



AALBORG UNIVERSITET

The NGOization in Palestine

An empirical study of the prevailing discourses in the NGO sector in Palestine

“They give us painting to paint the wall, but they don’t remove the wall”





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Abstract

The aim of the thesis is to examine how and why local organisations in Ramallah present counter-discourses towards the international discourse. To do so, the thesis applies the theoretical framework of Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe's discourse theory, to the empirical data. The thesis relies on a (shorter) ethnographic fieldwork, where the data has been gathered through a combination of a six-months internship, one-week preparatory fieldwork and five weeks gathered fieldwork in Ramallah. During our fieldwork, we conducted seven interviews with organisations and experts within the NGO sector in Palestine. Additionally, central data was gathered through participant observations, informal conversations and secondary literature. What the thesis reveals is, that there exist two dominating discourses within the NGO sector in Palestine, namely a local and an international discourse, where the latter is highly influenced by Western ideologies. Furthermore, our findings reveal that there exist various counter-discourses that are constantly battling against the international discourse to be the hegemonic one. The three main counter-discourses, that we identified doing our fieldwork in Ramallah, was 'The International Donor's Agenda Discourse', 'Inferior Status Discourse' and 'Individualisation Discourse'. These counter-discourses are built upon the notion, that the influx of NGOs in Palestine has weakened, and some would even say destroyed, the Palestinian civil society. What is being argued is, that the international donors push forth a political agenda through several restrictions that constrain the organisations autonomy. Furthermore, it is being argued that the Palestinians interlink the NGO sector with new forms of colonial power structures, which constrain the Palestinians from forming their own national project. At last but not least, the thesis reveals that the influx of NGOs has contributed to a more individualised and passive civil society, as a consequence of the neoliberal and capitalistic system that followed with the influx of NGOs. The thesis further reveals, that there is a generational gap in how the NGOs are perceived, where the younger generation seems to take advantage of the opportunities they offer, while the older generation have a far more critical stance towards their existence. At last, the thesis reveals that these counter-discourses stem from certain personal or ideological perspectives, namely from a romanticised notion of the past, a diaspora perspective, and from the ideology of Marxism. The thesis thereby concludes, that there do not exist one static dominating discourse, but rather a constant discursive battle between the international discourse and counter-discourses.



List of Abbreviations

Non-governmental Organisation - NGO

Community based organisation - CBO

International Non-governmental organisation - INGO

The Danish House in Palestine - DHIP

Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit - GIZ

Palestinian Non-Governmental Organizations Network - PNGO

The Palestinian Vision - PalVision

The Union of Agricultural Work Committees - UAWC

BISAN - Center for Research & Development - BISAN

The United Nations - UN

The United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestinian Refugee - UNRWA

Palestinian National Authority - PNA



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Introduction

“Do you really think they care about us?”

A late night at a café in Ramallah, we were sitting with our Palestinian and international friends and having a discussion about the different NGOs operating in Palestine¹. At some point, one of the Palestinian guys said; *“do you really think they care about us?”* This remark surprised us and made us wonder how come he was under this belief, and if other Palestinians shared the same opinion. Not everyone around the table accepted this statement but it seemed as if there existed a consensus that the NGO sector in Palestine is not unproblematic. It challenged our perspective on NGOs in general. As Danish students, studying Global Refugees Studies, the outcome of this Masters is highly likely to work in an NGO, as described on the website; *“typical job opportunities are in international and national government organizations and non-governmental organizations (...)”* (AAU, n.d.). Furthermore, growing up in a Western country where NGOs are mainly portrayed as ‘the good guys’ might have left little room for us to actually question their work. We do not wish to disregard the work that NGOs are doing in Palestine, but living, working and conducting fieldwork in Ramallah introduced several issues that relates to the NGO sector that we found difficult to overlook, and therefore important to study as it also challenged our own viewpoint.

Many Palestinians, that we met, often articulated the feeling of stuckness, especially amongst youth. One might ask, what do stuckness has to do with examining the NGO sector in Palestine? The answer may not be vivid or unambiguous but nevertheless it triggered our interest, because we witness how the large influx of foreigners working in NGOs might contribute to the feeling of stuckness. *“People come and go and I am always the one staying”*, is not an unusual comment to hear in Ramallah. Living, engaging and working with foreigners, as many Palestinians do in Ramallah, entails that at some point they will leave and saying goodbye becomes inevitable.

The above-mentioned examples illustrate why we began to wonder about how it is to live in a civil society that is highly influenced by the presence of NGOs. Furthermore, it became evident for us that we had to examine how the Palestinians themselves articulated their views and attitudes towards NGOs, as we constantly witness conflicting perspectives and many critical opinions.

¹ Throughout the thesis we will use the terms, the West Bank and Palestine. Palestine will refer to the areas of the West Bank, Gaza and East-Jerusalem. The same demarcation is used by our interlocutors.



Studying the NGO Sector in Palestine

Many scholars and notable Palestinian intellectuals have studied the subject of international development in Palestine. These studies are often presenting the political and economic consequences of what occurs when a massive amount of foreign aid is given to an occupied territory (Leone, 2010: 1). It can be argued that these studies focus on a structural perspective, which excludes an agency assessment on this particular matter. To put it differently; international development in Palestine is often studied through a political and economic lens that highlights certain structures, while neglecting Palestinians own perceptions, attitudes and articulations concerning the presence of NGOs in Palestine. This is not to disregard the significance of these studies, but we must argue for the importance of an agency perspective, as the Palestinians are the ones who should benefit from the work of NGOs and are influenced by it.

The purpose of this research is not to neglect the studies of the economic and political consequences, as they have been valuable for this thesis, but rather to combine them with a perspective that presents the Palestinians own narratives on this matter. The reason why this became evident for us to study was due to our above-mentioned observations and informal conversations during our fieldwork in Ramallah. This has inspired us to the following research question and sub-questions:

Research Question

The purpose of the thesis is to examine how and why local organisations in Ramallah present counter-discourses towards the international discourse.

Sub-questions

In order to examine the research question, we have constructed three sub-questions that are used to structure the discourse analysis:

1. Which discourses are prevailing in the NGO sector in Palestine?
2. What counter-discourses are present amongst organisation's employees and experts in Ramallah?
3. Which ideologies and personal perspectives can explain where the counter-discourses stem from?



Thesis Structure

Before presenting the ‘Historical Context’ we will briefly explain the structure of the thesis, in order to give the reader an understanding of how we will answer our research question. The thesis is structured in three chapters; the first chapter presents the methodological considerations in relation to our research. The overall aim of this chapter is to demonstrate transparency concerning the process of collecting, analysing and concluding on the conducted data. Furthermore, as we enter a highly political field, we argue that it is necessary to include ethical considerations when doing fieldwork in a conflict zone, both in relation to our own political partiality and responsibility towards our interlocutors.

The second chapter clarifies the theoretical framework of Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe’s discourse theory (1985). We present the selected analytical tools which we found most suitable for the analysis process, rather than to give an in-depth introduction to the theory.

The third chapter consist of the analysis and the presentation of our findings, which we have chosen to divide into three parts; the first part of the analysis will locate the prevailing discourses within the NGO sector in Palestine, on the basis of the selected organisation’s official websites and annual reports. The second part of the discourse analysis will illuminate the counter-discourses, presented by our interlocutors during our fieldwork in Ramallah, in order to reveal if there exist any contradictions between the organisation’s official statements and our interlocutors. After we have located the prevailing discourses and counter-discourses, the last part will illuminate the underlying ideologies and personal perspectives in order to understand where these discourses stem from.

Historical Context

The Development of International NGOs in Palestine

When examining the subject, the role of NGOs in Palestine and how they influence the civil society, one cannot study this without asking why Palestine has become the centre for international donor’s ‘expertise’? In the context of Palestine, the NGO movement is deeply rooted in the Palestinian civil society. It is believed that the share of the NGO sector in service provision covers more than 60 percent of all healthcare services, 80 percent of all rehabilitation services, and almost 100 percent all of preschool education initiatives (Jarrar, 2005: 1). 69 percent are operating from the West Bank and 31 percent are centred in Gaza (PEPRI, 2007: 11). 80 percent of the population in Gaza is dependent on humanitarian assistance, which illustrates the great dependency on aid (Palestine Economy, 2016).



NGOs constitute a major pillar of the society, which is revealed not only by their vital part of the Palestinian community in terms of their role in service deliveries, but also according to the fact that the number of NGOs grew from approximately 930 registered in year 2000 to more than 1500 in year 2007, of which 920 can be considered active (Devoir & Tartir, 2009: i – ii; Abdelkarim, 2002: 3). In addition, the number given from our interlocutors, concerning registered NGOs, counts more than 3000 in Palestine, which underlines the extreme presence of NGOs (Ubai, UAWC, app. 5: 5). But how has the NGO movement come to play such an important and implemented role in the Palestinian civil society? The following section will illuminate several historical events concerning changes in the political, social and legal context in Palestine, which contributed to the great influx of NGO as will be presented briefly.

From 1920 until 1948 the British mandate for Palestine controlled Palestine. After the Second World War Britain lacked political and financial means to maintain its colonial control in Palestine and wished to withdrawal. Britain therefore referred the question about Palestine to the UN. On August 21st 1947, the United Nations Special Committee on Palestine (UNSCOP) advised the region to be divided into a Palestinian and a Jewish state, with Jerusalem established as a corpus separatum (separated body) under UN administration. On November 29th 1947, the recommendations were adopted by two-thirds of the United Nations General Assembly in Resolution 181. Due to the 181 Resolution the UN Palestine Commission got established. The resolution led to a civil war between Palestinians and Jews due to contradicting opinions about the resolution. On May 14th 1948, the last British High Commissioner left Palestine and the day after the State of Israel was declared (Britannica, 2018). The Palestinian-Israeli war in 1948 led more than 700.000 Palestinians to flee, without counting the number of displaced Palestinians within Israeli controlled territory. The year after, The United Nations General Assembly established the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestinian Refugee (UNRWA) that came to mark the inception of the international society in Palestine, hence the number of internal displaced people kept growing as the Palestinian-Israeli war escalated and the need for humanitarian relief followed (UNRWA, 2007: 2). According to UNRWA they constituted the relief work and humanitarian assistance as their mandate was to carry out; “*relief and works programmes*” (Ibid.: 2). UNRWA's mandate was originally expected to be temporary but the United Nations General Assembly has repeatedly renewed the mandate ever since due to; “*the absence of a comprehensive solution to the*



Palestine refugee problem” and has extended to cover the educational, economic, social and healthcare services (UNHCR, 2007: 2; UNRWA, 2002: 4).

1967 marks the Six-Day War where Israel defeated the forces of Egypt, Jordan and Syria, and further took over more territory, including the West Bank, Gaza and East Jerusalem. Some of our interlocutors argue that the occupation began in 1948, while the official statement is that the Israeli occupation of Palestine began after the war in 1967. In an assessment of the Palestinian NGO sector, Abdelkarim argues that the Palestinians in the period of the Palestinian-Israeli war, managed to establish hundreds of organisations to provide a wide range of services in order to mobilise resources and provide relief on a local and national level (Abdelkarim, 2002: 6).

Later, in 1994, the emergence of the PNA stands clear as a historical core stone to the NGO sector’s development in Palestine. In the wake of the Oslo Accords, which was signed in 1993, the relationship between NGOs and the PNA, including the internal role between NGOs and local-community based organisations, was redrafted. The capacity of the NGO sector came to clash with the arrival of the PNA, and numerous discussions was carried out concerning the power balance between the PNA and NGOs in terms of services, responsibilities and programs. The relationship between the PNA and NGOs was burdened by the fact that NGOs, in the meantime of an absence of a Palestinian state, had developed an institutional form (Hammami, 2012: 53). NGOs had to change strategies and redefine and relocate their role by serving those sectors and communities that was not reached by the PNA ministries (Nahla, 2008: 12).

Drawing back upon the Palestinian-Israeli war in 1948, also known as Al-Nakba (The Catastrophe), caused hundreds of thousands of Palestinians to be dependent on humanitarian assistance. The Israeli occupation of the West Bank, Gaza, and East Jerusalem in 1967, stands as historical core stone to the proliferation of NGOs with international donors, as they became providers of humanitarian services counting medical, social and educational services in order to meet the needs of the Palestinians.

Terminology

Non-Governmental Organisations, better known as ‘NGOs’, dates back to the aftermath of the First World War. In 1919, Eglantyne Jebb founded Britain’s Save the Children Fund due to the massive destruction and trauma after the First World War. *“In 1946, there were 41 international NGOs*



registered at the United Nations (UN), while today there are more than 2800.” (Lewis 2014: 3). There is no general agreement of the number of NGOs worldwide, but studies reveal that the NGO sector is increasing.

NGOs are usually concerned with addressing issues of global poverty and social justice, and they are primarily working in the developing world. According to Alan Fowler (1997); “*an NGO has an identity that is ‘legitimised by the existence of poverty’*” (Ibid.). In relation to Palestine, poverty is maybe not the biggest concern, but rather promotion of human rights, women empowerment, democracy etc.

Mostly NGOs are understood to be ‘third sector’, while we may recognise NGOs as a specific classification of the third sector organisation, it is still important to distinguish between the many different types. Some NGOs are large, highly bureaucratised service-providing organisations with corporate identities and a great amount of staff, many of whom may see their work in terms of a professional career. We define such an organisation as International Non-Governmental Organisation (INGO). Other organisations are small, almost informal associations working at community level, with no paid staff but volunteers and supporters instead, who may be motivated by politics, religion or some kind of altruism. We will refer to these as Community-Based Organisations (CBO). We define a local NGO as an organisation that contain elements of the above-mentioned definitions of CBO and INGO. Some NGOs take a mainstream growth-centred ‘modernisation’ approach to development, while others want to challenge this approach and bring alternative approaches such as empowerment and popular mobilisation. Furthermore, some are funded from the outside, while others contribute to their own fundraising initiatives and therefore mobilise resources locally (Ibid.: 4).

To sum up, there are different kinds of organisations and therefore, we have selected INGOs, NGOs and CBOs when conducting data for our thesis in order to meet the broad representation of organisations that are operating in Palestine. Additionally, ‘organisation’ will imply all three types throughout out the thesis.



Methodology

Before pursuing into the analysis, the following section aims to outline how we conducted and processed our data during our fieldwork in Ramallah, and to present our methodological considerations that followed.

Research Approach

We combine elements of both inductive and deductive approach in order to continuously utilise our research in relation to the collected data.

In the first discourse analysis, we apply a deductive approach when analysing the dominating discourses that are prevailing in the NGO sector in Palestine. We assume there exist a discursive battle between local discourses and an international discourse, which we aim to test with the use of Laclau and Mouffe's discourse theory.

During our fieldwork we discovered that many of the selected organisations presented a critical stance towards the international agenda of which they presented several counter-discourses. We aim to examine these counter-discourses in order to reveal possible inconsistencies between the findings from the first part of the analysis, on how the organisations present themselves officially, and how they in reality articulate the international agenda during our fieldwork in Ramallah. Therefore, we apply an inductive approach, as our data and observations from our qualitative and ethnographic fieldwork in Ramallah is central to this analysis, rather than testing a hypothesis. The inductive approach then allows us to be open to the data that we collect in the field, which we afterwards will try to understand through different theories (Thomas, 2006: 238). This method is valuable when studying subjective perspectives that secondary literature solely would struggle to provide, hence we argue that secondary literature only would provide indications to our analysis. Nevertheless, our collected data will be studied through a discursive theoretical approach combined with secondary literature.

By using elements of both a deductive and an inductive research approach it can be argued that we use an adaptive approach (Rescher, 1978). This approach becomes profitable to our thesis as it allows us to adapt the approach on the basis of our data. Furthermore, it prevents the risk of the rigid nature of the pure inductive or deductive research approach that can leave out or ignore



elements of the field being researched because it does not fit with either the theoretical or empirical approach (Jacobsen, 2007: 253).

The two weeks fieldwork is inspired by elements from the ethnographic research approach. The term ethnography is used to refer both to a particular form of research and to its eventual written product. Ethnographic fieldwork is based on a variety of mainly qualitative research techniques and further, includes engagement in the lives of those being studied over an extended period of time (Davies, 2016: 5). We are aware that our fieldwork only lasted for two weeks, which would make some ethnographers question the ethnographic nature of our fieldwork. But as one of the group members, Edda, has spent eight months in the field, and we include data that has been collected throughout her internship, we still argue that our thesis contains elements of ethnographic fieldwork. We use elements of ethnographic research as interviews, participant observations, field notes and informal conversations. This type of data became useful not only to answer the research question, but also to access important sources of unexpected knowledge.

The qualitative research is not concerned about making generalisations about societies, but rather aims at understanding how people experiences the society or culture they are part of (Ibid.). Our research's ambition is to illuminate the different counter-discourses presented by our interlocutors towards the international agenda. Our interlocutors represent Palestinian civilians but are not representative for all Palestinians. We believe, by combining patterns and drawing similarities in their statements it is possible to present dominating narratives among our interlocutors. Furthermore, it can be argued that our findings about the influence of NGOs in Ramallah might be generalisable to other contexts where a strong presence of NGOs exists.

Data Collection

In the next section we will present how we have collected our data through chosen qualitative research techniques; field notes, participant observations and interviews. The data has been collected through a six months internship, one-week preparatory fieldwork and five weeks gathered fieldwork. Further, we will present our considerations regarding our interlocutors and the design of the interview guide.



Internship & Preparatory Fieldwork

As mentioned, Edda conducted her internship at DHIP from August 2017 to February 2018 in Ramallah. Furthermore, Edda stayed three weeks after she finished her internship to establish meetings for our fieldwork. To have a group member living in the West Bank became the starting point for our interest in Palestine, as she was very engaged in her internship and the situation in Palestine, which she shared with the rest of the group. Therefore, we planned a preparatory fieldwork in November 2017.

From Ramallah we visited different locations in Palestine; Bethlehem, Hebron, Jerusalem and Nablus. The preparatory fieldwork gave us a valuable insight and understanding of the ongoing conflict and how it influences the lives of Palestinians in various ways, which was quite overwhelming and an eye-opener that brought up a lot of questions and curiosity. Our interest in NGOs and their role in the Palestinian civil society, started on the basis of our observations from living and spending time in Ramallah. Here it was hard not to notice all the NGOs and the foreigner employees that have their base in Ramallah. During the trip we met a lot of people, both Palestinians and other foreigners that Edda through her stay had become familiar or friends with. As mentioned in the 'Introduction', it became clear that Ramallah is home to a lot of foreigners working in INGOs. When interacting with Edda's Palestinian friends the role of NGOs in Palestine became an on-going topic that was brought up in different situations and conversations. This made us aware of the major role NGOs in Palestine constitute in the absence of a state, which is completely different from the welfare state that we ourselves grew up in.

