWO) expressing their concerns regarding the 'shrinking space of civil society'. This phenomenon entails increasing attempts to complicate the activities of civil society engaged in democracy and human rights through inter alia the implementation of legal and logistic barriers (Carothers, 2016). Concretely, this is done through a combination of several mechanisms, such as restrictions on the freedom of assembly and association as the freedom of expression, both offline and online; funding restrictions; implementation of laws and regulations on the governance of CSOs related to registration and reporting; criminalisation, stigmatisation, and de-legitimatisation of human rights defender's activities; intimidation and attacks against civil society actors; co-opting spaces inhabited by CSOs and attempts to discredit them through parallel governmental organisations, or even forcing disclosures of CSOs; restrictions through false counterterrorism measures etc. (Ayvazyan, 2019; Buyse, 2018). Buyse (2018) theorises these mechanisms, ranging from peaceful to openly violent, into three groups that enhances the shrinking space: through changes or adoption of formal laws and procedures, through discourses and labelling mechanisms, and influencing the practical capacity of CSOs to create and maintain the space they work in. Those mechanisms influence each other and implicate the effectiveness and sustainability for civil society organisations (Carothers, 2016).

The AWO is not the only organisation that is concerned with this phenomenon; it is shared by many international actors resulting in several policy reports on the issue, for example by the European Parliament[1], the Council of Europe[2], USAID[3], GIZ[4] to name a few major development players. There is even an online tool for monitoring the (not) shrinking of civil

[1] https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/A-9-2022-0032_EN.html
[2] https://www.coe.int/en/web/youth/shrinking-space
[3] Baker, A., Boulding, C., Mullenax, S., Murton, G., Todd, M., Velasco-Guachalla, X., & Zackary, D. (2017, September 22). Maintaining Civic Space in Backsliding Regimes: Research and Innovation Grants Working Papers Series (Report). USAID.
[4] https://www.prif.org/en/research/projects/projects/engaging-in-shrinking-space-a-response-manual-for-german-development-actors

society[5]. Also within academia the discourse on shrinking space is increasingly discussed (Buyse, 2018; Hummel, 2020). An analysis of all existing policy reports is out of scope of this master dissertation, and a further academic discussion will follow in the theoretical framework. For this introduction it suffices to argue that many reports point at more or less similar dynamics of shrinking space and are highly concerned with this phenomenon. It is clear that in the last decade this issue of shrinking space has been prominent in the discourses and objectives of international and local development actors, as well as academic debates.

1.2 Assumptions of civil society

Concerns with the issue of shrinking civil society are high since civil society is represented as the driving force and guarantee behind democratisation and the containment of the state (Allen, 1997; Buyse, 2018). However, by recognizing "development as a set of ideas, institutions, and practices that has a distinctive history of its own" (Hodge, 2015, p. 431), we can identify that this centrality of civil society in democratisation strategies has not always been the case. Whilst the concept dates back from the Enlightenment period, it re-emerged in development thinking during the 1990s after the fall of the Berlin wall and the collapse of Communism in the former Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, and the democratisation processes in the Global South[6] (Edward, 2009; Fukuyama, 2001; Mcllwaine, 2007; Makuwira, 2020; Robinson, 1995; Rutzen, 2015). Deriving from a state-centred development policy during the 1950s and the 1960s, through the period of neoliberal principles of trade liberalisation, privatisation and austerity during the Washington Consensus in the 1980s, the last decade of the 20th century started to soften these neoliberal principles in the post-Washington Consensus (Hickel, 2017). The closing decade of the 20th century saw political and social, but also technological evolutions as a new era of civic empowerment (Rutzen, 2015). The rise of the internet granted access to information and media technology enabling people to organise more structurally and to spread awareness (Buyse, 2018). Development was redesigned into what Robinson (1995) refers to as the 'New Policy Agenda' (NPA) with principles of democratisation, good governance and the promotion of state building (Moldavanova et al., 2023). To achieve this, policy documents refer to the notion of 'strengthening civil society' echoing the assumption of civil society as the solution to social, economic, and political dilemmas, and mainly with NGOs as key agents (Edwards, 2009; Fukuyama, 2001; Mcllwaine, 1998). This was reinforced by a generalised discontent with political parties and trade unions as unresponsive, bureaucratic and concerned with the pursuit of power rather than functioning as true representatives (Chandhoke, 2007).

[5] https://civicspacewatch.eu/

[6] By using the term 'Global South' I do not refer to a geographical understanding, but as an intellectual production with references to histories of colonialism, (neo-)imperialism, and differential economic and social change that maintains inequalities (Dados & Connell, 2012).

The commitment to civil society of development actors corresponded within the research from the 1990s onwards on the quality of democracy claiming that democracy should go beyond simply the organisation of elections (Buyse, 2018). This shift in development thinking was reflected within the adoption of the Millennium Declaration in September 2000 by the UN General Assembly, proclaiming the importance of human rights and the value of NGOs and civil society (Rutzen, 2015). This resulted in a growing number of CSOs, mostly in the form of NGOs, in all fields of public policy (Buyse, 2018). A dense civil society started thus to presuppose the prerequisite for modern liberal democracy, or in Ernest Gellner's words "no civil society, no democracy" (Gellner, 1994, in Fukuyama, 2001, p. 11).

The democratisation power of civil society is assumed due to their role in the wake of the events occurring in Stalinist states in Eastern and Central Europe, military regimes in Latin America, and in some parts of Africa during the late 1980s and early 1990s (Chandhoke, 2007; Fioramonti, 2005). It was civil society that challenged those authoritarian and unresponsive states through non-violent methods such as strikes, protests, demonstrations, information dissemination through informal networks, and formation of associational life (Chandhoke, 2007). Due to the victories of civil society against authoritarian states, civil society was depicted as the "antonym of authoritarianism, [which started to be] on everyone's lips – government officials, journalists, funding agencies, writers, and academics, not to mention the millions of people across the globe who find it an inspiration in their struggles for a better world" (Chandhoke, 2007, p. 608). That is why assumptions of the relationship between civil society and liberal democracy run through various policy documents on the shrinking space of civil society, especially in authoritarian contexts. For example, the USAID report (2017)[3] recommends strategies to keep civic space from closing with the main goal of backsliding regimes. Similarly the AWO-report (2023), which this introduction started with, states that "the success of democratic government is contingent on the presence of […] a vibrant, engaged civil society" (p. 11). Civil society is thus seen as essential to balance the power of the state and to protect individuals (Fukuyama, 2001). Nevertheless, contemporary closing of civic space could then assume that Western democratisation strategies of the NPA of the past decades to foster civil society appears to be limited (Moldavanova et al., 2023).

1.3 Problem statement and research question

Over the past decades, development strategies have emphasised fostering civil society as a means for democracy, particularly in the Global South. The theoretical framework of this dissertation will further argue that these strategies, rooted in Western liberal traditions, often assume a clear distinction between state and society and treat civil society as a normative concept and a one-size-fits-all solution. However, in the context of Jordan, these assumptions

face significant limitations. Shrinking space for civil society is not due to state-imposed restrictions, but also reinforced by Western development and security discourses, illustrating the contradictions inherent in the democratisation efforts.

Theoretical and empirical insights suggest that the concept of civil society is often applied uncritically, with little regard for the complex socio-political realities of societies. This has led to a narrow framing of resistance and political engagement that exist outside the parameters of traditional civil society assumptions. By illuminating smaller, informal acts of resistance, often ignored by Western civil society assumptions of associational and ideological requirements, this research wants to challenge the stereotypes of a passive, depoliticized society under (semi-)authoritarian rule. By examining these forms of resistance that emerge in the context of the politics of shrinking civic space in Jordan, this research seeks to reveal the complexities of political engagement and to challenge the prevailing narratives that perpetuate the need for continued external Western development intervention to foster civil society.

This dissertation aims thus to uncover the complexities of shrinking civil space and to highlight diverse acts of resistance, beyond traditional understandings of civil society, taking Jordan as an empirical grounding. Therefore, the research question of this dissertation holds: How does the politics of shrinking civil space impact forms of resistance and political (un)consciousness in Jordanian society?. Additional sub-questions help to answer this main question stepwise: How does the shrinking space of civil society in Jordan manifest, and what are the key factors contributing to this phenomenon?; In what ways do Jordanians and CSOs resist the shrinking civil space in Jordan?; and, Which motivations and agendas inform the resistance to shrinking civil space in Jordan?. To address these questions, this dissertation will start with an overview of existing academic and policy debates related to the problem statement.

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Theoretical framework

The following theoretical framework starts with academic debates on the concept of civil society and its shrinking space. I argue that due to the theoretical unclarity and normativity of the concept, shrinking space should be reinterpreted as an interplay of different actors and discourses. Then, the framework proceeds by discussing traditional assumptions of resistance and political engagement, which overlooks smaller, individual or unintentional acts of resistance beyond this traditional meaning. However, I argue that it is important to recognize these untraditional ways of resistance as well as to critique ideas of a depoliticized society under (semi-)authoritarian rule.

2.1.1 The concept of civil society

If we want to understand the concerns of a shrinking space of civil society, we must start by looking at the concept of civil society itself. Within development literature and policy thinking there is rarely referred to the theoretical positions of civil society (Mcllwaine, 1998). The term is used in different meanings which results in civil society "simultaneously [as] a goal to aim for, a means to achieve it, and a framework for engaging with each other about ends and means" (Edwards, 2004, p. 110, in Jariego, 2004). The concept is often unclear or is rarely defined on how and why a stronger civil society contributes to democracy nor is the meaning of democracy beyond assumptions of procedural elements such as free elections (Mcllwaine, 1998). It is not that there are no democratic benefits of a lively civil society, however, as Fioramonti (2005) argues, academic research should address the relationship between civil society and democratisation in a critical way. Nowadays, the "rather hasty way" (Pearce, 1997, p. 261, in Mcllwaine, 1998, p. 417) of adopting the concept leads to an uncritical treatment of it.

The lack of theoretical explanations of the concept is due to the multiplicity of understanding of it. The concept has a long history and definitions are too varied, multiple, overlapping, ideologically laden, normative and empirically imprecise (Allen, 1997; Chandhoke, 2007; Flyvbjerg, 1998; Kopecký & Mudde, 2003; Makuwira, 2020; Mcllwaine, 1998; Weisskircher, 2020). The many attempts to theoretically and empirically ground it, shows how inexhaustible the concept of civil society is (Makuwira, 2020). This makes it a "notoriously slippery concept" (Bebbington & Riddel, 1997, p. 108, in Mcllwaine, 1998, p. 416). The term furthermore coincides and overlaps with other terminology such as 'the third sector', 'philanthropy', 'public benefit organizations', 'social movements', 'non-profit organisations', 'private voluntary organisations', 'non-governmental organisations' which all depends on the context and location

of where the term is used (Makuwira, 2020; Muukkonen, 2009). As policy reports and academic writing mostly use the term 'civil society', or in its institutionalized form – see further discussions – of 'civil society organisations' (CSOs) as the umbrella concept, I will stick to this terminology for the rest of this dissertation.

Generally, civil society rests on the claim that it is necessarily distinct from the state (Allen, 1997). However, historically this has not always been the case. The antiquity words in Greek, koinonia politikhe (political community), and Latin, societas civilis, for civil society refers to a civilised society opposed to chaos and barbarism, and thus meant the whole society including the state (Muukkonen, 2009; Weisskircher, 2020). Evolutionary meanings of the concept gradually included a level of institutionalisation, – deriving from Medieval times as a means to communicate between guilds and families from different cities –, and with the assumption of a separated space from the sovereign state, – established by liberal theorists such as Adam Smith, Adam Ferguson and Georg Willhelm Friederich Hegel during the 18th and 19th centuries (Muukkonen, 2009; Weisskircher, 2020).[7] General understandings from civil society stem from this historical trajectory claiming "that civil society has an institutional core constituted by voluntary associations outside the sphere of the state and the economy" (Flyvbjerg, 1998, p. 210). In several readings, these definitional elements are reoccurring: Mcllwaine (1998) indicates a public space between state and the individual with an associational culture and various organised activity; also Sternberg (2010) emphasis the voluntary associational role of civil society; Skidmore (2001) similarly points at the social organisations partially independent of both state and market. It is what Edwards (2004, in Jariego, 2004) calls civil society as part of society distinct from the state and the market. This understanding of civil society dominates contemporary debates and derives from the understanding of the founding father of the empirical study of civil society as associational life, Alexis de Tocqueville (1805-1859) (Weisskircher, 2020). It is this Tocquevillian understanding of civil society that is seen as a crucial element for liberal democracy which is central in the NPA and incorporated within the discourse of multilateral and bilateral institutions (Mcllwaine, 1998; Weisskircher, 2020).

These understandings of civil society in a Tocquevillian, or liberal, approach include some assumptions. Firstly, it involves an assumption about civil society as a separate distinction from the state (Fioramonti, 2005). An example of this assumption is Anton Zijnderveld's (1999) democratic triangle model in which he argues that the state, market and civil society are held together and need to be balanced to ensure democracy. This assumption of non-partisanship has been influential for aid donors, but is actually an illusion in reality (Carothers, 1999). If we

[7] See further discussions on the history of the concept: Keane, J. (1988). *Democracy and civil society*. London: Verso.; Cohen, J., & Arato, A. (1992). *Civil society and political theory*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.; Tester, K. (1992). *Civil society*. London: Routledge.; Gellner, E. (1994). *Conditions of liberty: civil society and its rivals*. London: Hamish Hamilton.

remind ourselves that the idea of civil society re-emerged during the social movements against the Stalinist states, we see that this distinction is theoretical and rather blurred in practice (Fioramonti, 2005). Distinction between the state and civil society is one of the core critiques of the neo- or post-Marxist understandings of civil society, which draws upon writings of Marx, Hegel and Gramsci (Mcllwaine, 1998). According to this approach the false separation between the state and civil society is unbearable, since civil society is linked to historical, economic and political circumstances (Mcllwaine, 1998). In fact, the presupposed non-partisan neutrality of civil society is elusive as social groups and elites are often intertwined by loyalties and bound together on clan or ethnic relations (Fioramonti, 2005). In the context of this research, this will also become apparent given the amount of royal organisations and semi- or quasi-governmental organisations within Jordanian civil society (Ragetlie et al., 2021).

