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Increasing constraints?

Civil society organisations in Jordan vis-à-vis the state

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Abstract

The Jordanian state apparatus is increasingly limiting civil society in Jordan from engaging in open debate, and organisations are gradually inhibited from executing their activities and events. These are the premises on which this research is based, and in exploring them several questions arise. How can civil society in Jordan be characterised and applied? What do these obstacles look like in practice? And why are civil society organisations (CSOs) repressed by the Jordanian state machinery? Interviews conducted with different active CSOs inside Jordan reveal the extent of the obstacles they are facing, and the internal state mechanisms behind it. This analysis is placed against a wider backdrop of literature on civil society in the Middle East and regional political developments that have recently had a huge impact on Jordan's societal structures and dynamics.

Keywords: civil society; NGOs; Jordan; foreign aid; freedom of the press; Arab uprisings; Middle East.

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Abbreviations

BONGO	Business non-governmental organisation
CDFJ	Center for Defending the Freedom of Journalists
CSA	Civil society actor
CSO	Civil society organisation
GID	General Intelligence Directorate
GONGO	Governmental non-governmental organisation
IAF	Islamic Action Front
IMF	International Monetary Fund
INGO	International non-governmental organisation
ISIS	Islamic State of Iraq and Syria
JIF	Jordan INGO Forum
JPA	Jordan Press Association
LIB	Law Interpretation Bureau
MOPIC	Ministry of Planning and International Cooperation
MoU	Memorandum of Understanding
NGO	Non-governmental organisation
PSF	Patron sponsored foundation
RONGO	Royal non-governmental organisation
SAP	Structural Adjustment Programme
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
USAID	United States Agency for International Development

1 Introduction

On November 3rd, 2015, an article in Jordanian newspaper Al-Ghad reported on the status of the freedom of expression in Jordan. Individuals referred to as ‘analysts’ are quoted to say that they consider the current government procedures as “the beginning of the end of freedom of expression in Jordan”, referring to recent arrests of political journalists and activists, the closing of Al-Kaluti Mosque Square, and a decision by the Law Interpretation Bureau (LIB) that allows blocking journalists and activists from accessing websites. The response from Minister of State Media, Mohammad al-Momani, is significant: “Jordan continues to take steps and adopt policies that maintain freedoms of opinion and expression within total compliance to state law.”¹.

This is just one example taken out of a series of news reports that signifies the changing climate defenders of human rights in Jordan find themselves in. The fact that the quote states ‘the beginning of the end’ is significant; it implies that freedom of expression as a right used to be something in Jordan that was taken more seriously, but that this has now changed and continues to undergo changes. A short article like this raises many questions: how is freedom of expression in Jordan being restricted? In what ways, and by whom?

From August 2015 to February 2016, I lived and worked in Amman, as a trainee at the embassy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands. The decision to look into the current topic was inspired by several observations but one event in particular. At the time, the Dutch embassy was funding a grassroots local Jordanian organisation aiming to promote public debate and critical dialogue about current issues in Jordanian society. They initiated to organise a public debate about the death penalty; a very relevant issue in Jordan at the time because there had been a de facto moratorium of capital punishment since 2006. In 2014, prisoners on death row suddenly started to be executed again, which sparked controversy. This debate was planned for October 10th 2015, with Jordanian lawyers and human rights activists as the panellists. However, three days before the planned event, the owner of the café where the debate was scheduled to take place was warned that he would be prosecuted if the event were to go ahead, on official order of the Amman governor.

This event sparked my interest, as it was described by the organisers of the event as something completely in line with recent developments and the constriction of the space they were allowed to operate in by the Jordanian government. Articles such as the one mentioned earlier only strengthened that interest. During my time as trainee for the Dutch embassy in

¹ Al-Ghad newspaper article, 03-11-2015: <http://alghad.com/articles/901462>- Translation was provided by the daily news review staff from the European External Action Service (EEAS) delegation in Amman, Jordan.

Amman, which lasted six months, as well as the period during which I conducted the interviews for this research, I followed Jordanian news reporting closely, talked to members of civil society organisations in Jordan, as well as Jordanian political analysts and people working for foreign missions in Amman. The overriding sense resulting from these conversations and news reports is that civil society in Jordan is becoming increasingly limited by the Jordanian state apparatus from engaging in open debate, and organisations are increasingly inhibited from executing their activities and events. Hence, the broad, but most important question I ask in this research project is the following: How are civil society organisations (CSOs) currently being repressed by the current Jordanian state machinery? The one assumption inherent in this question, namely that CSOs face repression, is quite obvious; whether that assumption holds is addressed by this research.

1.1 Statement of the research problem

Hence, the main topic of interest is civil society in Jordan, and the interaction of civil society organisations vis-à-vis the Jordanian state. What I aimed to show in the literature review, is that I am currently holding an assumption that has not yet been thoroughly explored by other scholars, namely that the Arab uprisings have had an adverse impact on the freedoms that civil society organisations currently enjoy. I thus want to find out whether this is indeed the case. The main research questions I identified are the following:

→ Are *civil society organisations* in Jordan being suppressed? If so, to what *extent*, *how* does this manifest itself and what are the *reasons* behind it in their opinion?

This question is rather broad and contains multiple aspects. In order to narrow it down, several subquestions were devised:

- To what extent is the term ‘civil society’ applicable in a Jordanian context and how should one define it?
- Has this changed since the Arab uprisings?
- What kind of pressure do civil society organisations experience?
- What are the main reasons behind the increased pressure on civil society organisations in Jordan in their own opinion?
- What is the influence of foreign donors on the organisations I focus on?

1.2 Disposition

This introductory chapter includes a section with background information on what the civil society landscape in Jordan looks like, and on some of the more recent developments in the country following the Arab uprisings. The literature review in the second chapter focuses on civil society as a concept, both more generally and in the context of the Middle East and Jordan. The literature review also leads to the identification of relevant theories that are useful for the analysis of the data. In the subsequent chapter, I outline the methodological choices I made for this research, and aim to provide the justifications thereof, as well as a brief discussion on the limitations of this thesis. In chapter four, I delve into the data, structuring it along the lines of topics and themes identified in the interviews. More on the structure of that chapter is provided at the beginning of the analysis. Finally, chapter five provides a conclusion and an overview of the main findings.

1.3 Context: The Arab uprisings in Jordan

In the interviews, I asked the interviewees whether they could identify a particular point in time, which they associate with the tightening of civil society restrictions. My expectation was that the demonstrations of 2011 and after, which can be placed in the larger, regional Arab uprisings that shook the region, were to be mentioned as the turning point. There is a reason why I had this expectation: the demonstrations affected Jordan tremendously. Chapter four delves into these questions, and although almost every interviewee noted that the protests from 2011 were very important, they do not necessarily identify this point in time as the turning point. Nevertheless, this section serves as a general background against which current developments can be placed, and as a general introduction to what the environment looks like in which the organisations that were interviewed as part of this research operate.

A note on terminology is necessary here: I use the term Arab uprisings instead of Arab Spring for several reasons. First, I believe it does not do justice to the wide variety of developments different countries in the region went through, even if they were related. Tunisia's revolution was not the same as Syria's civil war; and Bahrain's repressed demonstrations are very different from the transition that Egypt found itself in. Since this proposal focuses on Jordan, it is ambiguous to talk of a 'spring', since it implies some sort of revolution, which would stretch the meaning of that concept unexceptionally far. Moghadam (2014) likewise argues that instead, we should contextualise the word 'Arab Spring' every time one uses that term.

In Jordan, demonstrations started in 2011 in the rural south, mostly as a response to heavy economic deterioration, and as a protest against unemployment, high taxes, and corruption. Beck and Hüser (2015) note that the number of protestors – ranging from 7000 to 10 000 people – was considerably smaller than the number of protestors in neighbouring countries. The main oppositional parties were the Muslim Brotherhood and its political wing, the Islamic Action Front (IAF), professional associations, Arab nationalists, leftist political parties and some youth organisations (Susser 2011). During the demonstrations, violence was hardly used, and crucially, the demands that were made were qualitatively different than those that protestors in Egypt, Libya, or Tunisia called for: in those countries it was demanded the ruling regimes step down; in Jordan the demands targeted the government, and not the monarchy itself (Beck and Hüser 2015, Susser 2011). Besides protesting against deteriorating economic conditions, another contentious issue was the perceived problem with electoral laws. Current electoral laws have a significant gerrymandering effect: it favours the ‘East-banker’ (Transjordanian) rural, largely tribalist minority over the much larger urban Palestinian, usually Islamist majority. Tobin (2012) supports this argument: elections are manipulated to such an extent that without quota systems, electoral outcomes fail to represent ethnic minorities, Christians, women, and Palestinians.

The immediate and most significant response by King Abdullah II was to introduce a distribution package to alleviate the most immediate economic hardships that people in the rural south were facing. He also established a National Dialogue Committee in March 2011, intended to explore the ways in which the constitution and the electoral laws could be amended (Beck and Hüser 2015). This sounds more revolutionary than it was: Barari (2015) notes that this two-tiered strategy, of introducing financial distribution packages followed by reforms, was the first response of many rulers in the region, but that these reforms were in fact very ineffective.

Besides the difference in demands that were the focus of the protests, Jordan differed from its neighbours in other ways, which is how some authors attempt to explain why Jordan has remained the stable pillar in the region that it has been so far. Jordan’s image as a ‘moderate’, stable country in a very unstable and violent region has been carefully constructed and upheld by the current king. Yom (2013) puts it very aptly:

Jordan is the Goldilocks of the Arab world – not as repressive as Syria, not as democratic as Tunisia, not as religious as Saudi Arabia, not as fractious as Iraq, and not as poor as Egypt. (129)

What makes Jordan such a unique case compared to its regional neighbours? Yom (2013) notes that the traditional cleavage between east-bankers and Palestinians actually ensured that protestors were never really united. This is also what Susser (2011) maintains, arguing that the opposition remained divided between the elite East Bank and the Jordanian Palestinian population. Beck and Hüser (2015) explain this division: both groups were afraid that, if the status quo were to change, it would affect them adversely relative to the other.

They also note that Jordan is extremely dependent on foreign financial assistance from a wide variety of donors coming from the Gulf states, the United States of America, and the European Union, and although this dependence does not necessarily bode well for the future, it is a strategy that has allowed the regime to use financial carrots to diminish dissent thus far. It is the relationship with the US that has enabled Jordan to forge its image as the moderate ally that Yom (2013) so poetically describes, and which enables Jordan to get such large amounts of money from foreign donors. According to Albrecht and Schlumberger (2004), states in the Middle East have become extremely successful in adopting a “donor talk” (376) to acquire financial resources, and Jordan is no exception to that.

In addition, from everyday conversations in Jordan, and from following the news closely, the wars in Syria and Iraq, and the huge refugee population that was created as a result of those, made people more apprehensive about pursuing real political reform within Jordan, preferring more incremental reforms instead.

A final question then arises: what has changed in Jordan as a result of the uprisings throughout the region and within the country itself? Opinions on this differ, but from working at a foreign mission in Amman, the most notable change seems to be the humanitarian crisis that the large Syrian and Iraqi refugee population in Jordan is currently facing. In terms of reforms, the consensus seems to be there has been a move towards liberalisation, in the neoliberalist sense of the term, in the economic realm, while there has been very little political change (Beck and Hüser 2015, Schwedler 2012). Al-Atiyat (2012) argues that currently, women’s organisations inside Jordan are facing more restrictions on freedom of movement and of assembly as a result of a more repressive sociopolitical environment. In the overall scheme of maintaining stability, such developments move to the periphery of concerns: Helfont and Helfont (2011) argue that King Abdullah II has simply been very effective at balancing all internal and external forces in such a way not to anger anybody.

What this short analysis and review of the literature on the Jordanian protests in the context of the Arab uprisings show is that there is no final verdict on what it has brought

about inside Jordan – and this thesis attempts to provide a part of an explanation on what that is.

2 Literature review and theoretical framework

At the beginning of February 2016, a remarkable group of people came together in Amman, Jordan: a couple of Jordanian ministers; other government representatives; heads of missions of organisations of royal patronage; directors of think tanks; leaders of human rights organisations; directors of humanitarian aid agencies; journalists; and embassies. They gathered there that day to discuss the problems that currently exist in the civil society space in Jordan. The most striking observation that I was left with was the fact that these three different levels of organisations – the government, the civil society actors, and the donors – were all talking about different things when they were using the term ‘civil society’. The government was talking about humanitarian aid organisations; organisations themselves were mostly referring to human rights promoting organisations; while humanitarian aid organisations did not seem to realise that they were being approached on the same level as local Jordanian NGOs working to promote human rights. Finally, the donors became the scapegoat for all parties: the government accused them of not giving enough money to humanitarian aid, human rights organisations blamed them for making their support too conditional and dependent on their own agendas, and humanitarian organisations were complaining about the lack of advocacy that donors were engaged in to promote their agenda at the level of the Jordanian government.

Except for being an almost comical sketch, this discussion exemplified the ambiguity that surrounds the concept of civil society inside Jordan and the larger Middle East. Outside the region, the concept is already contested, but inside the Middle East itself this debate is further complicated by the discussions about neo-colonialism and the role that international donors play in promoting their version of legitimate civil society. Moreover, countries in the Middle East typically have specific kinds of organisations that do not fit the classical descriptions of civil society, such as tribal affiliations or Islamist organisations, which generates new discussions on the concept as a whole. Can the concept be applied to a context such as Jordan’s? And if this is the case, what kind of theoretical framework is the most useful to analyse civil society developments inside the country?