Edda's stay in Ramallah made her what, Kaur Johl and Sumathi Renganathan, defines as a gatekeeper, a person or an organisation that provides or assists access to the field being researched (Johl & Renganathan, 2010). First of all, her internship at DHIP was a gatekeeper in getting contact to different organisations and persons working within the NGO sector in Palestine. Secondly, the relations and friendships that she established through her stay has brought us to important interlocutors that we otherwise would have had difficulty to get in contact with. Due to the relations in the field, a trustful relationship to our interlocutors was easier to establish, which we experienced opened up for more personal narratives about the topic. What the challenges might be about having gatekeepers and personal relations in the field will be elaborated in the section 'Selecting Interlocutors'.



Fieldwork

Ramallah was an obvious choice to conduct our fieldwork for several reasons. First of all, we decided on Ramallah as we already had an established network. It was important for us to be in close distance to those people, to be able to socialise with them as much as possible, as they represent valuable interlocutors. Second of all, Ramallah is the capital for NGOs in the West Bank. The political, social and economic centre is placed in Ramallah, which makes it an attractive city for Palestinians as well as foreigners. It would not take you long when you walk in the streets of Ramallah to feel the vibrant atmosphere that seem similar to another big city in the Middle East even though it only inhabits around 57.000 people. The mix of old ladies selling vegetables from the countryside, men sitting on corner cafes playing backgammon while smoking shisha, to the big billboards hanging on the numerous tall buildings almost looking like skyscrapers, the colourful fancy cars with loud Arabic music playing in the speakers, and cafes like 'Stars and Bucks' instead of the large American coffeehouse chain Starbucks, illustrates the old and the new Ramallah (Field notes, 2018). Everyday new buildings are being build, which portrays Ramallah as an expanding city under huge growth and development, but what you notice indeed is that many buildings are empty. At the office of DHIP, this was often a topic; *"it's for investors"*, *"no it's for all the foreigners because we Palestinians can't afford it"*, and *"I think it's for the rich Palestinians outside of Palestine"* etc. (Edda's internship notes, 2017). Furthermore, there exist a specific way to characterise Ramallah which becomes evident when living in Ramallah. Everyone presents Ramallah as something else from the rest of Palestine; *"Ramallah is a bubble"*, *"if you want to see the real Palestine you have to go outside of Ramallah"* and *"you can't really feel the occupation here like other cities"* (Ibid.). Even though Israeli soldiers are not present in the streets of Ramallah, you only have to drive 10-15 minutes from the city centre and different checkpoints and illegal settlements will appear. It seems that the daily confrontation of the occupation is more optional according to many Palestinians living in Ramallah compared to cities like Hebron, where the practical measures of the occupation are very visible. How the occupation is present in different locations, and what it means to be Palestinian in respectively Ramallah or Hebron, is not the focus of this thesis, but rather it aims to illustrate what kind of city Ramallah is and why this city might seem attractive to both Palestinians but also to the many foreigners living there.



Selecting Interlocutors

Edda has through her internship been cooperating with a lot of different NGOs and the DHIP equipped us with a list of NGOs that we used in order to map out different organisations. We decided to select NGOs that explicitly aim at targeting the civil society. To discover potential differences, we decided to select organisations that seemed diverse. Through the definitions presented by David Lewis we chose INGOs, NGOs and CBOs in order to get a broad representation of the organisations operating in Palestine, and to examine if the different types of NGOs have different focuses and approaches in working with the civil society.

The organisations we have selected are the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ), the Palestinians Non Governmental Organisations Network (PNGO), The Palestinian Vision (PalVision), The Union of Agricultural Work Committees (UAWC), BISAN - Center for Research & Development (BISAN) and Dalia Association. GIZ represents an INGO, PNGO, PalVision and UAWC represent local NGOs, and BISAN and Dalia Association represent CBOs. What is common for all the organisations that we have chosen is that they all work with the civil society. The organisations will be further elaborated in 'Identities of Organisations' in the discourse analysis.

Prior to our fieldwork, we had two meetings with Andreas Hermann, Team Leader for GIZs Civil Society Programme, and Samer Daoudi, Policy Advisor and Communication Coordinator for PNGO. The majority of the meetings got established before our trip back to Palestine. PalVision is the only organisation that does not share the same location as the rest, as it is placed in Jerusalem. The reason why they became a part of our empirical data was by the help of Andreas from GIZ. We asked for partner organisations that potentially wanted to meet with us, and PalVision was one of them. We did not wish to write off an organisation due to its location, and we therefore proceeded with the meeting.

Most of the interviews took place at the organisations, which was a great opportunity for us to observe the distinctions between the different kinds of organisations. The office of GIZ was in a huge modern building in the new area of Ramallah, guarded by security professionals that proceeded security checks at the entrance. In comparison, Dalia Association was located in the old city of Ramallah and their office in an old house, where a lot of Palestinians came directly to donate second hand things for a local second-hand shop. In addition, our impression of PalVision, on the



basis of their website, was that the organisation was characterised by highly institutionalised settings with many foreign employees. Surprisingly, the location of the organisation was placed in a hidden alley in an antiquated tall building. During the interview, rats were running on the ceiling above us, which did not exactly correspond with our perception of the organisation. Such observations serve as strength to our interviews and it gave us an impression of the identity of the organisations and how they were functioning.

As mentioned above, living with a Palestinian guy enabled Edda to establish a wide network. Abdallah Safar was one of the people who often came to the house and he became one of the important relations in regards to this thesis. He introduced Edda and later on the other members of the group to his father, Salim Safar. Salim has a great knowledge about organisations in Palestine as he has been a board member in different NGOs, further he represents an older generation that has experienced the political changes in Palestine throughout the years. Additionally, he has spent many years inside Israeli prisons, which gave us an insight that is not always easy to access that we found valuable. One day we were discussing NGOs in Palestine and a friend of Salim came to visit. It was Ubai Al-Aboudi from UACW who came, Salim laughed and said; *“this is a NGO guy you should talk to”*, and we exchanged contacts and scheduled a meeting. Salim recommended us to talk to Itiraf from BISAN as they shared many of the same opinions about organisations operating in Palestine. Abdallah and Salim are gatekeepers as they not only provided us with contacts but also established some contacts. Having Palestinians to recommend us seemed to be a great benefit as the meetings were very fast to schedule, and furthermore doing research in a sensitive context where suspicion is prevalent, having gatekeepers takes off some of that mistrust there might be. With that said, there might be some challenges by establishing contacts through gatekeepers. As the above-mentioned show, one of the reasons why Salim chose to provide us with the contact to BISAN, was due to shared opinions about NGOs. It can therefore be argued, that a danger might arise when having gatekeepers, as their agenda, believes, or opinions affect the choice of contacts they provide us with, which might give a certain type of data. We as researcher must be aware of not reproducing a story as our interlocutors becomes a part of the interpretation, as many of them provided us with contacts.



Collected Data

When analysing the dominating discourses that are prevailing within the NGO sector in Palestine, our primary data consist of the selected INGOs, NGOs and CBOs own descriptions of their aim, mission and vision from their official websites and annual reports. These findings will enable us to examine how the different discourses are constructed and where they stem from.

During the fieldwork we did seven semi-structured interviews, five interviews with the selected organisations, two expert interviews and numerous informal conversations as well as participant observations. The semi-structured interviews, beside the informal conversations, were a major source when gathering our empirical data. Through the interviews we acquired empirical data, which is not observable, that allows us to enter our interlocutors perspectives (Merriam, 2009: 88). The semi-structured interviews allow the interlocutors more room to express their own experiences than a structured interview, which becomes valuable as it opened up for new topics and perspectives.

Before the fieldwork, we have contacted several organisations in order to establish interview appointments. Among others, we contacted International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent, USAID, PNGO and Rema Hammami, Associate Professor of Anthropology at the Institute of Women's Studies at Birzeit University, and who has been doing research within the field of NGOs in Palestine, but unfortunately they were unable to meet for an interview appointment. Even though we experienced cancellations, we still managed to get a short informal meeting with PNGO, which will be used as part of our data.

We struggled in reaching interviews with INGOs in Ramallah, which can be seen as a weakness to the discourse analysis. The INGOs are an immense part of the negotiation of power and therefore very relevant actors in our thesis. But as we examine the counter-discourses towards the international discourse, we believe that we can justify our discourse analysis of the international discourse, solely based on their websites and official documents.

The expert interviews we conducted were with Islah Jad who is an Assistant Professor of Political Science and a Faculty Member of Gender and Development Department at Birzeit University. Additionally, she was a prominent figure in the Palestinian women's movement. Apart from gender studies, Islah Jad has done research within the field of NGOs in Palestine where she takes a critical stance towards their presence. Islah Jad has among other articles written 'The NGOization of Arab



Women's Movements' from 2003 and 'Between Buzzwords and Social Movements' from 2007 that both address the influence of NGOs in Palestine, which we use as secondary literature in our second part of the discourse analysis. Therefore, the interview with Islah Jad provided us with her knowledge of the female movement in Palestine, but also different aspects ranging from the historical presence of NGOs, and how they have affected civil society on different areas, as well as knowledge of the relationship between authorities, the NGO sector and the civil society. Apart from Islah Jad, we also conducted an expert interview with Sahar Soufan who studies Political Science at Birzeit University in Palestine and further she is an employee at the DHIP where she has the position as a Program Officer. Sahar Soufan has through her studies been producing a lot of research within the field of NGOs in Palestine and therefore, she provided us with data of the historical presence of NGOs, and the consequences of their presence on a social, cultural and economic level. During the interview, Sahar Soufan spoke from a personal perspective on how she, her family, and friends experience the presence and historical development of NGOs differently. Sahar Soufan therefore, both speak from a professional and personal perspective.

Interview Guide

The guideline for our interviews was prepared on the basis of a number of certain themes that we aim to study through thematic semi-structured interviews. The themes we decided for the interview guide was created in the light of our interest in the field as well as inspiration from the secondary literature that we have studied. Some of the themes we focused on are presented through the following questions; how do the organisations perceive the collaboration with international donors? How do the organisations experience the balance between local needs and the possible funding opportunities from international donors? How the influx of NGOs influences the civil society in Palestine in a developmental, economical, historical and social perspective?

Our interview guide was flexible depending on the individual interlocutor's respond, which was essential as it allowed us, as interviewer, to trace new topics that emerged during the interviews (Edward & Holland, 2013: 29). New topics also arose during our interviews, as an example generation became a returning topic in how the civil society relate and perceive the existence of NGOs in Palestine. Furthermore, the Israeli occupation also became an on-going topic that was presented in every interview we conducted. What was central was to have the interlocutors to express themselves on their own from both organisational and individual experiences, followed up by questions relating to our overall themes (Heyl, 2001: 39).



Looking at our interview questions retrospectively, it became apparent that some of the questions, as; “*what would happen if all the NGOs pulled out of Palestine?*” gave rise to strong reactions and reflective responses, therefore we found it valuable to complete the interviews with this question. Our interview guide is attached as appendix.

Participatory Observations & Field Notes

Participant observation is the establishment of a place in some natural setting on a relatively long-term basis in order to investigate, experience and represent the social life and social processes that occur in that setting (Emerson et al., 2001: 2). We have used participant observations as a tool to gather data to explore narratives, discourses, and attitudes to gain access to both reflected and unreflected opinions about NGOs. By establishing a trustful relationship with the people whom we are studying creates opportunities of asking more provocative and personal questions and still expect thoughtful and serious answers (Bourgios, 2003: 13). Furthermore, an advantage of participant observation is the observation in itself. To observe, discloses the possibility to access unspoken knowledge, such as body language, sharp glances, tacit consent through nods or any other non-articulated information (Ambjörnsson, 2010: 39). Observations gave us useful knowledge about various attitudes in different contextual situations, when we did not understand what was being explicitly articulated, but where the body language made it understandable that there were different and conflicting attitudes and opinions being expressed. We experienced that two of our interlocutors would heavily disagree in discussions about whether NGOs in Palestine benefit the civil society. While they were discussing they switched to Arabic, but regardless that we do not speak or understand Arabic, observation of their body language and their volume of their voices, indicated conflicting attitudes and opinions about this topic. However, even in prolonged fieldwork, and especially on shorter ones, as our fieldwork were, it is impossible to observe everything. Hence, participant observation can be inadequate in itself, and therefore it needs to be combined with other methods, which in our case is semi-structured interviews, informal conversations and field notes, as described above (Davies, 2008: 81). The interviews provided us with the access to the social world beyond the individual understanding of it and thereby, our semi-structured interviews became a very important tool in conducting our data (Ibid.: 109). By combining participant observations and semi-structured interviews thereby secures a more nuanced and in-depth data collection that becomes valuable for our analysis.



In addition to participant observation, we also made use of field notes, which is a tool to reduce the observed events in the field and the collection of impressions, thoughts, incidents and narratives that emerge from this, remarkable changes in gesture or tone of voice, body language, into written accounts (Emerson et al., 2001: 3). Field notes have been used as a supplement to our interviews, informal conversations and participant observations. During our fieldwork we have not only received and experienced a lot of impressions and observations, but also engaged in several short informal conversations. We have several times made use of Palestinian public taxis, where conversations with the driver turned out as valuable knowledge that was unplanned and unrecorded. In addition, we attended a private dinner that likewise provided us with informal data. In these situations, we made use of field notes in order to remember important statements.

Processing the Data

The following section will present how we have processed our data, including our transcription strategy and how we have coded our data. Conducting fieldwork required transcription from oral to written sentences, therefore our interviews was audio-recorded. This allowed a better connection between our interlocutors and us since we were able to have longer conversations with a greater attention towards what was being said in the actual interview. All interviews were conducted in English and transcription became a tool to memorise each interview and when analysing our data, it served as a useful platform to fully examine what has been said and to cite the interlocutors in their own words (Bryman, 2016: 479).

We experienced that one of our conducted interviews with Hans from GIZ were not allowed to be audio-recorded, as he was laughing and asked; “*do you want the official opinion of GIZ or my personal and honest opinion?*” We then preferred the “honest” and “personal” interview, even though we wondered how come his official opinion could not be honest, according to him (Hans, GIZ, app. 7). To meet this wish and to create a trustful relation for the purpose of valuable data, we suggested to make use of field notes, as agreed upon.

The transcription process served as a second comprehension of our seven interviews that allowed us to discover new aspects and to memorise what had been forgotten. The transcribed interviews enabled us to examining the data in our theoretical approach of studying the power balance, and we



found, that some of our interlocutors contradicted themselves, which was an observation we were not aware of during the interviews.

Transcription also served as a useful tool to our methods of data coding. Open coding is an inductive technique of generating meaning of the collected data that entails searching for themes and arguments forming categories to be examined (Guvå & Hylander, 2005). Our data coding became a valuable tool to locate similarities and inconsistencies that became important when analysing the interlocutors counter-discourses. Thereby, various themes were located and patterns and differences could systematically be examined. Once the discovered categories have been formed into a schematic, we located three counter-discourses; 'The International Donor's Agenda Discourse', 'Inferior Status Discourse' and 'Individualisation Discourse'.

Methodological Considerations

In the following section our methodological reflections regarding our role as researchers and our ethical considerations will be presented. We argue for the importance of this section due to our role, influence and navigation as researchers within the field.

Our Position in the Field

Some of the most important considerations in relation to our fieldwork are the ability to reflect upon our role as researchers and how it influences our research approach. Reflexivity is our awareness as researchers of our connection to the field and our effect upon it (Davies, 2008: 7). When we collected and processed our data, we found that some of our interviews suffered from elaborations and explanations. We argue that our prior knowledge has been a possible limitation, as there was a risk that we, as researchers, forgot to ask elaborating questions. This is also referred to as 'imposed answers' or 'poor wording' that risk leaving out aspects or explanations that are important for the outcome of our data (de Vaus, 2001: 31).

When conducting ethnographic research, researchers position in the field are connected to or part of the object being studied. Depending on the extent and nature of these connections, questions arise to whether the results of the research are artefacts of the researcher's presence and inevitable influence on the research project (Davies, 2008: 3). It is of high importance to be reflexive about our connection to the field, our role, and what we represent. As Charlotte Davies states; "(...)



ethnographers must be prepared to examine as honestly and carefully as possible their personal reasons for undertaking the research and their feelings about it.” (Ibid.: 83). As we have lived, worked, and visited Ramallah it demands awareness of our position as researchers and our preconceptions of the field, and the challenges it poses. The risk of being embedded in specific opinions is always present when a researcher has been very engaged within the field that is being studied, especially in a highly politicised field where choosing ‘sides’ often seems necessary. In addition, researcher’s choice of topic and research subjects are shaped by our different personal backgrounds as class, racial and ethnic hierarchy of society, as well as our different academic backgrounds (Ibid.: 5, 9).

Due to our close relations with some of our interlocutors, we naturally created a more familiar atmosphere. When we enter the field as researchers, it requires considerations about involvement and detachment, also described as the researcher’s ability to “stepping in and out of the society” (Ibid.: 5). Involvement and detachment are a rather difficult balance, as it is hard not to be influenced by, and maybe even ascribed to, specific discourses that are prevailing among the people that we have been interacting with during our fieldwork. We aim to stress that our main goal as researchers is to collect data that we study within a discursive theoretical approach, though we found it difficult sometimes to detach ourselves from certain discourses. It became clear that when we returned to Denmark, it was easier to detach ourselves from the field than when we were right in the centre of it. Even though Davies argues that a researcher should be capable of detaching him/herself when being in the field, it at times became a challenge for us. The risk of reproducing dominating narratives among Palestinians without questioning them, was at times a struggle for us. To overcome this issue, we have tried to understand our collected data within a theoretical perspective that was not explicitly presented by our interlocutors. In doing so, we diminish the risk of reproducing narratives and rather shed light on their stories within a new perspective introduced by us and not by our interlocutors. Being reflexive therefore became a necessity and demanded us to constantly consider and reconsider the choices we made during our fieldwork, in order to avoid to privilege and give special credence to certain types of explanations and disregard others (Greenfell & Lebaron, 2014: 31).

Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations are imperative working within the field of ethnography. It is important to recognise that ethical concerns are inseparable from understandings about the ontological and



epistemological foundations of their work. As researchers our understanding of the *truth* and the nature of reality have significant implications for the judgement about our responsibilities (Murphy & Dingwall, 2001: 339). The aim of presenting these ethical considerations is first of all to highlight what it means to do research in a sensitive context, and second of all how our own position influenced the way we engaged in the field.

The thesis will present its ethical considerations on the basis of *consequentialist* approach and *deontological* approach. The first brings awareness about if the research has harmed the interlocutors in any way, and if so have it been outweighed by the research's benefit. The latter in contrast focus on the rights of the interlocutors, such as the right to self-determination, the right to privacy, or the right to respect. As Elizabeth Murphy and Robert Dingwall (2001) argue, the two approaches are not necessarily in competition, as researchers have a responsibility to protect interlocutors from harm but also to have concern for their rights. Throughout the thesis our research has been guided by three ethical principles; *non-maleficence*, *beneficence*, and *autonomy* or *self-determination*, which will be elaborated below (Ibid.).