Another assumption of the Tocquevillian understanding of civil society is the fact that it promotes democratic values which increases social capital, i.e. assumption of civility (Fioramonti, 2005). This assumption relates to the concept of the public sphere, based on the work of Jürgen Habermas in his book 'Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere' (1962). He sees the public sphere as a space where people can engage in critical debates in order to find consensus amongst each other (Edwards, 2004, in Jariego, 2004). To enable this, the concept of 'social capital' enjoyed a rise from the 1990s (Woolcock & Narayn, 2000). This concept has moved away from the original formulation by Bourdieu, and has largely been influenced by the work of Coleman and Putnam (Tzanakis, 2013). It is defined as the norms and networks between people that enhance co-operations between individuals to act collectively (Fukuyama, 2001; Woolcock & Narayan, 2000). It is thus believed that social capital is needed to facilitate a public sphere, and stands in a synergetic relation with the emergence of a vibrant civil society (Mcllwaine, 1998). The concept of social capital gets adopted in different disciplines, and is even described by one World Bank expert as 'the missing link' in development (Harris, 2001; Tzanakis, 2013).

Nonetheless, the concept of social capital also appears undertheorized leading to conceptual ambiguity and generalisations (Mcllwaine, 1998; Tzanakis, 2013). This conceptual ambiguity is actually what leads to the rise of its usages as it bridges divides amongst scholars, practitioners and policymakers (Woolcock & Narayan, 2000). The idea of social capital gets translated as the conditions that facilitate organisations to pursue collective projects by a large number of people (Harris, 2001). This however ignores the heterogeneity of groups who are often in conflict or competition with each other (Mcllwaine, 1998). The heterogeneity of goals also causes analytical problems as some organisations can be seen as CSOs, since they employ an intermediate role and have popular support, yet it is not always clear to what extent their proposed future will be a form of democracy (Fioramonti, 2005). Furthermore, Habermas'

consensus idea has been critically reviewed by thinkers such as Chantal Mouffe (1999) who see democracy as inherently agnostic with ongoing struggles and conflicts as necessary for a vibrant democracy. This is the exact opposite of the possibility of a kind of democracy through 'popular participation' without conflicts of values and ideas which make the concept of civil society so attractive (Harris, 2001). However, the liberal conceptualisation of civil society assumes actually one common goal by its implicit reference to the embrace of Western notions of democratic capitalist development (Mcllwaine, 1998).

Lastly, the notion of civil society in a Tocquevillian sense assumes full inclusivity to ensure real and popular participation (Fioramonti, 2005). Nevertheless, these assumptions are based on an idealised Enlightenment idea of equality and fails to recognize other power imbalances within the public sphere (Hohendahl & Silberman, 1979). This rests on an image of the civilised European man excluding different groups based on different lines such as gender, race, ethnicity, and sexuality (Flyvbjerg, 1998). These critiques align with a post-Marxist approach seeing civil society as a site to critically examine oppression and power inequalities (Mcllwaine, 1998). This corresponds with the understanding of civil society as a kind of society, according to Edwards (2004, in Jariego, 2004), which calls upon the responsibility of all societal actors, thus including the state, in acting against inequalities of power, access and opportunities to shape civil conditions for society. According to Allen (1997) analysing societies through concepts of class or gender actually contributes far better to understanding political change than the liberal interpretation of civil society. Still, civil society remains another Western concept that is being imposed upon the Global South (Mcllwaine, 1998).

Assumptions underpinning the liberal, Tocquevillian understanding of civil society shows that it is through the 'rough pastiche' becoming commonly understood as a network of civil associations (Foley & Edwards, 1996). Moreover, the little agreement on which activities civil society should focus on precisely, makes empirical translations of the concept quickly transform into an institutionalised form, talking about civil society organisations (Mcllwaine, 1998). According to the World Bank (2024) civil society organisations "include non-governmental organizations, community groups, labour unions, indigenous peoples movements, faith-based organizations, professional associations, foundations, think tanks, charitable organizations, and other not-for-profit organizations." However, I discovered those terms get easily used interchangeably or sometimes contrasted to each other. In line with the debates on civil society, I will stick to the term of civil society organisations as the empirical translation of the Tocquevillian concept of civil society.

Concepts that can be interpreted in various ways, such as civil society, are powerful, in particular in policymaking since it bridges people with different persuasions (Harris, 2001). "Civil society has come to mean everything to everyone remotely interested in" (Chandhoke,

2007, p. 607). Given this ambiguity, the value research of the concept could be questioned. However, the multiplicity of the concept suiting different agendas, is no different for (semi-)authoritarian states. The flexibility of the concept allows states to shape and co-opt civil society, which is a highly preferred strategy by the Jordanian regime, in ways that align with their interests often under the guise of promoting democratic engagement and development. As the concept is still used in policymaking, it should be addressed empirically to "study the nature of the relationship between CSOs and democracy/democratization rather than assume it" (Kopecký & Mudde, 2003, p. 1). To do so, I will draw on Chandhoke's (2001) argument that we should not accept that there 'is' a civil society, but see it rather as a dynamic process. Within this dynamic process, she emphasises that civil society should not only be critical towards the state and market, but also towards itself and challenging existing power dynamics to truly foster transformative change. This is what I have tried to do in this section by deconstructing the liberal, Tocquevillian assumptions of civil society that are present in current development strategies. The next section will largely build on the civility assumption of civil society. The implicit reference to embrace Western notions of capitalist development actually produces a narrow view of shrinking civil space, as it neglects the influence of Western securitisation and development discourses.

2.1.2 The politics of shrinking civil space

Development discourses focus on the assumed mutual enhancing relation between civil society and democracy, rather than critically engage with broader debates on the politics of development (Mercer, 2020). This conventional view often neglects the complex interplay of various factors that influence the shrinking space of civil society. Most policy reports frequently focus solely on the role of states in restricting civil space, overlooking how other actors such as media organisations, paramilitary groups or businesses for example, can also exert pressure on civil society (Buyse, 2018; Sander, 2023; Scaramuzzino, 2023). Interactions between different discourses and actors actually provides states with a strong mix of justification to rationalise its restrictions (Rutzen, 2015). Toepler et al. (2020) argue that a broadened view is needed to fully understand the complex phenomenon. If we want to engage in the politics of shrinking civil space, we have to go beyond a solely state-focused approach. Therefore, we need a relational understanding and looking at the repertoires of the state to counter or encourage restrictions on civil space (Buyse, 2018). Still, those links are rarely made in the many policy documents on shrinking space.

This subsection will mainly examine how securitisation and development discourses should be included in the debates on the politics of shrinking civil space. By looking at these discourses, the aim is to demonstrate the multifaceted pressures on civil society that extend beyond state

actions alone, and to argue for a more nuanced understanding of the politics of shrinking civil space. But first, the section will start with the concept of resilient authoritarianism, as current academic debates see this as an explanation of the continuation of authoritarian states which critiques the liberal democracy thesis. However, I argue that this concept remains limited due to the continuing state-centred approach and liberal assumptions on civil society.

2.1.2.1 Resilient authoritarianism

As discussed in the introduction, concerns about the shrinking space of civil society are significant, because civil society is seen as essential to combat authoritarian rule (Chandhoke, 2007). However, the liberal democracy thesis does not pass empirical tests since civic space is closing despite the NPA-strategies to foster civil society (Moldavanova et al., 2023). The contributions of the special issue by Toepler et al. (2020) shows that civil society, despite its highly praised and well-documented participatory functions, is not necessarily linked to democratisation outcomes. The concept of 'resilient authoritarianism' is often employed in academic debates to critique the liberal democratisation thesis and to explain the persistence of shrinking civil space. This argument claims that regimes permit their existence through adaptation of liberalising reforms to secure its survival resulting in an 'updated authoritarianism' (Heydeman, 2007). Within this view seemingly strong authoritarian regimes are reframed as constantly negotiating and adapting through everyday interactions in order to overcome its fragility to stay in power (Stoler, 2010). The study of Christensen and Weinstein (2013, in Buyse, 2018) concluded that regime vulnerability is in fact a strong predictor for the creation of civil society restrictions. This is especially the case in 'semi-authoritarian' or 'hybrid' regimes which are "democratic in name, but less so in substance" (Buyse, 2018, p. 13). Those regimes formally hold elections, but in practice are seeking to consolidate governmental institutions and state power (Rutzen, 2015). Shrinking civic space are in fact soft tools for the (semi-)authoritarian regimes to enhance its legitimacy (Toepler et al., 2020).

While resilient authoritarianism helps to explain mechanisms through which civil space is restricted I argue that this framework is not sufficient on its own. This is because it remains rooted in a state-centred approach, which overlooks the complex, dialectical relationship between resistance and state-making. As Schwedler (2022) points out, protests and forms of dissent are not merely a reaction to state power, but an integral part of the processes of state-making and state-maintaining. By focusing too narrowly on the state's strategies, the concept of resilient authoritarianism risks ignoring the ways in which resistance shapes and challenges these very processes. Moreover, the concept does not critically engage with the liberal assumptions underlying the concept of civil society itself. It tends to overlook other actors in shaping and shrinking civil space, in particular Western development agencies. Therefore, I

do not stick to the concept of resilient authoritarianism, but argue for a more complex understanding of power dynamics underlying the phenomenon of shrinking civil space, or in other words arguing for the politics of shrinking civil space.

2.1.2.2 The role of securitisation discourses

The rhetoric of counter-terrorism, especially following the post-9/11 era, has justified security-oriented measures and discourses on civil society such as stricter control on cross-border financing and a political discourse of fear (Ayvazyan, 2019; Buyse, 2018; Rutzen, 2015). Interestingly, during the same period the Freedom Agenda, initiated by George W. Bush, emphasised the role of civil society in democracy-building, particularly in the Middle East. This region became a focal point for both the War on Terror and the Freedom Agenda, linking development and military cooperation more closely together (Buyse, 2018). Recent policies embrace this idea through the concept of the 'Triple Nexus' of humanitarian, development, and peace efforts to create a more comprehensive approach (European Commission, 2022). However, this narrative often obscures significant differences and complexities, using ethical politics of development and security as a guise for other motives, for example as governmentality techniques to maintain the neoliberal order (Stern & Öjendal, 2010).

The linkage between development and military cooperation has compromised the neutrality of CSOs in the eyes of some governments, often perceived as connected to foreign security forces (Rutzen, 2015). Linked with the debates about the accountability and transparency of CSOs, this has gained momentum with the adoption of the 2005 Paris Declaration of Aid Effectiveness with concepts of 'host-country/government ownership' and 'alignment of aid with the partner countries' priorities (Rutzen, 2015). CSOs that receive foreign funding are more likely to be targeted through measures of shrinking space as regimes fear revolutionary actions, especially the ones that received outset help based on this securitization narrative (Buyse, 2018; Rutzen, 2015). This has led to the concept of a 'managed civil society', where states either co-opt civil society, allow CSOs to operate only if they steer clear of political issues, or shutting them down if they resist; or in short, it led to the shrinking space of civil society (Rutzen, 2015).

2.1.2.3 The role of development discourses

As debated in the introduction, civil society was deployed as the panacea for development issues and is central in the strategy for democratic promotion (Chandhoke, 2007). By directing a greater role to CSOs as development strategies, the IMF and the World Bank influenced the behaviour of these CSOs to work as intermediaries between neoliberal principles of the aid machinery and the recipients of that aid (Makuwira, 2020). A marketization idea had taken over

civil society through commercial revenue generation, contract competition, emerging new donors, and social entrepreneurship ideas (Eikenberry & Kluver, 2004). This is mostly influence through Northern-based development donors where the funding requirements are subjected to a neoliberal agenda (Sander, 2023). However, these marketisation principles based on ideas of individualism, self-interest and consumerism are incompatible with democratic principles of collective action for the public interest, fairness and justice (Eikenberry & Kluver, 2004). This seems contradictory, but is possible due to the abovementioned conceptual multiplicity of the concept of civil society. Mcllwaine (1998) clarified that the liberal assumptions of civil society implicitly refer to the embrace of Western notions of capitalist development.

Liberal assumptions of civil society can thus explain neoliberal roles of CSOs. Despite that donors carefully talk about civil society, in practice they tend to equate it only with NGOs (Mcllwaine, 2007). Historically, NGOs have enjoyed a good reputation for Western intelligentsia, and they are mostly assumed as members of civil society (Sternberg, 2010). The marketization idea demands a professionalisation leading donors to favour elite NGOs in capital cities and thus neglecting informal and small associations at the grassroots level (Edwards, 2004, in Jariego, 2004). This is often referred to as the NGO-ization which points at the process in which social movements are pushed to professionalise, bureaucratise, and institutionalise (Lang, 2022). Donors continue to see NGOs as 'the magic bullet' to promote citizen engagement, but also to establish an alternative delivery service system (Dai & Spires, 2018; Mcllwaine, 2007). Thus, within the post-Washington discourse a number of NGOs started to fulfil the tasks of civil society (Chandhoke, 2007).

The NGO-ization of civil society has led civic groups to focus on issue-specific, marketable expert knowledge, or transformed themselves into service providers (Lang, 2022). This makes them operate in a non-political arena, in close alliance with the neoliberal agendas of donor agencies, but has little impact on tackling structural causes or manifestations of poverty (Banks & Hulme, 2012). The technical translation of poverty depoliticizes the issue suggesting that it can be 'solved' through apolitical expert knowledge by the development apparatus, and is what James Ferguson (1990) calls the 'anti-politics machine'. As a result, any other role of civil society such as social movements and political struggles has been emptied out (Chandhoke, 2007). The neoliberal agenda of the NGO-ization supplanted the bottom-up, grassroot formations of civil society (Gianni, et al., 2021). Toepler et al. (2020) has tried to deal with different roles of NGOs by dividing them into three key groups: claims-making or advocacy NGOs, non-profit service providers, and regime-loyal NGOs. Still, those remain an emptied version of civil society or as Chandhoke (2007) phrases it "people struggling against authoritarian regimes had demanded civil society; what they got instead was NGOs!" (p. 608).