These are the questions that this section tries to answer. Following from this discussion, I outline the theoretical paradigm that I deem most useful for my own research. In addition, I wish to justify why my own research is a valuable addition to what has already been done before. I argue that this research is more idiographic in its approach and thereby provides valuable insights on the relationship between civil society organisations and the Jordanian state. The people that were interviewed all represent a very specific kind of

organisation, dealing with the promotion of human rights, democratisation, and freedom of the media. Therefore, this research is not meant to provide a comprehensive overview of Jordan's civil society: the findings limit themselves only to those issues and organisations that were discussed during the interviews.

2.1 The concept of civil society

In *Toward civil society in the Middle East*, Schwedler (1995) starts the introduction of the book with the genealogy of civil society as a concept. What transpires from this discussion is that 'civil society' arose out of Enlightenment thought and in response to the spread of capitalism and industrialisation. She quotes Hegel, who thought of civil society as a concept that was invoked to protect the individual property rights of men, members of the privileged bourgeoisie. Gramsci built on this and describes civil society as complementary social and economic control to the coercive political control of the state. Herbert (2012) elaborates on Gramsci's theorisation of civil society: it is an ambivalent space, where, on the one hand, the state is entrenched and uses that space to secure authority through consent rather than coercion; but also where, on the other hand, there is most room for opposition and resistance (Herbert 2012, 240).

Since the concept was introduced in Western political philosophy, thought on civil society has evolved and developed to understanding it as the space between the household and the state, where "democratic social interaction" (Schwedler 1995, 5) takes place. Since its inception, the concept has been up for discussion and used as an analytical tool in research. The most important focal point for current debates is locating the boundaries of civil society.

For this research, the more relevant part of the discussion starts here. One main feature identified in the literature is the nature of interaction between CSOs. Schwedler (1995) notes that civil society is characterised by a set of rules of behaviour that organisations usually observe. The ideal nature of this behaviour should be tolerant, not only towards the state, but also in interactions between different organisations within civil society, with respect for democratic principles and pluralism.

Since the early 1980s, debates on civil society in the Middle East started to increase, and Schwedler (1995) identifies two main schools of thought within those debates. The first one describes civil society in the region as absent, weak, or disorganised, often with a strong Orientalist bias, following the line of reasoning that Said (2003) identified. The adherents of this school of thought often point to radical Islamist groups that do not observe the rules of conduct of civil society, or to the 'backward' nature of Arab institutions and societies.

Scholars that contest the idea of an inherently weak civil society within Arab societies are more optimistic and view civil society as emerging and becoming increasingly active. Schwedler (1995) identifies Augustus Richard Norton as one of the main adherents within this school of thought, who employs the following definition:

[T]he place where a mélange of groups, associations, clubs, guilds, syndicates, federations, unions, parties, and groups come together to provide a buffer between state and citizen (as cited in Schwedler 1995, 10).

Although this definition has met a wide consensus, alternative views on civil society also exist. In their article *Rethinking civil society*, Kopecký and Mudde (2003) set out to blur the boundaries that have traditionally been part of the definition of civil society that Norton, and others, employ, where rigid limitations are delineated between the state and civil society actors. Kopecký and Mudde (2003) are mostly concerned with the unrealistic boundaries that the concept calls into existence, especially when researchers try to apply the concept empirically. Their argument is fourfold: firstly, civil society as a concept should be used as a heuristic device – an argument that I support and argue for below. Secondly, the distinction between CSOs that do not observe ‘civil’ behaviour and organisations that do is not as rigid as one might think, and therefore should be approached on a case-by-case and time and place basis. Thirdly, the assumed relation between civil society organisations and democratisation does not always hold and should be applied with the utmost care. Finally, because all of these distinctions are so blurred, researchers should include organisations that would not automatically be considered when studying civil society. For this research, the final point they make is less relevant since the interviewed organisations would all classify as a civil society organisation without much trouble, but for the Middle East more generally this is an important argument, especially when considering youth movements, Islamist groups, and other forms of associational life.

Thus, boundaries between civil society and the state are contested, and some authors, like Kopecký and Mudde (2003), contest the very assumption that such boundaries can be drawn. To approach the topic more empirically, an oft-heard argument is that the role of the scholar should be to explore the underlying power dynamics of the relationship that CSOs have with the state (Schwedler 1995). In my research, because of the nature of the organisations that were interviewed, the boundary remains rather rigid, but some of my interviewees also admitted that the fact that they still operate today can be attributed to their

relations with high-placed politicians or decision-makers within the Jordanian regime. What one should take from this discussion is that it is not always clear whether organisations can justifiably be included in a definition of civil society; instead one should always justify why or why not an organisation is in- or excluded.

Other authors also heavily contest the traditional view of civil society when applied to societies in the Middle East. According to Cavatorta (2008), the discussions about the concept in the region are so lively because of four main reasons. Writing in 2008, before the uprisings in the region, he already discerned the ambiguous nature of civil society in the Middle East. It is the place where opposition currently finds a voice; it is where Islamism is present and very active; it is where international donors promote democratic transitional policies; and it is where ruling elites have consolidated themselves in order to facilitate control (Cavatorta 2008). These four characteristics all feature heavily in the analysis of my data.

2.2 Civil society in Jordan

The term ‘civil society’ in the context of Jordan was used for the first time in 1923, in a Jordanian newspaper (National Research Team 2010), but it was only recently when the term became a concept holding any significance. From the outset of Jordan’s state formation, historical forces dictated that civil society as a concept coming from democratic societies had little chance of succeeding, according to Nevo (2001). Three main factors obstructed the formation of civil society in Jordan. The colonial legacy of British rule over the territory was paradoxical: on the one hand, the Transjordanians, having lived under British rule for several decades, were familiar with the concept of civil society, defined as civil liberties, sovereignty of the population, and the democratisation of political life. However, with the 1948 war after Israel’s declaration of independence, the influx of Palestinian refugees created a strong divide between the different population groups, characterised by suspicion. The Hashemites, placed in power by the United Kingdom, had little legitimacy, and they were reluctant to adopt those principles. The Transjordanian population in Jordan, feeling threatened by the large influx of newcomers, felt forced to close ranks with the regime. A second obstacle characterised the Hashemite rule: it was an imposed regime, with a forceful top-down administration and army. The third obstacle to the formation of civil society in Jordan was the fact that the large number of Palestinian refugees lived in camps, and hardly integrated into Jordanian society (Nevo 2001).

This view of civil society, as British and directly applicable to the Jordanian context, is heavily contested by other authors. In his article titled *Civil society, tribal process, and*

change in Jordan: An anthropological view, Antoun (2000) summarises and simultaneously criticises the volumes that were edited by Norton, called ‘Civil Society in the Middle East’, and the definitions employed by the authors in those volumes. He maintains that the contributing authors highlight civil society in the region as formal associational life, circumventing contextual phenomena such as indigenous institutions, interpersonal relations, or informal institutionalised relations. In the same volume edited by Norton, Brand (as cited in Antoun 2000) discusses Jordan’s civil society more specifically, and focuses on associational life, such as political parties, (limitations of) citizenship, press freedom, and the role of the king. Antoun (2000) notes that Brand does mention tribalism, family relations and *wasta*², but only fleetingly, even though these phenomena are very important to understand the Jordanian context. Essentially, Antoun (2000) maintains that many more local or even regional phenomena such as those mentioned above, are very much guided by the “ethos of tolerance that is the hallmark of civil society in the West.” (44) and should thus be included in a definition of civil society in the Middle East. Norton (1995) himself applies this feature and calls it “civility” (11). What Antoun notes should be a core characteristic in the inclusion criteria for civil society organisations is thus not very far from what Norton himself identifies as a defining feature of civil society.

Similarly, Wiktorowicz (2000) argues that civil society in the Jordanian context should be approached differently than the more traditional way that characterises civil society as collective associationalism, a mechanism of collective empowerment to counter repressive regimes. This more traditional approach views civil society as “an autonomous social space that can engender collective action, protect individual liberty, and promote good governance outside political structures” (44). This view was adopted in Western Europe, Latin America and Africa, and after the fall of the Soviet Union in Eastern Europe. Although Jordan boasts many civil society organisations, Wiktorowicz (2000) quotes Weber, stating “the quantitative spread of organisational life does not always go hand in hand with its qualitative significance” (45-46). Instead, civil society in the Middle East generally, and in Jordan more specifically, should be approached differently, acknowledging that political reforms that freed up space for civil society to develop were often initiated top-down, and with a view to secure regime survival. This argument is compelling, because today’s government can make decisions that affect the freedom of civil society in a similar way but in the opposite direction. A

² *Wasta* is a personal network an individual maintains, which is accompanied by strong tendencies to favour the people in that network over others.

constriction of the space CSOs can operate in is just as easily established as an expansion. Thus, initial reforms are easily overturned.

In Jordan, this process of top-down reform was initiated after the substantial riots of April 1989. At the end of the 1980s, rents coming mostly from the oil rich states that had enabled the regime to keep its population in check, dried up, while Jordan was simultaneously running a large trade deficit. This resulted in a severe budget crisis forcing Jordan to enter a structural adjustment programme (SAP) with the International Monetary Fund (IMF) at the end of 1988. This went hand in hand with conditionalities forcing the government to cut down on subsidies while simultaneously increasing the taxes it was collecting from its population. Deteriorating economic conditions consequently led to severe riots, triggered by cuts in fuel subsidies, incentivising King Hussein to call for parliamentary elections, which had not occurred since before the 1967 war with Israel (Robinson 1998).

Robinson (1998) dubbed the policy that enabled this liberalisation ‘defensive democratisation’, which “posits that a state seeks to pre-empt anticipated pressure for political reform in the face of a crisis in the *state*, not society.” (389). This emphasis on the state comes from the fact that the 1989 riots were not about democratic reforms necessarily; instead the protesters wanted the deteriorating economic situation to be addressed. Being faced with these demands, the government was unable to do much about the conditions it had agreed to for the IMF SAP. Instead, political liberalisation served to ensure regime survival. The reforms that were initiated included the lifting of martial law, the calling of parliamentary elections, and the legalisation of political parties (that had been banned ever since 1957) (Nevo 2001). These reforms went hand in hand with a proliferation of civil society organisations. It is true that subsidies were cut as rents dried up, but there was no grass-roots call for political reform; instead, these reforms were initiated top-down as a regime survival strategy (Robinson 1998). A new question that then arises from the same discussion: how could the Jordanian regime feasibly foresee that the opening up of the political landscape would not eventually lead to its own demise as people called for a change of regime?

2.3 Civil society in Jordan continued: disciplinary power

This is what Wiktorowicz (2000) attempts to explain, and in my opinion his explanation remains as valid today as it was in 2000 at the time of writing. He quotes Foucault very effectively: “disciplinary power derives not from the use of visible coercion and commands, but from the partition of space into surveillable units that can be regulated and administered.” (48). In Jordan, even though civil society organisations were allowed to grow in number after

the 1989 riots, they were strictly governed by rules and regulations that stipulate exactly the kind of activities they are allowed to engage in.

Every civil society organisation needs to register at the respective line ministry, which subsequently holds the responsibility to monitor and report on each aspect of the organisation's activities. Additionally, these activities need to remain strictly in the realm of that ministry's portfolio, or no permission will be granted (Wiktorowicz 2000). In line with this policy, civil society organisations are strictly prohibited to engage in activities that could be classified as political, while every member of and volunteer for such organisations has to be screened and approved by the Jordanian security apparatus. If organisations cross one of those lines, the government has the power to dissolve the entire organisation or to completely reshuffle its organisation. It is also very telling that royal family NGOs are given much greater budgets and larger operational freedom compared to other civil society organisations (Identity Center). Thus, "what remains is a well-organised civil society that facilitates the social control of the regime." (54).

This theoretical framework, of a civil society that has been completely immersed by a bureaucratic (legal) machinery, is often referred to by other authors as well. In his characterisation of Jordan's NGO sector, Harmsen (2008) emphasises that the law of Societies and Social Bodies from 1966, which is still in force today, strictly regulates the operational freedom of organisations inside Jordan. This law provides significant power to the government to intervene at any time a voluntary association engages "in any activity that can be interpreted as 'political', 'sectarian', or 'religious'" (Harmsen 2008, 154). Further clarification of these terms is not provided. The International Center for Not-for-Profit Law (2016) keeps an updated NGO law monitor on Jordan, and in their report it is stressed that the term 'political activities' or 'political speech' is not further clarified, which makes their definitions dependent on government discretion. Such rules ensure that political elites exercise complete control over what happens in the civil society sphere, and whose interests are protected by dictating the rules governing behaviour within that sphere (Schwedler 1995). Hawthorne (2004) notes that in Jordan, every civil society worker needs to be approved by the security authorities, and that throughout the region the state has completely infiltrated the civil society space.

This is also what Néfissa (2005) emphasises, when she characterises Arab non-governmental organisations (NGOs) as being 'para-public' in nature, meaning that they are under state influence rather than entirely independent. She distinguishes between two kinds of organisations. The first kind are the ones most studied and internationally active, which she

calls ‘advocacy’ organisations. The second group of organisations she identifies are the ones she characterises as being para-administrative in nature, and which she calls non-advocacy, ‘service-oriented’ (Arab) NGOs, often with a focus on the local level and not presenting any opposition to the state. In this research, my focus is mainly on the first type of NGOs, but even there the boundaries between state and civil society sometimes get blurred.

Another way in which the line between civil society and the state becomes distorted is the strategy of the Jordanian government to co-opt NGOs into promoting a state-led agenda. For instance, this happened with issues relating to human rights, gender equality and the environment, and allowed the government to ‘contract’ NGOs, while simultaneously exercising control over those organisations’ activities (Harmsen 2008).

A similar, yet even more radical way for the government to exercise control in the realm of civil society organisations are the NGOs set up by (former) government officials and royal family members. Harmsen (2008) provides several examples, such as the Jordanian National Commission for Women, established by Princess Basma bint Talal, the aunt of current King Abdullah II. This infiltration of civil society space is also cited by Hawthorne (2004), who describes how security services create NGOs to tap the resources that international donors make available and thereby take away chances from truly independent groups to receive the funding that would otherwise be available to them.