Non-maleficence concentrates on that researchers should avoid harming interlocutors. The principle of *beneficence* is concerned about research on human subjects should not simply be carried out for its own sake but produce some identifiable and positive benefits. The two principles therefore belong to the consequentialist approach and are often viewed at together. Doing research in a context characterised by uncertainty, it is vital that we as researchers operate under the belief of doing no harm. The interlocutor's safety is foremost important and we believe that if our research would compromise or jeopardise that, it is not worth continuing. This is not to say that the topic of this research is very controversial but rather that the context we were operating in was characterised by uncertainty, which especially became distinct in relation to freedom of speech.

Throughout our time in Palestine it became clear that uncertainty penetrated many aspects of life. One of the aspects was the fear of telling 'the truth'. Many stories were flourishing around Ramallah about spies working for either the Israeli Government or the PNA. Stories about how Palestinians had shared their experiences in Israeli prisons, knowledge about corruption in the PNA, or theories about how Israel, the PNA, and big international corporations were collaborating, and all of sudden these people would be taken from their houses and put into prison. The attitude towards journalists and researchers is therefore often influenced by paranoia and suspicion. In one of our meetings with Aisha from Dalia Association we introduced ourselves and started asking her



questions about the organisation. She asked us immediately about documentation from our university to proof that we were students. From previous experience with fieldwork around the world, Palestine was the place where interlocutors have showed greatest interest in who we were before starting the interview. Furthermore, during our fieldwork we have been in contact with two former Palestinian prisoners who have been detained through the practice of administrative detention. Both of them have spoken fairly opened about their many years in Israeli prisons. Itiraf from BISAN shared his story after our official interview and mentioned among other things that the work he does, as the director, might be one of the reasons why he was imprisoned due to his critical attitude towards the occupation, the PNA, and international donors. Some of the empirical data that we have produced can be characterised as sensitive data, which is important to be aware of and not oblivious to. To manage this matter, it has been important for us from the beginning to present our research exactly as it is, and to be attentive to this concern many Palestinians have and how we can accede this concern. Furthermore, some of the names in the thesis are fictional, to meet the wish of anonymity that some of our interlocutors had.

Additionally, it is worth mentioning, which relates to the *beneficence* principle, that after ‘approving’ our research all of our interlocutors have seemed excited to share their knowledge and experiences. It is not our conviction that our interlocutors believed that our research would either end the occupation or remove the corruption of the PNA, but the joy and eagerness of sharing their opinions illustrated some kind of hope to bring awareness about the situation in Palestine. Many of our meetings ended with them saying; “*remember to share our story in your country*”. It was tempting to agree with many of our interlocutor’s statements as many of them was characterised by sad and mad emotions towards the political situation, and furthermore to meet their wishes of sharing their story. With that said, it is worth mentioning that we as researchers became a part of the power play. It can be argued that our position was sometimes being used to convince or win the discursive and ideological battle that exists between the different actors being researched.

The principles of *autonomy* or *self-determination* are within the deontological domain. As we strived to respect our interlocutor’s rights throughout the research, it is important that there exists a mutual consent between interlocutor and researcher. Though it might be difficult, as it is the moral sense of the researcher that determinates whether the rights to autonomy or self-determination are being kept. Furthermore, a written or verbal consent does not necessarily mean that these rights are being respected, according to Murphy and Dingwall, but rather the quality of the consent (Ibid.:



342). We did not ask our interlocutors to sign a written consent, but instead we were honest about our motivation, aim, and purpose of the thesis, and further we emphasised the fact that the interlocutors would not be recorded without permission.

Autonomy or self-determination constitutes the right to self-definition. To produce research always comes with the risk of misinterpret the interlocutor's stories, hence constructing their reality that might not acknowledge the *truth* they were trying to portray. It is therefore crucial that we as researchers try to interpret as close to the stories being presented, which led us to the choice of appending the interlocutor's transcriptions. The danger might arise when we begin to interpret what we analyse as existing patterns between our interlocutor's stories. They might not see themselves sharing the same opinions, which therefore can conflict with our interpretation. To comprehend this issue, we often introduced issues that other interlocutors had mentioned throughout their interviews, to determine if there were similarities between our interlocutor's statements, without revealing who these statements came from. Furthermore, it is important for us to state throughout the analysis, if the argument is presented by us as researchers or from our interlocutors.



The Theoretical Framework of Ernesto Laclau & Chantal Mouffe's Discourse Theory

Laclau and Mouffe's discourse theory derives from a poststructuralist analysis form. Discourses give meaning to the social world and they can never be permanently established, as the world is formed by a constant transformation of discourses (Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002: 6). This transformation becomes relevant as Laclau and Mouffe's discourse theory is influenced by a Foucauldian discourse theory, that puts forth the ideological premises and power effects in studying and identifying the transforming discourses (Burr, 2015: 20).

Applying Laclau and Mouffe's discourse theory allows the analysis to reveal how organisations position the organisation's aim, mission and vision, and which ideologies they ascribe themselves into. In line with Foucault's concept on *truth*, as adhered by Laclau and Mouffe, the intention with our discourse analysis is not to reveal a reality that then define a discourse, hence no universal *truth* can be accessed, but rather to examine how organisations de facto construct a reality that appears as natural and factual (Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002: 14). Laclau and Mouffe's discourse theory is based on the assumption that there exists a world and objects that are independent of discourses. Furthermore, their theoretical conviction is therefore based on the assumption that actual facts are also discursive facts, as everything "out there" is something that has been given meaning (Squire, 2009: 31; Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002: 20).

Laclau and Mouffe's theoretical approach provides analytical tools suitable for identification of ruling and challenging discourses (Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002: 26). The main argument is, that the theoretical approach's ability to identify different premises, enables the analysis to reveal inconsistencies within and between organisations. Further, it allows the analysis to discuss these findings and where the inconsistencies stem from. The importance of Laclau and Mouffe's discourse theory is the construction process of discourses, which enable the analysis to 'uncover' the different prevailing discourses and ideologies within international and local organisations (Ibid.: 33).

According to Laclau and Mouffe, a constructed discourse includes non-linguistics objects, practices and social processes as valuable for a discourse analysis; "*every non-linguistic action also has a meaning and therefore, we find within it the same entanglement of pragmatics and semantics that we find in the use of words*" (Laclau & Mouffe 1987: 83). This allows the discourse analysis to



include other aspects than linguistics, when studying and analysing the underlying ideologies, whereby the use of interviews, field notes, and knowledge from observations can strengthen the discourse analysis. Thereby Laclau and Mouffe's theoretical assumption differentiates from other discursive theories e.g. Fairclough that exclusively pays attention towards linguistics of text.

The Social Constructionist Tradition

The Foucauldian approach, and thus Laclau and Mouffe's discourse theory, is often associated with the social constructionist premise, arguing that all knowledge is a discursive construction reflecting certain ideologies that represent them. Thereby, the nexus of *truth* or *false* knowledge is not reflecting one reality, but the perception of ruling ideologies. Vivien Burr presents the main features of social constructionism, that also covers Laclau and Mouffe's discourse theory, by expanding upon four main characteristics as we will elaborate upon in the context of our fieldwork (Burr, 2015: 2). The fourth characteristic will not be applied, as it is not relevant for our thesis.

The first characteristic, "*critical stance towards taken-for-granted knowledge*", is signifying how knowledge of the world cannot be regarded as one objective *truth*; rather knowledge has to be considered as our own categorisation of the world, which has to be challenged by its nature (Ibid.: 2 - 3). The thesis' analysis draws upon collected narratives, which represent a subjective *truth*, that we as researchers need to be aware of, in order not to take our interlocutors subjected *truth* "as taken-for-granted" knowledge.

The second one is the "*historical and cultural specificity*", meaning that knowledge of the world are not only embedded in each cultural and historical context, but also influenced by us, as historical and cultural human beings. It refers to how concepts and categories that are forming our knowledge of the world, are products of the differentiation of human beings and that particular cultures, certain historical times, social and economic aspects etc., are artefacts of the produced knowledge (Ibid.: 3 - 4). This implies that our interlocutors and our own heritage address a certain set of 'glasses' when analysing, discussing and reflecting upon a given theme. This has been evident when conducting interviews with people from different generations in Palestine. The older generation have experienced the Israeli occupation differently from the younger generation, which poses different historical and cultural conditions for generating knowledge.



The third one, “*knowledge is sustained by social processes*”, refers to how knowledge is created and sustained through social processes and interactions. This implies that knowledge is shared between people, and hereby creating new knowledge depending on how *truth* and *false* plays out. Social processes thereby form and change knowledge of the world (Ibid.: 4 - 5). The social environment around the interlocutors become important in setting the stage for producing knowledge meaning, that in relation to our fieldwork is relevant to consider. Do they work and interact in an NGO with internationals? Have our interlocutors been abroad to study or for work reasons? Do the interlocutors have friends or families in other parts of the world, or are they all resident in Palestine? These questions are relevant to ask when conduction data, as these factors might influence the outcome of the data.

Turning towards Laclau and Mouffe’s discourse theory, Marianne Winther Jørgensen and Louise Phillips (1999, 2002) combine the theory with the Foucauldian approach, as they elaborate on how discourses are connected to the relationship between power and knowledge. Discourses are aligned with the Foucauldian view on power, hence it does not belong to certain individuals or institutions with certain interest but is rather spread throughout different social practices. In the Foucauldian approach, power is implicit in everyday social practices. Not in the sense that there is a dominating agent subjugating power upon others, but that it is hidden, decentralised and developed from below. Power is what constitutes a discourse, knowledge and subjectivity. Determining how the knowledge of the world is seen, depends on how power and knowledge creates the social world. In the Foucauldian approach, the linkage between power and knowledge comes down to a relative *truth*. No such thing as an objective *truth* exists and *truth* is being represented relatively by different discourses (Jørgensen & Philips, 1999: 22 - 23). Building upon this notion of power, knowledge and *truth*, Laclau and Mouffe follow the Foucauldian approach when introducing discourse theory (Ibid.: 22 - 23). Conducting research about the nexus of power and knowledge, post-structuralism claims that all human beings and traditions are part of the discursive system; “*there is no neutral or objective vantage point from which to view or understand the discourse from outside*” (Betts, 2009: 35). Consequently, our own position as researchers are influencing the outcome of research findings, as will be elaborated in ‘Methodological Considerations’.

A remark on social constructionism puts forth a reflection of our own role as researchers. The implication of utilising the social constructionist tradition requires a critical approach towards



“*taken-for-granted knowledge*”. We as researchers, focus on the historical and cultural specificity of knowledge and the relationship between such knowledge and its implications of power and social action. Such considerations are of great significance as it provided us with important insights. As described in the ‘Interview Guide’, we chose to work with a semi structured interview form, allowing the interlocutors to elaborate and extend our pre-conditioned themes. The poststructuralist theory and method assume the relativity of all *truth* to a specific discourse, time and actor that represents it, and therefore we must consider and reflect upon our own perception in time and history, our bias and prior theoretical assumptions.

To overcome the possible issues that can be related to our role as researchers, have led us to be inspired by the phenomenological method when conducting fieldwork. A short remark upon the phenomenological approach is, that we have sought to understand the interlocutor’s own experiences and understandings of the phenomenon of prevailing discourses within the NGO sector in Palestine. We examine the interlocutor’s *truth* and thereby the subjective premise. In the phenomenological approach, we sought to gain the subjective experience and knowledge and we thereby acknowledge, that our analytical findings are not the dominant ones or the *truth*, but certain representations of the social world (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2009: 44 - 45).

Acknowledging social constructionism does not come without challenges. Conducting research through the eyes of social constructionism may lead to the question of ‘What can we then say about anything if everything is relative?’ To comprehend this question, the thesis recognises the discourses that dominates the international society, which we through the discourse analysis will outline, as a relative *truth*. However, the reality that these discourses constitute for our interlocutors is not seen as a relative *truth*, but as a *truth* that we acknowledge. The reason for that is, we as researchers do not wish to reject or refuse the reality that our interlocutors introduced us to. Furthermore, we were able to draw several similarities throughout the interviews, which confirms that even though realities are subjective, there exist comparable narratives in the Palestinian context.

Methodological Discursive Approach

In the following section we will introduce the key tools from Laclau and Mouffe's discourse theory that will be used in our discourse analysis. As described, the theory stems from a poststructuralist



tradition and it is therefore based on the perception that discourses are constructing the social world and that this construction is not irreversible but can be challenged by other discourses which is conceptualised as a *discursive battle* (Jørgensen & Phillips, 1999: 15). When examining the prevailing discourses within the NGO sector in Palestine, the battle can shortly be described between a local and an international agenda. For CBOs, we assume a local agenda consists of knowledge of local needs and high degree of participation of the Palestinian civil society. Ideologies, that stem from what we know as an international agenda, merely includes global and Western assumptions on how to build a strong civil society e.g. democracy and women empowerment. These different agendas risk clashing, which exemplifies a discursive battle.

In the poststructuralist tradition, language is not seen as a reflection of the reality “out there”, but it is structured through different discourses and the meaning changes according to these different discourses. How organisations define and characterise their own identity reveals much more than just aim, mission and vision, due to the underlying discourses influencing such perceptions. The theoretical key assumption is, that there is a constant battle about being the hegemon, ranging between different discourses within the social sphere. In relation to Laclau and Mouffe's discourse theory, any discourse is constituted of *signs*, and the purpose and goal of the discourse is to determine the meaning of the *sign* in relation to other *signs* (Ibid.: 21, 37 - 38). This determination of the meaning of a given *sign* is always contestable, which entails a constant fluidity in discourses, where different discourses battle over a given meaning to the *signs*, according to a specific discourse and understanding. When there is an establishment of what might seem like an objective *truth*, instead of something in conflict, it is an indication of *hegemony*. *Hegemony* illustrates how a specific discourse becomes the dominant one (Ibid.: 48 - 54). The theory assumes that one discourse tends to dominate, even though it is far more complex to identify the *hegemon* discourse, due to changing underlying ideologies and different power structures and impact from surrounding environments. When determining the meaning of the *signs*, it can establish what Laclau and Mouffe conceptualise as *chains of equivalence*, which is a chain of *signs* that relate to each other in meaning, and also to the *nodal point* of the discourse. The *nodal point* is a privileged *sign* that the discourse is organised around. The *nodal point* differentiates itself from other *signs* in how it is a central signifier for the discourse. Further, it does not have meaning in itself but is given meaning through the *chain of equivalence* of *signs*. This process gives the *nodal point* meaning in accordance to the given discourse (Ibid.: 62 - 63). Thereby, the process of examining the



complexity of locating the *hegemonic* discourse and where these stems from, become far more convenient with the use of *signs*. Posing an example, the dominating discourse could be ‘development’ in relation to NGOs programmes in Palestine targeting the Palestinian civil society. The *nodal point* could then be ‘INGO’ and the *chain of equivalence* would then include *signs*, describing and giving meaning to the *nodal point*, with concepts as ‘human rights’, ‘democracy promotion’ and ‘women and youth empowerment’ (Ibid.: 38, 62 - 63).

In the case of *discursive battles*, the central concept is *floating signifiers* that describe the *signs* that different discourses are trying to give meaning to (Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002: 28). These *signifiers* are then the battleground on which the *discursive battle* takes places. These battles illustrate *antagonisms*, which are the discourse theory's concept of conflict, where two or more discourses are trying to establish the meaning of the *floating signifiers*, in order for it to be the hegemonic understanding (Jørgensen & Phillips, 1999: 39, 60). To contextualise, the *discursive battle* illustrates how different discourses want to dominate the understanding of the *signs* ‘civil society’ or ‘NGOs’. Hence, an opposing *chain of equivalence* to NGOs in a civil society discourse could be ‘participatory approach’, ‘local needs’ and ‘civil engagement’ as presented by CBOs in order to articulate a different understanding and also response.

Analysis of the Prevailing Discourses within the NGO Sector in Palestine

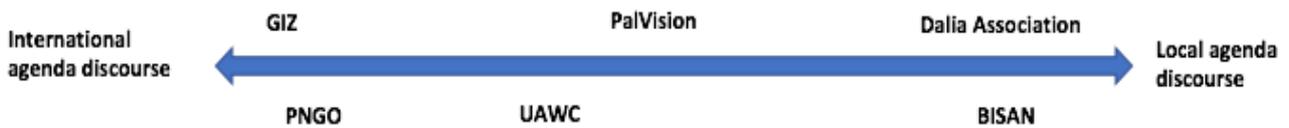
With the use of Laclau and Mouffe’s analytical tools of *nodal point*, *signs*, *floating signifiers*, *chain of equivalence*, *antagonisms* and *discursive battle*, the analysis will locate the dominating discourses that are prevailing within the NGO sector in Palestine. The selected organisations will be presented below followed by the discourse analysis that will locate the *nodal point*, *signs* and *chain of equivalence* for the selected INGO, NGOs and CBOs, which will enable us to identify if there exist a *discursive battle*, and whether there is a dominating discourse.

Identities of Organisations

As mentioned, our empirical data for the discourse analysis have been chosen from a set of different criterias. The section aims to give a brief overview on how the organisations describe their aim, mission and vision through their official websites, documents and annual reports. Worth noticing is



that some organisations can have elements of both the local and international agenda. Therefore, it will give a more accurate illustration when placing the organisations on a scale, where some organisations are more oriented towards either the local or international discourse, which we have tried to illustrate in the figure below and as will be further elaborated in the analysis.



Dalia Association and BISAN both represent CBOs. First of all, Dalia Association is working on a grass-root level, secondly all members of the association have Palestinian background, and thirdly the association have a very strong attitude regarding the Palestinian civil society suffering from dependency of international aid (Dalia Association, 2011). Therefore, Dalia Association promotes advocacy for social change, independency, political movements and resistance. In line with Dalia Association, BISAN describes how they contribute with a “bottom-up” produced knowledge, aiming to present the interest and needs of the Palestinian civil society, and to challenge the perception from the international society towards Middle Eastern civil societies. Furthermore, BISAN wishes to combat organisations that seem to interpret the political context in Palestine as “post-conflict” settings. They argue for a need to address the conflict by providing research and advocacy for Palestinian voices (BISAN, n.d.). The descriptions on BISAN and Dalia Association identities both suggest a critical stance towards international funding.

PalVision officially presents themselves an actor representing Palestinian youth with the aim of supporting leaderships and preserving a national collective identity within the framework of human rights, women empowerment and advocating for a democratic future for the Palestinian civil society (PalVision, 2016, 2018). PalVision were founded by a group of Palestinian youth, and today Palestinian employees run the organisation exclusively. PalVision’s approach is based on a strong connection with local communities and a deep understanding of the reality and needs of the youth



(PalVision, 2016: 2). Ranking from a scale between being influenced by either the local agenda or the international agenda becomes unclear when describing PalVision's identity, which will be further elaborated in the discourse analysis.

