Whose Civil Society?

A critical discourse analysis of USAID and Palestinian NGOs

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IV
Abstract

This thesis investigates the impact of the donor policy and practice of the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) on Palestinian NGOs. By applying the principles of critical discourse analysis, it examines the conception of civil society communicated by USAID and analyses how it affects the discursive dynamics within Palestinian civil society. Based on analysis of qualitative interviews with Palestinian NGO personnel, it suggests that Palestinian civil society can be understood in terms of a struggle between two competing discourses. One affirms the traditional role of Palestinian civil society which has been to mobilise for the political resistance against the Israeli occupation, while the other supported by USAID, constitutes a far more limited role for Palestinian civil society.

The analysis demonstrates that USAID promotes a rigorous and de-politicised conception of civil society; to balance the power of the state. Palestinian NGOs that are funded by USAID have adopted and reproduced this idea in their discursive practice within civil society. Consequently, their activities primarily address domestic issues related to the governing institutions of the Palestinian Authority rather than issues related to the Israeli occupation.

USAID influences the practice within Palestinian civil society by strengthening NGOs that reproduce its own conception of a de-politicised civil society. This support consists of both funding and training which subjects NGOs to the donor’s ideational influence. Moreover, this ideational influence is enforced by conditional funding. The thesis shows that USAID’s policy alters the balance of strength between perspectives on the future development of Palestine. Tilting this balance has real consequences by shifting the activities of Palestinian NGOs away from highly politicised forms of resistance against the occupation and towards a-political domestic issues.

Based on these findings, the thesis looks into the normative implications of USAID’s policy and practice based on Tocquevillian and Gramscian research traditions. This normative discussion accentuates the inherent paradoxes in subsidising civil society, whose virtue lies in being independent from government interference, both foreign and domestic.
Acknowledgements

No conflict has been subjected to more research and debate than the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. It is therefore somewhat paradoxical that so little attention is given to the role of aid in this regard. Learning more about this issue, was the major motivation behind why I wanted to research this topic. I am very grateful to my informants, who generously shared their perspectives on the state of civil society in Palestine.

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The responsibility for any omissions, mistakes or misinterpretations is solely my own.

Oslo, 31 October 2014

Erling Hess Johnsen
Abbreviations

ATC  Anti-Terrorism Certificate
CDA  Critical Discourse Analysis
CSO  Civil Society Organisation
DFLP Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine
DRG  Democracy, human Rights and Governance
GRO  Grassroots organisation
INGO International Non-Governmental Organisation
MENA Middle East and North Africa
NGO  Non-Governmental Organisation
oPt occupied Palestinian territories
PA  Palestinian Authority
PFLP Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine
PLO  Palestine Liberation Organization
PNGO Palestinian Non-Governmental Organization
P2P  People-to-people (program)
USAID United States Agency for International Development
WBGS West Bank and Gaza Strip
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1 Introduction

Civil society is generally perceived as a sphere for social organisation located between the individual and the state, and believed to articulate the interests of different groups in society. Within the liberal democratic view, the organisation and articulation of interests that takes place within civil society is both a guarantee against authoritarian statehood, and a catalyst for democratisation (Mercer 2002). This belief has put non-governmental organisations (NGOs) at the centre of development policy. NGOs are not only important service providers, but are also believed to have substantial democratising effects as they are seen as the main building blocks of civil society itself (Cornwall 2007: 476; Mercer 2002). As NGOs have begun to take on an increasing share of the development workload, it is perhaps a paradox that these organisations are considered to be part of civil society, when most of them are funded by foreign governments and therefore hardly decoupled from state interests (Tvedt 2006: 679). This thesis investigates how the ideas and policies of donors shape and constrain activities within civil society in Palestine.

1.1 Empirical puzzle

Palestine has long been known for a vibrant civil society. Over the decades of Israeli occupation, civil society organisations delivered services to the population in the absence of a legitimate state. These organisations also played a distinct political role, by mobilising the population for resistance against the Israeli occupation (Muslih 1993). However, over the past two decades, Palestinian civil society has changed dramatically in character. The politically oriented mass movements have been replaced by professionalised NGOs. The national agenda of confronting the Israeli occupation has been fragmented into ‘projects’ highlighting ‘needs’ and individual ‘rights’ (Jad 2007). What has happened?

Since the beginning of the ‘Oslo peace process’ in 1993, the Palestinians have become among the world’s largest recipients of foreign aid per capita (Le More 2009: 1). Donors have financed an extensive institution-building program aimed at establishing an independent and

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1 Funding NGOs as a means for democracy promotion is a phenomenon not limited to developing countries, but also authoritarian regimes and post-conflict settings. The many examples include U.S. and European funding of Serbian civic and political groups aimed at challenging the authoritarian rule of Slobodan Milosevic (Carothers 2006: 60–61) and efforts for establishing a liberal democratic civil society sector in Russia (Hemment 2004).
democratic Palestinian state alongside Israel (Khalidi and Samour 2011). In an effort to promote ‘good governance’ of the Palestinian Authority (PA), donors have provided extensive funding to Palestinian NGOs for fostering democratic values and balancing the institutions of the PA. Some scholars have argued that the influx of foreign aid has changed the ideas and practices of Palestinian NGO workers, who are more concerned with globalised ideas about development and human rights, than the domestic political struggle against Israeli occupation (Hanafi and Tabar 2005).