This entrenchment of the state in the civil society space reminds us of Gramsci’s definition of civil society: the space where resistance and opposition can find a voice, but also where the state infiltrates and establishes authority through consent rather than coercion (Herbert 2012). Norton (1995) notes that in Jordan, “women’s groups have been created by the government *expressly to dampen* support for autonomous groups” (17), which shows how far-reaching the control that the government wishes to exercise over civil society is. At the same time, organisations and reforms that promote issues such as gender equality or women’s emancipation serve the purpose of creating a positive image vis-à-vis international donors who wish to promote democratic reforms. One such example is provided by Schwedler (1995), who describes how King Hussein boasted of multi-party elections in the 1990s, while the electoral process was heavily adjusted to avoid political wins for the Islamic Action Front, the Jordanian political party of the Muslim Brotherhood.

Although Hårdig (2015) does not immediately invoke Gramscian theory, he certainly employs Gramscian terminology. He describes how the line between ‘Patron Sponsored Foundations’ (PSFs) and the state becomes hard to separate. He uses this term to denote organisations sponsored by influential individuals, such as ministers or other officials, in a

specific community, and argues that such a foundation “may serve as an extension of state influence (espousing the ‘cultural hegemony’ of the ruling class)” (Härdig 2015, 1137).

2.4 Theoretical framework in this research

What transpires from the discussion so far is that civil society as a concept within Middle Eastern studies remains contested. However, I would like to invoke the argument introduced by Schwedler (1995), to reiterate why I still think it is useful to speak about civil society in the Middle East. She maintains that the very idea of civil society in the Middle East is actually the strongest antithesis against Orientalist ways of thinking:

The idea that civil society exists throughout the Middle East is particularly valuable because it challenges lingering stereotypes of the region as traditional, primordial, and backward – that is, somehow less “modern” than Western countries and, hence, doomed to remain as such. (Schwedler 1995, 2).

Norton (1995) also provides some very strong arguments not to shy away from using the concept in a context other than the one where it was originally conceived. Firstly, this would mix up reality and the ideal-type that civil society as a concept ultimately describes, as there is no ‘perfect’ civil society to be found. Secondly, the concept has been adopted widely by civil society actors, government officials and academia inside the Middle East, creating a legitimate discussion in and by itself. Another scholar I would like to refer to is Homi Bhabha (as cited in Seidman 2013), who, arguing from a post-colonial perspective, maintained that the relationship between the coloniser and the colonised cannot be easily reflected in a two-world dichotomy, drawing on the ideas of hybridity, mimicry and ambivalence to complicate that relationship. Instead, ideas travel, and the concept of civil society is no exception to that rule³.

Moreover, what I find particularly useful is not to think of civil society as a rigid concept, but more as a social construct that scholars use for their analyses of societal developments. The following question, as formulated by Schwedler (1995), is what should define social science research on civil society in the Middle East: “What sort of groups in the Middle East – be they familial, professional, tribal, religious, clan-based, or whatever – fulfil the function of civil society[?]” (16). Using civil society as a concept is thus only useful to the

³ In much the same way, the proliferation of NGOs in Arab countries is often similarly depicted as a result of western interference (Jad 2009).

extent that it provides the scholar with an analytical tool to increase our understanding of phenomena and developments in the region with regards to politics, power structures and relations between society and the state (Schwedler 1995). Kopecký and Mudde (2003) make a similar point when they maintain that the concept of civil society should be approached as a heuristic device in social science research.

Empirical approaches that use civil society as an analytical tool rather than as a rigid concept abound. The most useful analytical framework that I have come across was devised by Hårdig (2015). He argues from an angle that is critical of the concepts employed by Western actors and international organisations of civil society, because their approaches often try to maintain a “semblance of “neutrality”” (Hårdig 2015, 1133) to conceal that they are interfering in the internal affairs of other states. An apolitical approach seems useful, but in fact, it is not, because, as argued extensively above, the boundaries between state and civil society are not always that clear-cut. The typology that Hårdig (2015) proposes treats civil society “as a space and, consequently, CSAs [Civil Society Actors] *are actors who engage in that space in any particular point in time*” (1134); and as a space where “actors engage both through contention and cooperation” (1134). Three empirical observations inform his typology. First, civil society actors have varying levels of independence from the state and enjoy different levels of legitimacy from society; second, the state-civil society boundaries are not rigid and are often impossible to identify; and third, formal organisations and informal networks are also a part of civil society. What I needed for this research is exactly that: an empirical approach that uses the concept ‘civil society’, without immediately condemning the practices of organisations that might not automatically fit the definition employed by Western actors. Hårdig (2015) argues that it is useful to acknowledge how different kinds of CSAs forge coalitions to achieve their goals, and recognises that different types of CSOs face different constraints and opportunities, among other things. These two observations also became very clear from the interviews in this research.

The way in which I used the concept of civil society as an analytical tool followed from my research aims. In order to analyse relations between the Jordanian state and individual actors and the organisations they work for, I aimed to reveal the power structures that affect their work. The discussions I had with the interviewees on their conceptualisation of the term ‘civil society’ functioned as creating a common understanding in each interview of what it was that we were talking about, and as such the concept became an empirical device, instead of a mere theoretical concept.

What makes this research unique is the small-scale and idiographic approach it takes to exploring civil society in Jordan. The literature that provides elaborate mappings of Jordanian CSOs and the legal framework in which these organisations operate (Al-Atiyat 2012, Brand 1995, Harmsen 2008, International Center for Not-for-Profit Law 2016, Jarrah 2009, Kamrava and Mora 2003, Odhibat 1995, National Research Team 2010) is very useful in that it provides the crucial background information informing the analysis of this research, but there is often no room for in-depth and more detailed accounts of the operations of CSOs. Therefore, the aim of this research is not to provide a comprehensive and general overview of civil society in Jordan; others have done that and the scope of this research is too limited. As argued for and explained in the methodology, the organisations that form part of this research are a very particular kind of organisation, and their relationship with the state is explored more in-depth than most other publications on the topic have done, and it is with this in mind that I use the term ‘idiographic’.

Besides the sources quoted here, there are several papers and books that discuss Jordan’s civil society from a particular angle, providing more in-depth analyses (Barari 2015, Beck and Hüser 2015, Identity Center , Helfont and Helfont 2011, Kamrava 1998, Nevo 2001, Robinson 1998, Schwedler 2003, 2012, Susser 2011, Tobin 2012, Wiktorowicz 2000, Yom 2013). Again, these sources provide very valuable information and analytical insights this research can draw upon; however, most of them are rather outdated, and were written before the demonstrations that shook the region and Jordan from 2011 onwards. The accounts written after the advent of those demonstrations focus on Jordan’s regime survival and (the lack of) democratic reforms, or the nature of the protests themselves. And although there are definitely authors who published on civil society in the Middle East after the Arab uprisings, they again ‘map’ the wider regional developments in the realm of civil society. Therefore, this research is not entirely new in its approach, but it does provide a more in-depth account of the developments in the realm of Jordanian civil society than most literature that has been published before, especially in light of new regional developments that followed the Arab uprisings.

3 Methodology

3.1 Approach of inquiry

This research is qualitative in nature, and uses the epistemological assumptions that social constructivists employ. This means that my ontological approach to the study of CSOs in Jordan is interpretivist, and that I view these organisations and the relations that they have with the Jordanian state as social constructs, created by social actors. For instance, most of the interviewees told me that they are accused of being ‘Western spies’. This category has been discursively created by the individuals and organisations, who employ that term (and in that capacity, carries some sort of condemnation with it). In much the same way, other concepts and obstacles have been created to obstruct civil society organisations in their activities. I find Foucault’s approach towards identifying social constructs most useful in this context, because he argued that categories are created and recreated through discourse (for instance, in his writing, the categories of the homosexual, the psychic, the prisoner) and on the disciplinary power that such constructs can evoke (Seidman 2013, Foucault 1978).

The interviews were interpretivist, in the sense that my interviewees explained to me what they perceived to be the obstacles that civil society organisations were facing as a result of such social constructs, in addition to their experience of the laws and regulations and how these impact them. The same approach is illustrated by the wide variety of answers I received when I asked them about their definition of civil society and civil society organisations: there is no fixed definition and their idea of civil society was subjective.

For this topic, I deemed a qualitative research design most useful. I am not interested in data sets and statistical inferences; instead I am interested in the experiences of the interviewees and how they make sense of them, and how they believe state power dictates the way their organisations operate. The strategy I used to research this topic is three-fold and therefore constitutes a method of triangulation: firstly, through my literature review, I identified relevant topics and the knowledge necessary to be able to connect my data to existing scholarship; secondly, I conducted semi-structured interviews on the topic; and thirdly, I corroborated the interviews with the knowledge I acquired through the six-month period as trainee at the Dutch embassy, as I attended numerous meetings and conferences on the topic at hand in that capacity.

The time horizon of my research is cross-sectional, meaning that there was one moment of conducting the interviews, in February 2016, for a duration of two weeks, following my six-month period as trainee. At the embassy, I worked with a wide range of people, including civil society actors and organisations, and employees of different

international NGOs. There I could witness first-hand what kind of problems they were facing with the authorities. Although two weeks is a short period of time, the fact that I spent a significant of time in Amman, Jordan, from August 2015 until February 2016, negates that somewhat, as I was able to learn and acquire necessary background knowledge on the topic of this research prior to doing the actual fieldwork.

3.2 Sampling and access

As transpired from my literature review, a wide variety of civil society organisations exist in Jordan. However, in my selection of organisations that I interviewed, my focus lay on the kinds of organisations that would very easily fit into a more classical definition of civil society organisations, as they are completely independent from the state (even though they do depend heavily and almost exclusively on external state actors or international donors), and focus on issues that one would easily associate with civil society, such as the promotion of human rights, the freedom of the press, the promotion of the rule of law, the promotion of democratic reforms, gender equality, and other similar topics. The most important factor that determined which organisations I got to interview had to do with convenience sampling: through established connections I had access to certain organisations and not to others.

In my sampling strategy, the four-tiered framework provided by Robinson (2014) for sampling in qualitative studies proved very useful, which entails delineating the *sample universe*, the *sample size*, the *sample strategy*, and the *sample sourcing*. In setting my *sample universe*, my first criterion was that the organisations I was looking for needed to be located in Amman, Jordan. My aim was to make my sample as homogeneous as possible, because my sample would be quantitatively limited and a too diverse sample would then reduce the generalizability of my findings. In delimiting my sample universe, I aimed to exclude organisations that had outspoken religious affiliations. Even though it needs to be acknowledged that a large section of Jordanian CSOs are Islamic, due to the limited scope of this research, I did not wish to engage with these CSOs, because that would weigh heavily on the ways in which I could conceptualise civil society in Jordan, and I expected that it would reduce the homogeneity of the sample. I also aimed to stay away from including organisations that are solely concerned with international humanitarian aid in Jordan, because even though they are currently very active and present, they represent an entirely different segment of civil society.

That brings me to my final criterion of inclusion: the kinds of issues the organisations I interviewed aim to promote. I specifically looked for organisations that aim to enhance

human rights, the freedom of expression and public debate, democratic reforms, and freedom of the press. These organisations often get accused of promoting values that are inherently ‘un-Jordanian’, or of being ‘Western agents’, and as such present an easy target for the Jordanian government to exclude or get obstructed in their activities and operations. Moreover, news reports reveal that freedom of speech and press are currently heavily affected by new repressive regulations. My interest also stems from the fact that the literature indicates that these freedoms were the first casualties after the initial political liberalisation that was initiated in post-1989 (Schwedler 2003).

There were other motivations at play as well. In the professional environment I worked in during my time in Amman, it became very clear that most of the funds that foreign donors were spending in Jordan were chiefly reserved to offer assistance to the Jordanian government in its efforts to support the large influx of refugees as a result of regional unrest. This raised the question as to whether this meant that fewer funds were now available for the CSOs that had previously received large quantities of funding, as the priorities of donors had changed. Since the organisations I interviewed were almost exclusively relying on foreign funds, and as these funds were being limited, this provided the Jordanian state with the opportunity to stop tolerating the issues that these organisations aim to promote, and to limit the operational space they had enjoyed before.

With regards to the *size* of my sample, tier two in the framework by Robinson (2014), my interview research approach is idiographic in the sense that each case represents a “locatable voice” (Robinson 2014, 29) in the research, such that each interviewee can be given a defined identity. Simultaneously however, the research has a nomothetic edge, meaning that I aim to arrive at more general findings by testing whether the individual cases point towards similar themes and issues, or “cross-case generalities” (29).

I had exactly two weeks in Amman to complete a number of interviews during my time in February 2016. I foresaw multiple difficulties with getting access to relevant organisations for interviews, not least because of the political sensitivity of the topic I am interested in (see section 3.6 ‘Research ethics’). However, based on the network that I built up during my work at the Dutch embassy in Amman, my hope was to do at least around 10 interviews. Although my initial target lay around 15 to 20 interviews, a number I aimed to reach by means of snowball sampling (Clark 2006), where one organisation helps with establishing contact with other organisations, time proved too limited to do more than 9 interviews. One colleague at the embassy was very helpful in particular, Lina, who, at the

time, was the Human Rights and Policy Officer at the embassy. She is Jordanian and by virtue of her work had a very wide network of individuals and organisations I could tap into.

In addition to these interviews, there are certain meetings, two in particular, which I attended in my capacity as trainee for the Dutch embassy, where relevant issues for this research were discussed. Since I do not have the explicit permission of these organisations to use the reports of those meetings for this research, I will not include those reports or use direct quotes. However, the things that were discussed and the things I learned as part of my stay in Amman do serve as a background to the analysis. Finally, in the same capacity, I attended an event by *Himam*, a one-year-old organisation in Jordan where civil society organisations gather, together with ministers, other government representatives and donors, to discuss the problems that civil society in Jordan faces. The report I wrote of that one-day event has also been used in this research as a means of corroboration.