Thus, if we judge NGOs based on their actions, rather than the statues and rhetoric, we could question whether they could be addressed as part of civil society (Sternberg, 2010). Still, development strategies remain to focus mostly on NGOs as vehicles for strengthening civil society and thus contributing to a further emptying out of the political roles that civil society should fulfil (Chandhoke, 2007). This has been possible due to the lack of theoretical conceptualisations of civil society, because now it can operate as a solution that suits many different agents all pursuing their own agendas, such as market expansion at the expense of the state, transformation from mass politics to single-issue localised campaigns, undermining the belief in formal modes of representation in the form of political parties; which in general all attributes to the shrinking of the accepted modes of politics (Chandhoke, 2007).

The technocratization and depoliticization of civil society by donor-driven NGOs cannot be overlooked in the politics of shrinking civil space (Sander, 2023). By transforming civil society into an apolitical, service-oriented sector, the capacity for grassroots mobilisation, political advocacy, and systemic change is diminished which stabilises existing power dynamics. This shift undermines not only civil society's political functions, but can also enable greater state presence and control due to unintentional side-effects of technocratic translation of political problems, as is demonstrated in Ferguson's (1990) case study of Lesotho. As a result, the very mechanisms intended to foster civil society inadvertently contribute to its shrinkage. Thus, the influence of Western, neoliberal, donor-driven discourses of development cannot be excluded in discussions on the politics of shrinking civil space. As this reinforcing role of donor practices on shrinking civil space remains largely overlooked, this dissertation attempts to highlight these dynamics and look at how this politics of shrinking civil space impacts forms of resistance and ideas on political (un)consciousness.

2.1.3 Resistance to the politics of shrinking civil space

Previous section highlighted the complexities of shrinking civil space. However, Buyse (2018) warns against the usage of the notion 'shrinking space' as a catch-all phrase which could dismiss how the experiences of restrictions and pressure differ between large, well-organised, internationally connected CSOs and smaller, more grassroots groups (Buyse, 2018). By stopping the analysis here, it would suggest that no political options are possible under (semi-)authoritarian rule, depicting the population as rather passive and depoliticized. Whilst scholarly debates on authoritarianism are well-established, the attention to the resistance against it lacks behind (Tomini et al., 2022). In the process of authoritarian politics people do not undergo this passively, but they often resist it (Tomini et al., 2022). Shrinking space can also induce coping responses on both the individual and the organisational level (Scaramuzzino, 2023). As Kenneth Roth, the former executive director of Human Rights

Watch, stated in their 2019 World Report “the excesses of autocratic rule are fueling a powerful counterattack” (p. 1). Civil society has been able to carve out more political space than is generally believed (Dai & Spires, 2018). This can be empirically verified as no democracies or hybrid regimes are turned (back) into fully autocracies or dictatorships despite experiences of shrinking civil space (Buyse, 2018).

Highlighting the complexities of the politics of shrinking civil space, opens up discussions on how neoliberal development discourses can provoke reactions and politically challenged (Wood, 2015). Vice versa, protests and forms of dissent are inherently part of state-making and state-maintaining processes (Schwedler, 2022). Therefore, tries this dissertation to provide “a re-thinking, particularly when it comes to the over-emphasis on the role of the state, ruling elites and traditional political and civil society actors to the detriment of societal forms of unstructured mobilisation and non-traditional, leaderless and horizontal social and political actors” (Pace & Cavatorta, 2012, p. 127).

2.1.3.1 Liberal understandings of resistance

Grassroots organisations often employ a variety of advocacy strategies to influence politics at multiple levels (Dai & Spires, 2018; Noakes & Teets, 2018). These strategies include utilizing existing institutional channels and establishing stable, interactive relationships with the government, indicating an approach of working ‘within the system’ to enact change (Tomini et al., 2022). This method involves careful framing of policy goals and outcomes to align with both governmental expectations and the organisation’s aims (Dai & Spires, 2018). Civil society then is viewed as an alternative to the formal sphere of party politics (Chandhoke, 2007). While this institutional approach is important, it is not the only pathway through which societal politicization occurs. Moreover, within restricted civil society, such as Jordan, these strategies can be rather limited.

Resistance can also be deployed to obtain societal support in order to put pressure on the state (Dai & Spires, 2018). This is what Tomini et al. (2022) call the societal resistors which can include grassroots CSOs, but also actors from the social, economic or cultural spheres. Concretely, the strategies can vary from demonstrating, signing petitions, obtaining media exposure, or political consumerism (Dai & Spires, 2018; Marien et al., 2010). This is what Tilly and Tarrow (2015) would conceptualise as ‘social movements’. They see social movements as an historical category involving sustained claim-making and repeated repertoires based on social networks, organisations, traditions and solidarities. According to Edwards (2009) social movements often evolve over time into CSOs if they have a substantial network and a strong social network to get this idea into politics. In fact, social movements with popular mobilisations are often led by structured, formal CSOs (Fioramonti, 2005). Social movements are thus

assumed to have a level of organisation promoting clear interests of people (Makuwire, 2020). This remains, thus within liberal, Tocquevillian understandings of civil society arguing for an institutionalised core and a level of ideology. Remaining in liberal assumptions of resistance would not critically engage with the liberal democracy thesis. However, there has been a rise of "unconventional political participation" which deserves attention (Barnes et al., 1979, in Inglehart & Catterberg, 2002).

2.1.3.2 Non-institutional ways of political participation

Non-conventional forms of political participation are gaining traction, particularly among new generations (Marien et al., 2010; Stolle & Hooghe, 2010). According to Marien et al. (2010) distinctions between the conventional and non-conventional ways of political participation should revolve around the issue of institutionalisation. Seligmann (2002) argues that institutionalisation is in fact the "Achilles' heel" of any social movement or civil society, as it must go through the legal and coercive state apparatus; and thus is more vulnerable to state's mechanisms of shrinking civic space. The shift away from formal political engagement towards more spontaneous, unstructured actions aligns with the concept of 'contentious politics' as described by Tilly and Tarrow (2015). The non-institutionalised forms of political participation tries to have a distant, indirect impact on political decision-making, or circumvents the political system altogether (Marien et al., 2010). This is a broader understanding of social movements including sporadic, less organised forms of claim-making that challenge the status quo (Tilly & Tarrow, 2015). This includes thus a de-institutionalisation of political participation which involves an expansion of the political action repertoire (Marien et al., 2010). In line with the suggestion made by Kopecký and Mudde (2003), I will thus include unstructured mobilisations and contentious politics to look at the resistance forms of the politics of shrinking civil space.

Contentious politics, as conceptualised by Tilly and Tarrow (2015), still presupposes the element of collective action which assumes a level of coordination efforts on behalf of shared interests or programs. Resistance is thus often believed to be a collective endeavour (Tomini et al., 2022). But a de-institutionalisation does not necessarily entail an equal representation of people's interests (Marien et al., 2010). The study of Stolle and Hooghe (2010) demonstrates that non-institutionalised forms of political participation still reproduce inequalities around educational and class lines. This could assume an idea of a de-politization of people at the margins of society, and risks dismissing the agency of the periphery: the peasant, the rural and the non-state (Dove et al., 2011). If these groups are not included, it risks 'speaking on their behalf' and even further perpetuating their marginalised position (Spivak, 1988).

Theoretical views on 'the margins' by Tsing and Agamben argue that the margins can simultaneously be sites of exclusion and inclusion (Stevenson, 2007; Tsing, 1994). These

perspectives on the periphery highlight the potential for resistance and agency, even within oppressive systems. As Tsing (1994) eloquently states “there is always an uncanny magic […] in imagining the beleaguered community in the heart of the oppressive system, however familiar the social division or the political struggle” (p. 280). People at the margins often resist not only state intervention, but also tactics of refusal, protest or grassroots organising, and make claims to spaces despite being “dispersed, unorganized and atomized” (Bayat, 2017, p. 106, in Atia, 2022, p. 1). Scott similarly argues that it is not the orderly institutionalised procedures that gains emancipatory freedom, but rather the “disorderly, unpredictably spontaneous action cracking upon the social order from below” (Scott, 2012, in Shipper, 2016, p. 105). This hints at the concept of everyday resistance.

2.1.3.3 Everyday resistance

Everyday resistance is understood as routine, subtle forms of opposition that are not (yet) necessarily articulated as political claims or formally organised (Johansson & Vinthage, 2016). Popularised by James C. Scott, particularly in his book ‘Weapons of the Weak’ (1985), this concept emphasises how marginalised groups engage in small acts of defiance – such as foot-dragging, false compliance, gossiping or sabotage – to resist their oppressors highlighting their everyday politics and micro-existence (Bayat, 1997; Johansson & Vinthagen, 2016). In his famous book ‘The Art of Not Being Governed’ (2009), Scott describes the socio-political phenomenon of the so-called backward hill people that actually deliberately move towards the highlands in order to escape state power, or as he describes “the history of deliberate and reactive statelessness” (p. x). Scott’s focus on the survival tactics of the poor has been pivotal in deconstructing the discourse of viewing these populations as either passive victims or as destabilizing forces (Bayat, 1997). These strategies are not overt political confrontations, but are nevertheless politically significant in navigating and subverting dominant powers through everyday practices (Scott, 2009).

By examining everyday resistance more analytically and comprehensively, the analysis of repertoires, temporalization, and spatialization should be studied (Johansson & Vinthage, 2016). Spatial dynamics play a crucial role in everyday resistance, as the control over contestation of space often underlie these acts of defiance (Atia, 2022). Henri Lefebvre’s concept of ‘right to the city’ highlights urban spaces as not only the arena of struggle, but also as an integral part of that struggle (Schwedler, 2022). Whereas Scott’s analysis focuses more on rural resistance, the ‘right to the city’ argues how urban environments become arenas where ordinary people assert their rights to shape the space they inhabit, often challenging the power structures that seek to control them or make them invisible (Atia, 2022; Menoret, 2014). For instance, in the work of Asef Bayat (1997) urban spaces like streets become volatile sites of

political conflict, where spontaneous, unplanned collective actions can erupt that challenge the status quo (Bayat, 1997). Similarly, in Pascal Menoret's (2014) ethnography of joyriding in Riyadh, the use of cars and roads – both symbols of Saudi's state power – by marginalized youth becomes a form of resistance, albeit one that also reflects the internal contradictions and dangers of such acts. These resistance acts are done through the 'art of presence' which is "the fundamental movement in the life of nonmovements" (Atia, 2022, p. 1). The spatial elements can be seen as alternatives to the idea of a level of institutionalization by Tilly, by seeing urban spaces as 'passive networks' in which instantaneous communication between individuals can happen (Bayat, 1997).

The art of presence is also interesting to look at the motivations behind everyday resistance. Despite Scott's contributions, Bayat (1997) argues that Scott remains in a dichotomous class struggle framework and misses the opportunity to engage in an entirely new perspective. This limits the ability to engage with the urban poor, who not only act to survive but also strive to improve their lives; they do not just resist hidden oppression, but also take offensive actions to challenge privileges (Bayat, 1997). In order to do so, Bayat expands Scott's view by introducing the concept of 'quiet encroachment' as "silent, patient, protracted, and pervasive advancement of ordinary people on the propertied and powerful in order to survive hardships and better their lives" (p. 7). Bayat's argument adds a layer of complexity to the motives behind struggles; a mixture of rational calculations involving the survival element emphasized by Scott, but also moral elements stressing the right to a dignified, better life. Similarly, Tomini et al. (2022) stress that decisions of resistance actors can be a variety of diverging motivations based on political assessments, for cost-benefit calculations in terms of power redistribution, or even for non-political reasons. For example, Menoret's (2014) ethnographic work shows joyriding as political acts in a non-emancipatory and dangerous sense, contradicting Scott's claims of everyday resistance out of survival; instead it rather reaffirms Bayat's call to recognize a more complex set of resistance motivations.

Insights from everyday resistance challenges the notion that political acts require a level of consciousness and/or formal organisation around this collective identity. Everyday political acts are often dismissed, because they seem insignificant when compared to revolutions which are seen as the universal image of social change (Bayat, 1997). Furthermore, resistance is often criticized as bouncing back to the status quo after a disturbance (Cretney & Bond, 2014). However, this hints again at the liberal democracy assumption, and forgets that resisting authoritarianism is not the same as preventing it (Tomini et al., 2022). Still, the work of Atia (2022) about the Moroccan slum-dwellers shows that albeit their resistance was not a radical insurgence, but a form of 'deradicalized resistance', it still induced a dramatic change in Moroccan housing policy. The effectiveness of resistance does not only depend on the

capacity of resistance itself, but also on the ability to exploit the vulnerabilities within the system they resist (Bogaert, 2014). Even within the institutionalised forms of resistance, it is the small adaptations that can catalyse larger organisational changes (Noakes & Teets, 2018). “[A]ctors [can] become a counterforce, without intending to be so” (Bayat, 1997, p. 2). People should be the focal point of theoretical departure (Gilder, 2008). This reaffirms Scott’s (2009) call to study ordinary people, rather than just formal political movements and to move beyond state-centric views of history and politics.

This is what this thesis attempts to do, by examining forms of resistance in the urban space of Amman or by people working in the Jordanian civil society. As power and resistance are intertwined and mutually constraining, creating opportunities for one another, this dissertation will examine how the politics of shrinking civil space impacts the forms of resistance in Jordan. (Tomini et al., 2022). However, the characteristics of political regimes have a strong influence on the capacities to resist (Tomini et al., 2022). This argues for an empirical grounding of abovementioned theoretical debates. The following contextual framework will provide sociopolitical history needed to understand the empirical data.