GIZ is a non-profit company owned by the German Government and therefore we will characterise GIZ as an INGO, even though they do not identify as a non-governmental organisation, according to them. GIZ works within four areas in Palestine; (1) Water and Sanitation, (2) Economic Reform, (3) Employment and the Labour Market and (4) Institution Building and Civil Society and Civil Peace Service (GIZ, n.d. b). GIZ officially describe their main ability as providing and developing solutions for partners and governments. In relation to GIZ's Palestinian programmes, they describe; *"the targeted combination of international expertise and national know-how benefits ministries, private and public institutions and civil society organisations."* (Ibid.). GIZ consider themselves as a global actor with the capacity to advice policy-makers, in regards to training of state officials and to monitor or advice development processes on different political levels (Ibid.: a). Compared to the other organisations that we have chosen, GIZ is the only non-profit company, and they have a distinct relation to the German Government; *"as a federally owned enterprise, we are guided by the principles of our social order, act in the interests of Germany and, first and foremost, support the development policy of the German Government."* (Ibid.: a).

PNGO is a coordination body for the NGO sector in Palestine. At present PNGO boasts 135 NGOs in the West Bank and Gaza. They work on a national level and monitors organisational processes. PNGO aims to influence decision-makers to ensure, that all legal aspects and policies are directed towards creating a lawful environment that response to the development needs of the Palestinians, and the creation of sustainable human development policies (PNGO, 2015). PNGO's overall goal is to reinforce the role played by NGOs through contributing to the development and empowerment of civil society within an independent democratic Palestinian state, based on the principles of democracy, social justice, and respect for human rights.

UAWC has developed from a volunteer-based organisation to a big NGO with 114 employees in the West Bank and Gaza. The main work of UAWC is to provide services to Palestinian farmers and empower them and their families. In doing so, they vision a resilient Palestinian farmer, that will have better chances to stay on his/her land; *"a resilient Palestinian farmer on his/her land*



empowered through social justice; struggling effectively for his/her national and democratic rights within a free and food secured Palestinian society.” Like PalVision, UAWC has had a vast organisational transformation, namely from a union to an NGO.

The Local Discourse

In order to locate the prevailing discourses within the selected organisations, the following section will identify the *nodal point*, *signs*, and the *chain of equivalence*. Hence, the analysis is concerned about how the organisations articulate their approaches in working with the civil society. Therefore, civil society will be the *nodal point* that our *signs* are organised around.

Dalia Association advocates for the civil society and work directly to promote the needs of Palestinians. By approaching the local needs and taking a critical stance towards the dependency of international aid, Dalia Association positions themselves as an organisation influenced by a local agenda.

“Dalia intends to fund hopeful, inspirational and sustainable civil society, including **community efforts** that just need a small grant to supplement their **local resources**. We will do this using **community-based decision-making** because we believe that communities **know their own needs** best, and they know how to address their needs in ways that are dignified and cost-effective (...) In the short-term, Dalia Association is trying to **ADVOCATE** for an international aid system that respects and responds to **local priorities** and increases the amount of **local control** over how resources are used. (...) to realize our rights as Palestinians to control our resources and sustain our own development for generations to come. Our mission is to **mobilize and properly utilize resources** necessary to empowerment a vibrant, **independent** and accountable civil society”

(Dalia Association, 2011a; 2011b; 2011c)

This shows, that Dalia Association is addressing a critical approach towards the international agenda, and it reveals how Dalia Association positions themselves as grass-roots oriented. Dalia



Association articulates the need to support the civil society's leadership, promote local ownership and mobilise the local resources. Dalia Association believes that the solution to strengthening the civil society is by strengthening the local priorities, local control and enhance the involvement of the Palestinians in the development process in order to meet the 'real needs' of the locals (Dalia Association, 2011). Further, Dalia Association states in their Annual Report from 2016, the importance of involving Palestinians in the development within the community, which indicates that they have a participatory approach in targeting the civil society that they state is necessary, in order to ensure the sustainability (Dalia Association, 2016: 1 - 2). The strong emphasis on "communities know their own needs best" reveals a certain ideology and an implicit criticism on how the international aid system do not encounter local needs in their work in Palestine or not in a "dignified" or "cost-effective way", which would be the case if the locals were in control, according to Dalia Association.

The *signs* that can be located on the basis of the data from Dalia Association are then 'community-based decision making', 'local control', 'local needs', 'participatory approach', 'independency from international donors', 'mobilize resources' and 'grass-roots orientated'.

The second CBO is BISAN that aims to support the Palestinian people and build a strong Palestinian civil society. BISAN describes how they seek to do so in the following quote:

"BISAN seeks to promote a **participatory** model of **development**, which is based on the principle of **social justice, democracy, equality, human rights** and respect of individual and collective **freedom**. To realize this the Center aims to analyze and **criticize development approaches** as currently applied by both national and international actors in the occupied Palestinian territories, which are often based on the misguided interpretation of the political context as "post-conflict" setting. (...) BISAN Center's key tool to elaborate an alternative model of development is **participatory action research**, a form of **inclusive bottom-up knowledge** production, in which research and social action reciprocal inform and guide one another. This **the voice of community actors**, and especially marginalized groups, is made heard and furthermore their steadfastness is increased by **building their capacities** to better represent their needs and their interests and equip them with strategic means to **secure their basic rights**."



(BISAN, n.d.)

The above quote illustrates that BISAN promotes social justice, democracy, human rights etc. these are often concepts that are related to the international agenda language. But they also take a critical stance towards both national and international actors concerning the development approaches, which are currently being applied. BISAN emphasises the importance in understanding the political context as not being “post-conflict” as the Israeli occupation is still well going. BISAN’s great concern about the local needs and attention to an inclusive participatory- and bottom-up approach through their research and their advocacy work, also reveals what they might think the current development approaches are lacking, namely inclusiveness. They further pay attention to the local’s needs by focusing on capacity building of the locals, which equip them with the tools to secure their basic rights.

BISAN and Dalia Association seem to share the same attitude towards the international aid system, which are being reflected in their use of discourses. The *signs* that relates to the *nodal point* civil society in relation to BISAN are ‘participatory’, ‘bottom-up approach’, ‘local needs’, ‘advocacy’ and ‘capacity building’.

The third chosen organisation is PalVision. The organisation started as a grass-root organisation as described below:

“PalVision was created by a group of young Palestinians in 1998. It arose as a response to an urgent **need for Palestinian youth** to have an outlet through which to express themselves and their desire to build **a strong and healthy Palestinian society**. The aim was to provide opportunities for **young Palestinian leaders** to become **agents of positive, constructive change** within their communities; to give them **space, tools, and training** they need for their voices to be heard and taking into account. (...) PalVision implement **community-based programmes** that **build leadership skills, strengthen self-esteem, identity, and community spirit**, and provide positive channels for self-expression”.

(PalVision, 2016: 6)



This shows that PalVision focus on the local communities and their needs as well as capacity building through different trainings for youth that strengthen their identity, self-esteem and community spirit, all in order for the Palestinian youth to be able to advocate for themselves. Giving youth more power can according to PalVision lead to positive and constructive change, which in the end would constitute a strong and healthy Palestinian civil society. Furthermore, it also presumes that the Palestinian youth have an interest in becoming leaders and building a resilient civil society.

The *signs* that can be argued to be in relation to the *nodal point* civil society, from a CBO perspective, are ‘local needs’, ‘community-based programmes’ and ‘capacity building’. At the same time PalVision’s description of their aim and programmes also reveals a focus that seems to be influenced by the international agenda:

“PalVision aims to **empower** Palestinian youth through national awareness campaigns, leadership opportunities, and the establishment of national youth networks. The goal is to initiate youth-led **sustainable development**, social **equality**, and **economic viability** through volunteerism, social activism, **entrepreneurship**, lobbying and **advocacy**, both on a local and national level.”

(Ibid.: 2018, a)

PalVision officially describes their identity as being both grass-root oriented but at the same time they use phrases and words that indicates that they are influenced by the international agenda and also target international donors. Therefore, the *signs* that can be argued to be related to the international agenda are ‘empowerment’, ‘sustainable development’, ‘equality’, ‘economic viability’, ‘entrepreneurship’ and ‘advocacy’.

UAWC as mentioned, is also originally a grass-root based organisation that has developed and increased through the years. In line with PalVision, UAWC also positions themselves officially as being grass-root oriented, but at the same time they use a language and certain words that relates to the international agenda for instance when the organisation describes their mission and vision:

“UAWC effectively contributing towards **empowering** farmers and their families and enhancing their **resilience** on their land within a **developmental** public and **voluntary**



framework (...) A **resilient** Palestinian farmer on his/her land **empowered** through **social justice**; struggling effectively for his/her national and **democratic rights** within a free and food secured Palestinian society.”

(UAWC, n.d.: a, b)

The *signs* that are located are ‘empowerment’, ‘resilience’, ‘development’, ‘voluntary’ ‘social justice’ and ‘democratic rights’. It shows that they use words that can be related to both the local and international agenda, as they are concerned about the local farmer’s needs, but they use phrases that target the international donors, which UAWC is also partly funded by. In the case of UAWC’s organisational development, we argue that it illustrates the complexity of how the organisation perceives their own identities. Once, UAWC was constituted as a grass-rooted volunteer driven organisation that, due to the Israeli occupation of Palestinian land, caused the Palestinian farmers to be dependent on assistance. As this issue grew bigger and the need for assistance increased, the organisation slowly transformed into institutionalised settings with the support from a broad range of international donors (Ibid.: c).

The analysis of the local agenda demonstrates the complexity in studying how organisations position themselves officially. Such complexity underlines the fact that organisations include and exclude themselves within the international and the local agenda. It is therefore difficult to state, that the selected organisations are only influenced by one agenda and therefore can be characterised as either an INGO, NGO or CBO. But we still argue that, the located *signs* illustrate that there is a consistency within the *signs* that relates to the *nodal point* civil society within CBOs, namely ‘participatory’, ‘bottom up approach’, ‘independency from international funding’, ‘local ownership’, ‘voluntarism’, ‘local needs’, ‘advocacy’, ‘community-based programmes’ and ‘capacity building’. These *signs* constitute a *chain of equivalence* that outline what we will define as the local agenda discourse, as illustrated below:



The International Discourse

To illustrate the *signs* that constitute the international discourse, we will go through selected parts of the material from PNGO and GIZ, which are the selected organisations that represent an INGO and an NGO. The international agenda is important to locate in order to later examine the counter-discourses presented by our interlocutors, which will be analysed upon in the second part of the discourse analysis.

PNGO describes their mission and vision as following:



“PNGO is a coordination body for the NGO sector in Palestine with the purpose of strengthening the Palestinian civil society and contributing to the establishment of the Palestinian state based on the principles of **democracy**, **social justice**, **rule of law**, **tolerance** and respect of **human rights** through networking, **building up the capacity of NGOs**, developing information management center and mainstreaming of society concerns into public policies, plans and programs.”

(PNGO, 2015)

This illustrates *signs* as ‘democracy’, ‘social justice’, ‘human rights’ and ‘capacity building of NGOs’. Furthermore, this demonstrates, according to PNGO, that to be able to strengthening the Palestinian civil society, there is a need to build capacity of the NGOs. NGOs seem to be a great part of PNGO’s vision of a strong civil society. Focusing on ‘human rights’ and ‘democracy’ can be argued to reveal a more Western orientated ideology in how to build a strong civil society.

The other selected organisation is GIZ. Posing an example of how GIZ describes their programme in Palestine ‘Local Governance Reform Programme’:

“In accordance with the principles of **good governance**, the programme supports the partner authorities in **modernising** their administrations, introducing transparent financial management and **improving the quality** of their service provision. Elected local officials and employees of civil society organisations receive training that enables them to contribute to local policy planning and decision-making processes, and to carry out joint initiatives. In this way the programme supports **local reform processes**, strengthens the participation of citizens in the political process and promotes the **development of democratic structures.**”

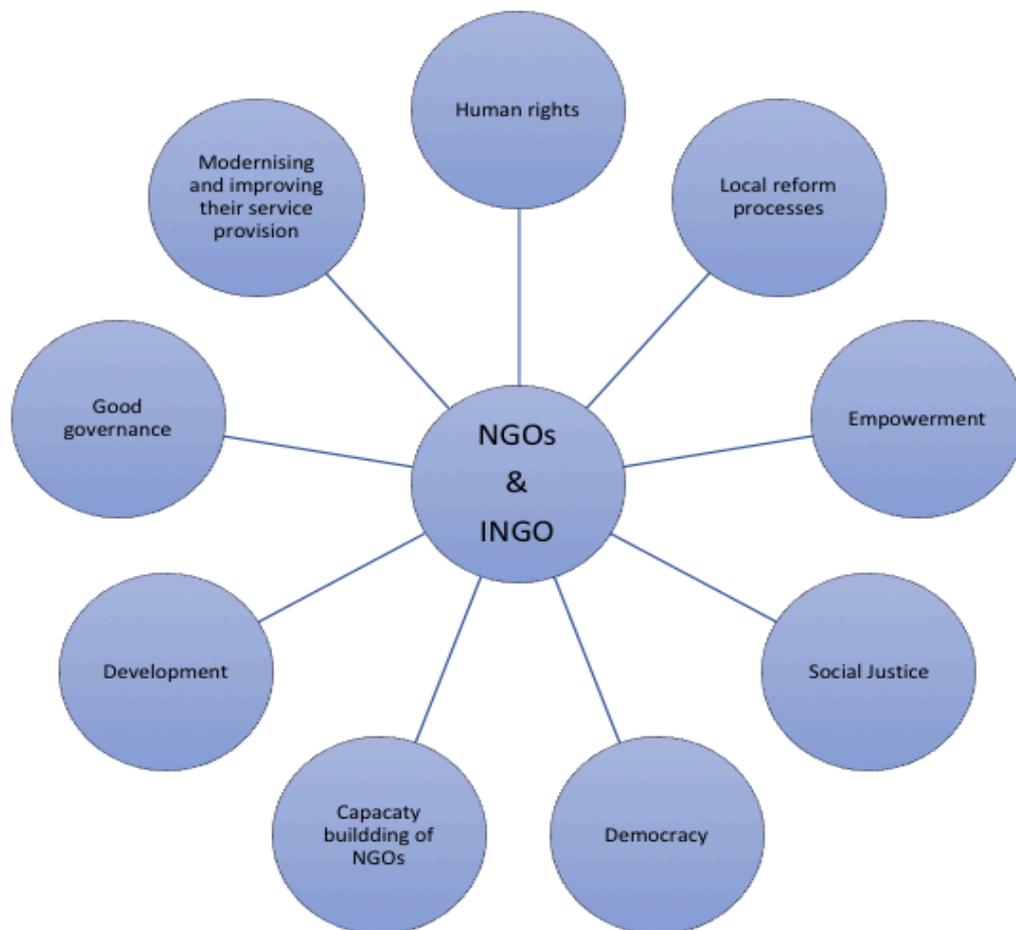
(GIZ, n.d.: c)

The located *signs* are ‘good governance’, ‘modernising’, ‘improving the quality’, ‘development of democratic structures’ and ‘local reform processes’. GIZ’s use of words like modernising, introducing and improving reflects an agenda that are working towards enhanced political institutions, according to the German government's requirements. This again reveals an international agenda characterised by Western ideologies. This might be a part of Dalia Association



and BISAN’s criticism because a foreign part determines what should be “modernised” and “improved” and not the locals. Furthermore, GIZ operates under the believe that; “*Germany is endeavouring to find a peaceful solution to the conflict and advocates a two-state solution*” (Ibid.: b). This reveals a Western ideology due to that many Western European countries believe in the two-state solution.

The *signs* do not give meaning in itself, but combining these in a *chain of equivalence*, reveals the discourse of organisations influenced by an international agenda, which illustrates how these organisations are imposed by Western ideologies. The figure below illustrates the findings from the discourse analysis, illustrating the common *signs* of PNGO and GIZ:





Discursive Battle

According to our findings from the above analysis of *signs* and *chain of equivalence*, it can be argued that there are two different discourses within the understanding of building a strong civil society, namely the local discourse and the international discourse. According to Laclau and Mouffe, there is a constant battle between discourses to be the *hegemon* discourse, which they characterise as the *discursive battle*. The located discourses are not completely different, as they contain some of the same concepts, as e.g. ‘capacity building’ and ‘development’, but the concrete approaches, might be slightly different. This could be argued by using BISAN as an example, which wishes to contribute with alternative development models, as they criticise the current development approaches. The *floating signifier* that describes the *signs* that the different discourses are trying to give meaning to, which in this context is civil society, becomes the battleground of which the *discursive battle* takes place. It can be argued that the above analysis reveals a conflict between the local and international discourse, which is referred to as *antagonisms* by Laclau and Mouffe.

The CBOs are very concerned about the local’s ownership and priorities and not at least the independence from international donors. Almost 90 percent of the organisations operating in Palestine are receiving funding from international donors, which influence the content and requirements of the organisations work, according to PNGO (Field notes, PNGO).

The findings of the first part of the discourse analysis reveal that it is uncertain to determine whether there exists a *hegemonic* discourse within our empirical data. But the discourse analysis reveals the potential different ideological beliefs that exist, and that might influence which discourses the selected organisations, ascribe or exclude themselves from. The rejection from some of the CBOs towards international donors could be argued to be a resistance to the great power international donors have achieved in Palestine. Furthermore, the discursive battle between organisations might not be the greatest issue, but rather the way to approach the civil society, and that could be an explanation on why some of the same *signs* are being articulated by the organisations.

These findings lead us to questioning whether the organisations operating in Palestine corresponds to the local needs of the civil society, and further whether there is a contradiction between how organisations officially present themselves, and if it corresponds to what our interlocutors are articulating in the interviews. It is interesting to examine how the existence of the large number of organisations influences the Palestinian civil society on different levels. These



questions will be analysed in the following analysis, which will be based on findings from our fieldwork in Ramallah.

Sub-conclusion

To sum up, it can be argued that the *signs* related to the *nodal point* civil society, are articulated differently by the selected organisations. The *signs* illustrate, that INGOs and NGOs programmes are more influenced by the international agenda and their Western ideologies of democracy, women and youth empowerment, and human rights. These concepts become the solution for building a strong civil society. In contrast, the *signs* that are defining the CBOs approach towards strengthening the civil society are characterised by a more participatory and bottom-up approach. They are more explicitly concerned about the local needs and to build capacity among the Palestinians in order to enable them to gain control. The capacity building in the context of NGOs and INGOs is different from the CBOs as they are more focused on building capacity within the organisations instead of building capacity among Palestinians.