All of these considerations relate to the *sample strategy* that I used, tier three in the framework provided by Robinson (2014). I used convenience sampling, in that I approached organisations that I previously knew through my network in Amman, and who were willing to participate because of that. As Robinson (2014) describes, the risk inherent in this sampling approach is that if the sample universe is insufficiently narrowed down, generalizability becomes more problematic and results less representative. However my inclusion and exclusion criteria of my sample universe provide sufficient grounds on which to make cross-case generalisations, as the generalisations that I aim to make only extend to the type of organisations my interviewees came from: human rights and democracy advocacy organisations, or organisations that promote media freedoms. Additionally, I corroborated the data from my interviews with reports from organisations like the *United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization* (UNESCO) and the reports from meetings where influential individuals from Jordanian think tanks spoke about the relations between civil society and the state.

Finally, point four of the sampling framework by Robinson (2014) deals with *sample sourcing*. When I approached the organisations about potential interviews, I was very open about my aims and what I could offer them. I did not offer any incentives, financial or otherwise. Instead, I told them that I would share the final thesis with them, if they were so inclined, and expressed my gratitude very explicitly. This strategy proved good enough to arrange the interviews that I aimed for.

In order to present my findings as comprehensibly as possible, the table in Appendix 1 provides some information on the participants. The information on whether the organisation

(previously) received funding from the Dutch embassy is included, since the participants knew I worked for the Dutch embassy previously, and this might have affected the way in which they interacted with me.

3.3 The interviews

My interviews were semi-structured (O'Reilly 2005). My research question is quite specific but I wanted to be open to a wider variety of answers from my interviews, and therefore did not want to limit the kinds of answers that the interviewees were able to give. I have included an appendix (2) with the interview guide I used. It is mostly thematic in nature, with plenty of room for follow-up questions. Thus, I was not looking for straightforward yes-or-no answers to the questions I posed, which would entail a more positivist outlook on doing research. Instead, my approach was more interpretivist in nature, where I was looking for the personal meaning my interviewees attach to the phenomena they encountered (van Maanen 2011).

Hermanowicz (2002) provided me with some useful advice on how to approach the interviews, for instance on how to organise the order of the questions in my interview guide (see Appendix 2). The first few questions were more general in nature, and gradually, the subsequent questions dealt with the more sensitive issues I wished to address. The final questions I posed, although not included in my interview guide, were usually about less charged topics, such as future plans for the organisation, or more casual in nature, to end the interviews on a lighter note.

3.4 Data analysis

Six out of nine interviews were recorded; the remaining three could not be recorded at the time or it was against the wishes of the interviewee. The interviews that did get recorded were transcribed completely, and the transcriptions were subsequently re-read copiously and riddled of any information that could lead back to the interviewee (see section 3.6 'Research ethics'). During the interviews that were not recorded, I took very accurate notes and subsequently wrote reports of those interviews. In order to maintain the anonymity of the interviewees, the transcripts and the reports have not been attached to this thesis⁴.

The identification of themes in the data was led by the approaches that Ryan and Bernard (2003) suggest, looking for repetitions, metaphors and analogies. The theme identification was led partially by theory, as the literature review already provided some

⁴ Available upon request.

themes I wished to explore, as is the case with the bureaucratic nature of the obstacles that CSOs face and the definitions the participants used for the concept of civil society. Other themes were guided directly by the data, such as the role of donors and the challenges they present CSOs with. In analysing the interviews and the reports, I read all of them several times and looked for the similarities and differences between the texts. Subsequently, the main themes and issues the participants mentioned were all taken note of and structured along the lines of several major themes. The 'Findings and discussion' chapter was subsequently structured accordingly.

3.5 Reflexivity

In any research project, it is crucial to realise what impact the researcher has on the study and the subjects of the study – in this case the interviewees (Bryman 2012). A certain power imbalance between the researcher and the interviewees is always present. In terms of where I come from, I felt that many interviewees had preconceived ideas about the values I hold, and what I thought of Jordanian society. This was further conflated by the fact that they knew I had worked for the Dutch embassy previously: Dutch foreign policy was linked to my personality, at least to some extent. The fact that I worked for the embassy (although not at the time of the interviews themselves) influenced the way in which my interviewees approached me: firstly, they knew I had been representing Dutch foreign policy previously, and secondly, some of the organisations I spoke to received funding from the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

This is a limitation of this research, but at the same time I was not too concerned. The reason for that is that I was asking them about the obstacles they faced in their capacity to operate as NGOs in Jordan, which was a way for them to speak openly about the problems they were having, possibly with them thinking in the back of their minds that I might have some sort of influence on the embassy's relations with the Jordanian government, and the willingness of the embassy to address these issues with the government. Therefore, I believe the stories that they told me were genuine and transparent. To partially circumvent the risk that they would tell me what they thought I wanted to hear as a representative of the Netherlands, I very clearly stated in my request for the interviews that these interviews were not going to be conducted in my capacity as embassy employee, but in my capacity as a master student in Sweden. In addition, by having open discussions about what civil society entails, I intended to show that I was trying to come up with a suitable conceptualisation for

this context, and that I did not approach the topic from a position where ideas about what civil society should be were set in stone.

Another factor affecting the power relations between the interviewees and myself was the fact that the topics I was investigating were sensitive from time to time, especially when interviewees touched on issues revolving around the involvement of the intelligence authorities. It is impossible to completely negate this factor, however, I was very careful about asking questions that made my interviewees visibly uncomfortable. Moreover, I always underscored, both at the beginning and during the interviews, that they could stop the interview, or skip questions at any time, if there was something they were uncomfortable discussing. In general, I tried to keep in mind that by talking to me, some interviewees felt like they were taking a risk. Regardless of whether that risk was real, I tried my utmost to make them feel comfortable by telling them that the interview would be anonymous, and by making some small talk before and after the interviews. I also promised to share my final thesis with them, so that they could see the result for themselves. The interviews became more comfortable when I took a personal and open approach. In addition, this attitude also fared best for myself, and created a more open atmosphere to ask a wide variety of questions.

In response to my social position, many of the interviewees were slightly confused. It was hard to explain I was a Dutch student, who previously worked for the embassy, but who was simultaneously studying Middle Eastern Studies in Sweden. This resulted in questions about my interests, my background, and what I planned to do next. However, explaining these things was advantageous, as it helped to place my research in a more comprehensible location for the interviewees. Furthermore, talking about my genuine interest in Jordan and the wider region was received very positively by the interviewees and evoked enthusiasm from their side.

Of course, one issue that was hard to avoid was my inability to interpret some of the formulations, remarks, or other expressions, simply because I come from an entirely different context. As an outsider, the way I framed the questions might sometimes have been rather simple, but these basic questions were sometimes very helpful to establish some sort of common understanding between the interviewees and myself, and approach topics with a more open view than the approach people from a more similar context might adopt. The interviews were conducted in English, as all of the interviewees were completely comfortable conversing in that language, and two of them were native English speakers. However, for the others, not being able to express themselves in Arabic might have affected the way that they were able to say what they were meaning to say.

3.6 Research ethics

The article by Carapico (2006), who talks about research and ethics in Arab contexts, also applies to this particular research. Carapico (2006) highlights the different attitudes that researchers might take while doing fieldwork in the Arab world, and her conclusion is that there 'are no easy answers' to which attitude one should take. My own attitude during the fieldwork I did comes closest to the 'fly-on-the-wall-model', where the researcher tries to remain neutral and not to express opinions.

However, I recognise that the very topic of this research already invites a certain angle that is far from neutral-free, and the kinds of organisations that I interviewed are all promoters of values one would associate with Western organisations and governments as well. Therefore, being unbiased is an almost impossible task, and although I most definitely attempted to stay neutral during the interviews and let the interviewee talk without me judging the answers that were being conveyed, the fact that the participants already identified me as coming from the Dutch embassy probably gave them a rough idea of what kinds of values I hold. They might also have inferred from body language or other kinds of unconscious signs that I sometimes agreed or disagreed with what they were saying. In some instances, this was not a problem, because encouragement from my side would make the interviewees more comfortable in talking about their experiences. In turn, I was careful not to show my disagreement or shock at some of the things they were telling me, because this might have deterred them from continuing their story.

To ensure that participants do not suffer from any kind of harm as a consequence of taking part in this research, their identities are kept entirely confidential. Harm might follow from talking openly and critically about the Jordanian government. As my interview guide in Appendix 2 shows, before starting an interview, a declaration was read out loud (a tip by Hermanowicz (2002)), which explained everything very clearly to the interviewee. I assured them of their anonymity, and will only make transcripts or interview reports available upon request, heavily edited to take out personality-sensitive information so that it is not possible to trace that information to whom it is that I spoke to. In addition, in the thesis, pseudonyms are used to refer to the participants. Finally, during the entire research process, I refrained from sharing material with others that might reveal the participants' identity, and after the completion of the research this information will be destroyed.

3.7 Limitations

Some potential limitations have already been touched upon in the discussion above, concerning my position as a researcher in relation to the interviewees. In addition, as transpired from my literature review, there is a disproportional amount of literature devoted to the topic of democratisation theory in the Middle East and on civil society studies. In my research, I am looking at exactly those organisations that are typically inspired by ‘Western’ ideas about democratic transition, and as such, I am “searching where the light shines” (Anderson 2006). These organisations are often overstudied while others are understudied. In the case of Jordan however, there is less literature devoted to civil society in general, and the fact that there is already substantial literature about civil society in the Middle East more generally, has helped my research, rather than restrict it.

In terms of representation, I believe my sample universe is narrow enough to be able to draw more generalizable conclusions. At the same time, it needs to be acknowledged that a narrower sample universe also means that, although generalisations may be drawn, they have a limited scope of representation.

4 Findings and discussion

This chapter has been structured according to the themes that were identified from the data. After copiously reading the interview transcripts and reports from interviews that could not be recorded, a large amount of topics was identified, with some bigger themes that could be used to structure these topics. Part of those themes were derived from the way the interview questions were asked (see the interview guide in Appendix 2), such as the section on the way that the participants view civil society in Jordan, and were thus largely derived from the literature review. Other topics were not identified beforehand, such as the internal challenges that civil society in Jordan is dealing with, and were thus raised in the interviews by the interviewees. All quotes in this section were taken directly from the transcripts, which is why grammar mistakes or confusing phrases have not been altered.

In order to answer the research questions, the chapter has been structured according to the questions I identified in chapter 1. The main question asked is “Are civil society organisations in Jordan being suppressed? If so, to what extent, how does this manifest itself and what are the reasons behind it in their opinion?” First, the concept of ‘civil society’ in Jordan is discussed in section 4.1, and the way the interviewees approach this concept. Then, I move on to discuss the different challenges they identified in section 4.2, with the first few sections devoted to challenges emanating from the Jordanian state apparatus. Some attention is given to one specific theme in section 4.2.2: media freedoms or the lack thereof, as this kept recurring in the interviews. Additionally, there were other obstacles the interviewees identified, which I also discuss briefly in section 4.2.6. Subsequently, in section 4.3, the role of foreign donors and the funds they bring along was an oft-heard topic, which is why a separate section deals with this. Section 4.4 focuses on the timing of the restrictions, and what role the demonstrations of 2011 played. Finally, the last section (4.5) deals with possible explanations for the current crackdown on Jordan’s civil society. The literature and theories that were outlined in chapter two are continuously used to elucidate the topics that the interviewees discussed. Throughout the chapter, I aim to link the findings to the discussions that were part of the literature review in chapter 2, making connections and analysing the interview material, by going through it theme by theme.

4.1 Civil society

As transpired from the literature review, the debate about what constitutes civil society continues, especially in a context like Jordan’s. The discussion came up in one of the interviews immediately, when Kadar stated that for her, the controversy started with the term

itself, “because it’s like borrowed, it’s from English”, and then continued to explain that the term itself can have rather negative connotations because of the link people make with “Western foreign interference in internal issues” (Kadar).

However, as emphasised in the literature review, concepts like ‘civil society’, and ideas more generally, tend to travel, even though they are definitely impacted by their context of origin. Critiques maintaining that concepts conceived in the ‘west’ should not be employed in Arab contexts because of “stereotypes of the region as [...] backward” (Schwedler 1995, 2) can be countered exactly through adopting such concepts and creating hybrids, as postcolonial scholars would argue (Seidman 2013). None of the other interviewees mentioned this particular problem, but all of them recognised how people within (or outside, depending on the definition) civil society hold different definitions of the concept. Other accusations of being ‘Western’ also came up in different discussions, mainly in the context of receiving funds from foreign donors – more on that below.

Another ambiguous issue that arose out of the interviews concerned what organisations to include or exclude in the definition of civil society. From the literature review, it transpired that for each organisation, determining whether it constitutes part of civil society or not should be considered on a case-by-case basis (Kopecký and Mudde 2003). What proved most ambiguous in the interviews involved the question of whether political parties in Jordan should be considered as civil society organisations or not. According to the more classical definition as described by Wiktorowicz (2000), political parties do not fit that description, and most of the interviewees agreed with that. Their reasoning is that political parties ultimately strive to gain power over the body politic, and therefore fall outside the scope of civil society, where, in contrast, organisations that have aims unrelated to gaining political power should be situated. However, some of the interviewees did not identify with such opinions. Zainab argued that political parties in Jordan are very different kinds of organisations than political parties in other contexts, and that, as long as they are opposition parties, they should be considered as part of civil society:

Political parties, it’s part of the civil society, and it’s really very important. [...] *Halla*’ [common phrase, literally means ‘now’ in Arabic, but usually used as a stop word], in Jordan, political parties don’t form governments [laughs]. And so, they are like associations [laughs even more]. Of course, I believe they are civil society [laughs].