2.2 Contextual framework

I argue for an empirical grounding to understand the nuanced and contextual realities of the politics of shrinking civil space, and how it impacts resistance and political (un)consciousness. Through uncovering the socio-political and historical context within this framework, I will argue for the utility of Jordan as a compelling case study. Jordan offers valuable insights into the complex interplay between state power, development and securitisation discourses, shrinking civil society, and resistance. The section will start with a brief overview of the sociopolitical history of the modern state of Jordan, mostly focused on the state-making efforts, to contextualise the empirical arena[8].

2.2.1 The making of the modern Jordanian state

Figure 1 - Map of Jordan (George, 2005)

The modern Jordanian state, officially known as the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, is located in the Middle East, bordered by Saudi Arabia to the south, Iraq to the northeast, Syria to the north, and Palestine to the west, with the Red Sea to the Southwest (see figure 1) (George, 2005). Jordan emerged from the post-World War I division of the Ottoman Empire, with its foundation laid during the interwar period when the British Mandate established the Emirate of Transjordan in 1921, under the rule of Abdullah I (Massad, 2001; Robins, 2004). This first era marked the beginning of the state's efforts to unify a sparsely populated and an impoverished periphery into a coherent political entity (Robins, 2004).

2.2.1.1 1920s – 1940s: Early state-building efforts

The initial state-building phase in Jordan involved integrating the social-spatial periphery into the physical and normative framework of the newly adopted state, which sought to transform the inhabitants into a unified Jordanian political community (Robins, 2004). However, this process was met with resistance, as it remained an external and neocolonial project under the guise of the League of Nations which was dominated by British officials and a dependent elite

[8] For a more detailed and earlier experiences of politics and state-building in Jordan, the work of Robins (2004) and George (2005) can be further consulted.

administration (Massad, 2001; Robins, 2004). Jordan's creation served to maintain British influence in the region through local patronage, rather than a stable future for the country (Milton-Edwards & Hinchcliffe, 2009). The establishment of state institutions, particularly juridical and military organs, played a significant role in both producing and repressing identities and cultural practices, a dynamic that continues to affect civil space in Jordan today, as this dissertation argues (Massad, 2001). This period already witnessed strategies of coercion and co-optation of local Bedouin elites into state structures, and has been used to consolidate state power and to silence resistance (Massad, 2001).

2.2.1.2 1940s – 1970s: Independence and turbulent territorial changes

The second phase of Jordan's state-building project spanned the late 1940s to the early 1970s (Robins, 2004). This period was marked by the formal independence of Transjordan in 1946 and the transformation of Abdullah's title from Amir to King, leading to the renaming of the country as the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan (George, 2005). The independence process was shaped by international dynamics of the post-World War II era and diplomatic pressure from the Amir rather than anti-colonial revolts (Massad, 2001). Independence remained nominal as the country remained dependent on massive British subsidies and the army was led by a British officer (Massad, 2001). Anticolonial thought started to rise in the mid-1950s based on an Arab and predominantly Islam identity, which demanded the removal of the British head of the army and a realignment of Jordan in international politics (Massad, 2001). However, these sentiments were merely objecting to some particularities of colonial control, rather than representing a unified nationalist identity or movement (Schwedler, 2022).

This era also saw the Hashemite regime seeking to ensure its viability through territorial expansion, notably with the annexation of the West Bank in 1950, which was later lost in the 1967 war which exposed the vulnerabilities of the new state (Robins, 2004). These geographical and demographic shifts significantly impacted Jordan's national identity, further complicated by the Arab-Israeli conflict and the influx of Palestinian refugees (Massad, 2001; Ryan, 2010). New social cleavages emerged between the more tribal, rural populations of Transjordan from the East Bank and the economically and socially differentiated, better-educated, but damaged and dispossessed population of Palestine of the West Bank (Robins, 2004). These cleavages also translated into economic differentiation, whereby Palestinians worked mostly in the private sectors and Transjordanians were offered jobs in the public sector (Baylouny, 2008). Through the combination of jobs and patronage, the regime sought to boost their East Bank support base, added with an official narrative of the nation as having a 'tribal' and 'Bedouin' history and the Hashemite regime leading the nation into the modern, independent period, which is the 'Jordanization project' (Schwedler, 2022)

However, the period after 1967 intensified challenges in reconciling Jordan's national identity, especially as it became clear that there would be no speedy restorations of the West Bank and the ongoing presence of a substantial Palestinian population within the country (Robins, 2004). Moreover, the rise of the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO) and Palestinian guerilla movements challenged the Jordanian government's claims on the West Bank and the presupposed Jordanian identity of its populations (Massad, 2001). The PLO even started to make claims on the Jordanian sovereignty resulting in a bloody conflict of the 1970-1971 Black September (Massad, 2001; Schwedler, 2022). The conflict between the Jordanian army, which also includes Palestinians, and the Palestinian guerillas, which also includes Jordanians, further complicated the state's efforts to create a cohesive political community (Robins, 2004). 'The other' shifted from the external British colonialist to the internal Palestinian-Jordanian (Massad, 2001).

After the violent defeat of the Palestinian guerilla movement, the Jordanization campaign which was already started before the civil war, had intensified (Massad, 2001). Moreover, the Jordanization project was a useful tool to counter the upcoming leftist and Arab nationalist challenges, as the Jordanization narrative claimed that the Hashemites descended from the Prophet Muhammed and thus fit within an Arab, Muslim identity (Schwedler, 2022). Still, the Hashemite's worries that the nationalist thoughts might sweep the monarchy away, was only tempered by the 1957-palace coup with the support of the UK and the US (Massad, 2001). As a result the Jordanian "state survived, but against virtually all expectations" (Robins, 2004, p. 2).

2.2.1.3 The 1970s onwards: From oil prosperity to neoliberalism and political liberalisation

During the 1970s and 1980s, Jordan benefited from the secondary effects of regional oil wealth channelled through Arab aid and remittances, which allowed the state to strengthen its public institutions and consolidate its power (Robins, 2004). While continuing the Jordanization project, Jordan's strong economy at the time also enabled the creation of public jobs with increased wages to strengthen its East Bank support basis (Schwedler, 2022). At the other hand, the consolidation of power also led to discriminatory policies against Palestinian-Jordanians and a growing dependency on the military as the key pillar of regime stability (Massad, 2001).

These dynamics were halted by the international debt crisis of the 1980s coupled with the rise of neoliberalism which reshaped Jordanian's political economy (Robins, 2004; Schwedler, 2022). During the 1980s and the 1990s the MENA-countries were facing rising socio-economic issues, such as declining oil revenues and the inability to offer social mobility to the educated

youth (Bergh, 2012). “The flush years were over, and the state’s Jordanization project left it with a bloated bureaucracy and a massive security apparatus but with little ability to continue to fund them” (Schwedler, 2022, p. 107). The foreign debt accumulation offered momentum for the US to reimpose a financial hegemony through the adoption of SAP reforms (Leopardi & Trentin, 2022). Encouraged through the Reagan administration, Jordan turned to the IMF to support its delaying economy in 1988 (Schwedler, 2022). The SAP-reforms aimed at enhancing efficiency and attracting foreign investment led to the privatization of public assets and the opening of Jordan’s economy to global competition (Bergh, 2012; Banwell, 2015). As in many Global South countries these economic reforms had social impacts such as the exposure to international market fluctuations, but in Jordan it also impacted the rural East Bank population who lost their public sector jobs to which they felt entitled to which actually jeopardized the regime’s support base (Baylouny, 2008; Schwedler, 2022).

The unpopular economic reforms sparked riots within the traditional support basis for the regime (Lucas, 2003). Instead of coercion, King Hussein strategically reacted to these riots by a tactical political opening (Lucas, 2003). Additionally, this also fitted within the international discourses on the ‘War on terror’ and ‘ending autocracy’ launched by the US and aimed at ‘freedom’ and ‘democratisation’ in the Middle East (e.g. the Greater Middle East Initiative (GMEI) by George W. Bush) (Girdner, 2005). In fact, this reflected a desire to contain China and Europe through the power over oil and to strengthen US capital accumulation which gave rise to the neoliberal control over the region (Girdner, 2005). Within this perspective the main premise is that top-down democratic reforms were needed for the inevitable linear path towards democracy, which in the MENA-region is exemplified by the GMEI (Pace & Cavatorta, 2012). Within this light, Jordan adopted a political liberalisation program in 1989 which included parliamentary elections, the legalisation of political parties, and the reduction of security forces’ role in governance (Robinson, 1998; Wiktorowics, 1999). However, Jordan’s political liberalisation, described by Robinson (1998) as “defensive democratisation”, was primarily aimed at preserving the core structures of power within the monarchy, military, and elites, while limiting the potential for more fundamental changes. On the other hand, both economic and political liberalisation reforms could be used to advertise an American vision of societal transformation in the Middle East (Baylouny, 2008). As a result, Jordan’s state-building efforts of a neoliberal opening increasingly relied on militarized liberalisation that maintained control while limiting broader political changes, this with the main support of the US (Baylouny, 2008).

The political economy and history of Jordan is marked by a continual balancing act of state-making efforts, as the state navigates various internal and external challenges, while striving to maintain stability. The overview also shows that the recent articulated strategies of shrinking civil space through co-optation, limited political opening, and the usage of identity politics, has

been historically present in Jordan's state-making processes. Complex interactions at various scales force the Jordanian regime to balance different agendas to remain in power, and are all at play when looking at the politics of shrinking civil space.

2.2.2 The politics of shrinking civil space in Jordan

As the political history of Jordan showed, the Hashemite monarchy maintains its power through a combination of coercive measures and selective liberalisation creating an environment where civil society operates under constant pressure and surveillance (Wiktorowicz, 1999). Specifically, in Jordan CSOs can be divided into three categories, all bounded by state control: CSOs established independent from the state, semi-or quasi-governmental CSOs established by the government, and royal organisations headed by a member of the royal family (Ragetlie et al., 2021). The constant balancing of Jordan to maintain its power, provides fertile ground for analysing tactics and strategies that navigate and resist state constraints on civil society. Firstly, I will address the politics of shrinking civil society in Jordan specifically.

2.2.2.1 The role of the Jordanian government

Officially is Jordan a constitutional monarchy with democracy and a focus on human rights (George, 2005). However, according to the 2022 Freedom House report, Jordan scores only 33% on political freedom, reflecting the limited nature of its democracy. Despite holding parliamentary elections, King Abdullah II retains substantial control, including the power to appoint and dismiss the prime minister, cabinet members, and the National Assembly (George, 2005). The constitution reinforces this status quo, as exemplified by Article 30 which stipulates that "the King is the Head of State and is immune from any liability and responsibility" (George, 2005, p. 28). Additionally, the judicial system, while nominally independent, remains subject to authorities' influence (George, 2005).

Even though Jordan went through a political liberalisation process, the country still experiences repression of public voices and bottom up political participation (Sharayri, 2021; Wiktorowicz, 1999). Although Jordan projects an image of rule of law, free media, and academic freedom, these freedoms are heavily restricted as it has to operate within constraints preventing any criticism of the King or actions that might threaten national unity or Jordan's foreign relations (George, 2005). For example, in response to restrictions on platforms like Facebook and Twitter, many Jordanians moved to the social media platform Clubhouse that worked through virtual private networks, only for it to be banned in 2021 (Sharayri, 2021). Wiktorowicz (1999, p. 607) states that "grassroots voluntary organizations are tightly controlled and managed by the state; public demonstrations are strictly limited; and the press is under siege." The government scrutinizes demonstrations prior to their occurrence, and security forces often

engage violently with protesters, effectively limiting the right to free assembly (Freedom House, 2022). Furthermore, certain groups, such as women, LGBITQ+, and Palestinian refugees, face additional discrimination both in law and practice, which demonstrates the continuing identity politics of the Jordanian state (Wiktorowics, 1999).

The political changes and democratic reforms in Jordan are, and historically have been, channelled from above as strategies to maintain social control, significantly limiting options for genuine political participation. Despite the shrinking space for civil society and critical voices, Jordan continues to uphold an image of liberal democracy to the West, which remains crucial for its international relationships and aid (George, 2005). This already touches upon the following two discourses that also influence shrinking civil space in Jordan.

2.2.2.2 The role of securitisation discourses in Jordan

Jordan's geopolitical significance, due to its proximity to Israel and Palestina, makes it a key ally for Western powers, particularly the US and the UK. The US has historically provided Jordan with military support, partly to counter Soviet influence during the Cold War and to ensure the stability of King Hussein's regime against internal and external threats of the Palestinian guerilla movements or neighbouring states (Levey, 2006). This aided the militarized liberalisation and enabled more state control, as debated above (Baylouny, 2008). The strategic importance of Jordan has been reinforced by its involvement in the Middle East peace process and its alignment with the West, especially in the context of the Iraq War and the broader War on Terror (Milton-Edwards & Hinchcliffe, 2009). The stability of Jordan is seen as crucial for regional security, which justifies the regime's tight control over civil society under the guise of national security (ICNL, 2021a). The empirical data of this dissertation will show that the geopolitical role of Jordan actually plays an important role in how the politics of shrinking civil space is perceived, and which acts of resistance they provoke.

2.2.2.3 The role of development discourses in Jordan

Jordan's recent history includes significant liberalisation efforts, yet these have not translated into expanded civil liberties or reduced state control. Jordan depends heavily on foreign money to support its resource-poor economy (Masad, 2001). The country's development trajectory has thus been influenced by international aid and development agencies that actually reinforce the regime's strategies to restrict civil space (Sander, 2023). How these reinforcements work are addressed in the theoretical framework, but not specifically to the case of Jordan. Literature on how the notion of politics of shrinking civil space works in Jordan is rather limited, and thus deserves further empirical exploration of what this thesis aims to do. Inspirational to further explore this, is the work of Sander (2023) who looked at the reinforcements of donor agencies

on the shrinking space of Jordanian women's NGOs. Theoretically, an analysis of societies through the concept such as gender, can also contribute to a better understanding of political change (Allen, 1997). The focus on women's issues appears to be illuminating to understand the politics of shrinking civil society in Jordan, because it works as a rhetorical tool to ensure the raison d'être of both the development apparatus as the Jordanian government.