Furthermore, the analysis reveals that some organisations can be difficult to position as either an NGO or CBO on the basis of their official statements. Hence, the analysis shows, that it is more suitable to consider the balance between the international and the local agenda on a scale, where some organisations are more oriented towards either the local or the international agenda, and thereby some organisations will have elements of both agendas when they present themselves officially. Nevertheless, the above analysis shows that there exists a *discursive battle* between the international agenda and the local agenda in how to approach and build a strong Palestinian civil society. It can be argued that many organisations are dependent on the financial support that they receive from international donors, and therefore they need to ascribe themselves into the international agenda discourse. Hence, many organisations co-opt a certain language that ‘suits’ the Western language for the purpose of greater funding opportunities. Not to proclaim that “women empowerment”, “human rights” or “democracy” are not important concepts but from a critical perspective, it speaks into a political framework that canalise Western ideologies, also referred to as international agenda. This will further we elaborated in the following section.



Analysis of the Presented Counter-discourses

As Laclau and Mouffe argue, a discourse; “*can never establish itself so firmly that it becomes the only discourse that structures the social*” (Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002). Hence, our second part of the discourse analysis aims to illuminate the counter-discourses towards the international agenda and the influx of NGOs, that was presented by our interlocutors during our fieldwork in Ramallah. This will enable us to reveal whether there exist any contradictions between the organisations official statements and statements posed by our interlocutors. The analysis is divided into three sections, namely ‘The International Donor’s Agenda Discourse’, ‘Inferior Status Discourse’ and ‘Individualisation Discourse’, which represent the three main counter-discourses.

The International Donor’s Agenda Discourse

” (...) Most international donors have their own agenda (...) another important issue is that most of the donors they fund fields or areas that the Palestinians don’t find as a priority (...) There is this perspective of neglecting a field and giving birth to another field.”

(Sahar Soufan, app. 1: 2)

This critique was presented in almost all the interviews we conducted. The critique contains three elements; firstly, that international donors have their own agenda. Secondly, there is a disconnection between local needs and international donor’s priorities, and thirdly, this agenda is favouring certain fields and target groups while neglecting others. Therefore, this critique outlines a discourse that is structured around the *nodal point* ‘The International Donor’s Agenda’ that relates and gives meaning to the *signs* ‘Political Agenda’, ‘Disconnection between Local Needs & Donors Priority’ and ‘Favoured & Neglected Fields’.

Political Agenda

The first *sign* ‘Political Agenda’ is presented by our interlocutors, who states that international funding comes with a certain political agenda; “*I mean of course international aid comes from a political agenda. It doesn’t come from humanitarianism you know. If there were no political interest, there would be no money coming in, especially to this country.*” (Aisha, Dalia Association, app. 4: 4). According to our interlocutors, many international donors have their own political



agenda that favour a certain side of the conflict and further, that many international donors tend to underestimate the political situation that the Palestinians find themselves within. Our interlocutors claim that the political agenda of the international donors becomes visible, through the restrictions international donors put forth, when organisations have to apply for funding:

“There are lots of international donors that restrict you from using lots of phrases like the word Zionism or occupation (...) for example the USAID you can never use the word occupation, instead you always have to use the Israeli state. (...) What I meant with restrictions is that it’s not only words and phrases that you use, but it’s also restrictions on activities. For example, if you want to go to Hebron, maybe you should focus more on that area rather than other areas because in that area you might find a lot of settlers and they don’t want to be in trouble with the Israelis (...) so, all the activities and reports has its own restrictions by the donors and the Israelis and by the PA.”

(Sahar Soufan, app. 1: 5)

What Sahar Soufan argues is that the restrictions play out on different levels, which influence the work of organisations. According to Rema Hammami and our interlocutors, these restrictions influence and restrict the autonomy of setting and managing programme priorities such as the content of the programme, the target group, and the location of the project (Hammami, 1995: 56). When Sahar Soufan states that international donors do not want “to be in trouble with the Israelis” and operate in areas with settlers, it can be argued to be an indication of neglecting the issues with illegal settlers in the West Bank (UN News, 2017). Furthermore, USAID state that organisations are not allowed to use the word ‘occupation’ but instead use the word ‘Israeli State’ which indicate, according Sahar Soufan, that they support a certain side of the conflict, and that the donors neglect the fact that Palestine is under occupation of the Israeli State:

“It’s really important to say that all the donors they have this perspective of talking to the Palestinians as they are out of the context. “They are not under occupation but they are just a poor nation and a third developed country”. They neglect the political side. I am not generalising but most of them (Int. donors) are. They are talking about the development but they neglect that Israel is controlling border, Israel is controlling the electricity and Israel is controlling all the roads and the movement of Palestinians.”



(Sahar Soufan, app. 1: 1)

What Sahar Soufan argues, is that many of the international donors compare the situation in Palestine with issues related to third developed countries, which neglect the political situation and the Israeli occupation of Palestine. Another critique is presented by Itiraf from BISAN, who criticise international donors as they according to him often interpret the political situation as a 'post-conflict' situation, which he argues is incorrect because the conflict is still well-going. According to Itiraf, this shows how the international donors do not acknowledge the current political situation. Furthermore, Sahar Soufan argues, that many donors require the organisations to write 'the Occupied Territories of Palestine' instead of 'Palestine'. According to her, this indicates that some donors do not acknowledge or recognise the occupation of Palestine as an independent state. What this can indicate is that Sahar Soufan might have the experience that international donors ascribe themselves into an Israeli discourse, where Palestine is not acknowledged as an independent state, which is a discourse that the Palestinians do not want to ascribe themselves into.

In the interview with Sahar Soufan, she especially raises a critique against USAID as they are one of the donors that put most restrictions on their funding and through that push forward a political agenda:

“Politically I think that the older generation they feel that they have been betrayed by the world in general. Betrayed by the UN, the EU and the U.S. in specific. For example, if you ask my uncle; ‘would you work in for USAID or in EU?’ He would say ‘no! I don’t trust them at all’. The U.S. has been digging into Palestine in all aspects. We know that there is this diplomatic between Israel and the U.S., so it creates this sense of ‘no I don’t want to be within a USAID organisation”

(Sahar Soufan, app. 1: 7)

As Sahar Soufan argues, there is a lack of trust to some of the big international donors like the USAID and EU among the older generation, as they feel the donors are bias in relation to the conflict. Sahar Soufan further explains how there is a general negative discourse and attitude towards USAID among many local NGOs and CBOs. This can be explained by the fact that the U.S. and Israel have strong military alliance in diplomatic, military and economic matters since the founding of Israel in 1948, based on common perceptions of shared democratic values and religious



affinities (Zanotti, 2013: 1-3). It can be argued that the reason for some of our interlocutor's critical attitude towards USAID, might be due to USAID is being representative for the U.S. and its political agenda. This is further argued by Katerina Dalacoura (2005) who states that the U.S. democracy promotion in the Middle East comes with a hidden agenda, for example to help Israeli control Palestinians, to control Iraqi oil fields, or generally to extend American hegemony (Dalacoura, 2005: 974). Additionally, she argues that the lack of credibility to the U.S., that Sahar Soufan mentions, is caused by the U.S. has allied itself with authoritarian regimes and supported Israel against the legitimate rights of the Palestinian issue, which is seen to be overly pro-Israel, according to Dalacoura (Dalacoura, 2005: 173). This was further demonstrated by Donald Trump's decision on moving the American embassy to Jerusalem, and thereby declares Jerusalem as the capital of Israel. This might explain why there exist a general critical discourse towards the U.S. and thereby USAID, which can explain why many organisations dissociate themselves from USAID funding opportunities.

USAID is further criticised by Itiraf from BISAN that explains how USAID constrains the target group of the programmes that they are funding; *"(...) for an example USAID, if you have been arrested by the Israelis, you cannot be a beneficial of their programmes. All Palestinians families have someone who have been jailed from the occupation"* (Itiraf, BISAN, app. 3: 3). According Amnesty International there are currently 6500 Palestinian prisoners, including at least 300 children, detained on security-related grounds in Israeli-run prisons and detention facilities, where at least 500 people are held without charge or trial, in administrative detention (Amnesty International, 2017). This shows how a certain part of the population is excluded from participating in USAID programmes. According to Itiraf this further neglect the fact that Israel imprisons people unlawfully in accordance to international law. Moreover, it is worth noticing that Itiraf's statements, and opinions correspond to the organisation's official statement and their critical attitude towards the international donors and the occupation, as presented on their official website.

The restrictions that limit the organisations autonomy are interesting to examine in order to reveal where they stem from. According to Michael Barnett (2005) the restrictions stem from a neoliberal development, which was followed by an institutionalised role of NGOs performing public service responsibilities (Barnett, 2005: 730). This means, that the need for international donors to hold NGOs accountable for their efficiency and effectiveness growth due to the increase of funding. Barnett claims that this development has caused bureaucratisation that introduced several



monitoring mechanisms towards NGOs that allowed; “states (...) to use direct and indirect means to constrain and guide the actions of humanitarian agencies in ways that agencies believe potentially violate their principles.” (Barnett, 2005: 731). A possible cause of bureaucratisation would then be, that organisations relying on international funding become vulnerable and exposed to external control through restrictions, which is what our interlocutors argue and criticise that they experience. This external control is what especially Dalia Association and BISAN are trying to avoid as they do not want to be in a “conditional relationship” as Itiraf states it, and therefore take a critical stance towards international donors (Itiraf, BISAN, app. 3: 2). According to Barnett the change from relief work to a more development orientated approach, has caused that many organisations and international donors in a higher degree work in close relation with states, and thus entering the world politics (Barnett, 2005: 723 - 724). This can be one explanation why aid and international funding has become more politicised as argued by our interlocutors.

What this counter-discourse further shows is that both the international donors and the local organisations represent different political agendas. Both BISAN and Dalia Association are two organisations that are highly critical towards international donors, which are both represented in our interviews, as well as their official websites and documents. Due to their critical stance towards international donors, they present a counter-discourse that is critical towards the international donor’s political agenda, as it contradicts with their own local agenda. This illustrates the *discursive battle* between the international and the local agenda.

Disconnection between Local Needs & Donor Priorities

The second *sign*, which is the ‘Disconnection between Local Needs & Donor Priorities’, is according to our interlocutors caused by the restrictions on target groups, locations and the content of the projects. These restrictions do not allow Palestinians to define and demand their own projects, according to our interlocutors. Aisha from Dalia Association, states that it is difficult to fundraise for ‘bottom-up’ projects, where Palestinians from the local community define their concerns and on the basis of that, form a project. She further elaborates on this matter:

“That’s the problem with many of these donors, they don’t understand that it is a process that you are paying for and not the actual project. The project for us is not even that important. For us it is really changing the way we think and shifting paradigm and making



communities more active (...) The donors are looking at that thing (project) instead of looking at the whole process, which is the key for us.”

(Aisha, Dalia Association, app. 4: 4)

When Aisha states “they don’t understand” it illustrates an ‘us’ and ‘them’ perspective where she points out, that the CBOs and the Palestinians working in local organisations, are the ones who knows the local needs best and not the international donors. This again indicates a power battle between the international donors and the local organisations, where the local organisations are trying to combat the ‘top-down’ approach, which is imposed by many international donors. The lack of attention to the process, due to the attention of the end result as well as restrictions from donors, can according to Walid Salim cause this disconnection between NGO’s projects and the actual needs, which put forth a criticism of unsustainable projects (Salim, 2012: 4). This is further criticised by James Petras, who states that critical authors characterise organisations with multi-billion dollar budgets and bureaucratic set ups, as transnational corporatism, rather than actual member of the civil society itself (Petras, 1999: 429). He further criticises the funding procedure as a reason for disconnection between local needs and donor priorities:

“Their programs are not accountable to local people but to overseas donors who "review" and "oversee" the performance of the NGOs according to their criteria and interests. The NGO officials are self-appointed and one of their key tasks is designing proposals that will secure funding. In many cases this requires that NGO leaders find out the issues that most interest the Western funding elites and shaping proposals accordingly.”

(Petras, 2007: 433)

This way of applying for funding where NGOs need to ascribe themselves into Western interests to increase their funding opportunities, indicates a political agenda, as the funding proposals are designed to meet the requirement of the “Western funding elites”, rather than meeting the local needs. It is argued, that canalising political priorities through imposed restrictions, can question the term ‘non-governmental’. Furthermore, due to the restrictions from the international donors, that can cause disconnection between local needs and donor priorities, is further argued to question the sustainability of the projects which is criticised by Islah Jad, who states:



“(…) so, when I saw the issues related to gender and justice transforming itself into projects, that was so scary for me, because it tells me that we will never achieve the goal. Why? because once you don’t have funding or money to keep running your project you will not defend your course. (…) you have what you call a target group and a target group is not a constituency. You don’t build linkage with the target groups. The target groups end with the end of the activity you provide, whether it is training, services etc.”

(Islah Jad, app. 2: 1)

According to her, the social movements are nowadays created by NGOs through projects with a certain timeframe, which is problematic as the social movement will end, when the project and the funding ends. She thereby argues, that social movements have been replaced by NGO’s projects, which challenge the persistency of social movements, as the goal and the cause that you defend is depended on funding and the priorities from the international donors, instead of the Palestinians own priorities (Jad, 2007: 627). By letting NGOs and donor priorities define social movements, leave no ownership for the civil society, as they are prevented from defining their own goal and causes that they want to fight for. According to Islah Jad, social movements need to be defined by the civil society in order to be successful and sustainable, which is not the case nowadays. The general issue that is presented in this critique is the lack of local ownership to define their own issues, goals or causes instead of being subjected to the international donor’s priorities, which creates this disconnection between local needs and donor priorities. Islah Jad thereby ascribe herself into the discourse that NGOs are the reason for a more passive civil society, which will be further elaborated in the analysis section ‘Individualisation Discourse’.

Moreover, during our interview with Hans from GIZ, he expressed that GIZ, like Denmark, also supports a two-state solution. This further corresponds to GIZ’s official website, where they state; *“Germany is endeavouring to find a peaceful solution to the conflict and advocates a two-state solution”* (GIZ, n.d.: b). It became evident during our fieldwork that the majority of Palestinians that we were in contact with, did not believe in a two-state solution. We therefore witnessed conflicting opinions about how to solve the on-going occupation. GIZ’s opinion indicates a political stance regarding the current political conflict, which clashes with the beliefs of Palestinians. It can therefore be argued, that this illustration is another way that the INGOs work from a different starting point, then the CBOs, and therefore do not meet the beliefs or needs of the Palestinians.



Favoured & Neglected Fields

The third *sign* that are related to the *nodal point* ‘The Agenda of International Donors’ is ‘Favoured & Neglected Fields’, which raise the critique that international donors support certain fields and target groups while neglecting others, as explained by Minas from PalVision:

“So, the donors they have their own agenda and they have their own priorities that they want to focus on. (...) We see the priorities of donors is shifting, so for example for the last 3 years in Jerusalem there was no focus on economic opportunities or economic empowerment for youth. (...) So, there was a certain focus in the field, so it was really hard to fundraise for these types of projects before, but now it is easier because the focused has changed. (...) The identity programme is more difficult to fundraise for, because sometimes donors don’t really like to focus on Palestinian identity programmes. So, for example, we have Palestinians from the West Bank, Jerusalem, Gaza and Israel, so if we want to bring these Palestinians, to have collective Palestinian identity, the majority of donors don’t approve, because they don’t consider Palestinians from Israel as Palestinians. They (the donors) tell you what your target group is and this is where you have to work.”

(Minas, PalVision, app. 6: 4)

What it indicates is that the international donors use a ‘top-down’ approach to influence the work of the organisations by defining the target group and the location of the project. What Minas explains is that the field of youth used to be difficult to fundraise for, as there was more focus on women’s empowerment and children at that time. This shows how international donors favour some target groups while neglecting others from participating in certain programmes, which according to our interlocutors exclude certain part of the civil society. The political agenda becomes evident when donors do not want to give funding to Palestinians living in Israel or to projects that support the Palestinian collective identity. According to our interlocutors this neglect the Palestinian identity in favour of projects that promote Western ideologies.

A report made by Ayat Hamdan, in collaboration with BISAN, shows that some fields are more prioritised by the international donors than others. It is argued in the report, that the percentage of aid given to social services is declining in favour of supporting the fields of democracy and peace, which indicates a political agenda (Hamdan, 2011: 44 - 45). The report shows, that NGOs working



within the field of agriculture development, water, environment, vocational training and fields similar to this, constitute 12 percent of all NGOs and receives 21 percent of the total amount of aid. NGOs that work in the field of human rights or democracy promotion and good governance also constitute 12 percent of all NGOs but receive 30 percent of foreign aid. In contrast, those working in the field of social services, which constitute more than 36 percent of all the NGOs, only receive 25 percent of the total aid. According to Allam Jarrar, it is believed that the share of the NGO sector in service provision covers over 60 percent of all health-care services, 80 percent of all rehabilitation services and almost 100 percent of all preschool educations (Jarrar, 2005: 1). The field of social services therefore constitute a very important role in the Palestinian society in order to meet the needs of the Palestinians. Even though, the field of social service might constitute the biggest percentage of all NGOs, the field of democracy promotion and human rights have higher priorities among the international donors, which are criticised by our interlocutors. Additionally, the priorities of democracy, human rights and good governance exemplifies how the international donors are trying to promote Western ideologies in Palestine through certain programmes. Ubai from UAWC is further criticising the unequal share of the international aid. He argues that there should be a change in priorities both from the donors but also the budget priorities from the PNA. They should invest at least 60 percent of its total budget in the three most vital sectors, which according to him is, education, healthcare and agriculture, as these three sectors will make a positive change and create development in Palestine rather than the priorities of democracy and human rights.

Furthermore, Minas from PalVision, explained that certain projects that contain elements of religion can be difficult to fundraise for. The refusal of any contact with Islamist organisations is criticised by Sibille Merz, arguing that despite their democratic legitimacy is reflected in the international donors' conditions for funding, which can be argued to be the reason for the difficulties in funding for certain political and religious organisations and projects (Merz, 2012: 59 - 60). She further argues that it is contradictable that the U.S. to put Hamas on the terror list, which means that no Western donors will give them funding and then, at the same time, call a free election in which by definition emerge as legitimate and representative political movement (Ibid.: 59). Merz further argues:



“This not only excludes large segments of society as potential target groups or partner organisations, but also reflects the international agenda of refusal of support to Islamic or Islamist groups and parties – indeed, to anything related to Islam, no matter how deep its roots in society.”

(Ibid.: 60)

As the majority of the population in Palestine practice Islam, it can be argued that it is a rather big exclusion of a large segment of the society. Even though Hamas is categorised as a terror organisation by most Western countries, it can be argued that they still constitute a great part of the civil society, which is not acknowledged by the international donors. This confirms that the international donors have the power to decide who is excluded and included in the civil society.

Another explanation can be, that many organisations and donors are under the humanitarian mandate and therefore have to live up to the four humanitarian principles of humanity, neutrality, impartiality and independency. By not supporting religious organisations can thereby work against the principle of neutrality when operating in an area of conflict. By focusing on human rights and democracy can somehow be argued to be more universal and less political than supporting certain political parties and projects. But as Itiraf from BISAN states; “(...) *we have a non-political organisation, but everything you do in the world is connected to politics, everything!*” (Itiraf, BISAN, app. 3: 8). This statement indicates how difficult neutrality or impartiality can be as donors and organisations always, at some level, will represent a certain agenda, according to our interlocutors. As the donors have financial power, there will be some fields that are more prioritised than others depending on their agenda.