Charles also argued that political parties constitute civil society, because “They’re all working in communities and in society, and you know, trying to push things in a certain agenda and a certain way.”

For my own discussion of civil society as a concept, it does not matter much whether I include political parties in Jordan in my definition, as this research does not address them. However, the more general conclusion one can draw here is that the meaning of the concept is far from clear, and that different opinions exist – indeed, the same, perhaps unsatisfying, conclusion that was drawn following a discussion on the relevant literature.

4.1.1 “Real” civil society and the diversity of civil society organisations

One of the major themes that was addressed in all of the interviews was the discrepancy that exists between different kinds of organisations in the realm of civil society, another thing that became clear from the literature review. Part of this discrepancy exists between international non-governmental organisations (INGOs) and national NGOs. National, or local organisations are much more vulnerable in a way, when it comes to state regulations targeted to thwart the activities of these organisations.

Another part of that discrepancy plays out between different kinds of local organisations. The interviewees all employed similar kinds of categorisations and most of them pointed at the differences between four kinds of organisations: governmental NGOs, or GONGOs; royal NGOs, or RONGOs; business NGOs, or BONGOs; and “real” NGOs. What sets these organisations apart is not necessarily the activities they organise, or the values they stand for; instead, the differences become visible in the way the government deals with them, how they acquire funding and from whom, and in the case of BONGOs, what their long-term objectives are. Therefore, Hazem argued that, in Jordan, “it’s a fragmented civil society”.

Generally, the participants were very negative when we talked about GONGOs. They highlighted how these organisations are established at the behest of former government officials, such as ministers, and how they suddenly promote certain values that they were previously fighting against. Zainab told me that two former ministers established such a GONGO, and uses a ‘play’ as a metaphor to emphasise how ridiculous she believes it is that they did this:

And these ministers used to be Minister of Justice, and at that time while they were ministers, they didn’t care for legal aid. And they were Ministers of Trade and Industry and they were thinking of how to close these NGOs, so how come they registered as an

NGO, working on legal aid? It's not because of legal aid, I am sure. Now there should be a play!

Finally, since the involvement of (former) government officials in non-governmental organisations creates conflicts of interest, this equipped the Jordanian government with material to accuse the entire NGO sector of corruption and thereby to tarnish the reputation of civil society in general. Again, Zainab told me:

So whenever you talk about corruption, it's true! The government says 'we want to change the law', and as justification because of the corruption in civil society. So they had like, these excuses for the government, the government created them, and they have the excuse to change the law, to amend the law, so more restrictions on civil society because of corruption. While it's their organisations [laughs].

Similarly, Hazem states:

[S]ome ministers who used to be totally against them, against this freedom [of the press], when they serve as ministers.. the day after they create an NGO and receiving fund from European institutions to promote press freedom and independence.. as if nothing happened before!! [laughs] You know? [...] It's not independent. At all.

I wish to connect the negative associations my interviewees expressed when talking about GONGOs to the definition of civil society they simultaneously employ. In their opinion, GONGOs are not part of the 'real' civil society that they count themselves to be part of. In the literature review, it was noted that several scholars use the hallmark of 'civility' (Norton 1995, 11) to characterise which organisations should be considered as part of civil society and which should not. This hallmark indicates that the interactions between CSOs should be tolerant, with respect for democratic principles and pluralism (Schwedler 1995). However, if one considers that GONGOs are used to tarnish the reputation of the entire civil society sector, by making allegations of corruption more credible, the nature of interactions between different CSOs can hardly be called 'civil'. Similarly, accusing other CSOs of being agents of the west is not very respectful if such allegations do not rest on grounded empirical observations.

The involvement of the royal family in some (often very well-known) organisations is another matter completely. These NGOs are not governmental but instead enjoy other advantages in many aspects: in relation to the kinds of laws they are subject to; the kinds of bureaucratic procedures they have to abide by; and the visibility and reputation that royal patronage brings to the table. These discrepancies have far-reaching consequences for the status these organisations enjoy, but also to what extent their activities are guided by the rules and procedures they have to follow. In relation to this topic, Lina stated:

in terms of ehm.... Regulatory framework, most royal NGOs are governed by their own laws, which gives them tax incentives, that are not available for other organisations; which gives them ability to receive money freely, okay?

For both RONGOs and GONGOs, Harmsen (2008), as previously mentioned, provided several examples, using them to illustrate how the Jordanian government infiltrates civil society space. These organisations thus exist alongside other types of organisations, and have multiple purposes, some of which are to obstruct the activities of non-royal or non-governmental NGOs. It is exactly these kinds of organisations that Néfissa (2005) characterises as ‘para-public’ in nature, to signify that they are not independent from state power.

Finally, two participants also mentioned business NGOs, or BONGOs. Contrary to what one might expect, these are not businesses; instead they are “real” NGOs (as are the organisations the interviewees represent, in their eyes), but without long-term objectives; they always bend their aims to the will of what donors prioritise in their calls for proposals each time. Mahmud used the metaphor of a ‘supermarket’, where NGOs simply identify donors’ priorities and adjust their proposals and aims accordingly. Zainab also elaborated a bit on this:

We were shocked. [...] Last week I received a call from someone, this is the third time she called me. Every time there is a call for proposals, and she calls me to ask about ideas [laughs astoundingly]. Ideas, what kind of work on women’s rights she can do, to get the fund [laughs]. If you don’t have an objective, if you don’t have any idea about the issue, how come you just collect ideas from people? Is it just the fund? It’s business.

As referred to earlier, Härdig (2015) recognises that different types of CSOs face different constraints and opportunities – and this is exactly what became clear from the combined

narratives of the interviewees: RONGOs, GONGOs, “real” NGOs, and BONGOs all have different relations with the state, and as a result, the advantages they enjoy, or the disadvantages they are subjected to, vary tremendously. This ‘fragmented’ civil society corresponds to the image that Cavatorta (2008) sketched of the civil society space in the entire region, as many different actors promote a wide variety of aims. Ruling elites (RONGOs, GONGOs) facilitate control through a consolidated presence in that space; international donors promote their agendas of democratic transition; Islamist organisations are very active and present; and ‘real’ CSOs, to use my interviewees’ definition, are able to find an oppositional voice.

4.2 Challenges to civil society emanating from the state

The main purpose of this research was to find out the kinds of challenges that civil society in Jordan is currently facing as a result of government action or the state bureaucracy. In the interviews, several kinds of challenges were addressed, and the troubles that these organisations have to deal with were structured according to the major themes that were discussed, comprising the legal framework they operate in; the restriction of freedoms of the media; the implementation of the existing laws and regulations; the role of the security authorities; and other challenges not directly tied to the state.

4.2.1 Legal framework

Without exception, all participants indicated that most problems arose out of the legal framework they currently operate in. The most prominent issue on the agenda of the Himam conference that was previously mentioned, concerned the foreign funding regulations that civil society actors have to abide by, and which have been altered recently. During the Himam conference, it became apparent these new laws are big obstacles for civil society organisations to, once they secure donors’ funds, actually get the money wired through. The original legislation regulating foreign funding stems from the 2008 Law No. 51, and requires CSOs to acquire approval from the Council of Ministers. However, since October 2015, acquiring this approval has become much harder. CSOs now have to submit extensive approval forms in which they have to report every possible detail about what the funds are for, and interestingly, specify how these funds will contribute to “Jordan’s national development goals” (International Center for Not-for-Profit Law 2016). In the interviews, much of this was confirmed, and participants talked openly about the way that these extra requirements directly translated into problems for them. Lina notes:

What's happening right now is that for the past one year and a half, for example, the bank doesn't process payments from foreign donors, unless the organisation shows the bank that the approval of the Council of Ministers for foreign funding was obtained. This was never a practice. This is very recent.

This illustrates that the implementation of the requirement of approval from the Council of Ministers has become stricter, and that this is a very recent phenomenon.

During the Himam conference, Assem Rababa from *Adaleh Center for Human Rights Studies* noted that the new foreign funding mechanism is breaching the Right of Association that Jordan has affirmed in an international covenant, and which was published in the official Gazette. At the same conference, Oraib al Rantawi from *Al-Quds Center for Political Studies* stated that with this new mechanism, it can take up to eight months for CSOs to get the funding wired through simply because the approval they need is not granted. Similarly at Himam, Dima Jweihan from the *International Center for Not-for-Profit Law* maintained that CSOs come to them with complaints, and that instructions about the approval process need to be published officially, since CSOs are not aware of the correct procedures. Regarding the reason behind the new foreign funding mechanism, one of the interviewees, Lina, states:

[T]his new mechanism for foreign funding, I mean the minister said that she, they wanted to ensure that ehm, that you know, aid effectiveness.

She also states that although the goal to make aid more effective is good, the mechanism that has been put in place is not effective at all, and affects organisations disproportionately. Another interviewee, Julia, believes that the new foreign funding mechanism is connected with anti-terrorism legislation, and explains how it has made it harder for CSOs to obtain their funding:

[T]he anti-terrorism legislation, and the 2008 Societies law just has stipulations in there, that kind of let the banks do anything. So they are stopping wire transfers and then asking for inappropriate information: beneficiary lists; a letter from the Prime Minister saying that you have project approval.. they don't seem to understand that.. I don't know... they're taking control of ... things they probably shouldn't be taking control of. You know, we get approval to implement [projects] through this process, but now

suddenly the banks are saying: 'Ok, you have to prove to us that you have approval', and things like that.

Beyond the foreign funding mechanism, the *International Center for Not-for-Profit Law* also reports that as recently as March 21st 2016, the Jordanian Ministry of Social Development initiated a process to replace the previously mentioned law No. 51, the 2008 NGO law:

The draft, if enacted, will significantly restrict the legal environment for NGOs in Jordan. Among other constraints, the draft requires at least 50 founders to establish an NGO, provides the government with broad discretion to dissolve an NGO, imposes new requirements on branch offices of international NGOs, and places new restrictions on the foreign funding of Jordanian NGOs. (International Center for Not-for-Profit Law 2016).

These examples, the new foreign funding mechanism and the new draft NGO law, show that the control the government exercises over Jordanian NGOs derives very much from the rules and regulations that they impose, perhaps even more so than direct security threats – but more on those below.

Yet another example of this legislative control comes into focus when one looks at the way in which CSOs are classified in Jordan. It was noted before that there are vast differences between the ways in which different categories of organisations are treated from a legal point of view. This is most obviously the case between royal NGOs (RONGOs) and other NGOs. Lina noted that RONGOs are subject to different laws, as each royal NGO has its own legislative framework. This often entitles them to tax incentives and the ability to receive funds freely. Moreover, besides these advantages, Lina stated:

[J]ust because it's a royal NGO you need to know that all implementation becomes much easier, because the government officers, they don't want to upset the royal family, so if things can be arranged like 'Yeah, yeah, whatever, please, please' and 'please make this work because it's for the princess whomever..' you know? Regardless.

An example of this was provided by Mahmud, who talked about a project by *Save the Children*, an organisation that enjoys royal patronage in Jordan. While the approval waiting

time for project foreign funding can take more than 8 months, it took this organisation merely one month to obtain approval for a fund of 12 to 13 million Jordanian Dinars⁵. This illustrates that RONGOs receive preferential treatment not only because they are subject to different laws, but also because they literally enjoy the patronage of, and thereby, protection from the Jordanian royal family. Once again Foucault's writing about power and punishment is illuminating here: "disciplinary power derives not from the use of visible coercion and commands, but from the partition of space into surveillable units that can be regulated and administered" (as cited in Wiktorowicz 2000, 48). In this case, the 'space' is the civil society space in which organisations move, and the 'surveillable units' are the different kinds of organisations that exist and have to register: royal NGOs, NGOs, for-profit companies, not-for-profit companies, and more.

On the not-for-profit companies, Charles noted:

and so the way the law works, if you're a non-profit, or NGO, if you receive money from outside of Jordan, you have to get approval to do that project. The way it works for for-profit companies is you don't have to get that approval.

This is merely one example of how the law works differently for different organisations. What is important to note here is that, as a consequence, typical civil society organisations that might otherwise register as not-for-profit companies, now attempt to register as for-profit companies, even though this subsequently carries consequences for their ability to obtain funding for their projects.

4.2.2 Media freedoms

Kadar:

When journalists were covering these demonstrations [in 2011], they would be beaten *more* than even the regular people. Some people believe that they were even targeted in terms of breaking their equipment, breaking cameras. Like in two or three cases there were journalists who were sent to hospital, one of them was broken [one of the journalists had fractured bones]. And every time they would say that 'It's because you don't have this thing saying that you are press' [clothing intended to make it visible that

⁵ 15 to 16.5 million Euros.

people belong to the press]. And according to the CDFJ [*Center for Defending the Freedom of Journalists*] investigation, they found that, no, it was clear that they were press, and that they were targeted. They wanted to scare journalists not to cover these demonstrations.

This quote hints at a very significant theme that arose in several of the interviews, concerning the restriction of media freedoms and the legal framework that media organisations and journalists operate in, which merits a separate discussion, as this is such a large and complex topic. Most of the things covered by the interviews have also been reported by UNESCO in a report called ‘Assessment of media development in Jordan’, dated July 2015.

This report states that “the legal framework includes a number of unduly restrictive rules” on what may be published by the media, “including broad and harsh criminal defamation laws with only limited defences, and extensive limitations on freedom of expression to protect national security, the courts and religious feelings.” (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization 2015, 11). More specifically, the report notes that the Jordan Media Commission is not independent from the government; that there are legal limitations on who is allowed to be a practising journalist, and if one is not up to the standards, that person is excluded from a *Jordan Press Association* (JPA) membership and thus formally banned from working as a journalist; and that news websites are controlled and limited significantly. Especially the interview with Kadar was enlightening in this regard. She outlined precisely what kinds of laws impact journalists and media organisations, and pointed out many of the same issues in the report by UNESCO. She singled out two laws in particular that have restricted media freedoms. The first one is the Anti-Terrorism law, which included an article that restricted freedom of speech on the internet.