Development initiatives frequently emphasize gender equality as part of the global NPA trend (Sillman, 1999); see for example SDG5: 'Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls' (United Nations, n. d.). The development apparatus, with its underlying neoliberal agenda, is deeply invested in the so-called 'woman's question' for a threefold of reasons (Sander, 2023). Firstly, because of the reproduction function of women's bodies to ensure the population growth needed to continue economic growth (Sander, 2023). Secondly, due to the productivity of women's bodies as unused potential for economic activities pushing them into the capitalist market for example through development programs of microcredits (Rankin, 2001; Sander, 2023). Thirdly, based on the discursive construction of women in need for the development own sake (Sander, 2023). This last reason reflects Chandra Mohanty's (1991) concept of the 'Third World Woman' as a simplistic and universal representation of non-Western women. The image of the Third World Woman perpetuates stereotypes of oppression and victimhood and consequently reassures the need for development projects focusing on them (Mohanty, 1991).

Gender equality has become a focal point for Jordanian CSOs as well since the establishment of the Jordanian National Commission for Women in 1992 (Ragetlie et al., 2021). As debated, the anti-politics machine of the development apparatus transforms political questions into technical solutions, particularly focusing on women's economic empowerment, rather than tackling deeper social and political power imbalances that underpin gender inequality (Ferguson, 1990). The study of Ragetlie et al. (2021) showed that in fact the implementation of gender equality programs in Jordan are often limited and fragmented, focusing only on economic income-based initiatives. This aligns with the Hashemite's strategy to allow civil society only within certain parameters that would not question social and political roots of gender inequality nor strive for societal change. Moreover, many women's initiatives are co-opted by the Jordanian state which once again enables the regime to uphold a liberal image to its Western allies (Ragetlie et al., 2021). At the other hand, through the co-optation of women's issues by the Jordanian state, it restricts spaces for CSOs that would question gendered power imbalances, which is important as the regime is based on neopatriarchal national identity, structure, and functioning (Massad, 2001; Sander, 2023). A focus on women's organisations are thus specifically targeted by the Jordanian state as part of their identity politics (Sander, 2023).

Despite limited attention, development discourses in Jordan, and in particular on women's issues, reinforces strategies of the Jordanian states of shrinking civil space, arguing for a more complex understanding of the politics of shrinking civil space (Sander, 2023). More concrete findings of these reinforcing dynamics have become apparent during the fieldwork, and will be addressed in the result section of this dissertation. But before that, I will elaborate on the perceptions of political engagement in Jordan

2.2.3 Perceptions of political engagement in Jordan

Jordan's stability of its monarchy and restrictions on civil space could lead to the perception that the country is politically quiescent, especially in comparison to its regional neighbours. This image, however, is misleading and will be explained through the academic and media coverage of the 2011 Arab uprisings. While substantial amounts of newspapers and academic publications were dedicated to the Arab uprisings and their societal and theoretical impacts, they mainly focused on countries such as Egypt, Tunesia, Libya, and Yemen (AlMaghlouth et al., 2015; Lynch, 2021; Schwedler, 2015; Valbjørn, 2015; Yom, 2015). While Jordan did not experience the same scale of uprisings as the neighbouring countries, this does not imply an absence of political contestation as protests did happen in Jordan during the 2011 uprisings (Debruyne & Parker, 2015). This perception of political unconsciousness could be attributed to the fact that Jordan's monarchy was one of the few authoritarian Arab regimes that survived these region-wide protests (Kikkawa, 2021). The survival of the regime, however, was not due to a lack of wide-spread protests in Jordan, rather because of the opposition's failure to achieve coordination and alignment on how to respond, and once again by the successful co-optation by the government (Kikkawa, 2021). Priya (2019) argues that Jordan never got a momentum for political change because the Arab uprisings reached the country in a fragmented form. Due to domestic support and local coalitions the monarchy managed to survive in the context of the protests, "as a kind of hybrid liberalizing and yet still authoritarian regime" (Ryan, 2012, p. 166).

Another explanation for this image of Jordan as politically unengaged or unconscious, could be found in the democratisation assumptions. Jordanian demonstrators demanded not necessarily a regime change, rather reform changes such as ending perceived endemic corruption, democratization through public participation, accountability for government officials and a shift toward a more constitutional monarchy (Ryan, 2012). Most explanations on the Arab uprisings focus mainly on political discontent that sparked the events, and only mention economic deterioration at the fringes of their research. As the Arab uprisings are generally placed within the repressiveness of regimes and the suppression of individual liberties, I argue that the demands of the 2011 Jordanian protesters are viewed as too 'soft' reflecting limiting political awareness (Debruyne et al., 2013; Osman Salih, 2013; Ryan, 2012; Spierings, 2019;

Teti & Gervasio, 2011). However, “resisting autocratization does not always mean being pro-liberal democracy” (Tomini et al., 2022, p. 122). Neoliberal reforms and socio-economic exclusions need to be linked to the discontent leading to the Arab uprisings (Bergh, 201; Kaboub, 2014). Dismissing this and overemphasising the connection between democratic regime change and the protest movements risks marginalizing how authoritarianism is debated and enacted locally (Howard & Walters, 2014). In other words, if these protests are solely seen as reactions to authoritarian regimes, it risks masking peoples situated and localized responses on their daily survival challenges due to changes in the political economic system (Debruyne et al., 2013; Debruyne & Parker, 2015). These protests should be reinterpreted as reactions on the challenges of neoliberal reforms and the crisis within global capitalism, with authoritarianism not as an exception of this neoliberal world order but as an essential part of it (Debruyne et al., 2013; Debruyne & Parker, 2015). The dismissing of the Jordanian political agency can thus merely attributed to an uncritical view on these protest movements, rather than a depoliticized population.

Even though in academic literature Jordan was taken less as a case study to understand reactions on broader political-economic changes from the last decade, political contestations, often toward neoliberal reforms, were present in Jordan (Debruyne et al., 2013). The recent example of the Hirak movement of 2011/12, including workers’ strikes, governate protests, civil and political initiatives and weekly protests, are not isolated or sudden ruptures, but rather connected to broader history of contestation, such as the 1989 protests against lifting the fuel subsidies (Ababneh, 2016; Schwedler, 2022; Yom, 2014). Attention to the Arab uprisings were in fact unexamined with a normative preference for particular outcomes, leading to an overreaction of these events (Lynch, 2021). This overemphasis risks dismissing research done on political participation before and after the uprisings (Howard & Walters, 2014). “It also minimizes the significance of popular mobilization and everyday forms of political contestation as issues worthy of study in their own right” (Howard & Walter, 2014, p. 398), echoing Bayat’s arguments. Jordan’s history of protests[9] and other forms of resistance illustrates the population’s political engagements, and can teach us more about the constantly evolving relations between authoritarian state and society which actually pushes unthinkable forms of resistance (Yom, 2014). Again, this affirms the statement of Schwedler (2022) to look at resistance and the state-making attempts as inherently connected and constantly influencing each other.

Based on these insights, I argue that Jordan is a compelling case study, often overlooked in both academic and media discussions on the political contestation in the region. However,

[9] For a detailed overview of Jordans history of protest, please refer to the book of Schwedler (2022) ‘Protesting Jordan: Geographies of Power and Dissent.’

scholars and activists such as Yom, Schwedler, Ababneh, and Rana Husseini have empirically shown that resistance in Jordan occurs, challenging normative narratives of shrinking civil spaces and depoliticization in semi-authoritarian or hybrid regimes. By taking Jordan as a case, it can shed a light on normative assumptions on the politics of shrinking space by authoritarian states and the impact on the perceptions of political (un)consciousness and resistance. By examining the empirical realities of Jordan's context, this dissertation attempts to open up broader discussions on political engagement.

3 METHODOLOGY

This methodology chapter outlines the methodology to try to answer the central research question of this thesis: How does the politics of shrinking civil space impact forms of resistance and political (un)consciousness in Jordanian society?. Additional sub-questions help to answer this main question stepwise: How does the shrinking space of civil society in Jordan manifest, and what are the key factors contributing to this phenomenon?; In what ways do Jordanians and CSOs resist the shrinking civil space in Jordan?; and, Which motivations and agendas inform the resistance to shrinking civil space in Jordan?. The following section exists out of three subchapters discussing the data collections, the data analysis, and ends with ethical considerations.

3.1 Data collection

To gain knowledge and explore a context in all its complexity as the research question of this dissertation demands, it is appropriate to use a qualitative research approach (Bogdan & Biklen, 2014). Within this approach, I have chosen a fieldwork method as it helps to understand interlinked social, political and cultural contexts (Bernard, 2017). This is in line with the argument from the theoretical framework that shrinking space should be addressed in a complex, interlinked and nuanced way. Moreover, this approach helps to reflect upon the perspectives of interlocutors in a broader and detailed way which could research the level of political consciousness or collectively of resistance as debated in the second section of the theoretical framework (Cambré & Waege, 2003). Therefore, I have conducted a three-week fieldwork study in Amman, the capital of Jordan. Fieldwork research often use the 'triangulation method' to gain a deeper understanding of the concrete practice (Woodside, 2017). This means that multiple methods to collect data are being used in order to construct a more complete picture (Bhandari, 2023; Woodside, 2017). For this master dissertation this included informal conversations with encounters on the street, unstructured interviews with actors from CSOs, and reflective observations in the public space.

Firstly, to delve into the sub-question: *How does the shrinking space of civil society in Jordan manifest, and what are the key factors contributing to this phenomenon?.* I conducted interviews with different kinds of CSOs, mostly in a rather informal, conversational way. I did not stick to a structured set of questions since I feel more comfortable to facilitate a flexible conversation with less distance, and at the other hand aligned more with the hospitality ways of interacting with others in Jordan. Moreover, interviews as a form of conversations allow more depth and flexibility to obtain a rich and nuanced understanding, and optionally adapt or co-construct the specific research focus which will be discussed further in the ethical reflections on the methodology (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2015).

Secondly, through observations within the public space I managed to address the sub-question of: *In what ways do Jordanians and CSOs resist the shrinking civil space in Jordan?.* This sub-question however was often also addressed during the conversations with the CSOs. Still, through observations in the public space, I managed to find more hidden, informal, unorganized, and thus non-traditional performances of resistance. This method helped to capture non-verbal or unintentional forms of resistance as it allows to capture that social context and behaviour that is often overlooked during verbal interactions. Moreover, the observations sometimes implicitly hinted at different dynamics of development or securitization discourse that impacted the built environment and thus also reflected the first sub-question.

Those observations often gave me the opportunity to open an informal conversation with people I encountered on the streets of Amman which helped me to identify the sub-question: *Which motivations and agendas inform the resistance to shrinking civil space in Jordan?*. By engaging in casual dialogues, I could gather spontaneous and genuine responses, revealing how ordinary citizens perceive politics and might (not) react upon it. Informal interviews offered a method to understand meanings and experiences from the perspective of the interlocutors themselves (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2015). Additionally, this sub-question was also addressed in some interviews with the CSOs.

The mixture of these methods were conducted during a three-week fieldwork and resulted in 34 interlocutors. When referring to an interlocutor, it is generally assumed that this involved a formal, private and one-to-one interview. However, this assumption is based on a Western methodological individualism (Rudolph, 2005). Nonetheless, the empirical realities of the fieldwork proved this liberal Western methodology assumption wrong. I have already noted that the interviews were in a rather informal, conversational way as if fitted more into my personal approach as the Jordanian hospitality culture as to approach the research question. When I talk about interviews in this dissertation, I thus mean interviews in the informal, conversational way. On the other hand, the individualism assumption did fit the reality; conversations with the CVOs and (I)NGOs was not a one-to-one interaction, but mostly around three people engaging in the conversation. Thus, references to interlocutors within this thesis does not necessarily mean one individual person, but reflects from which perspective they talk, either as an individual citizen or multiple persons reflecting together upon the position of their organisation. Based on their specific position within society and the way I have encountered them, I have grouped the interlocutors. Specifics for each interlocutor can be found in the tables below.

The first group are the expert interviews including academics, journalists or activists. These conversations were content wise, but also methodological reflections and suggestions preparing for and during the fieldwork as reflections on my positionality.

Table 1 – Expert interviews

Interlocutor	*Function within society*
Interlocutor 1	Master student experienced in fieldwork in Jordan
Interlocutor 2	PhD student experienced in fieldwork in Jordan
Interlocutor 3	PhD student working on shifting roles of high-class Jordanian women
Interlocutor 4	Professor Comparative Politics – Social Movements and Contentious Politics
Interlocutor 5	Professor Women's Studies in Jordan
Interlocutor 6	Doctor and activist on Palestinian women's issues
Interlocutor 7	Journalist and individual podcast-maker of academic work

The second group are the civil society actors ranging from local grassroots organisations, national CSOs or international NGOs. However, the precise positions of the organisations and the who fund them remain unclear. In fact, this affirms the abovementioned statement on the unclarity of civil society actors. The descriptions on the civil society actors I provide in table 2 are thus mostly focused on the identifications given by the actors themselves.

Table 2 – Civil society actors

Interlocutor	*Function within society*

Interlocutor 8	Royal women's co-operative
Interlocutor 9	Self-funded inclusive space for Jordanian and Palestinian (refugee) artist
Interlocutor 10	Non-profit company focusing on educational inequalities
Interlocutor 11	Non-profit organisation focusing on Jordanian women's economic and social participation
Interlocutor 12	Feminist policy platform
Interlocutor 13	Local women's rights organisation
Interlocutor 14	Self-funded inclusive space for knowledge and culture
Interlocutor 15	NGO supporting youth issues
Interlocutor 16	INGO focusing on youth and women's issues
Interlocutor 17	National NGO providing a safe space for youth
Interlocutor 18	Regional CSO supporting grassroots and community organisations
Interlocutor 19	Feminist NGO
Interlocutor 20	Jordanian department of the international Quaker movement
Interlocutor 21	Nationalist feminist organisation
Interlocutor 22	Jordan INGO forum for networking with other INGOs

The last group includes rather coincidental, local encounters with people in the public space. Due to my positionality those encounters are mostly educated, English-speaking and often middle-class Jordanians.