What is common for all the above-mentioned *signs*, is that the international donors have the financial power to exercise a certain political agenda, by defining and favouring the type of projects, target groups and locations of the project. What is interesting to examine, is how this selection of certain categories and target groups affect the civil society. This can be explained with the use of Richard Jenkins theory about social identity, where he explains how organisations contribute in dividing a civil society into different categories, where some are more privileged than others (Jenkins, 2014). According to Jenkins, defining an organisation’s members and non-members through criterias is the principle of exclusion and inclusion, which is the heart of the production and reproduction of hierarchy and stratification (Jenkins, 2014: 180, 173). This means



that when international donors define the organisation's target groups, they thereby contribute to a certain hierarchy in society, as the international donors are in the position of allocating resources, and thereby have the power to decide which target groups should be included and excluded (Ibid.: 190). For instance, when most international donors state that they do not support religious or certain political organisations, especially Islamic initiatives, it can be argued that they exclude an important part of the civil society. This type of exclusion is what Aldo Boitano argues as the monopoly paradigm, where exclusion stems from restrictions to goods and services for those other than the dominant group (Moras et.al. 2017: 235). According to our interlocutors, dominant target groups have been women and youth and projects that target human rights, democracy and good governance. These priorities are a result of the dominating discourses that are prevailing within the international donors, as analysed in the first discourse analysis. By dividing the population into certain categories, can according to Jenkins, be a way that humans are constituted as objects of governance and subjects of the state, which can explain how international donors become powerful in the context of Palestine with an absence of a state (Jenkins, 2014: 109). The power to favour some part of the society can thereby be argued to be a tool for international donors to promote a certain political agenda, which can be argued to create a fragmented civil society, as some are more privileged than others as will be further elaborated in the section 'Individualisation Discourse'.

Inferior Status Discourse

“This status of being inferior, like to feel that someone are superior and someone are inferior, has made the Palestinian society unable of designing its own national projects.” (Sahar Soufan, app. 1: 2). By this statement, Sahar Soufan presents another located counter-discourse 'Inferior Status'. The discourse is structured around the *nodal point* 'Inferior Status' and relates to the *signs* 'Submission' and 'Colonialism'. The dominating narrative amongst our interlocutors is, that historically they have been deprived from forming their own national projects, as according to them, the Palestinians themselves have never been given the power to determine what that should entail. This section will present the different historical events that according to our interlocutors have resulted in this narrative.

Palestine has suffered from colonial powers exacerbated by The Ottoman Empire, Britain, and latest Israel. The section will not further elaborate on the colonial history of Palestine that in short counts



the Ottoman Empire, which controlled Palestine from 1500 century until 1st World War (Deringil, 2003: 1 - 2). Afterwards Britain, Jordan, and Egypt have ruled Palestine and latest, in 1948, the state of Israel was established. From that time and ever since, Israel has led cumulative politics restricting Palestinians and despite the Palestinian resistance, Israel today control large areas of Palestine. The Palestinians argue by this act, that the colonial system was transferred to the new 'Zionist settler state' (Hamdan, 2011: 18 – 19). According to Itiraf from BISAN; "*Palestine is under colonialism til now and we are fighting to regain our rights, political, socio-economic and historical. (...) The Palestinian struggle of the colonialism and the Zionism at the same time*" (Itiraf, BISAN, app. 3: 1). Itiraf underlines that colonial events throughout the history and today's occupation by the Israeli state, has caused Palestinians to suffer from foreign powers in areas of domestic rights, politically, socio-economic and historically. This form of power can be described by three types of forces:

"First, the Zionist colonialization of the Palestinian space; which in turn is linked to the Western global capitalist imperialist project, of which it is tool in the Arab region. Second, the dominating, ideological groups inside Palestine with their relations and allegiances to the West. Third, the international system that works through the aid network provided to the Palestinians and the colonial entity."

(Deringil, 2003: 16 – 17)

It has been clear throughout our fieldwork that this is the Palestinian comprehension of the history of colonialism and today's post-colonial structures, which is shared by our interlocutors when asking about power structures between the Palestinian civil society and the international agenda, practised by NGOs. It is argued by our interlocutors, that the former unequal power relations caused by colonialism and the current Israeli occupation has brought post-colonial structures that Palestinians suffer from:

"(...) most of the donors they fund fields or areas that the Palestinians don't find as a priority (...) And there are lots of similar organisations and there is this perspective says that this thing of neglecting a field and giving birth to another field, it creates more like inferior status for Palestinians. So, they feel 'okay we feel that the American field is this, the U.S. feels that the priority is culture and youth empowerment and we think it's not, but



maybe it's right? And maybe they have money, so let's do it!' (...) we know that it is imposed towards this kind of aid or this specific field, so we can't do anything with it! But we keep receiving and accepting the aid."

(Sahar Soufan, app. 1: 2)

As Sahar Soufan describes it, INGOs are generating unequal relations between locals and foreigners, by setting priorities and projects in accordance with the international agenda, which has left the Palestinians to doubt their own capacity and knowledge. The quote explicitly comments on how the feeling of being 'inferior' is constructed within this process as well. Unequal power relations, that has been argued to be important in relation to the Palestinian 'inferior' status, has moreover been elaborated by Ubai from UAWC, when explaining his personal story of his family's livelihood:

"I come from a small village near Ramallah that's called Ein Eirek and to tell you the truth, it's a way of life that has been destroyed (...) But in general this peasant way of life was destroyed over the years and it was not destroyed through natural, let us say, or not natural through socioeconomic rise of capitalism and society, it was destroyed through occupation and colonialism."

(Ubai, UAWC, app. 5: 3)

What can be extracted from this quote is, that Ubai combines Palestinians 'inferior' status with post-colonial structures by arguing for a "destroyed" Palestinian livelihood, caused solely through the occupation and colonialism. In the Palestinian case, post-colonial structures have had huge influence on the daily life, e.g. by mentioning the destruction of Palestinian farming business. Though the quote is heavily based on Ubai's subjective story, the object is, that Palestinians today struggle to remain their own heritage apart from the international agenda. An illustration of such is that Israel Defense Forces have been accused of uprooting olive trees the past 40 years, which is seen as a method to deprive the Palestinians of their main livelihood. Olive trees are of symbolic, cultural and historic significance to Palestinians, and represent their 'rootedness' in the land, which emphasis the devastation of this deprivation (The Ecologist, 2015). This becomes another way to articulate the counter-discourse of how the Palestinians have been deprived of their heritage, due to the occupation and colonialism.



Aisha describes the “superior” power’s ability to interfere and change the subjecthood of Palestinians, by pointing out their “forgotten” capacity and resources that the Palestinian civil society contains:

“We forgot that we are not poor. We think we are poor but we are not poor! That’s why this whole Dukan activity, the second-hand shop, shows how much we have as Palestinians and how we can make something of what we have. So we are not poor. We have resources. (...) We have to remind people sometimes, because we forgot it through all of this aid and money coming in.”

(Aisha, Dalia Association, app. 4: 3)

According to Aisha, the lost Palestinian recognition that prevents the Palestinian people from realising their own capacity to define local needs, the ability to develop projects, and to condemn restrictions, posed by international donors, is another articulation of the *sign* ‘Submission’. In line with Aisha, Stephen Frosh argues that; “*colonial power is built on this capacity of the colonizer to remove the source of subjecthood from the colonized*” (Frosh, 2013: 148). What we argue then, according to our interlocutor’s statements, are that the removal of Palestinian subjecthood, become an element that enhance the counter-discourse.

The unequal power relations between Palestinians; that demands a degree of power e.g. in forming their own national projects, and the international donors; that through international funding position themselves as being the “superior” when defining local needs. Aisha has for years been combatting the ruling feeling, according to her, of who is considered ‘inferior’ and ‘superior’, by addressing USAID, publicly:

“USAID one time wrote an article saying how they embrace community philanthropy (...) community philanthropy means that you, USAID come and you have your billions and you put them on the table and the community, whatever country that you are in, and if you are in Palestine, the community says ‘ohhh there is five billion dollars, okay I’ll tell where WE should use them’, but they don’t work like that! So this is not community philanthropy in



the end of the day! Any aid that doesn't come in this way is not helpful, so why should we as Palestinians accept it?"

(Aisha, Dalia Association, app. 4: 9)

This quote illustrates the on-going power battle between international donors and local CBOs of how to develop programmes. Such statement reveals how Palestinian CBOs argues for the need to address and uphold, what the international donors define as 'community philanthropy'. Dalia Association aims to strike against 'submission' and seek to combat the feeling of 'inferior' by publishing an official article, written by Aisha herself. Dalia Association is heavily against the fact of developing a civil society which is exclusively build upon Western ideologies, as it speaks into the narrative of feeling 'inferior' due to external powers and not developed by the Palestinians themselves. According to the Foucauldian view on power, where power do not belong to individuals or institutions, it can be argued that our interlocutors almost contradict this notion, as they indeed feel submissive to the international power, which is exercised through institutions and individuals.

Whereas this section has analysed how Palestinians feel 'inferior' and 'submitted' to the international power, it is noticeable that our interlocutors also have expressed advantages in collaborating with international donors. For instance, UAWC argue for both advantages and disadvantages in collaborating with foreign countries; "*you can practice your beliefs inside the organisation. You will not be able to practice all of your beliefs but at least in the areas of the jobs that you are doing (...) in that specific area*" (Ubai, UAWC, app. 5: 5). Even though, Ubai from UAWC states a supportive attitude towards the possibilities that international donors can offer, the quote also illustrates how he can only practice his "beliefs" in accordance with their "specific area". Thereby, the possibility to address the national project, as Ubai wishes it to be, is weakened as restrictions from international donors constrains him from pursuing his "beliefs". In addition, we argue how UAWC confirms our finding regarding the complexity that some organisations have when ascribing into both Western and local ideologies, on how to develop a strong civil society.

The chain of equivalence is characterised by the *signs* 'submission' and 'colonialism'. The above section reveals how the Palestinians interlink the NGO sector with coercive power structures. The



presented counter-discourse characterise how the Palestinians continually feel ‘inferior’ and prevented from generating their own national projects.

Individualisation Discourse

“The system makes them become like that, we are not like that, we are not like that as Palestinians, we are not individualistic people, we are community people (...) this is the capitalist system, you don’t even know who your neighbour is, you don’t even care. It’s a system that made people like that, unfortunately (...) a part of our heritage as Palestinians is not that kind of individualism.”

(Aisha, Dalia Association, app. 4: 10)

Aisha from Dalia Association is drawing upon a dominating discourse among our interlocutors. The increasing flow of NGOs in the West Bank is a part of a neoliberal and capitalist project, which are being criticised throughout our empirical data. Aisha argues, that individualisation is a consequence of this neoliberal and capitalistic system that undermines what traditionally characterised Palestinians, namely community people. Throughout our fieldwork in Ramallah, the discourse that was articulated continuously was structured around the *nodal point* ‘Individualisation’, and related to the *signs* ‘Passiveness’, ‘Consumers’, and ‘Fragmented Identity’. The discourse constructs around the notion of memories, or longing for the past, before external involvement, which in this case constitutes international donors, influenced the Palestinian civil society. The central focus of individualisation claims, that the influx of NGOs has created a space for Palestinians to be passive, consumers and fragmented. This does not correlate with the idea of how the Palestinian civil society once was, and how it should be, and it thereby excludes Palestinians who believes that the current development within the civil society is positive. The following section will illuminate the three located *signs* ‘Passiveness’, ‘Consumers’, and ‘Fragmented Identity’ within different theoretical perspectives.

Passiveness

This section will present our interlocutor’s arguments about how the immense flow of international aid and NGOs have left Palestinians passive, due to three different issues in this regard; the non-existent political focus created by NGOs, a dependency syndrome that has followed due to aid, and



the sense of hopelessness and lack of freedom of speech because of the continues Israeli occupation and corruption within the PNA.

Political Apathy Among Generations

“On the one hand, they aim at transforming individuals’ frames of reference, their subjectivities, around the notions of enterprise, consumerism, individualism and freedom; on the other hand, they often result in increased economic dependency on international aid, declining voluntarism and political apathy.”

(Merz, 2012: 62)

Merz explains what the majority of our interlocutors perceived as one of the major issues related to NGOs in the West Bank. Itiraf from BISAN agrees with Merz’s observation, when we asked if NGOs had left Palestinians more passive:

“(…) Yes, they try and use and invest a lot of resources to make youth passive, to make them just individually thinking and achieving your interest, to be entrepreneur, to be yourself, don’t feel with others because they have their own problems. This machine fragmented the collective life and the collective sectors, and now a lot of them are individualised. A lot of investment to make the people passive made by the World Bank, USAID etc. leave all the political side, just think with your problems.”

(Itiraf, BISAN, app. 3: 8)

What the above-mentioned quote illustrates is, that there exists a clear ideological resistance towards the neoliberal idea about focusing on the individual and not the collective good of the society. The individualisation process implemented by the NGOs, according to Itiraf, has led to political apathy in this case amongst Palestinian youth. It can be argued that when you are born in a highly political context, a political responsibility follows. Before explaining how this political passiveness might influence the Palestinian civil society, the generational gap will be analysed.

We have chosen to incorporate a generational perspective because our interlocutors expressed the generational dynamics fairly often, as a way to explain differences in relation to attitudes, opinions, and actions, concerning the NGO sector in the West Bank. Karl Mannheim (1952), one of the founding fathers of generational dynamics, will be applied to illuminate how members of the same



age group will show similarities due to their so-called “fresh contact” or first experiences with a society (Mannheim, 1952: 290-291). He argues that; “*specific structural locations predispose individuals to experience historical events in a similar way*” (Kublitz, 2016: 70). Mannheim claims that generations are both social positions and social processes of becoming. The reason why this assumption about generations becomes important is due to the significance generations get. At one point, Mannheim argues that generations are social positions, which makes them a part of a specific social and historical structure. Hence generations cannot “run” from the structure they are born within. At another point, generations are social processes of becoming, which also constitutes that generations are a part of a specific structure, but as it is a process, it provides generations with the ability to approach a given topic differently, and therefore potentially facilitate a social change (Ibid.: Bohl, 2017: 64). Mannheim’s theory can assist explaining why it during the interviews became evident, that the attitude towards NGOs in Ramallah was influenced by generational differences. Furthermore, how the correct way to resist the occupation, was articulated differently according to which age group we were talking with. To understand where the individualisation discourse stems from, and why passiveness is articulated differently between generations, we must briefly present two historical events, namely the First Intifada (uprising) and the Oslo Accords.

The First Intifada began in December 1987 as a result of a military truck driving into a van with Palestinian workers and killed four of them. This event began a movement of mass strikes and demonstrations in Gaza and the West Bank. The intifada ended in 1993, and around 2000 Palestinians were killed during this period (Britannica, 2018). We will not go further into details about the historical circumstances of the First Intifada, but the important thing to understand is, that the First Intifada symbolises a tragic period among many Palestinians, while it simultaneously illustrates a time of hope due to the united fight among Palestinians. Anne Marie Baylouny describes the First Intifada as following:

“The intifada was truly a popular rebellion; it mobilized all segments of the population to protest and build alternative civil society organizations. The participation of women, children, and even the elderly was particular evident. A new, elaborate mobilizing infrastructure emerged (...) Tens of thousands of committees were formed to provide for society’s needs, from medical committees to education, food, and security committees.”

(Baylouny, 2010: 1)



Many of our interlocutors who lived during the First Intifada, supports Baylouny's description of a highly mobilised civil society. Islah Jad explains how the civil society has develop during the First Intifada and the time after the Oslo Accords:

“Civil society before the authority than after. Before you will see lot of grass root organisations providing all kinds of services to a lot of people. People were so organised. They used to start to recruit members in student unions in primary school even in elementary school, they used to go out and do demonstrations, so people were very politicised. In school, university, writers, teachers, each group of people used to be organised and well organised. That triggered lot of philanthropy work. Student used to be in summer camps, building fences, helping people in the rural areas, confronting settlement activity or settlers. They used to be very active, in making their lives better and taking the initiative to make their live better and to defend themselves against the occupation, so they feel so much empowered. After Oslo, the target started to be very limited.”

(Islah Jad, app. 2: 5)

Because of the ability to mobilise, the common fight to resist the occupation, that gathered all segments of the society together, seems to be understood as a successful resistance, based on Islah Jad's and Baylouny's description. This is a common narrative among the older generation of Palestinians, and young people as well, as the stories of how it once was have been passed on through generations. The First Intifada becomes a symbol of what Palestinians once were capable of doing if they organised themselves, a memory that seems very vivid in the older generation's minds. It can be argued, that the stories about the First Intifada becomes a way to challenge the supposedly individualisation process in Ramallah, by repeatedly arguing that Palestinians have been capable of showing solidarity amongst each other. What the narrative further includes is, that the ability to mobilise has later on been weakened severely due to the aftermath of the Oslo Accords.

The Oslo Accords was signed in September 1993, as the first attempt of a peace agreement between Palestine and Israel. Both sides of the agreement recognised a need for a Palestinian Authority to govern responsibilities in Gaza and the West Bank over a five-year period. This agreement signalled a hope and optimism among a large number of Palestinians, that now 25 years later, seem



to be vanished. As we mentioned in ‘Historical Overview’, a massive influx of NGOs started operating in the West Bank due to the new hopefully peaceful era that required many state building and civil society initiatives. Minas from PalVision elaborates on how the perception of the Oslo Accords and the PNA has changed over the last 20 years:

“(...) there was space for political participating and everything was new. Oslo was new, the PA as a transitional initiative, and there was a conscious among all Palestinians that the PA will represent us. So there was no problem. But today, after 20 years, no!”

(Minas, PalVision, app. 6: 9)

Minas is a young woman who grew up during a time that was influenced by a high presence of NGOs, and a PNA that supposedly did or still do not represent the Palestinian population.

The time during the First Intifada and after the signing of the Oslo Accords marks two very different periods in relation to the political landscape and the Palestinian civil society, according to our interlocutors and many scholars. This is important to take into consideration, as Mannheim explains that particular historical circumstances affect the emergence of new generations. The active and mobilised civil society during the First Intifada is a strong memory among the older generation, which conflicts with the emergence of NGOs, as it accordingly fragmented and pacified the Palestinian civil society. The correct way to fight the occupation then, is not to join the NGOs but actually resist them, as they become one of the reasons for Palestine’s immobilised, apolitical, and static state. Itiraf from BISAN, supports the argument that Palestine would be better off without the many NGOs, when we asked him what would happen if all the NGOs pulled out of the West Bank; *“this is better, I hope it will happen soon. To go back to talk collectively, to see what kind of problem we have. Just ourselves, we can solve our problem. So I hope they soon leave us, I hope.”* (Itiraf, BISAN, app. 3: 7).