The second law is the Electronic Crimes law, which now includes an article about defamation and slander. Under these laws, it has become possible to arrest journalists, even though in 2010, the king pushed for a famous modification of the Press and Publication Law that made it illegal to arrest journalists. Kadar states:

So they amended this law to stop arresting journalists. So what is going on is that they are arresting journalists through other laws. So these two laws, the first because it is a state security law, which is a private law and it is like, superior to regular law. And the other law, the Cyber Law, according to this law, it allows arresting journalists.

As a result, ten journalists were detained last year in Jordan, which is the highest number since 2006⁶.

Another issue that Kadar addressed was the discrepancy that exists between journalists who work online, and journalists who work for more traditional paper media outlets. The former are subject to significantly more restrictions than the latter. According to the Electronic Crimes law, online journalists cannot be classified as journalists. However, in order to continue their work, the Press and Publications Law stipulates that they need to be classified as journalists, and obtain a licence. To solve this issue, the question “Are journalists allowed to be subject to both laws?” was sent to an interpretation council. According to Kadar:

[T]he reply was shocking, a shock to all journalists: it was the worst reply ever. [...] So it's like, as organisations they have to be licensed according to the Press and Publication Law, and as individual journalists, they are not journalists, they are not protected as journalists, so they have to be accountable to, or restricted by the Cyber Law [Electronic Crimes law]. And since then, over one year, there is more than ten journalists, who were arrested, and this is like a *dramatic* increase of arresting journalists in Jordan, in general.

Although there were many topics Kadar addressed in the discussion on media freedoms, one big issue she kept on emphasising concerned access to information, or rather the lack thereof, affecting journalists tremendously. Kadar marks this as one of the major restrictions that journalists face:

Like for example, in media freedoms reports, internal ones, for example, CDFJ [*Center for Defending the Freedom of Journalists*] and JPA [*Jordan Press Association*], when they have questionnaires and ask journalists about the number one restriction, they would say access to information. And this is like a weapon that the government uses to restrict the freedom of journalists.

⁶ This was reported by the *Center for Defending the Freedom of Journalists* (CDFJ). For a summary in English, see this news article by the (government-owned) Jordan Times: <http://www.jordantimes.com/news/local/2015-marked-highest-number-journalists-behind-bars-2006---report>

The report by UNESCO confirms this, stating that the Jordanian constitution lacks guarantees of the right to information. Moreover, it notes that Jordan was the first country in the region that adopted an Access to Information Law in 2007, but that this law is seriously undermined by extensive rules on secrecy in the legal framework. On this particular law, Kadar stated:

Jordan was very proud that it was the first country in the region to have this law. Like many journalists, including myself, believed that it's like, not access, it's blocking information, this Access to Information Law! It's to show the international community that we have this law but it's not helpful at all.

This example illustrates how Jordan's government at the time attempted to talk "the "donor talk"" to seek political rent (Albrecht and Schlumberger 2004, 376). Albrecht and Schlumberger argue that Arab states learned how to successfully adopt the "donor talk" to acquire "[d]emocracy-money" (376).

4.2.3 Implementation of the law

Besides the major challenges that organisations face arising out of the legal framework, what became even more apparent was that the pre-existing legal framework did not change immensely; what changed was the way the existing legislation is being implemented by civil servants, bankers, and the security authorities. This was also what Mahmud said. He noted that before the changes in the legal framework were made, the laws did not change, but "on the ground, *everything* changed". He stated that the implementation of the existing laws became much more restrictive and that "They'd like to constrict the freedom space of civil society". Lina confirmed the same thing:

The implementation of the law has been, has become very, very more restrictive for the last one year and a half, and it's based on different, different justifications.

Moreover, Mahmud told me that "It is important to focus on the practices, because the legal framework doesn't tell much just by itself. It is about the power interference of the intelligence". These statements led me to ask my other interviewees whether they could identify themselves with these views. The answer in all cases was a resounding 'yes'. The main factors that affected the ways in which laws are being implemented, pointed to the

current government, and the arbitrary procedures CSOs encounter, most of which centre around the approval process for projects.

One of the main factors in the implementation of the law concerned the current Jordanian government, and some ministers in particular. Zainab talked about one minister, who let her own interests interfere in the way she conducted her ministerial role:

So she's stopping us from having access to social care centres, but she gives them [the organisations that the minister is affiliated with] the access instead of us. We were the first to sign an agreement, to have an office inside a women's shelter. Before she became minister. And the first thing she did when she became minister, to stop our agreement and to give the access to the other one. And all the founders of this organisation are former ministers!

Besides such conflicts of interest, Lina also talked about the inconsistencies and arbitrary procedures CSOs have to deal with in their relations with ministries. As she put it:

And they're not even announced. Like, every day, you're just like 'Do you go?' when you hear something new. And it's not necessarily the same thing that I would hear, you know, its very inconsistent, very different. So yes, like you said, it's not even clear if you want to go and open an organisation, and operate within an organisation, you wouldn't know what is waiting for you.

Apart from the confusion this creates for CSOs, similar confusion arises within some ministries about the correct procedures for getting projects approved. In my conversation with Julia, she attempted to explain how, in turn, this confusion translated into even more requirements that CSOs had to deal with:

So here MOPIC [*Ministry of Planning and International Cooperation*] is thinking that the INGOs aren't coordinating, when really, the people inside the line ministries just aren't communicating at all, and that problem comes up over and over and over again for us.

And, in even stronger statements:

I mean, we have this system that they made transparent, and suddenly the ministries have taken all the transparency out. You don't know why something's being requested and it's not the same for everybody. Some get approved, some don't. So that's the first thing. The second thing with the ministries is the unequal reporting that they ask for [when projects are already running, organisations need to meet differing standards of reporting to the ministry that they are registered with].

What all of this comes down to is the approval process that organisations need to go through in order for them to execute their projects and activities. In November 2015, the *Jordan INGO Forum* (JIF) reported that the main obstacle that international humanitarian relief organisations are facing is getting their projects approved. The JIF report focused on Syrian refugee projects, and most of these obstacles have to do with the current way in which the legal framework gets implemented. INGOs are now being asked to sign Memorandums of Understanding (MoUs) with different ministries, and as a result, organisations have to wait incredibly long for approval. The longest an organisation had had to wait at that point was 224 days. On top of that, the requirements of the MoUs are very inconsistent; they change from time to time and differ for each ministry. Finally, there is an element of corruption as well, where ministries are often attaching (financial) conditionalities to signing these MoUs, without proper mechanisms to ensure accountability – the MOPIC relies heavily on individuals and their *wasta*. As a result of all these obstacles, only larger NGOs, who have the capacity to install a government liaison at their organisation, can overcome those hindrances relatively unscathed; smaller organisations, which lack those resources, have had to cancel some projects.

In the interviews, similar issues were discussed, and the fact that these procedures affect not just the international humanitarian organisations, but also the local organisations that deal with human rights and freedom of the media. One organisation specifically reported that its event, a debate that had been planned for weeks, was cancelled at the last minute at the behest of the Amman governor. On the difference between international and local organisations, Julia argued:

[Y]ou know what's happening is that they [local CSOs] don't share information as much, like, as a large group. So they're all kind of fighting it, not as a group, but as individual organisations. And not only that, but when their funding is delayed [...] I suspect that they're a little harder-hit, if they don't get funding for six months. Whereas

a big international organisation can still pay its staff, do you know what I mean? [...] the local organisations don't have the protection that saves the donor community and that's why I feel like they're in a much more difficult position.

Part of this has to do with the foreign funding mechanism and the approval that organisations need to obtain for that, as explained above, but this link is not always clear – it can also affect organisations in other instances. Lina noted that “Even if they [organisations] collect funds from local resources, they need a license from the government to do so.”.

4.2.4 Security authorities

What follows from the discussion on the implementation of the law is the increasing importance of the role of the security authorities in Jordan, most notably the *General Intelligence Directorate* (GID), or mukhabarat, who are, besides the line ministries and banks, the ones who implement the law. Lina, during the same discussion quoted above, noted that the organisation she works for was under investigation, and that the intelligence authorities whom she was in touch with claimed that every organisation was subject to similar investigations. She told me the following story:

They called most organisations, if not all, and they told them ‘please hand us your registration documents.’. And for example, in our case, we told them ‘Well, we are registered under the supervision of the Minister of Interior, so our file is there, you guys are the same department, you know, so just go and ask them for that’, and they said: ‘No no no, we need you to submit them’. Then we said, ‘Ok fine, we're going to submit them, but why, what's happening, is it only us?’ and then they said ‘No, no, no, it's for everybody, because now, if you want to do any event in Jordan, the Ministry of Interior has to get our approval first.’. And so it was like, so this is an actual restriction, this is an additional practice.

These practices can get very personal as well. Zainab told me several stories about how she was personally threatened and was even sentenced to death in state security court at one point. She talked about threats very openly:

[A]gainst me personally, for a while, I was facing health problems because of the threats, I received. I did an interview with media, about a case – another year also.

About a case, we filed against intelligence, for torture [laughs]. And after I finished the interview, I received calls, I even couldn't sleep at my home, because I am living alone, and I received a lot of threats. So I left my home at 11 o'clock at night. I saw strange people on the gate and I left.

Sayyid also talked openly about the ways in which his personal freedom was restricted when he said:

The GID threatens us a lot. The first time I was threatened was when I had just started studying, after four months in university. In 1994, I was detained in jail for five days by the military police, not the GID.

This final statement also shows that it is not just the GID that has become more rigorous in the implementation of the existing laws; the military police similarly works to constrain civil society actors. However, there are ways these threats and restrictions can be circumvented. Sayyid told me that now that he has become a very powerful public figure, he gets significantly fewer threats, but that his colleagues continue to face harassment from the same authorities that he had to deal with for years. Mahmud confirmed this, noting that *wasta* can help to reduce the kinds of threats one receives.

In the realm of media freedoms, the security authorities also play a more important role than they used to. Kadar noted that because of the new anti-terrorism legislation, more and more journalists are being detained, and the military forces are able to issue decrees on what media are allowed to cover. For example, at the time of the incident when ISIS captured a Jordanian pilot and burned him alive⁷, the military forces issued such a decree, forbidding journalists to publish anything that involved ISIS, including the material ISIS publishes online.

What became most apparent about the role of the security authorities in Jordan at the moment is the fact that they are an omnipresent force, invading every part of Jordanian society. Mahmud stated that all kinds of organisations face security investigations, even the royal NGOs. In addition, he told me that two years ago, the king criticised the GID for its far-reaching interference in Jordanian affairs, but that at the end of that discussion, the king had

⁷ For a news article that describes this event, see <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/feb/03/isis-video-jordanian-hostage-burndning-death-muadh-al-kasabeh>

to concede, as his family's dynasty and his own rule depended on them. Mahmud literally told me that "The GID is the government of Jordan".

4.2.5 Relations between the state and Jordanian civil society

In several of the interviews, a recurring theme was the way in which the Jordanian state approaches and treats civil society. Again, there is a discrepancy between the different kinds of organisations that exist; RONGOs, GONGOs and other NGOs are all treated differently depending on the way they are registered. Another kind of organisation within Jordanian civil society are Islamist organisations. The scope of this research is too narrow to include an analysis of the relations between Islamist organisations and the state, but some of my interviewees nonetheless addressed this issue. These organisations are often charitable in nature, and are the biggest oppositional group in Jordanian society, taking the form of the *Islamic Action Front* (IAF), the political wing of the Muslim Brotherhood in Jordan. Levins (2013) notes that during the 1970s and 1980s, the Muslim Brotherhood reached some powerful positions as a direct consequence of their support for the monarchy, but that after they started pushing for Islamisation, the king declared them "proponents of backwardness and oppression" in 1992 (Levins 2013, 417). Although their influence waned after this, Kadar noted that even today, as a consequence of the policies in the 1970s, the Ministry of Education is still heavily influenced by the IAF.

Despite this influence, the IAF is not officially part of the government, and as such remains the strongest and most organised oppositional political party inside Jordan, something which Hazem also emphasised during his interview. Charles also addressed the role of Islamism inside Jordan, and stated that the role that the IAF gets to play is entirely dependent on the space that the Jordanian government grants to them. He characterised the IAF as the party that the government needs to claim that Jordan allows for oppositional voices, and that it gets used as a scapegoat whenever it is convenient for them. Beck and Hüser (2015) note that during the demonstrations in 2011 and after, the main oppositional force was the Muslim Brotherhood, among a few others.

Why this brief discussion of the Islamists in Jordan? Charles repeatedly referred to the 'cleverness' of the Jordanian state. The policies in the 1970s and 1980s to grant some positions of power to the Islamists, and to subsequently reduce the role of the IAF to a mere oppositional role, all fit into a larger pattern of containment, and ultimately served and continues to serve the goal of political stability. Charles thus characterised these moves not as true practices of reform, but more as a means to ensure the survival of the monarchical

dynasty. This pattern is also what the literature review revealed. According to Wiktorowicz (2000), political reforms that created more space for civil society did not arise out of bottom-up pressure, but were initiated top-down, to secure regime survival. The argument by Robinson (1998) about top-down reforms as a regime survival strategy post-1989 reiterates that this is indeed a pattern.

The smart power of the Jordanian state also became evident during the demonstrations in 2011. Charles noted:

I think Jordan always plays this very smart kind of like.. *then* [during the demonstrations], they were very careful not to arrest anybody or hurt anybody or kill anybody, it was very important not to kill anybody, because this is what, you know, would explode. So they were extremely careful: the police, the military, everybody, the government was extremely careful. And you have to give them credit, whether you agree or not, they are good at playing this game.