Table 3 – Local encounters

Interlocutor	*Function within society*
Interlocutor 23	Teacher in a private school, man
Interlocutor 24	Local shop owner, man
Interlocutor 25	Local shop owner, man
Interlocutor 26	Musician, woman
Interlocutor 27	Taxi driver, former NGO employee, man
Interlocutor 28	Taxi driver, former NGO employee, man
Interlocutor 29	Teacher and musician, woman
Interlocutor 30	Taxi driver, man
Interlocutor 31	Jordanian man, working and living in the US
Interlocutor 32	Former NGO employee, woman
Interlocutor 33	Former NGO consultant, man
Interlocutor 34	Working in a touristic art shop, woman

As addressed, these interviews are combined with observations and impressions during the fieldwork and publications of CSOs. The combination of these data collection methods offered a rich variety of data. The next section outlines how this variety of data has been analysed.

3.2 Data analysis

A fieldwork methodology results in complex data with multiplicity of descriptions (Bogdan & Biklen, 2014). Therefore, the method of thematic analysis of Braun and Clarke (2006) is being used to identify general themes with a variety of data (Howitt, 2014). However, adaptations were made according to the political context of the field and the topic. The sensitivity of the topic, the surveillance risks, and the comfortability of the interlocutors made it impossible to record the interviews. Instead, detailed personal notes were made given the oral agreement of the interlocutor. Those notes were later transcribed, and thus are not as much as possible yet not exact quotations of the interlocutors. The transcripts formed the rough data which were the starting point for the thematic analysis. The rough data was then imported into NVivo, a qualitative data analysis software, which facilitated the organisation and coding of data. The choice to work with NVivo is a personal one, as it enables structuring big amounts of data to identify key themes and patterns. The key findings of the data will be discussed in the results chapter, but the ethical considerations should be addressed first.

3.3 Ethical considerations

In this subsection, the ethical considerations involved in conducting research will be discussed, focusing on how firstly the confidentiality and secondly the positionality are managed in relation to the study's sensitive political subject matter. The ethical implications of the political topic, the role of the researcher, and the potential dilemmas that may arise will be critically examined below.

3.3.1 Confidentiality

Given the political nature of the research topic, protecting the confidentiality and privacy of research participants during the complete research process is crucial. Firstly, during the fieldwork phase it would have made interlocutors suspicious when asked for a recorded or formal agreement with a written signature as consent. Instead, oral consents were more appropriate given the nature of political fieldwork research. During such agreements, a clear and open conversation on sharing resistance specific strategies were asked and was addressed to where the results would be possibly published, and also on the purpose of the research. As stated in the analysis subsection, conversations were not recorded for the protection of the anonymity of the interlocutors. This made the interlocutors more comfortable,

more trusting, and to open about sensitive topics. Nonetheless, the informal setting of interviews risked to creating a blurring line between research information and non-research information. In such cases, I have maintained a clear and open message on my role as a researcher. Oral agreements were asked upon multiple occasions during the interviews, not only to have consent but also to reaffirm my role and intentions as a researcher.

During the writing and reporting phase, a grand responsibility as a researcher to what happens with the data and to ensure further protection of the shared knowledge. The notes from interviews were put within a protected residence and later anonymously digitally transcribed which is securely protected. Paper notes from interviews were shredded. The digitally stored transcriptions will be deleted once the dissertation comes to an end. While reporting the data findings, ethical implications had to be taken into account. The research involves individuals engaged in potentially sensitive activities, where exposure of resistance strategies could lead to risks. Therefore, the confidentiality of all data will be strictly maintained by reporting anonymously, excluding certain details from interviews when necessary, and avoiding any identifiable information. However, differences between the openness of activism exists between participants. Concretely, there was dealt with this by reflecting upon the way that people express themselves in the public sphere, ranging from rather clandestine activism to having their name linked to activism openly, and was taken into account while reporting.

3.3.2 Positionality

The concept of positionality refers to the influence of a researcher's background, identity, and perspectives (Holmes, 2020). Grounded in a social constructivist theory of knowledge, we should not strive to overcome positionality as knowledge is constructed in a social reality through social interactions (Amineh & Asl, 2015). Instead, I argue for an acknowledgment and continuous reflection on how my personal and cultural background shapes and influences every part of the research process.

Firstly, a researcher's role creates certain power structures toward the research participants both during the fieldwork stage as to the reporting phase. Engaging in political and social research risks creating over-research populations that feel exploited and a research fatigue as previous research did not offer tangible benefits or positive changes (Sukarieh & Tannock, 2012). Moreover, studying down can even amplify the experience of powerlessness through the lack of privacy and/or ownership of one's experiences (Bowman, 2009). This dissertation attempted to engage with these dilemmas by continuously trying to approach a non-extractive research approach (Igwe et al., 2022). Concretely, I engaged in conversations if I have asked the 'right' questions and adopted my research questions and approach based on the critical reflections of the interlocutors. This has been possible through a fieldwork methodology as this

allows to adopt methods, questions and priorities throughout the process (Bernard, 2017). This could overcome the fact that populations often have no voice in the research, and created a more fruitful and insightful fieldwork experience as it forced me to move beyond personal assumptions (Igwe, Madichie & Rugara, 2022). Moreover, there has always been offered to take up a specific role needed for the social organisations itself to avoid exploiting the participants' knowledge and experiences purely for academic gain. Additionally, I have followed Nencel's (2005) experiences to allow silence on experiences as it may be an expression of power and form of resistance to paternalistic and ethnocentric ideas of intersubjectivity. This underscores the need for a thoughtful dialogue regarding the scope and extent of publication, and a personal awareness about the participants' willingness to talk or not talk about sensitive information. In my opinion these reflections and conversations of decolonizing the research will be an ongoing, never-ending process which is also necessary to acknowledge the agency of people and to study with people instead of on people, and regarding the theme of my research question it is inevitable to do so.

Nonetheless, I have experienced that my position as a master student actually helped to overcome initial suspicion of the research participants. As Jordan gets confronted with many Western funding agencies, they often asked me which funding I received and to whom I had to report. By hearing this was a project in order to graduate it often led them to open up more easily in order to help me, and this would also explain why many conversations included a critical assessment on international funding mechanisms. Additionally, as I am still part of social reality, the fieldwork sometimes caused dilemmas between my own personal and/or cultural ethics and the ethics of the research participant. To balance this, I have discussed these dilemmas during the expert interviews that functioned for me as brokers to understand the field better.

Still, power imbalances remain mostly due to my Western background and exerts a significant influence on my worldview and perceptions. It is essential to acknowledge power dynamics and how they shape my knowledge and perceptions of the truth. It remains essential – in the context of my master's dissertation and beyond – to recognize that I have been exposed to specific cultural constructs and power imbalances. This constitutes a personal struggle and produces ongoing introspection and debate. This becomes specifically apparent when focusing on women's issues, as I have been influenced with Western feminist thought which risks generalizing women of the Global South, and overlooking women's agency. Engaging with critical feminists, such as the work of Chandra Mohanty, helps me to challenge stereotypical Western views on women, and remain open to diverse experiences of women in the research context.

Thus, positionality should not be viewed as an obstacle to overcome but rather as an integral aspect of the research process that requires continuous reflection and dialogue. It shaped the direction of the research focus and results. In line with the social constructivist theory of knowledge, the knowledge production in this dissertation is shaped through interactions and within a specific historical and cultural context. Regarding the interactions, it is important to note that the findings do not claim to reflect the general ideas of all Jordanians, but rather point out dynamics based on personal encounters which, due to my positionality, are mostly reflecting the view of middle-class, English-speaking (Palestinian-)Jordanians living in or close to Amman. Regarding the specific historical context, it is important to note that the genocidal reaction of Israel toward Palestinians following the events of the 7th of October were very prominent in all the conversations I had during the fieldwork. Given the historical and geographical connection, the Palestinian case evoked many emotions and were part of almost all the conversations I had. This thesis, however, does not attempt to find the 'unbiased truth' of 'all' Jordanians, nor is it an analysis on international relations. Rather, it assesses general patterns on the contingent encounters and what is on people's mind in that particular moment of time. Following arguments of Schwedler (2022) and Scott (2009), the fieldwork attempted to go beyond a historical exceptionalism and tried to study people instead of states, and their ongoing relations toward state-making attempts.

4 RESULTS

This chapter presents the findings derived from the empirical data collected during the fieldwork in Amman, Jordan. The results aim to provide deeper insights into the complex interplay of actors and discourses that contribute to the politics of shrinking space in Jordanian civil society, as well as the conscious and unconscious reactions of those involved. The first main theme examines the mechanisms and discourses that contribute to the politics of shrinking civic space in Jordan, building on existing literature and incorporating new insights from my fieldwork. The second theme explores how these dynamics have influenced the perceived political consciousness in Jordan. The final section, however, will show that acts of resistance to the politics of shrinking civil space were present during the fieldwork. This opens up more theoretical and reflective debates on social change, which will be further discussed in the dissertation's conclusion and discussion.

4.1 The politics of shrinking civil space in Jordan

The following section presents concrete, empirical data to support the theoretical argument of the politics of shrinking civil space beyond a state-centred approach. Given that this dissertation is rooted in conflict and development studies, the analysis primarily focuses on the interplay between development actors and discourses that reinforce the Kingdom's efforts to silence critical voices within civil society. As interlocutor 18 summarized it "[i]n NGOs, and specifically women's NGOs, there is a lot of politics at play and we can only work within certain parameters." The following sub-sections expand upon the work of Sander (2023), and as my findings corroborate her argument, I will discuss my results based on the mechanisms and discourses she identified and further expand them.

4.1.1 Administrative restrictions

As previously discussed, administrative restrictions are widely recognized as a crucial mechanism for limiting civil society's activities. Jordan is no exception in this regard. In 2008, the country replaced its 'Law on Societies and Social Bodies' (Law 33 of 1966) with the 'Law on Societies' (Law 51 of 2008, amended by Law 22 of 2009), which governs the registration and operation of the CSOs (ICNL, 2024a). While this new law, generally referred to as the 'Associations Law', ostensibly improved conditions for civil society, it has also been criticized for its potential to restrict civic spaces in Jordan (ICNL, 2024a). Specifically, article 3 of the law prohibits any legal entity from undertaking activities aimed at achieving political goals (ICNL, 2024b). This forces CSOs to operate as service providers within a paternalistic framework, a role that CSOs themselves find limiting, as emphasized during conversations:

> Within the laws, development work comes with many conditions, and it deals with development only as a charity, for example by only giving aid to people. But it is not political or structural. […] We want to talk about poverty as a redistribution of wealth, but it is forbidden to talk about these issues. We are only allowed to help [the beneficiaries of aid] or give them support (interlocutor 21).

This suggests that the Jordanian state seeks to suppress critical voices that could challenge the Kingdom's power. However, literature indicates that the transformation of CSOs into service providers is also driven by the neoliberal agenda. Article 3 of the Jordanian Associations Law echoes the concept of the anti-politics machine, as introduced by James Ferguson (1990), which only allows for technical and apolitical solutions to be pursued. Consequently, political questions, such as those concerning wealth distribution, are off limits, both at the level of the Jordanian state and within the neoliberal agenda of international development actors.

The Associations Law is part of a broader strategy to present Jordan as a country undergoing political reforms by promoting civil society (Human Rights Watch, 2007). As previously discussed, promoting civil society aligns with the development discourse from the 1990s onwards, and Jordan's Western-imposed political liberalisation process. The Associations Law requires CSOs to apply for approval for any foreign funding they receive, justified by the need to monitor potential terrorist organisations, reflecting also the abovementioned influences of the securitisation discourse in the politics of shrinking civil space (Sander, 2023). The primary issue, however, is not the registration itself, but the fact that organisations cannot begin their work until the often lengthy approval process is completed. Coupled with the international donor dynamics that prioritize short-term project funding with quick wins makes it impossible to engage in structural and sustainable work, as they are "just learning to know the people" (interlocutor 10).

These frustrations towards administration is widespread among civil society actors, who feel that sustainable planning with impactful projects are unattainable. As one interlocutor noted: "They [international development donors] work too much from a quantitative perspective, and we want to work more on quality" (interlocutor 17). Moreover, donors are often unwilling to wait for the approval process and may withdraw funding, opting instead to support governmental organisations that are not subjected to these approval requirements (Sander, 2023). The donor-driven focus on quick wins forces CSOs to transform into charity organisations, addressing 'technical solutions' that pose less of a threat to the Jordanian regime, just to be able to obtain funding. Development dynamics, bolstered by a security discourse centred on counterterrorism, enable the Jordanian state to maintain an image of promoting civil society while still restricting political voices within it.

4.1.2 Co-optation

Despite limited primary sources during my fieldwork on this mechanism, co-optation is a significant factor in the ongoing process of state-making and state-maintaining in Jordan. This has been historically a part of the state-building project, as debated in the contextual framework, and remains the case until today. One interlocutor emphasized that: "[c]o-optation is their [Jordanian state] favourite tactic" (interlocutor 4).

During the fieldwork, it became evident that the Jordanian government creates an illusion of political freedom, reflecting the hybrid regime and the dual role of the Kingdom. This sentiment was echoed by an interlocutor who stated:

> I am afraid to join a group, and then if we complain they will say: 'why did you not form or join a group?' [...] It is as if someone is holding my leg, but I do not know who. They make you confused. […] So here they say: 'you can make a union, you can form a group, you can rally'. It is just to keep you in the middle and keep you confused (interlocutor 30).