The younger generation also express concerns about the major NGO sector in the West Bank, but with a different attitude than the older generation. This might be explained with Mannheim’s theory, as they grew up in a different time where the fragmentation among Palestinians became greater, and the corruption within the PNA grew. What might be perceived by the older generation as being passive, may be due to alternative ways of resisting the occupation or a sign of lack of



political representation among youth. Minas from PalVision explains the marginal focus they have on politics in their projects, as the youth do not wish to engage in politics:

“The reason why we don’t work on a political level is because the youth are not very concerned with the political level (...) whenever we talk about political engagement or political participation, they are like: yeah what does it mean? The youth didn’t see election since 2006. Our youth they don’t have no leadership, or being a part of political decision making processes. They don’t believe in it. So the concern is to focus on the economic situation. It becomes more evident for us as an organisation working with youth. But restoring that faith is another story... (...) If we wanna’ preserve the youth in our work, we can't get deep engaged in the political transformation.”

(Minas, PalVision, app. 6: 6)

Of course, PalVision cannot speak for the whole young generation of Palestinians - even though they had 17.331 beneficiaries in 2015 - but there seem to have been a shift from how engaged Palestinians are in politics, depending on which generation they belong to (PalVision, 2018: b). Additionally, Minas’ explanation illustrates a contradiction between what PalVision is expressing on their website, namely that PalVision is an organisation that are trying to promote strong leadership and a resilient civil society amongst youth, which do not correlate with the statement above, as we understand those concepts as highly political. When we talked to Sahar Soufan about how young people nowadays resist the occupation she said following:

“If you are a youth you want to get out of the fucking situation. That’s why most of Palestinian seeks to emigrate outside of the country.”

Is it a new form of resistance?

“Yes it’s a passive form. I totally say that out loud, it’s passive!”

(Sahar Soufan, app. 1: 9)

By commenting “I totally say that out loud,” reveal Sahar Soufan’s constantly conflicting opinions about resistance. In the Palestinian context emigration becomes a passive notion, but according to



Sahar Soufan it can still be understood as a form of resistance. Even though she is aware of emigration among the older generation, might even be perceived as national betrayal as such an action moves away from the collective and national cause and more towards an individualistic approach to life. Sahar Soufan further explains why she does not want to engage in politics:

“Whatever you hear, you say ‘this is not possible’. Even on the political parties. I remember in the university they will start to recruit you. The Hamas etc. And I was like ‘no I can’t, I can’t be supporting any of you or be a member of any of these parties because I don’t trust you. I don’t trust that after 60 years you are talking, talking and talking. But you are not doing anything real’. So it makes sense that I don’t want to be politically active. And the same goes with like trying to resist and the peaceful resistance and etc. Why do I have to try?”

(Sahar Soufan, app.1: 10)

The sense of hopelessness about the situation in the West Bank has marked many of the young Palestinians. According to Sahar Soufan, change is no longer a part of the equation, so why even bother? This is maybe one of the reasons why the younger population do not seem as critical towards NGOs, as they provide them with a sense of stability and an alternative way to resist the occupation. Sahar Soufan explains her ambivalent feelings about international aid and NGOs:

“(…) it has made a sense of stability maybe? Or maybe a secure feeling for Palestinians that at least we have international aid, at least we know that we can trust their budget (...) I know that I would never work in a PA organisation. I would never work for a Palestinian governmental organisation. But I will work for international NGOs because I know that I’m most secured in terms of financially and socially. But If I work in a governmental institution, I know that I’m not secured at all. It’s all depend on whether the PA have money to pay or don’t have money to pay. Another thing is that I’m really sad to say that, but we don’t trust to work in local Palestinian organisations but we trust to work in international NGOs. It is something selfish and individuality and not collectiveness. But if you think about living here in 25 years under occupation, under lack of trust from my side to the PA, I just feel like I want to be stable, stable financially and just have my own life, and focus on my own, because I’m sick of all this thing of the politics, occupation, PA



corruption and all that. Yes I say like I criticise international NGOs, but I still work in international NGOs because I know that they are the one who will provide you with a secure feeling or a feeling of stability.”

(Sahar Soufan, app. 1: 7)

What the above quote illustrates is, that Sahar Soufan is aware of the narrative about NGOs making Palestinians more individualised, she even agrees with this narrative. She speaks from an individualised perspective when arguing for her own opportunities such as financial security and stability. Another reason that can explain how the younger generation seeks these opportunities as Sahar Soufan describes, is the growing professionalisation in NGOs; *“I don’t feel that I develop my capacity if I work with local Palestinian organisation. But I feel that I will develop my capacity in international NGOs because they have developed capacity and expertise and all that”* (Sahar Soufan, app.1: 7). Our findings in the first part of the analysis, revealed that NGOs and INGOs are far more concerned about capacity building within the organisations, whereas CBOs instead focus on capacity building within the community, Sahar Soufan’s statement corresponds with this finding. According to Sahar Soufan, she reasons that professionalism motivates her to work in an INGO. As noticed by Belloni, humanitarian work has *“adopted explicit business-like professional practices”* which can support the notion, that professionalised organisations might have a greater ability to attract especially well-educated Palestinians, compared to organisations with less business-like setups (Belloni, 2007: 769).

Merz is elaborating on what the older generation possibly also perceives as an unfortunate development on this argument:

“(…) The NGO sector constantly reproducing itself and penetrating every possible space, tangible or intangible, in the West Bank today, in order to neutralise and depoliticise behaviour, aspirations and self-conceptions. As Leone also discovered, students increasingly abandon their studies in humanities, Arabic or Palestinian history, and prioritise technical degrees in NGO management and English translation.”

(Merz, 2012: 63)



Studies in humanities, Arabic or Palestinian history are a way to preserve the national entity. Shifting from these studies to NGO management is seen as problematic, according to the older generation. Islah Jad, is explaining what she witnessed at her work at Birzeit University:

“NGOs now it is the dream of any university graduate, because this is almost the only way. If you graduate from business faculties you seek to work in banks, financial institution etc. but for graduate the lucky one they find a work in one of the NGO, that’s why you see lots of new graduate that conduct their internship in NGOs with the hope of getting a position afterwards. Lots of human rights organisation etc.”

(Islah Jad, app. 2: 4)

Additionally, Itiraf from BISAN explains, by articulating the individualisation discourse, the issues related to the younger generations big commitment to the NGO sector; *“the last 20 years the intervention from the international community has affected us and our youth, like how to deal with the life and to deal with the occupation.”* (Itiraf, BISAN, app. 3: 5). In continuation of Itiraf’s statement about how the international community has affected the approach to deal with the occupation, we will briefly stress the division between the older and younger generation’s thoughts about the Israeli occupation. It became rather clear that the older generation still believe that the occupation one day will end, while the younger generation do not share the same conviction. Minas from PalVision explained the difference; *“the difference? There was more collective identity. I think before they thought that the occupation would end. Yeah... Today we know it’s not gonna’ end. Yes. That’s the major difference. Now we know the occupation is sustainable.”* (Minas, PalVision, app. 6: 10). Aisha from Dalia Association had a far more optimistic attitude about this matter; *“the occupation will go, there is no occupation that last forever (...)”*. (Aisha, Dalia Association, app. 4: 5). This attitude is shared by Sahar Soufan’s father; *“my father, he will tell you ‘no no no, the occupation will end’ and whenever I talk to him about this, I feel so fucking annoyed. He will say no no no it will end. But I don’t see it will end!”* (Sahar Soufan, app. 1: 10). How our interlocutors perceive what will happen in terms of the occupation might also reflect their opinions about the NGO sector. If the older generation still believe that the occupation will end, it is not through the work of NGOs, according to them. While the younger generation do not share this believe, and therefore do not mind to engage in the NGO sector, because the hope of ending the occupation does not exist.



Conflicting opinions between the older and the younger generations of Palestinians are indeed present among our interlocutors. The young generation might also be critical towards the excessive international aid flow in Palestine, but NGOs do not seem to be the biggest scapegoat as they also provide opportunities for them. The older generation seems to have difficulty in perceiving the NGOs as beneficial, as they have become the reason for dividing the strong mobilised civil society that once existed during the First Intifada.

The Dependency Syndrome

“Before the aid system the Palestinians were very active. Civil society was active and mobilising local resources nobody waited for anybody outside to do anything for them, they just did it.” (Aisha, Dalia Association, app. 4: 2). Aisha from Dalia Association is expressing a ruling concern among our interlocutors. The international aid system has made the Palestinians dependent and passive, which do not assist the on-going political issues in Palestine. Action Aid describes aid dependency as following:

“Whilst aid is succeeding in contributing to human development, dependency on foreign aid can be more problematic. This is not, as is sometimes argued, because aid dependency inhibits economic development or mobilisation of domestic resources. But it undercuts countries’ ability to chart their own development strategies, which is what is needed if development is to really take root. It does this by reducing developing countries policy autonomy, undermining recipient governments’ accountability to their own citizens, and making it harder for them to plan development programmes due to its unpredictability.”

(Action Aid, 2006: 16)

According to Action Aids definition of aid dependency, it is incorrect to state that aid dependency inhabits economic development or mobilisation of local resources. This definition differs from what our interlocutors argue, as according to them, these are often the main issues that are related to aid dependency. Aisha explains how Dalia Association tried to comprehend the issue of aid dependency:

”(...) if you go now 20 years after Oslo and international aid everybody got used to what these donors and international projects they want you to implement. So we don’t want them



to think like that, so you like “oh yeah what kind of project do you want us to do”, NO! What is a problem in your community, what local resources do you have to solve this problem. This is what we want people to do, we want people to think outside of the box. (...) we focus on how do we identify issues in my community? How do I identify local resources? Because unfortunately we forgot that we are not poor, we think we are poor but we are not poor.”

(Aisha, Dalia Association, app. 4: 2)

What the quote illustrates is that Aisha operates under the belief that they have to inform and make the Palestinians understand that “they are not poor”, as they are a community filled with resources. Accordingly, this is another issue that followed with aid dependency. Furthermore, the dependency on international aid is argued to be another method to fragment the Palestinian civil society; “(...) *now we have a civil society that for the most part is weak and depended and waiting for external resources, which are not the way, that we as Palestinians are*” (Aisha, Dalia Association, app. 4: 2). What Aisha is articulating is, that the Palestinians as individuals are strong and independent and she therefore has difficulty in recognising the current civil society as she characterises as weak and dependent. It can be argued that Aisha is articulating what many of our interlocutors, that belongs to older generation, does, namely that the civil society today is far more reluctant to just give into the described international agenda, and not reflect upon NGOs existence as they accordingly do not question their presence and influence.

According to the statements above, international aid has prohibited the Palestinians to think in alternative or creative measures, and additionally weakened the civil society by waiting for external resources to improve their situation instead of taking matters into their own hands.

The Dominant Lack of Trust

The above analysis touched briefly upon the lack of trust that is prevailing among many Palestinians, mainly due to the Israeli occupation and corruption within the PNA. The dominating argument among the interlocutors is, that the lack of trust is another reason why the Palestinians are left passive in the resistance towards the occupation.

Sahar Soufan explains how freedom of speech has been severely restricted due to different reasons:



“There is a lot of abuse of the freedom of expression for youth. We say that Ramallah is free liberal city, but it’s not! If you go inside the people’s head you will feel it’s still controlled by all the social and religious norms of the occupation and the fear of the occupation and the fear of the PA. Like, I know a number of students in Birzeit University who used to be active politically 5 years ago. But now they all stopped to be active, because they all have been arrested by the PA! They feel that whatever they say they will be judged, arrested, and the freedom of expression will be killed. I know that none of us has a feeling of being comfortable to expose our own vision. We are not allowed. They feel depressed.”

(Sahar Soufan, app.1: 9)

According to Sahar Soufan, the social and religious norms that have been created due to the occupation, and further the fear of the PNA, has left the Palestinians passive, at least the youth. Different elements are introduced that, according to Sahar Soufan, structures the thoughts and actions of the Palestinians, because of the lack of trust towards the occupation, the PA, and also among the Palestinians themselves. The argument then is, that due to mistrust towards these authorities and individuals, it contributes to passiveness and also the Palestinians’ ability to fight the passivity. Islah Jad agrees with Sahar Soufan’s interpretation and speaks upon this matter:

“Absolute, very passive. What happened after Trump's decision with moving the embassy to Jerusalem, the authority itself, were inciting people to go demonstrate. No one came out, because they don’t trust the leaders and they know that they are using them, they are not defending them. Yesterday, after the kidnapping of the student, we organised a demonstration on Manarah Square, and we were seeing a lot of police around, but where were the police when they attacked the university? When demonstrating they are there, but are they there protecting us? No. So it is very demobilising. People are very demobilised.”

(Islah Jad, app. 2: 7)

Islah Jad believes that since the Palestinians do not have an authority they can rely on, they do not wish to engage in demonstrations or other political affairs, because the PNA, according to Islah Jad, uses the Palestinians and do not defend them. She further describes how her students are afraid of expressing their thoughts due to the fear of security agents:



“When I see my students in the class, they are afraid to discuss issues. We used to have lots of vibrant discussion and you see they are afraid to express their minds because they know that there are some security agents in the classroom.”

(Islah Jad, app. 2: 7)

According to a poll, that was conducted as part of a Power2Youth project, largely funded by the EU, one out of 10 young adults in the West Bank said; “*they trust their dealings with other people*”, and in Gaza it was one out of 20 (Global Observatory, 2016). These numbers showed exceptionally low levels of trust among Palestinian youth, compared to other countries in the Middle East. One of the conclusions was that these numbers points to a fragmented society that is unable to effectively engage especially youth (Ibid.). It can therefore be argued that the poll study agrees with some of the above-mentioned argumentation, as they highlight the aspect of lack of trust in relation to engagement in the society.

Additionally, the lack of trust to the PNA and the police has been a topic of great attention in our interviews, which also included the argument of lack role models, as has been described by Minas from PalVision:

“If you see that all Palestinian authority, the PLO or PA, they are all like 70-80 years. So there are no youth role models that they can follow. When they talk about youth; who is your role model? They will bring like personalities from the First Intifada or from the 1980’s or 1990’s, but not from today. So they don’t see any from today. No role model for them to follow.”

(Minas, PalVision, app. 6: 7)

According to Minas from PalVision, she argues that Palestinians suffer from lack of role models to inspire and lead the Palestinian civil society. Seemingly, the lack of role models in the form of political authorities, activists or national public visionaries contributes to mistrust between Palestinians and the PNA, hence she argues; “*we talk about political engagement or political participation, they are like: yeah what does it mean? (...) Our youth they don’t have no leadership, or being a part of political decision making processes. They don’t believe in it*” (Minas, PalVision,



app. 6: 6). The connection between lack of role models and politics has caused the Palestinian youth not to “believe in it”. This might pose another perspective on the political passiveness that exists due to mistrust.

This section was meant to illustrate other factors that have left the Palestinians passive, than the pronounced NGO sector. The structure that surrounds the Palestinians; the occupation, the PNA and the NGO’s, all have different methods to restrict the freedom of speech among Palestinians, according to our interlocutors, which often are related to the mistrust towards these components. Further it is argued, that the lack of role models has meant that especially the Palestinian youth does not “believe” in political authorities, which as our findings shows, brings forth mistrust.

“The Fancy Cars & Big Buildings”

The individualisation discourse is related to the *sign* ‘Consumer’. As we also mentioned in the ‘Methodology Section’, Ramallah at least, has become a city with fancy cars, big buildings, and high-end shops. An establishment of a consumer society due to the neoliberal and capitalistic project in Palestine shaped by the large influx of NGOs, according to our interlocutors and many scholars. Sahar Soufan explains one of the main issues related to the Palestinian society that is highly influenced by INGOs:

“(…) some Palestinian scholars and international scholar, they called it ‘the prosperity under occupation’. So they feel that they can live with good salaries, but they are still under occupation, but we are receiving good salaries so we keep passive, because as soon as we have good money and good salary in the bank, it’s fine. So they are not thinking about the national project about freedom, all that they think about is we want a stable life and using the salary that we receive”

(Sahar Soufan, app. 1: 2)

Sahar Soufan is arguing that the national project about liberating the Palestinian people from the occupation has been forgotten due to the financial opportunities the INGOs offer. Jamil Hilal is commenting on this development after the Oslo Accords was signed. According to Hilal, a sizeable middle class emerged which is very dependent on employment in service and security agencies of the PNA, in ministries and in NGOs. He further states that:



“With the availability of easy bank loans and the regularity of receiving monthly salaries to pay the banks by instalments, large numbers of the new middle class were enticed to use such loans for buying consumer goods such as cars, furniture, etc., as well as homes. Any real delay or faltering in the payment of salaries from the PA, NGOs or the private sector would put at risk a large section of the new middle class who would not be able to cover their bank loans. (...) A dependence on salaries from the PA, NGOs and the modern private sector explains why the Palestinian middle class in the WBG (West Bank and Gaza) remains reluctant to engage in any collective action that could jeopardize its source of livelihood and privilege.”

(Hilal, 2015: 357)

Hilal therefore argues that the dependency that has been created on salaries and loans prevents the Palestinian population from engaging in collective actions, as they do not wish to jeopardise the relation with those who provide them with the new rich livelihood. What the above-mentioned quotes illustrates is, that the emergence of a consumer society and a new middle class has created another way on thinking, as the new financial opportunities make Palestinians more reluctant to engage in resistance activities against the occupation. Itiraf from BISAN describes this new way of thinking as “distorted”, as it has made the Palestinians focus on the individual; *“to go more and more individually. To work more on a upper level of the community as it has been called by Marx”* (Itiraf, BISAN, app. 3: 4). What Itiraf is referring to by “upper level” is the emergence of the middle class and according to him this has led to the; *“this kind of killing the actual community and social work, killing its soul”* (Itiraf, BISAN, app. 3: 4). By neglecting the lower level of society and only focusing on the upper level, which according to him is what the NGO sector is doing, the “actual” community is getting killed. Aisha from Dalia Association is explaining how this capitalistic system has changed the community in an unfortunate way:

“I remember Palestine back then. Yes okay it was simple and we didn’t have all of these fancy cars and I don’t mind if most of them go away anyway... the fancy cars, the big buildings, you know what I mean? So I don’t mind if that stops, all the construction, this type of thing that they call development, the capitalistic kind of development. Yeah it will be difficult because the economy has been distorted because we have to work slowly back



to the local economy, which is what we are advocating for in what we do with the communities but mainstream as you see is the neoliberal economic paradigm that's going on, which is not really supporting local communities anyway, it just uses its resources for somebody else's gain at the end. (...) But when the system makes it so hard to survive, which you know, before Oslo people didn't have that much money. I remember living here as a kid and I loved it, I was from America and I didn't even wanted to go back to America. I spend around one year here and we grew, we had goats and sheep's (...) there were not that many cars, maybe a few people had some old cars, we all walked and you know. So there was no money but people were community driven. We went to this old lady, who lived by herself, my aunt would cook and make her a plate, this is how people were, now the system is so hard that you can't even survive so then you... this is the capitalist system.”