Another aspect of this cleverness of the Jordanian state was highlighted by Hazem, who did not think that CSOs have to deal with any outright violent repression, but instead characterised the repression as ‘soft containment’. By providing people with enough perks and advantages as part of their jobs, the status quo is maintained:

[W]e found that the leaders of the strict rule in general are softly contained by the government, without need to send them to jails, or to make restrictions. Some of them on the payroll, some of them being good possibilities of being invited to travel with the minister and officials, or to join some closed meetings.

Another aspect of civil society-state relations in Jordan concerns the judiciary. Some of the participants in this research are actively working to create more awareness of the legislation that affects CSOs, and they talked about the ways in which flaws can be addressed. However, one recurrent problem seems to be the low number of CSOs that actually attempt to claim their rights in court when these get violated. According to Noor, one of the biggest problems lies with the judiciary, since CSOs are reluctant to go to court when laws are enforced illegally. The reasons for this are that they distrust the courts, or because trials are too lengthy. An additional factor is the expenses that they would have to make to hire a lawyer. As a result, CSOs prefer to settle.

4.2.6 Other challenges facing civil society

Although the main discussions with the interviewees focused on the relationship between the state and civil society, several interviewees also elaborated on different challenges that civil society faces. Although not the main focus of this research, a brief discussion of the things they identified provides a more holistic view. In one way or another, most of the challenges identified in this category are the result of current government policies and are therefore relevant for the discussion, as it indirectly answers the research question about challenges emanating from the state that CSOs face.

Due to the crackdown on civil society by the Jordanian government, Charles argued that civil society actors have altered their objectives: “[C]ivil society has, after the Arab Spring, has just been like ‘Okay, we don’t want any problems, so we’ll talk about the environment, and we’ll talk about women’s rights, and these things, but we won’t talk about democracy and change, and transparency and accountability in the government.’”. This exemplifies what kinds of effects government repression might bring about. Hazem identified a similar challenge, as he explained that CSOs are not taking the responsibility he feels they should be taking, to work towards a larger goal of pushing for democratic reform inside Jordan:

[T]he civil society is not yet a serious player on the scene. [...]Civil society itself, they fail to understand their role to see the broader picture in the country. Almost they are working separately in a very local group...they believe that what they are doing is the end of the story, without linking that to the bigger agenda with pushing forward the reform agenda in this country.

Another direct effect of the current government attitude towards CSOs is the way that organisations are obtaining funding – earlier discussions already noted the dependency of some CSOs on foreign funding. Foreign funding however, is almost always connected to concrete projects and programmes, and does not usually cover the overhead costs that organisations also have to cover. Two of the interviewees especially expressed their concern about the ability of their organisations to pay these costs and keep the organisations afloat. Again, Hazem provided some insight on this topic, stating that not being able to cover overhead costs threatens the stability and independence of the organisation he works with:

It's a big issue, a big challenge to maintain your stability, your independence.. a big challenge. You have a lot of things to pay, but you don't have a systematic income, therefore one of our major sources of headache is how to cover our basic expenses.

Yet another factor that affects civil society in Jordan is the fragmentation that exists and the different kinds of organisations that compete for funds. They explained that many CSO employees in Jordan are not 'real' activists in the sense that they would work for civil society organisations if there were fewer monetary incentives. Especially Charles was persistent and outraged about this issue:

.. and someone was just like 'Yeah, just go into NGOs. NGOs are much better, better work, better organisations, better pay, just don't even worry about, or even think about any other stuff'. [...] And these people are you know, very like, simple, in the sense that they.. they would be one of those people who would be getting a Jordanian government job. It doesn't pay very much but it's consistent and you know, they'll be able to buy a car, they'll be able to buy a house, they'll get married eventually and you know, do all those things. [...] You know, they just want their kids to be able to get married, and have kids. And you know, sitting there was like 'Oh man, this is like a whole..it's like a career path now!'. But it's not authentic, right? I mean, there are very few organisations that are really authentic.

One factor that I would like to address yet again is the role of so-called GONGOs. In the discussion above, it already became clear these are considered quite controversial by most of the interviewees, as they believe they tarnish the reputation of Jordanian CSOs in general. Zainab described the different roles GONGOs play to contribute to this:

So they started like, GONGOs, governmental NGOs. These governmental NGOs, they have several jobs. The first one... they will be invited in the future, after they registered, to the meetings with donors, the politicians, with the foreigners. Then they started to rise voices against us. They have like.. the intelligence inside each meeting. The second thing they.. are competing to funds. So instead of the fund going to real organisations, then they share this fund.

In addition to the aforementioned ‘corruption’ that GONGOs accuse other CSOs of (see the discussion above), they, as implied in this quote, also function as an extra arm of the intelligence authorities, in addition to competing for the funds that CSOs are so reliant upon.

Finally, the theme of ‘corruption’ repeatedly returned to the conversations I had with the interviewees, in several ways. In the discussion above, some elements of corruption in Jordan’s civil society and state landscape were already discussed, such as the corruption that exists within ministries (asking for favours); the establishment of GONGOs by former government officials; and the issue of ‘soft containment’ whereby the state provides advantages to people in higher positions to keep them from pushing for too many reforms, essentially functioning to keep them happy. However, Hazem pointed out yet another element of corruption that affects CSOs, and which relates to donors and their preferences:

We have some payers, who prefer to work with certain organisations, not based on their activities, therefore based on personal [connections], or in some directions.. for other motivations. But this is really something we cannot mention any cases our names.. it is sensitive.

Although it is impossible for me at present to verify this, he did talk about it at some length, and was essentially stating that he believed some donors to be corrupt, or at least, not careful enough about the process by which they select the project proposals they fund.

What becomes abundantly clear from the entire discussion above, is that the Jordanian state is personified by a wide variety of actors, among which are government officials, royal patrons, civil servants, security authorities, the judiciary, and others. All these actors have some sort of presence within the civil society space in Jordan, and as a consequence, the line separating the state and CSAs becomes very hard to distinguish. The Gramscian characterisation that Herbert (2012) employed to describe civil society is very apt, as he noted it is the space where the state infiltrates to avoid using coercion to establish its authority, and to create that authority through consent instead. In Jordan, that consent is achieved through ‘soft containment’, laws, procedures, GONGOs, RONGOs, and other methods. The boundaries between the Jordanian state and CSAs, so extensively discussed in the literature review, are not rigid at all, precisely because of the large extent of state infiltration in the civil society space.

4.3 Role of foreign donors

The previous paragraph already touched upon the role of foreign donors, and there was much more the interviewees had to say about this topic. It was one of the subquestions devised for this research, because foreign donors are a very central actor when it comes to the relationship between CSOs and the state. One theme kept recurring in the conversations that I had with my interviewees, and this concerned the various accusations all of them, to some extent or another, have been exposed to. The main allegation that organisations face is best caught by an extract from the conversation I had with Zainab:

Zainab: That year, 1999, or in 2000, we received funding like 12,000 from the British Embassy, and the campaigns started. And in fact, the government doesn't go directly, sometimes they go indirectly, by mobilising other people to start a campaign against the civil society - foreign funding, something like that. They said that 'ah, Britain occupied Jordan before, they caused the Palestinian issue, how come you claim that you work on human rights and you receive British funds', so we faced a lot of problems.

L: And this criticism, about foreign funding, and being... what, how did they.. how is that voiced, what is the underlying idea behind that?

Z: That we are agents.

L: Of.. the west?

Z: Of the west, or the UK. It was started by [unintelligible] Bar Association, who issued a statement against us, and they asked the prime minister to send us to the state security court. Because we are working like spies, for the UK and foreigners. I still have a copy of the statement.

Thus, civil society actors are accused of being spies, working for foreign donors. During the Hiam conference, Assem Rababa of the *Adaleh Center for Human Rights Studies* reiterated that CSOs are increasingly being accused of promoting foreign agendas. Most of the interviewees I spoke to confirmed the same, and condemned the practice, like Kadar and Charles did. The simple extrapolation of west versus east was something they could not identify with. Jad (2009) recognises that the proliferation of NGOs in the Arab world are usually contextualised precisely in this dichotomy of west versus east, but that it is too simplistic to view them as such. Kadar and Charles were expressing exactly that sentiment, heavily disagreed with the accusations, and essentially identified it as a case of calling the kettle black. Both of them pointed out that Jordan as a country is very reliant on

foreign aid and remittances, and that it is hypocritical to point fingers at civil society for the foreign funding that it obtains. Charles:

But I like to challenge that whole idea, because it's crazy! You know, we mix, capital, money, funding, if you just want to look at money, it's all over! I mean there's just no way this is 'Jordanian'. There's almost no Jordanian money, right?! [...] Most of Jordan's income, like revenue as a state, comes in through tourism, which are not Jordanians; comes in through very, very limited amounts of natural resources, it's almost nothing; and foreign investment. It's all foreign money coming into the country. And this is why I think it's less important in Jordan, as the government is funded by foreign money! Right? [laughs]. So who's going to come and say that 'you're funded by foreign governments'. The government gets *huge* subsidies from Saudi, and from Iraq.. oil.. U.S., EU..

Kadar similarly pointed to these double standards, as she called them, concerning the foreign funding that the government receives versus the funding that CSOs obtain. It also matters what the foreign funding is used for, and who provides it. She was very clear on this:

So it's like, as a country it's mainly dependent on foreign aid. And when I say, as a country in general, it's the government; NGOs; even the private sector; like *everyone* is getting some support from foreign aid. [...] And in general nobody is against it, but it depends on *who* is giving the money. And for what they are using this money. Is it against the government? To criticise the government? And especially, they *hate* NGOs, which always have people participating in international conferences and where they would have papers saying, or criticising Jordan outside. Oh my God, this is like the worst for them! And they would be like, highly criticised, and they would even be accused of being traitors. So it's double standards, again, always.

The literature on this topic supports Kadar's statements about the importance of who the foreign funder is, and what the funds are meant to do. In a chapter by Al-Atiyat, Amneh Zoubi, head of the Jordanian Women's Union at the time, stated: "In fact, the Union rejects conditional funding that is associated with certain political agendas and accepts donations from NGOs in friendly countries. The Union, for instance, is firm on not accepting aid from

the U.S. government because of its pro-Israel policies and its occupation of Iraq. (as cited in Al-Atiyat 2012, 146).

Another interviewee, Noor, also explained that some civil society actors dislike some donors while they are fine with others, precisely because of the criticism they otherwise receive. Her organisation decided not to apply to U.S. funding, specifically. She recalled an example of how this choice affects the reach that her organisation has:

Noor: Some CSOs dislike certain donors. [Our organisation] decided not to apply for USAID funding in any case because they do not want to risk [our] reputation [...]. Instead, [our organisation] takes its funding from EU embassies and US private donors.

L: Why?

N: MPs voice this concern about USAID and sometimes when [the organisation] invites people to their events they get asked whether they receive funding from USAID. Taking no funds from USAID also makes [the organisation] more approachable for other civil society actors.

Last year, this organisation organised an event, which was attended by high-level decision-makers of the IAF, to the surprise of many, as this organisation is headed by a woman who does not wear a hijab. However, the IAF told them that they respect the organisation and view it as credible and objective. Thus, the accusations that CSOs get are not always empty rhetoric – they can have real political consequences.

4.3.1 Other challenges associated with foreign aid: Cherry-picking and sustainability

As follows from the discussion above, the role of foreign donors is far from uncontroversial, as their role in providing funds allows conservative voices within Jordanian society to accuse CSOs of importing external agendas, or even to condemn individuals as being spies to the west. Mohammad Al Hussein from the *Identity Center* in Jordan, at the Hiram conference, identified two challenges pertaining to the role of foreign donors. The first relates to how they are able to set the agenda of NGOs: in his words, donors have a “flavour of the month”. This criticism points to the fact that donors often have single issues they wish to promote, like gender, decentralisation, or the environment. This was confirmed at the Hiram conference in general; several of the speakers identified this as a problem, but at the same time recognised that this is simply the nature of the asymmetrical relationship between donors and NGOs. Oraib Al Rantawi, from *Al-Quds Center for Political Studies*, maintained that donors set the

conditions of this relationship, and that they get to prioritise what NGOs work on. According to him, right now those priorities are not related to human rights and a Jordanian democratic transition, but instead focus on stability and security. In the interview, Sayyid was especially adamant on this point, as he stated that human rights are no longer a priority on the agenda of the 'West' and that it is "priority number 100", while instead ISIS, al-Nusra and other terrorist groups are priority "number one". He stated that nobody is paying attention to human rights violations anymore, and that NGOs are paying the price for that. He accused the 'West' of spreading propaganda about their promotion of human rights, but that this is merely talk.

The second challenge that Mohammad Al Hussein identified concerns the sustainability of projects that donors fund. This comprises two elements: first, once funding for a programme or project stops, the organisations that received the funding also stop working on that issue if they are unable to find other funds to continue their work. Second, donors usually wish to fund projects that are new and that have not been funded by other donors previously, so that 'their' project gets more visibility. This also inhibits the longer-term sustainability of programmes that CSOs organise. Lina commented on this as well:

You don't feel like there is some kind of ehm.. how would I say it.. like a plan to sustain a certain objective or like a certain, you know, work-plan, or like, progress.

In general, both the discussion about the sustainability of projects and the criticism on what kind of priorities donors envisage are concerned with the way that donors deal with the responsibility that follows from bringing so much money to the table. This also relates to how donors work together with the Jordanian government, and their advocacy efforts to promote a more open civil society space. Kadar talked about the responsibility of donors, and the failure of donors to live up to that:

Sometimes I feel like there is also a responsibility, sometimes donors are blamed also for that. Especially when it comes with a huge amount of money going to royal NGOs and they don't follow up on the impact and the results of these projects. Like, if you compare the size of support compared to the results, it's a big gap.