By allowing protests or to unionise, the government finds it easier to monitor, infiltrate, and ultimately control these movements. This was observed in the public space in Amman, where access to a public square in the city centre was controlled through narrow passage gates, preventing large crowds from forming suddenly. On the other hand, permitting protests allows the government to maintain its legitimacy in the eyes of its Western allies, aligning with their liberalisation programs. The example of labour unions further illustrates this point. However, today, unions are either shut down, co-opted or used to promote nationalist voices. During my preparation for the fieldwork and while in Jordan, I sought to learn more about the unions but encountered opposition. I even tried to visit the building of the Jordanians teachers' syndicate, which were very active in political struggles before being resolved, but encountered an empty building and two angry policemen chasing me away. Substantial part of my interlocutors acknowledged the continued operation of the unions, but only in a very informal and disorganised manner as the formal syndicates were mostly co-opted by the Jordanian state. Thus, the co-optation of critical CSOs into governmental institutions has led to the depoliticization of spaces that once fostered political activism: "[t]hey are not a place of political activism, because they used to be a place of political activism" (interlocutor 4).

This co-optation strategy is reinforced by marketization ideas of civil society, as donors favoured professionalized (I)NGOs for funding. As a result, donors either co-opt local CSOs or fund the co-opted royal CSOs, which are not subjected to the Associations Laws, offering them a more secure funding option (Sander, 2023). Both avenues lead to development projects that focus on social issues unrelated to social change, as addressing these issues would

undermine the raison d'être of the INGOs and threaten the controlled activities of royal CSOs, which are restricted to non-threatening topics (Sander, 2023).

4.1.3 Divide-and-rule

The divide-and-rule strategy further exacerbates distrust among CSOs (Sander, 2023). Although many organisations acknowledge the need for collaboration, competition often arises. Funding mechanisms actually play a big role in further fuelling the competition between them. This mostly included "competition [over funds] between local organisations and INGOs, but the local organisations are mostly left behind" (interlocutor 6). The limited access to funding, reinforced by abovementioned administrative restrictions, also impacts the specific agendas of CSOs as "small NGOs […] wants to do something for the community, so they just do whatever there is funding for" (interlocutor 5). This means that the international development funds actually dictates the priorities, and further risks depoliticizing the agendas of CSOs.

This competition over funds hinders the formation of a unified social movement. Interestingly, despite the mentioning of collaboration, many CSOs claimed to be the leading actor in concrete legislation changes, such as the abolishment of the article 308 of the Penal Code which exonerates a man in cases of rape or sexual assault if he marries the victim, or the changes in the articles 29-69 regarding labour rights for women. This could be interpreted as a way to reassure their individual right to exist.

4.1.4 Othering and identity politics

Sander's (2023) work highlights the identity politics of the Jordanian state based on discursive practices of essentialization and stereotyping. This results in a public discourse where human rights CSOs, particularly women's CSOs, are perceived as not authentically Jordanian. The King's power, which rests on neo-patriarchal and religious foundations, finds identity politics a useful tool for restricting civil society. This discourse is powerful, as individuals themselves internalise these narratives of identity and otherness. For instance, interlocutor 1 noted that some people are even hesitant to identify themselves as feminist, preferring instead to be associated with social movements.

This dynamic contributes to the further silencing of critical work, despite the fact that such work often originates within the local community. Interlocutor 18 recounted how their organisations, which supports local community activists, has encountered the narrative of the 'outsiders' and accused of ruining the social fabric and destroying traditions and religion in Jordan. They attempted to counter these narratives by involving traditional practices in their work, for

example by garnering the support of local religious leaders or conducting home visits according to local customs.

The perception of an invasion of the traditional fabric of the Jordanian society has caused activists to face various forms of repression. As interlocutor 16 explained:

> They tried to humiliate me, tried to hurt me. They said what I was saying were not my ideas. They claim that donors give me money to make Jordan less conservative, and that what I was saying are only Western ideas.

This quote illustrates that it is not only the Jordanian state that contributes to identity politics, but also the interplay of different development and geopolitical dynamics. These dynamics were prevalent during my fieldwork and significantly influenced the direction of the conversations I had. This was partly due to the ongoing genocide in Gaza at the time of the fieldwork, and partly due to my positionality as a white, Western woman. Despite the overlapping and interfering dynamics, I will divide the rest of this discussion into three subsections to make it more comprehensible.

4.1.4.1 Liberalisation versus moral economy

As presented in the contextual framework, the Jordanian state presents itself as progressive and liberal on the international stage, but identity politics shows that it at the same time maintains an image of conservatism towards its national population. This balancing act exemplifies the state-making process of this hybrid regime. For most Jordanians, family and community values remain important cornerstones of life, with many viewing a liberal, individualistic lifestyle as a threat to their moral economy.

> Here, we have community support, and a stronger relationship within the family. This is different in the US, if people are in trouble… There is too much individualism, and people that get into trouble […] do not have any support. So, it is better here in Jordan (interlocutor 25).

This sentiment reflects a resistance among the populace to transform into a liberal, individualistic society. As Scott (1976) argues, people do not necessarily want to change society but rather to preserve what they see as essential moral and social values. Nevertheless, Jordan adopted a liberalisation program with SAP reforms, a process that some amongst my interlocutors believe is destroying the social fabric. Some individuals expressed frustrations with the Jordanian state for yielding to international demands for neoliberalism, but most of the blame was attributed to Western powers than to the Jordanian state itself; suggesting the effectiveness of the identity politics by the Jordanian state as a way to balance different internal and external agendas.

4.1.4.2 Women's issues

As argued in the contextual framework, women's issues are interesting to examine how development discourses impact shrinking civic space, and in the case of Jordan this happens as part of the identity politics. A significant concern to women's issues in Jordan is the so-called 'gender paradox', described as "the puzzling failure of women's educational attainment to deliver higher results across several economic indicators, including access to jobs, financial resources, and longevity in the workforce" (FICRI, 2021, p. 4). This puzzle is often attributed to local patriarchal dynamics, as concluded in FICRI's (2021) research report: "men are primary responsible breadwinners and that women's work and economic contribution to household wellbeing is subordinate to that of men" (p. 28), and that "their decision-making about work is constrained by gendered norms and practices, which are both internalized by women and imposed on them" (p. 28). This narrative is exemplary of concerns about women's issues in Jordan and informs many donor agencies when deciding which projects to fund. I also observed that many CSOs target women, focusing specifically on issues of economic inequality and sexual harassment (in the workplace) (noted by interlocutors 10, 11, 15, and 18).

However, as interlocutor 3 pointed out, there is a risk of overfocusing on this so-called gender paradox. In-depth information needed to interpret these alarming numbers often lacks, such as whether informal labour or women working through development foundations or micro-loaning projects, Jordanian regional differences, or the female refugees are included in the numbers. As interlocutor 3 puts it: "[t]he Jordanian woman does not exist; there are just women living in Jordan." This concern echoes Mohanty's critique of the dangers of the arithmetic method, where the gender paradox is treated as if the sexual division of labour is an universal fact. Major funding entities, such as the World Bank, often focus on grand quantitative numbers, like the high percentage of highly skilled women and their low economic participation rates. As a result, development discourses perpetuate a view of women as an oppressed group – non-progressive, religious, family-oriented, domestic – due to the local patriarchal systems (Mohanty, 1991). Women, as a coherent group, are often included in development projects in a one-size-fits-all and paternalistic manner. These projects are typically focused on the goal "to empower them, give them skills, training, and experience" (interlocutor 10). This sentiment became not only evident during interviews, but also in the public domain, where I frequently encountered signs with development logos and references to the goals of such projects. For example, the sign at the entrance of the organisation of interlocutor 8 stated: "[w]hit the aim of empowering women and creating job opportunities for females in the local community."

In short, women's issues are often attributed to local patriarchal systems and are supposed to be addressed with economic opportunities. Yet, these economic opportunities are often confined to skills within the household domain, such as cooking and crafting (as noted by interlocutor 8), or hairdressing and sewing (as noted by interlocutor 19). This approach exemplifies the offering of technical solutions to political problems which, as interlocutor 5 argues, fails to provide a political analysis of the problem:

> It pains me… it is painful to watch that even economic efforts to empower women are perpetuating the role in the domestic: e.g. selling things, cooking. This is reproducing the status quo and does not go beyond the domestic role. Yes, they [women] are economically active, but not in other fields beyond the domestic tasks.

This observation aligns with Maria Mies' (2014) concept of 'housewifization' which highlights the devaluation of women's work as an extension of their domestic roles, even when performed for the international market. Mies' argument, based on her study of lace-making in India, critiques development theories that translate projects into economic growth, as they often result in Global South women being drawn into low-paid, labour-intensive work that does not improve their economic status. By maintaining a discourse that women are dependent on their husbands, it becomes possible to argue that activities like lace-making – or in the light of my data cooking, sewing, or crafting – are merely leisure activities, thus enabling their exploitation in the capitalist market. Development projects for women serve the capitalist world order as well as the Jordanian state, because it prevents strong women's mobilizations. "Western feminism and the funding of gender issues based on stereotypes is acting as a divide and a way to demobilize women" (interlocutor 6).

Mies's analysis underscores the importance of understanding women's roles at multiple levels and within different structures, not just along gender lines. S Class inequalities should be part of the analysis. For example the heads of the programs to skill women, despite often being women, mostly exclude themselves from conversations and dissociate from the 'poor women' in their programs (see interlocutor 3).

Frustrations amongst misunderstandings of the local context were expressed by interlocutors towards development projects aimed at addressing female unemployment. Interlocutor 3 recounted an experience with a GIZ-funded employment project that aimed to match unemployed women with companies:

> [The project] is destined to fail from the beginning. […] The targets were designed by the donors and was then outsourced to us. They needed 200 people to be hired who stayed at that job for more than 3 months. But this was an impossible target and a dumb

> design. When they put such a target, they imply that there are vacancies on the job market, but there are no jobs in Jordan.

As stated by interlocutor 7, the feeling is that “women’s issues and human rights come from the top down, and not bottom-up.” This feeling of a top-down implementation of civil society suggests a disconnect between the original vision of civil society and its current state. When civil society lacks local roots, it often results in the creation of local elites who are adept at writing grant proposals but lack durability (Fukuyama, 2001). This observation is valuable, because if civil society lacks durability, it will also be less likely to structurally question or change the prevailing power dynamics within Jordanian society.

Still, representations and discourses of the ‘Third World Woman’ persist. This was evident in my own experiences, such as reactions ‘back home’ where people questioned my safety in Jordan as a woman and whether I should wear a hijab. Similarly, at the start of conversations with Jordanian interlocutors, I was often reassured that women in Jordan have rights and are respected. Development discourses and programs implicitly reinforced this idea of the oppressed woman, attributing it to local patriarchy and often to religion, particularly Islam. Western donors frequently believe that there is no coexistence between human rights and religion, interpreting Islam as misogynistic and oppressive to women (Sander, 2023). Many grant proposals rely on this image of the ‘Third World Woman’, which does not align with local experiences of womanhood and empowerment.

> If you talk about women’s resistance, the agenda is mostly white, for example they want to talk about abortion. But I do not want to talk about that when Palestinian women are facing rape and occupation. Women’s rights is translated into white feminism and is not in the interest of all women. For example, there is a difference between feminism for Palestinians and Jordanians, because they have different traditions and views on what women need (interlocutor 9).

Thus, development discourses and programs remain focusing on the ‘Third World Woman’ which actually confirms the Jordanian identity politics of women’s issues as external to the traditional culture, and actually creates difficulties for women’s activists as previously stated by interlocutor 16.

4.1.4.3 Geopolitics

The identity politics is deeply influenced by both historical and contemporary geopolitics in the MENA-region. The legacy of colonialism, coupled with recent interventions under the banner of the War on Terror, has fuelled a deep-seated suspicion of Western interference. This sentiment was palpable during my fieldwork in Amman where alliances within the region and

resentments towards Western powers, particularly the US, were present. This was for example articulated through messages in street art, or I have observed taxi drivers displaying images of Saddam Hussein, the Iraqi president during the 2003-US-invasion of Iraq, highlighting a subtle yet visual act of resistance and solidarity.

Furthermore, development projects were often described to me as neo-colonial or neo-imperial tools designed to advance Western agendas, rather than genuine efforts to aid the region, or in the words of interlocutor 6: "[f]unding and development money is a tool for foreign policy." This sentiment was expressed or experienced by many interlocutors (interlocutor 5, 6, 7, 9, 12, 14, 16, 17, 18, 21, 24, 25, 31 and 33).

Building on Sanders' (2023) assertion that Western donors often believe that human and women's rights are intrinsically Western concepts, many Jordanians I encountered expressed a similar sentiment. "Feminism is associated with Western agendas. It is seen as a backdoor for Western intervention and with women's rights used as a legitimation" (interlocutor 5). They feel that externally designed development projects lack local roots and merely serve to push Western, neoliberal agendas through top-down funding mechanisms, as was already touched upon above.

> INGOs and the pressure from the US and the EU is why they do not feel like it is according to the traditions. They see the traditions as not compatible with the Western system (interlocutor 7).

Academic research on colonial legacies in development work support this view, suggesting that these concerns are not merely conservative sentiments but reflect a broader reality. This perspective is particularly relevant to the discussion of the politics of shrinking civil space, as it underscores the complex dynamics at play.

During my fieldwork in April 2024, these sentiments where further amplified by the ongoing genocide in Gaza. Although this thesis does not focus on international relations, it is important to highlight the profound impact these events have on the Jordanian(-Palestinians) I spoke to. Many expressed frustration with the perceived hypocrisy of the West, which claims to champion human rights while continuing to support the occupier both financially and rhetorically.

> The people in the Middle East distrust the West and their money. […] The West advocates for human rights, but after the events of Octobre there is a mistrust, not only in the region but in the whole Global South. We see it as propaganda when the West talks about democracy. […] and people start to question the core ethics of the West (interlocutor 14).

The contemporary shift towards the triple nexus, which links security, development, and humanitarian efforts, has further blurred these lines between development and geopolitical policies.

However, securitization rationales are also often addressed by Jordanians as a reason to avoid politically provocative actions. The Jordanian state argues their alignment with the West within a framework of regional stability, comparing their situation with other countries in the region such as Iraq, Syria, and Palestine. As interlocutor 25 states:

> If we combine our minds, the leaders must go. And we saw what happened in Libya, Tunesia, Iraq. We are just alert. We don't want anything to happen to our country, and I do not want anyone else taking over. I believe in my community, even if they are corrupt. […]. It is picking the best out of the worst.