(Aisha, Dalia Association, app. 4: 8)

According to Aisha, it is necessary to work towards improving the local economy instead of being a part of the capitalistic system that has distorted the economy in Palestine. As the increase of money flow and the consumer society, will not bring back the community spirit. Merz is describing how the 'Palestinian Reform and Development Plan' has redefined economic, political and social relations:

“The PRDP, then, not only redefines economic and political, but also social structures and relations. And its success (as well as the long-term goal of the construction of a single neo-liberal economic zone across the Middle East, which the US envisions) is dependent on the fracturing of the resistance movement and of national unity, and the reshaping of people's self-conceptions as atomised, private individuals, working for their own economic success rather than for the collective goal of wider political liberation.”

(Merz, 2012: 57)

According to our interlocutors, the neoliberal and capitalistic project has created an individualised consumer society that has changed the economic, political, and social structures in Palestine, which do not benefit the national project of liberating Palestine from the Israeli occupation. The consumer



society therefore constitutes another obstacle, created by the international agenda, in regards to making the Palestinians more political active and not passive individuals.

The Missing Collective Cause

The last *sign* that has been located is ‘Fragmented Identity’. We have already presented the argument from our interlocutors stating that the NGO sector, has contributed to a fragmentation of the Palestinian civil society, by undermining the political aspects in their work and by the creation of a consumer society. This section will introduce another aspect namely how the lack of a collective cause among Palestinians has created a fragmented identity and intensified the sense of individualisation.

Sahar Soufan is introducing some of the issues that relates around the *sign* ‘Fragmented Identity’:

“There are some development projects that target the cultural heritage of Palestinians. When you talk about cultural heritage, you talk about collectiveness. You can't have a cultural heritage without having collective identity within a nation (...) I don't see many international NGOs working within this (...) and it's not the responsibility of the international NGOs only. It's also a responsibility of the Palestinians (...) we have only few individuals that work on trying to promote the national identity and how to think out of dependency of Israel.”

(Sahar Soufan, app.1: 6)

Sahar Soufan argues that there is a need to promote cultural identity, as it creates a sense of collectiveness that is necessary for the Palestinians. She further states, that is it necessary as the PNA do not manage do have a vision or a national plan that will enable the Palestinian society to develop. Hilal elaborates on Sahar Soufan's argument, stating that the Palestinians no longer have a clear national strategy, nor a unified leadership or unified national institutions. These components are needed to address the need for mobilisation of their various communities, as it would assist the Palestinians in their struggle to self-determination and their collective interests (Hilal, 2015: 356). Ubai from UAWC agrees with Hilal's explanation, that the social movements have become smaller due to the lack of unified institutions and a national strategy:



“(…) for the Palestinian society there was this dream of emancipation and freedom etc. This dream people got divided about it when the PNA signed the Oslo Accords (…) a lot of people lost beliefs in the Palestinian political system. Today when they are talking about unions, the official membership in unions is 19 percent in the West Bank and Gaza. It’s a real horrible number. So when you are talking about that, you are talking about people are less active, but why are they less active? Because the cause that unites them together is not clear anymore, they do not believe in it anymore. But people are now I think they start to be more aware of they cannot achieve individual salvation, let me put it in that context, if they have to work for salvation it has to be on a community level.”

(Ubai, UAWC, app. 5: 4)

Both Sahar Soufan and Ubai articulate the individualisation discourse, as they both argue that the sense of collectiveness among Palestinians is crucial to assist development within the Palestinian society. Ubai states that “individual salvation” will not achieve anything, but it has to be on a community level. It can therefore be argued, that the lack of a collective cause has contributed to a fragmented identity among Palestinians because they do no longer have the means, will, and unification to fight for a collective cause, which strengthens the sense of individualisation.

From what our interlocutors and our overall fieldwork has told us, is that after the signing of the Oslo Accords a hope spread among Palestinians for a peaceful solution. The NGOs followed and became an indication of a brighter future for Palestine, and a long anticipated engagement from the international society was finally present. The frustration grew over the years, as the occupation still continued. The NGOs have not ended the occupation but operated alongside it. As Salim Safar said; *“they give us painting to paint the wall, but they don’t remove the wall”*. The role of NGOs started leaving a big question mark among Palestinians, as they did no longer understand their purpose. Itiraf from BISAN says; *“you support the occupation or you fight the occupation. We need to finalise this occupation, not to deal with the occupation not to negotiate and live under the occupation.”* (Itiraf, BISAN, app. 3: 3). According to Itiraf, international donors are supporting the occupation when they are not directly resisting the occupation. There is no middle ground, either you fight it or you support it. When we asked Hans from GIZ why no one is working on ending the occupation, he said:



“They don’t have the mandate to do so. There are no funds giving to this, so therefore you do not address the root causes.”

Why isn’t there a mandate?

“Because it demands an agreement between Israel and Palestine, which is difficult. And secondly because we are against violent means and it is difficult to fight the occupation in line with our values.”

(Hans, GIZ)

The hope the Palestinians had for the NGOs to contribute to the ending of the occupation vanishes due to the NGOs actual mandate. As Hans explains, first of all there are no funding in ending the occupation, and second of all there is no agreement on how to do so. The collective cause that once were prevailing among Palestinians is slowly fading away, as the NGOs do not have the permission to operate under the political mandate; ending the occupation. This is not to state that NGOs are the only ones who should contribute to the ending of the occupation, but it can explain the growing resistance towards NGOs, as they did not live up to the hope they once symbolised.

Sub-conclusion

In the above analysis we have located and examined the prevailing counter-discourses, which are battling against the international discourse. What is argued in the analysis is that international donors have a major influence on the civil society. Furthermore, the analysis revealed that there were only few contractions between the organisation's official statements on their website and our interlocutor’s arguments.

The first counter-discourse is based on the critique that international donors have the financial power to influence and restrict the NGOs autonomy, by constraining their choice of content and location of the project. These restrictions, posed by the international donors, are argued to create a fragmented civil society, as the organisations and the international donors have the power to decide who is included and excluded from participating in certain programmes. This creates, according to



our interlocutors, a society where some groups are more privileged than others and thereby contributes to a certain hierarchy in the society.

The second counter-discourse on feeling ‘inferior’ articulates submission and colonialism, causing the inability of Palestinians to design their own national projects, due to the constant presence of foreign power structures. Today, the Palestinians interlink the presence of NGOs with coercive power structures, which is understood as both, a prolonging of historical colonial structures, and a contribution of weakening Palestinians own perception of capabilities, national determination and sovereignty.

The third counter-discourse is based on the critique that the influx of NGOs, has changed the Palestinian’s identity from a collectivistic to a more individualised identity. It is argued that the Israeli occupation, the PNA, and the influx of NGOs have contributed to the perceived passiveness among Palestinians. Especially the older generation raise criticism towards the NGO sector, which implies a generational gap between the older and the younger generation. Some of the factors, which are argued to contribute to passiveness are lack of trust and freedom of speech, as well as lack of role models to inspire and lead the younger generation to resist the occupation. Furthermore, the neoliberal and capitalistic project is argued to create an individualised consumer society, which do not benefit the national project of liberating Palestine. Additionally, it is argued that the collective cause is gradually fading away, and one of the reasons for that is, the NGOs missing attention on a collective identity.



The Ideological & Personal Perspectives

By locating and analysing the local, international and counter-discourses, it reveals that different ideologies and personal perspectives are at stake, which constitute the discursive battle between them. We therefore argue that it is inadequate to only locate, analyse, and characterise the different existing discourses, as we also need to understand where these discourses stem from, as it reveals a specific ideology or what we will refer to as a personal perspective, when ideology do not seem sufficient or correct.

The first discourse analysis located the local and the international discourse, while the second part of the analysis presented three counter-discourses; ‘The International Donor’s Agenda Discourse’, ‘Inferior Status Discourse’, and ‘Individualisation Discourse’. Based on the selected organisation’s official descriptions of their work, and our interlocutor’s statements and arguments, we present a discursive spectrum that demonstrates if there have been any changes on where we place the organisations:



As illustrated, the majority of the organisations are positioned the same place as exemplified in the first discourse analysis. PalVision and UAWC are the two NGOs that have changed position on the discursive spectrum. We argue so, due to PalVision’s far more critical articulation of the international discourse during our interview, than what is presented on their website. UAWC expressed many of the *signs*, that are structured around the local discourse, on their website, alongside the selected CBOs who repeatedly articulated the same discourse. During the interview with Ubai from UAWC constantly ascribed and detached himself to the international discourse, which did not reflect the written descriptions on their website.

Now that we have illustrated where the different organisations are positioned, whether they articulate a local or an international discourse, we can proceed with presenting our take on their ideological beliefs and personal perspectives.



Several questions arose during the analysis process of the counter-discourse; why do the older generation have a more critical attitude towards the existence of NGOs while the younger generation in a higher degree seem to accept their existence? How come that some Palestinians attribute colonisation as a matter for the current situation, as others focus on the possibilities for their future? Why do some perceive the possibilities of NGOs as positive, while other merge such initiatives with de-development? Together, these considerations have significant implications of ideological positions and personal perspectives. We argue, that our findings stem from the ideological perception characterised by Marxism, and personal perspectives such as a romanticised notion of the past and the concept of diaspora.

Romanticised Notion of the Past

The description of the period before the large influx of NGOs is common for all our interlocutors that belong to the older generation. What we noticed was, that all our interlocutors from the older generation presented a romanticised remembrance of the years before the presence of NGOs, where most people were farmers, lived a good life with peaceful coexistence, and the local's needs indeed were present. This can be explained by Sophie Richter-Devroe (2013), who states that Palestinians, who have experienced Palestine before 1948, often present their lost homes and villages as a paradise, where land was abundant and fertile, neighbour-kind and supportive, life stable and secure. We are well aware that none of our interlocutors lived before 1948, but the described narrative has seemingly been pasted on through generations, to a greater or lesser extent, which assist reproducing this narrative. According to Richter-Devroe, romanticising the past can be a way to create unity and a collective identity, which indeed became evident during the discourse analysis, that the Palestinians supposedly lack. Speaking of one's loss with warm memories can constitute a genuine feeling shared by the generation (Richter-Devroe, 2013: 103). According to Richter-Devroe, presenting a romanticised and strongly emotional narrative of the past, as we experienced many of our interlocutors did, Palestinians from this generation mainly want to make a comment on the difficult situation they find themselves in. According to Richter-Devroe, the past represents what has been denied, which in the situation of Palestine is the ownership of land, the recognition of rights, a sense of belonging in one's own homeland, and a process of justice (Ibid.).



Additionally, what can be argued is that even though the life they had in the past might not be a ‘fairytale’, they still remember it in a romanticised way compared with the situation they live in now. This can explain why some of our interlocutors from the older generation has a rather critical opinion towards the influx of NGOs. The older generation has experienced a society that was active and vibrant and, in many ways, independent due to the abundant and fertile agriculture that, according to Ubai, constituted 45 percent of the workforce back then. That can be the reason why some of our interlocutors from the older generation believe, that it would not be a catastrophe if the international donors pulled out of Palestine. On the contrary it would lead to a more progressive civil society, as they believe they can survive on their own, as they were able to do so before the presence of NGOs. Accordingly, the presence of NGOs therefore ‘destroys’ this narrative, as they pass on and represent ideologies and values that are incompatible with the romanticised narrative.

The Diaspora Perspective

The second perspective, which supports the notion of a romanticised view of the past, is the diaspora perspective. Aisha from Dalia Association is born and raised in U.S., but due to her Palestinian roots from her parents, she has always had a strong tie to Palestine. As she explains in the analysis, she has been in Palestine several times and lived there one year as a child and from there she has a romantic remembrance of Palestine before the influx of NGOs, which brought her back to Palestine as a diaspora. When she returned to Palestine it was a different reality from the idyllic remembrance she had from her childhood. According to Stef Jansen (2010), diaspora often experience that what they perceive as home is not always as remembered, which can lead to a feeling of displacement. Not that Aisha expressed a feeling of displacement as such, but nevertheless, the life she returned to was very different than she thought it would be and left her with feelings of sadness. Growing up in a country like the U.S., made her desire to return back to a country with a slow pace and where capitalistic values were not present. The massive changes that had happened while she has been away from Palestine, motivated her to work for a CBO as Dalia Association, where local needs and resources are the main focus.

Marxism in Palestine

One of the dominating critiques towards the international agenda, throughout the discourse analysis, is the critique of the creation of a consumer society, the passive condition of the Palestinian people,



and the individualisation tendencies the international agenda has entailed. Especially the older generation are articulating this critique and counter-discourse greatly.

According to Andrew Heywood (2007), the developing world has created various forms of nationalism, that in some way draw inspiration from the struggle against colonial rule. Alongside Heywood, we argue that Marxism has become an ideology for the older generation of Palestinians, to liberate them from post-colonial structures, capitalism and the Israeli occupation, as argued by our interlocutors as the main issues. Heywood explains a typical tendency in Africa and Asia that occurred after colonial powers withdrawn:

“The quest for political independence was inextricably linked to a desire for social development and for an end to their subordination to the industrialized states of Europe and the USA. The goal of ‘national liberation’ therefore has an economic as well as a political dimension. This helps to explain why anti colonial movements typically looked not to liberalism but to socialism, and particularly to Marxism-Leninism, as a vehicle for expressing their national ambitions.”

(Heywood, 2007: 122)

Furthermore, Heywood states that the appeal of socialism, in this case Marxism, is based on the fact that the values of cooperation and community that socialism embodies are often deeply founded in traditional cultures and pre-industrial societies. Social solidarity and collective action are both emphasised by nationalism and socialism, and they therefore interlink (Ibid.).

As mentioned above, the individualisation tendencies and the creation of a consumer society, are causing less social solidarity, collective action and equality. To bring back those concepts, the older generation endorse Marxism, as a way to combat these problematic tendencies. We therefore argue, that our interlocutors explain their critiques against neoliberalism and capitalism through a Marxist point of view, as this theory explains how the class conflict arises from the capitalistic system due to contradictions between material interests of the oppressed and the ruling class. In the case of Palestine, it is argued that the influx of NGOs has contributed to a capitalistic system, which divided the society into different classes and categories, where some people are more privileged than others. For instance, the influx of NGOs, has according to our interlocutors, created a larger middle class due to the higher salaries that INGOs offer. This has contributed to a consumer society



and influenced the inflation of prices, which has created more inequality in the society, as it is only the new middle class who can keep up with the rising prices. This development has led to less collective action and resistance towards the occupation, which was present during the First Intifada. The First Intifada is almost a symbol or an attempt on what Karl Marx would characterise as a revolution, as it according to the Palestinians was a time where all segments of the society were fighting alongside each other, and it worked because the result of this collective fight was the first attempt of a peace agreement. According to our interlocutors, a fragmentation of the Palestinian people therefore becomes a catastrophically development because the national liberation project no longer becomes possible, as the right way to do it is through social movements that have to come within the society itself, and not through external powers.

The younger generation on the contrary, do not seem to believe that this ‘revolution’ or social movements are an actual possibility, as they have never witnessed or participated in them. The only knowledge they have about these events are through their grandparents and parent’s stories. The different strategies to cope with the influx of NGOs might be explained by that the younger generation has grown up in a society that has been characterised by insecurity, hopelessness and fragmentation. With the NGOs good salaries and working conditions, they have become the representatives of the stability that has been lacking amongst the youth. This explains why the younger generation in a higher degree seems to accept and take advantage of the existence of NGOs. Moreover, the change in how to relate to the situation can be argued to be a natural generational development, which can be seen independent from the historical events, and more as a natural cause of globalisation that the younger generation naturally try to adapt to.

What we have tried to illustrate in this section is, that the different counter-discourses does not derive from nothing but are rooted in different ideologies and personal perspectives, which influence the articulation of the counter-discourses.



Conclusion

In this thesis our aim was to examine how and why local organisations in Ramallah presented different counter-discourses towards the international discourse. In order to examine these counter-discourses, we applied analytical tools from Laclau and Mouffe's discourse theory to our empirical data. Before we examined the counter-discourses towards the international discourse, we located the prevailing discourses within the NGO sector in Palestine. What our findings revealed was, that there exist two dominating discourses, namely an international discourse and a local discourse. We can conclude that the international discourse is characterised by Western ideologies carried out through promotion of democracy, human rights, women- and youth empowerment etc. With these discourses in mind we started to examine the counter-discourses. What we discovered was that there exist three main counter-discourses among our interlocutors, namely 'The International Donor's Agenda Discourse', 'Inferior Status Discourse' and 'Individualisation Discourse'.

The first counter-discourse 'The International Donor's Agenda Discourse' reveals a narrative that the international donors have the financial power to influence and restrict the organisations autonomy through different restrictions posed by international donors. These restrictions are argued to represent a political agenda and to create a disconnection between local needs and donor priorities, as well as contribute to an exclusion and inclusion of Palestinians. The findings from the second counter-discourse 'Inferior Status Discourse', shows how Palestinians interlink the NGO sector with power structures through arguments of colonialism and submission, which throughout history till today, prevent Palestinians from forming their own national project. The third and last counter-discourse is the 'Individualisation Discourse', which presents a narrative that the influx of NGOs has made Palestinians individualised and passive due to the neoliberal and capitalistic development that followed with the influx of NGOs. Moreover, the analysis reveals that there is a generational difference in the perception and resistance of the influx of NGOs between the older and the younger generation.

Finally, the third part of our analysis disclose the fundamental ideology and personal perspectives of which the located counter-discourses have arisen from, which further explains why the older generation have a more critical attitude towards the existence of NGOs, than the younger generation. What our findings reveal are that the older generations of the Palestinians embrace Palestine as a former 'paradise' with stability and sovereignty, that today has been challenged and almost 'destroyed' by the NGO sector, alongside other factors. Due to the older generation's



memories, they speak from a romanticised notion of the past as a justification of their own national belonging and an attempt to create unity in a land suffering from political instabilities. Another determining perspective that serves as a personal motivation of engaging in an organisation that aims to combat the changes that followed with the increase of NGOs, is the conditions of being diaspora, which supports the romanticised notion. Furthermore, Marxism has been an ideology articulated by the older generation, that assist explaining their critical opinions of neo-liberalism and capitalism that NGOs represent, which has contributed to a fragmentation of the Palestinian civil society.

What can be concluded is, that the international discourse at first seemed as the hegemonic discourse, which we still argue might be the case, but what the analysis reveals is, that the international discourse is constantly challenged through various counter-discourses. Which implications it might have for the NGO sector in Palestine is not what we aim to study, but what we can argue is, that there constantly will be a discursive battle between the international and local discourses.



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