Lina also addressed this, saying that donors should do more to advocate at the level of the Jordanian government for the importance of CSOs:

[T]here's no diplomatic pressure or investigating what's happening, so they don't think that there is any kind of, I would say, watchdogs for what's happening, or what they do for organisations in terms of restrictions, you know?

Again, on that responsibility, Hazem similarly commented on the lack of engagement that donors show. He argued that donors are too preoccupied with the visibility of their own foreign mission and positive image, instead of being focused on pushing for true reform:

I really find it, with some donors, not all of course, with some donors they are very much interested in their show, or their visibility. Not about the *content* or the activity we make. The first question we receive from some donors is 'where is our logo?' [...] [W]e want them to focus more on the substance and the content of the activity. And differentiate between the seriousness and the commitment of their partners.

4.4 Time frame of restrictions

We have of course, upsides and downs. But the worst was, you know, I am a person who was sent to the state security court, but the worst is now. (Zainab).

This quote by Zainab illustrates how stringent current restrictions on CSOs are, She was personally jailed and convicted for her activities as a human rights lawyer inside Jordan, and at some point even received the demand that she be sentenced to death. Fortunately, she was able to resume her work after the courts were unable to find enough evidence of the accusations against her. Even though that was a dark period for her, she still considers today's civil society environment as the worst since she started her career.

However, not all interviewees could pinpoint when exactly these restrictions started to worsen. This research started from the premise that things had become worse as a result of the demonstrations in 2011. However, following from the interviews, this is not what I found to be the definitive point in time that affected a shift for the worse. Charles commented on the Arab uprisings and the shape they took in Jordan:

I think the protests were minimal in Jordan, compared to Egypt and other places, but they were quite significant for Jordan, and there were, you know, *huge* protests and

fighters and crazy events just here on *Duwaar al-Dakhliyyeh* [Jamal Abdul-Nasser intersection].

After stating that the uprisings were very important for Jordan, even though they were relatively mild compared to neighbouring countries, he however did not see a direct link between the demonstrations and the tighter hold on civil society. He again referred to the cleverness of the Jordanian state and said:

So, whether the current crackdown is tied to the protests, I guess I would push back a little bit, and say that the state and the security is much smarter than that. I think it's probably more closely tied to what's happening in Syria, and a fear of unrest, and a fear of Islamist activities.

So, he connects the current developments not to the Arab uprisings, but to the regional unrest that they brought about, especially the rise of ISIS and the war in Syria. This is actually what most interviewees stated. In the discussion on the legal framework, Mahmud was already quoted, but just for the argument's sake I wish to repeat that statement. Mahmud explicitly stated:

The legal framework is currently being changed, but that didn't start with the Arab uprisings. This process really only started last year [2015]. Before these changes in the legal framework, the laws didn't change, but on the ground, *everything* changed.

Another interviewee, Hazem, also commented on the time frame of the restrictions on civil society. He, in contrast to most of the others, did recognise the demonstrations of 2011 as a turning point, but then also stated that the regional unrest Jordan finds itself in the middle of exacerbated these developments. He said:

Right now it is not an easy process, as it used to be in 2011, when it comes to example to organising a conference or workshop, a town hall meeting or something.

Finally, I wish to highlight what Sayyid told me. He argued that in 2011, the Arab Spring (his term) triggered an expansion of the space for democracy and civil society, but that after one year, this space was constricted again, with even more restrictions than before. From

the brief overview of the developments in Jordan following the Arab uprisings in the entire region as part of the introduction, it already transpired that there was no definitive conclusion on what the demonstrations had brought about precisely, even though the king introduced some reforms. The general conclusion that can be drawn from the conversations with the participants is therefore ambiguous; most of the interviewees pointed at the influx of Syrian refugees and the fear of terrorist attacks inside Jordan as the developments that made the government more restrictive in its attitude towards CSOs, instead of the demonstrations of 2011.

4.5 Explanations for the current restrictions

The discussion on the demonstrations of 2011 and the developments that participants identified as the turning points for the shift in governmental policy regarding civil society leads one to ask: but what are the reasons behind these policies? – this was another question I started out with. Part of the explanation was already hinted at: regional political unrest affecting Jordan. In fact, this is also what the government provides as the reason for the new legislation and other procedures CSOs now have to deal with. The government rationale contains two main pillars: fighting terrorism, and carrying the burden of Syrian refugees who come to seek security in Jordan. The first pillar informs new legislation limiting media freedoms, as can be seen from the discussion above, and includes the Electronic Crimes Law and the Anti-terrorism Law.

The second pillar provides the government with a reason to compete with CSOs for foreign funding, in the form of GONGOs, but also through urging donors to focus their attention on humanitarian assistance. Zainab used the metaphor of ‘cake’ to highlight how GONGOs are created to compete with NGOs for funding that is available through foreign donors:

Halla’, it could be for security reasons. But, also, for me, it’s not just the security reasons. It’s the funding itself. And they said this very clearly in the meetings. We had a meeting with the Prime Minister, several NGOs and non-profit companies, and the Prime Minister, he said that this fund that we receive, is part of the cake. And this cake, it’s the king who brought this cake. It’s not because you know, we work, or do something good for Jordan. We take from the cake. So they don’t want us to take from the cake.

The same was reiterated by Sayyid, who noted that the government fears NGOs taking out of the pot of funds that foreign donors make available to Jordan. However, he immediately dismissed this as a false presumption, because donors are unwilling to make these funds available in the form of direct budgetary support. In very strong language, he stated that the ultimate dream for the MOPIC is to receive such direct support, after which the ministry gets to decide where and how to spend this money. Charles expressed similar beliefs, when he said that:

So all of that is, I would say, an interesting shift in Jordan's thinking. So like, [...] for me, I see it as using the Syrian crisis to create foreign investment.

Besides these government rationales, interviewees gave their own explanations and reasons, which they think are behind the current restrictions. The answer that Sayyid gave to the question as to why restrictions have become worse, he noted the government fears the power of civil society and NGOs. He stated:

Right now NGOs are becoming a shadow government. Twenty years ago, there were much fewer NGOs, but now we have many more women, media, human rights, and environment NGOs, and they have also become more powerful.

Thus, he attributes the worsened operating space for civil society to a governmental fear of NGOs becoming even more powerful, and of becoming a 'shadow government'.

Other reasons interviewees identified also have to do with the current government. Lina blames current developments on the conservative nature of the government:

Part of it, we have a government that is very very traditional. Eehmm.. the minister of social development, the current one, I mean, she has proven to be, like, very, I would say eehm... elaborate and vocal about her opinion about certain NGOs. She's not, I wouldn't say she's supportive.

Julia, who works for an organisation that addresses problems that CSOs are facing with the Jordanian government, and who thus gets her information directly from a large range of organisations, simply explains current restrictions as the result of ineptitude on the part of

some of the ministries and individuals in the bureaucracy of Jordan. In a comment about bankers:

But they're working under this... I think they just don't know what they're doing. It just seems to be like, complete ineptitude. They were told to interpret.. you know they were told to, like, uphold the anti-terrorism laws, but they don't.. they weren't told how, maybe?

It is not just bankers that she criticises this strongly. In many cases, she blames corruption in individuals, and the large egos that some decision-makers seem to have:

But in the case of education, the feedback that I've gotten the most, is just that the ministry is completely inept. And in the case of health, it just seems like there's just huge egos, and I feel like they're [CSOs] just being made to do things, to satisfy those egos that work there. So I mean.. like, in a way those are reasons, do you know what I mean?

On the capabilities of the state apparatus in general, she stated that some ministries simply lack sufficient capacity to face the current number of projects that need approval. In the same report by JIF that was mentioned earlier, it was also noted that there is some inter-ministerial competition for getting projects; if a project is registered with a different line ministry, this might lead other ministries to hold off on signing an MoU.

Furthermore, corruption is an element that plays a role yet again. JIF reported that ministries often attach (financial) conditionalities to getting approval MoUs signed, and thus organisations have to rely heavily on *wasta*. Additionally, corruption not only exists in the shape of satisfying people's egos; Zainab identified two main reasons for the procedural hassle the organisation she works for had to go through, and the personal security threats that she received: gifts, and the presence of the security authorities:

I think it's two things. The first, the stuff they wanted, gifts or favours, or something like this. The second, it was, I believe, intelligence. Because we received threats at that time a lot from intelligence.

Finally, one question that is of relevance here: what is the role of the Jordanian public if indeed such far-reaching restrictions on civil society are currently being imposed? Although I do not claim to have the answer, at least one sharp observation by an individual working for a local CSO in Jordan provides part of the explanation. It was stated previously that for both the government and foreign donors in Jordan, stability and security are major priorities right now. The same seems to be the case for the Jordanian public – which in 2011 was still willing to step up and voice its discontent with government policies. Now, however, the public seems to be apathetic to the case of repression, because of its concern about security, stability and safety, which all result in a lack of public pressure to push for reform. This brings the analysis back to a fear grown out of regional developments, and it seems the government is well aware of how far they can stretch this rationale. Thus, it seems like the interests of the government and donors coincide with the interest of the public right now: stability is preferred over human rights and democracy. Indeed, this is what Jillian Schwedler, who has published widely on Jordan, argues, when she stated in April 2016: “The name of the game in Jordan today is security.” (Schwedler 2016, paragraph 6). Therefore, civil society organisations that wish to promote these topics find themselves on the wrong side of time.

5 Conclusion

This thesis started out with rather broad questions on Jordanian civil society and the kinds of repression that it is currently facing. At least one thing can be concluded: civil society organisations inside Jordan are facing more obstacles than they did previously. This manifests itself in different ways. Civil society is fragmented and different types of organisations face different kinds of obstacles depending on their status. The legal framework has tightened with new legislation, while the implementation of existing laws and regulations has become stricter. The current government is, according to some of the interviewees, very ineffective and incompetent at implementing the new laws relating to anti-terrorism, and corruption runs through the government, manifesting itself in various ways. The security authorities are indiscriminate in how they approach different organisations and individuals, thereby making open threats and reducing the space that civil society actors can comfortably operate in. On top of that, the interviewees all worked for organisations that face problems from time to time due to accusations of being ‘spies’ for the West and of importing foreign agendas. The Jordanian state, embodied by a wide variety of actors, has infiltrated civil society space very effectively, and to a very large extent.

On the time frame of the restrictions, the answer was less unified. Most interviewees pointed to the recent surge in Syrian refugees, in addition to the government’s preoccupation with maintaining security and stability in Jordan, thereby preserving the image of a stable ally of the west, or the “Goldilocks of the Arab world” as (Yom 2013, 129) put it – although this preoccupation is as much linked to the preservation of Hashemite rule as it is connected to the priorities of foreign donors. Therefore, on the reasons for the current restrictions of civil society, the interviewees pointed to these concerns of the government, as well as to the corruption that marks the state apparatus in Jordan, and the lack of engagement of the Jordanian public at the moment.

Suggestions for future research

This is a long list of findings, and it reflects the richness of the data that I was able to gather from analysing the interviews. However, as explained in the methodology chapter of this thesis, the findings in this research do not represent a very broad cross-section of Jordanian civil society organisations; the research was small in scope and only dealt with one particular kind of organisation. Therefore, it would be of tremendous value for the future to engage in a research project that is both broader in scope in terms of the types of organisations, as well as the number of organisations that are asked to participate.

Moreover, in order to get a more comprehensive and accurate understanding of the reasons behind the current restrictions of Jordan's civil society, more in-depth research needs to be undertaken, possibly engaging more with the Jordanian state apparatus, not least to get a better grip of what Jordanian state power actually means – another question that unfortunately has not been addressed in this research.

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Appendix 1 – Research participants

Participant	Topic covered by organisation	International or local organisation ('regional' indicates the MENA region)	Received funding from Dutch embassy	Length of interview	Recorded yes/no
1) Lina	Legislative framework of civil society	International	No	38:57	Yes
2) Hazem	Political reforms and promotion of democracy, capacity building civil society	Local, regional objectives	Yes	58:33	Yes
3) Julia	Helping non-governmental organisations in Jordan	International	No	40:41	Yes
4) Noor	Legislative framework of civil society, push for reform	Local	Yes	n.a.	No
5) Charles (active for two organisations)	a) Digital media and journalism	Local	Yes	56:06	Yes
	b) Journalism	Local, regional objectives	Yes		
6) Sayyid	Media and promoting freedom of the press	Local	Yes	n.a.	No
7) Kadar	Digital media and journalism	Local	Yes	1:00:48	Yes
8) Mahmud	Promotion of civil society, human rights, and democracy	Local, regional objectives	No	n.a.	No
9) Zainab	Legislative framework of human rights and civil society, promotion of democracy and human rights	Local	Yes	46:33	Yes

Appendix 2 - Interview guide

This research is about civil society in Jordan, very broadly speaking. Your participation in this interview is strictly confidential. I would like to tape record our conversation if you are okay with that. The recordings will be destroyed once I have transcribed the interview. If, at any time, you wish to stop, you may do so without me conferring any prejudice on you, and you should also feel free to ask me questions concerning the interview or the study. May we begin?

Can you tell me about yourself? What organisation do you work for?

What does your organisation do? What aims is it trying to achieve?

Are you familiar with the concept of civil society? How would you define civil society in Jordan?

Do you consider the organisation that you are based in a civil society organisation in the sense of your understanding of that term?

How would you characterise your organisation's relation to the Jordanian state?

Have you noticed any changes in the way your organisation can conduct its activities vis-à-vis the government? Why do you think this is (not) the case?

Do you receive support from foreign donors? Why/why not?

Other themes:

Relation King-Parliament, security authorities, fear of radicalisation-terrorism.