The emphasis of Jordanian stability compared to the broader region was often taken as a justification of Jordanian corruption and attempts to further restrict civic space (interlocutor 3, 7, 23, 25, 28, 34). This reflects a cautious approach to political activism, or as George (2005) aptly puts it, "Jordan, however, is not Saddam Hussain's Iraq or Hafiz al-Asad's Syria" (p. 5).

The dynamics of the identity politics was challenging to fully grasp at first, as reactions were not always directed solely at the state, nor was it always clear where the state's influence ends and other actors' influence begins. My observation reveals that people often conflate the actions of the government with those of international politics or development and vice versa, which actually reaffirms the intertwined dynamics of shrinking space as how it is perceived on the ground. Moreover, identity politics was sometimes deeply internalized by the people themselves. It allows the Jordanian government to legitimize its position both externally and internally, leveraging Western discourses on the region to reinforce its own strategies of identity politics on which the Kingdom's power relies. Contradictory, this contributes to the shrinking space for CSOs that the West claims to want to expand. The interplay between these discourses reveals the complex dynamics among the state, securitization, and development actors, all of which are often inadvertently reinforcing the shrinking space for CSOs.

4.2 Perceptions of Jordanian political (un)consciousness

The statement below encapsulates a prevalent sentiment among Jordanians who feel trapped between the forces of state-making, international development actors, and security discourses.

> We try to make the best of it. We try to be satisfied with life because we cannot do anything about it. […] You get fed up by it. There is really no democracy… (interlocutor 25).

This sense of giving up political attempts recurring during my encounters in the field whereby interlocutors expressed a similar feeling of powerlessness.

Such attitudes could be interpreted as evidence of the perceptions of an unengaged political society in Jordan that lacks the opportunities or the will to exercise agency. This perspective is echoed by interlocutor 7 who stated that "we [Jordanians] should develop more critical thinking. The problem is that this is lacking in this society." These statements were surprising and intriguing, because contrary to these expressed feelings of political apathy, my fieldwork revealed a different empirical reality. As interlocutor 25 expressed powerlessness towards politics, at the same time he made claims on the city which was actually the initial start of the conversation. Furthermore, despite the perception that Jordanians are not politically active and that few social movements or protest opportunities exist (as noted by interlocutors 3, 4, 15, and 23), protests were held every Friday in front of the Israeli embassy during my fieldwork.

As discussed in the contextual framework, many protests and resistance have taken place in Jordan which contradicts these perceptions of a political unconscious or unengaged society. These inconsistencies between the feeling of political powerlessness and empirical realities of resistance, raises new questions about the meaning of political consciousness. As interlocutor 4 explained: "what it might mean if this person is saying nobody is politically engaged, that he is talking about domestic politics. But of course we will mobilize for Palestine." Thus, possibly people understand political engagement more in the sense of domestic politics, or linked to formal ways of opposition. Unfortunately, I lack sufficient empirical data to provide further insights into this matter, but this invites further analysis of the understandings of political action.

The absence of more comprehensive empirical data stems from the fact that when I pointed out these acts of protests or resistance, many still argued that such actions would not make a difference or that they could be part of a broader strategy to co-opt or weaken social and political movements. This reflects an internalisation of the depoliticized or paralyzed subjectivity, where people feel their actions are ultimately futile. Interlocutor 24, for example, expressed scepticism, stating, " I think it won't make a difference, because the government put fences around the embassy. And many Palestinian work as spies for Israel, what people do for money…" Even when individuals engaged in personal acts of resistance, they often dismissed these as isolated actions, not part of a collective movement and therefore not contributing to societal change. Interlocutor 17 noted, "it is always an individual action, not in a group. Even if the activists increase the idea of boycotting, it remains an individual decision from the organisation, and not a collective action." This reaffirms Bayat's assertion that individual, unorganised or unintentional acts of resistance are not granted the same legitimacy as organized protests or opposition movements. Similarly, references to concrete examples of resistance, such as the sit-ins as described by Ababneh (2016) or the Hirak movement during

the Arab uprisings, were often refuted with the idea that “it was very surprising this happened, because Jordanian people are actually not that politically aware” (interlocutor 3), or that it was an exceptional timing, for example, because “Facebook [had] created a momentum” (interlocutor 25), reflecting the coverage on the uprisings seen as radical ruptures, rather than part of a contingent history of resistance. Additionally, some interlocutors viewed protests as happening only due to daily survival (interlocutors 3, 23, 30), also resonating liberal democratisation assumptions of political movements, as if motivations of daily survival are not legitimate as they are not driven by an ideology.

The discrepancy between the expressed feelings of political disengagement and the observed acts of resistance, makes me conclude that normative understandings of resistance remain present within the Jordanian society. I suggest that an overemphasis on shrinking space reinforces these perceptions and normative ideas of resistance. By overcoming this and arguing against a depoliticized Jordanian society, I want to address the last section of my results to small, unconventional forms of resistance that I did encounter during my fieldwork. Moreover, these forms of resistance are mostly informed by the argued complex understanding of the politics of shrinking space, underpinning the ongoing dynamics of state-maintaining and resistance.

4.3 Subtle forms of resistance in Jordanian society

During my fieldwork, I encountered numerous acts of resistance by Jordanian citizens, as by civil society actors. The most visible one, were the protests in front of the Israeli embassy every Friday. However, these protests remain in a liberal understanding of resistance. As debates, I want to highlight forms of resistance that go beyond conventional or normative understandings of resistance. Therefore, I will address a few examples of subtle forms of resistance I encountered during my fieldwork in Amman.

4.3.1 Performances of resistance within CSOs

CSOs generally employ more traditional forms of resistance, such as advocacy, campaigning, and increasingly, the usage of social media to spread their message. This has also been the case of the CSOs I have spoken with, who are engaged in these long processes of, in the words of interlocutor 13, “a constant nagging, and nagging, and nagging”. Most of the conversations with the CSOs actually started with a long overview of acronyms of projects, funders and accomplishments which was hard for me to follow. It seemed as if they first wanted to secure the right of existence before we could move on to more critical reflections on their role in civil society.

The critical parts of the conversations highlighted many subtle forms of resistance, beyond their traditional strategies. Most of those subtle forms of resistance are not explicitly against the Jordanian state, but towards dependency on external, Western funding agencies. As debated above, many organisations feel that the proposed funding projects are based on Western ideas which do not necessarily align with local needs. “It is an outside agenda which does not take into account the local knowledge” (interlocutor 20). Many CSOs complain that it is hard to get around this, as the administrative restrictions actually force them to connect to international organisations in order to receive funding (interlocutor 10, 13, 16, 19, 20).

However, many CSOs still attempt to engage critically with this. Most CSOs (interlocutor 10, 16, 17, 19, 20, and 21) are selective to whom they can fund. CSOs, however not all of them, try to connect only with funding programs that align with their own goals and priorities. CSOs “do [their] research about them before deciding to reject or to collaborate” (interlocutor 17). Moreover, most of the refusal of specific donors are actually informed by clear political positions, in particular concerning the Palestinian case. Some CSOs told me that conditions of some funding are pushing them to take a distance from the Palestinian cause. But CSOs actually take a clear political stance toward this issue, and therefore often refuse funding of the USAID, one of the biggest players in the development aid machinery in Jordan. Even though finding financial resources remains a challenge for CSOs, they “do not want to change our vision, mission and what [they] believe in” (interlocutor 21). Refusing particular funders are acts to resist the transformation of CSOs into service providers or to act as political ‘neutral’, instead seeking to assert their political agency and critical voice.

Furthermore, CSOs create grey areas on the project proposal to be able to make the project in practice more aligned with the local needs and still remain in the narrative of the international funders. For example, interlocutors 10, 17, 20 and 33 mentioned that it is important to “speak the language of the funders” to secure funding, but adapting the implementation of these projects to fit local contexts. Some CSOs even act as brokers between funders and local communities, providing resources, knowledge, and professionalized images to less organized groups to help them to secure funding. Surprisingly, some individuals or CSOs apply for funding simply because it is the only way to have an impact on society, even if the projects align with Western priorities rather than local ones. Still, the fact remains that these people apply for funding just to have an impact in society.

More far-reaching resistance strategies are the total refusal of development funds. As can be seen in the methodology part, interlocutors 9 and 14 have not depicted themselves as civil society actors, but still maintain a critical presence within civil society. By doing so, they do not need a connection to international development actors.

> We do not want to have external funding anymore. We only want to have projects totally independent from funding in alignment with our core values. It is a way to extend the boycotting strategies (interlocutor 14).

Additionally, by changing their status they can also avoid and resist governmental restricting mechanisms such as the administrative one. This is in fact the adoption of Chandhoke's (2001) call to see civil society as a process that constantly reinvents itself. Other CSOs do not totally refuse development funds, but similarly adopt and examine other income to reduce dependency on development funding. Alternative modes of financing makes this possible, such as regularly organising different cultural events and collecting the incomes out of the tickets, or through a local community network fund. Other organisations also rent their physical space when it is not being used, or want to start a volunteer-led bar which could generate extra income. Another example of reducing the funding dependency is CSOs that have enough private donations that could grant them the possibility to maintain their work. Even though it is not clear if these alternative financing modes will remain sustainable in the future, it is still interesting to examine the creative ways in which CSOs seek to reduce their dependence on international development actors in order to reclaim their political voice. Those practices actually empirically resist the theoretical image of what a CSO should be, envisioned by the Western development discourses. In line with the broader argument of this thesis, it exemplifies the ongoing attempts of CSOs to resist the politics of shrinking civil space.

4.3.2 Rights to the city in Amman

Beyond the efforts of CSOs, everyday acts of resistance were also present during my fieldwork. These acts often involve individuals taking matters into their own hands to address the shortcomings of the state, and were observed in the urban public space of Amman. For instance, an interlocutor explained how his neighbours dug a drainage hole in the pavement, because the government failed to address the issue. Similarly, interlocutor 24 described how he planted a tree in front of his shop because the one planted by the government had died, and there was no follow-up or maintenance. These actions reflect a sentiment of self-reliance and an understanding that it is often easier to take action oneself than to wait for the government to respond.

Other subtle acts of resistance were identified through observations in the public sphere, such as removing speed bumps that were imposed by the government but disliked by the local community, or creating makeshift parking spaces using oil crates filled with concrete. These actions demonstrate a defiance of government-imposed rules and an assertion of rights to the city. However, some speed bumps that got torn were again restored with extra concrete by the government, exemplifying broader patterns of an ongoing challenge and reclaiming urban

spaces. Similar observations were made by the visual presence of both the state, through flags and big pictures of the royal family as part of the Jordanization project, as resistance, through street art. These empirical observations underpin the previously theoretical arguments that power and resistance are intertwined and create both constraints and opportunities to one another (Schwedler, 2022; Tomini et al., 2022). Following Bayat's critique, these subtle and visual acts of everyday resistance and claims to the city are often neglected or not validated due to normative understanding of resistance, even by the ones that are doing it. This could explain previously incongruencies between the empirical data and the perceptions of the interlocutors themselves on political engagement. However, as "resistance is part of everyday life" which argues against the view of a depoliticized Jordanian society that passively undergoes authoritarian attempts to restrict civil space.

In conclusion, these examples of subtle acts of resistance, whether by CSOs or carried out by individuals, illustrate the ongoing challenges to state authority in Jordan. The government is not a static entity but is constantly being challenged by these acts of resistance, which requires in turn manoeuvring and adapting in response. These dynamics show a more complex and nuanced political consciousness in Jordan than is generally understood.

5 CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

This master dissertation tried to provide an answer to the following research question: How does the politics of shrinking civil space impact forms of resistance and political (un)consciousness in Jordanian society?. The research has theoretically, contextually and empirically argued for a more complex understanding of power dynamics underlying the phenomenon of shrinking civil space, or in other words the politics of shrinking civil space. By doing so, it underscores the need to reconsider the assumptions underlying Western development interventions, particularly the one-size-fits-all approach to civil society and democratisation. The politics of shrinking civil space demands recognizing the ways that development and securitisation discourses have reinforced state's mechanisms of shrinking space of civil society. Concretely, this has been empirically argued for through the examination of mechanisms of administration, co-optation, divide-and-rule, and othering and identity politics. These reinforcing dynamics have been specifically apparent when focusing on women's issues, as it serves both the neoliberal agenda of development actors as the neo-patriarchal basis of the Jordanian governance.

The thesis has examined that dynamics in the politics of shrinking civil space actually induced different, mostly subtle forms of resistance both within and outside CSOs. The findings on resistance of CSOs in this research, offers a more critical view on civil society as a process that constantly reinvents itself, which enables us beyond liberal, Tocquevillian assumptions of the concept of civil society. I argue that the analysis on the politics of shrinking civil space should include these resistance impacts, as otherwise it risks presenting an image of a passive, depoliticized society under (semi-)authoritarian rule. Depoliticization notions would also fail to recognize the ongoing interactions between the attempts of state-maintaining and state-challenging, as has been debated through theoretical insights and empirical findings. Power and resistance are thus inherently constructing and restricting each other, pushing the other to adapt or reinvent their strategies.

Although the importance of recognising subtle forms of resistance, this has often been neglected, even by those who are engaged in it. The results show incongruencies between empirical findings of resistance, and the perceptions of political unconsciousness. This could be attributed to the incorporation of liberal, Tocquevillian assumptions arguing for levels of institutional and ideological requirements of political actions. However, resisting authorisation does not necessarily mean that it has been motivated by liberal democracy. As the inspiring work of Scott and Bayat demonstrated, resistance can include different motivations such as survival or moral claims. The empirical inconsistency between the perceptions and the acts of

resistance opens up broader discussions on what contributes to societal change, which can be an interesting starting point for further research.

Furthermore, this research has been limited to CSOs and individual citizens in Amman. As the capital has a totally distinct social, geographical, and demographical reality, experiences and perspectives might differ in other parts of the country. Since, the importance of identity politics and the different social groups within Jordan, future research could focus on a different geographical approach.

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