1.2 Research question and objective

The objective of this thesis is to investigate how donors through foreign aid influence the ideas and practices of Palestinian NGOs. There are countless donors active in funding Palestinian NGOs. This thesis focuses on the ideas and policies of the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), the largest bilateral donor active in Palestine. On the basis of the empirical puzzle, the thesis will seek to investigate the following research question:

What political ideas prevail in the support by USAID to Palestinian NGOs, and to what extent do these ideas shape and constrain the activities of the NGOs themselves?

The thesis does not investigate how USAID’s policies are designed and formulated, but how they are practiced and communicated, as well as how this impacts Palestinian NGOs. Similarly, on the recipient side, I do not seek to provide a comprehensive analysis of NGOs’ impact upon development. Rather, I analyse the social aspects of the USAID-NGO relationship and how NGOs through interaction with donors are exposed to new ideas that change the way they go about in implementing their missions. Examination of these mechanisms might improve our understanding the dynamics within civil society and its implications for democratic and political development in Palestine.

1.3 Analytical approach

Since the 1980s and 1990s, constructivists have gained increased recognition for their claim that ideas influence processes in international politics. Wendt (1992: 399) has argued that international politics must be understood as a process of socialisation, in which actors define
their own identities and construct collective knowledge about the world around them. These insights have widened the scope of international relations research, which have long been dominated by a rationalist perception of unitary, rational actors. Similarly, scholarly research on foreign aid has mostly been concerned with its material functions and effects rather than the social conditions that enable it. The practice of foreign aid is first and foremost characterised by symbolic power politics, where the donor has the power to give, while the recipient is forced to reciprocate in terms of gestures of gratitude (Hattori 2001). Arguably, this asymmetrical relationship enables the donor to impose its own ideas about how development should be conducted upon NGOs.

The thesis employs Norman Fairclough’s theoretical and methodological approach to critical discourse analysis (CDA) in order to investigate how ideas promoted by donors influence the social organisation of Palestinian NGOs. Discourse can be loosely defined as “a particular way of talking about and understanding the world (or an aspect of the world)” (Jørgensen and Phillips 2002: 1). Donor agencies and international NGOs are part of what Tvedt (2006: 678) has termed as the ‘international aid system’. Within this system, actors help construct and proliferate ideas or worldviews that help influence policy makers, scholars and NGOs alike. Even in Palestine, many of the ‘buzzwords’ of professionalised development discourse are internalised by Palestinian NGOs (Cornwall 2007; Jad 2007). CDA allows us to investigate how globalised ideas penetrate fields of domestic politics in developing countries and challenge existing worldviews and beliefs of NGOs, which eventually changes their behaviour.

1.4 Structure of the thesis

Chapter 2 begins by illustrating that ‘civil society’ is a disputed term. I illustrate this by briefly introducing two theoretical perspectives derived from the writings of Tocqueville and Gramsci that each has their own view on the nature and role of civil society. Moreover, I provide a theoretical account for understanding foreign aid as a social relationship between donor and recipient, and discuss the role of NGOs in contemporary development policy. Furthermore, the chapter provides a contextual backdrop of the evolution of a Palestinian civil society and accounts for how it has changed after the influx of large-scale foreign aid.
Chapter 3 presents the analytical framework for the thesis. It builds upon an assumption that ideas and interests are complementary explanations, and that donor conditionality serves to reinforce donors’ ideational influence over recipients. Furthermore, it presents Fairclough’s approach to CDA and his three-dimensional model that accounts for analysis of text, discursive practice and social practice. The chapter also adapts this model for empirical analysis of the dynamics within Palestinian civil society. Theoretically, I treat USAID as a foreign entity producing material and ideational output that influence the discursive and subsequently social dynamics within Palestinian civil society.

Chapters 4, 5 and 6 constitute the thesis’ analysis. Chapter 4 employs textual analysis in order to identify the prevailing political ideas in USAID’s policy towards Palestinian NGOs. My focus here is to investigate whether and how ideas about civil society are adjusted to match the Palestinian context. The chapter will conclude that USAID communicates a limited and rigorous conception of civil society derived from neo-liberal ideology.

Chapter 5 deals with the two inner dimensions of Fairclough’s model, text and discursive practice. As USAID’s concept of civil society is not adjusted to fit the local political context, it collides with existing conceptions of civil society in Palestine, as well as the historical role played by civil society organisations. NGOs that receive funding from USAID value the training and support they receive from USAID, and tend to reproduce its conception of civil society in the discursive practice within Palestinian civil society. NGOs that do not receive funding from USAID criticise its policies of conditional funding and see it as an attempt to dismantle the Palestinian resistance against Israeli occupation. I argue that the discursive practice of NGOs can be understood and analysed in terms of two competing discourses, one of which reproduces the core ideas advocated by USAID.

The analysis concludes in Chapter 6 at the level of social practice by investigating the how the two competing discourses identified in earlier shape and are shaped by the activities of NGOs. There is a tendency that USAID-funded organisations address primarily domestic issues related to the PA in contrast to others who advocate a more confrontational stance towards Israel and the occupation. Moreover, the conditional funding practiced by USAID acts as a mechanism of control that reinforces ideational influence over NGOs. Finally, I discuss the implications of the findings in light of two normative perspectives on civil society. This discussion highlights the inherent paradox of foreign governments subsidising civil society in the name of democratisation.
2 Theory and background

This chapter focuses on the relationship between foreign aid and civil society both theoretically, and within the Palestinian context. Section 2.1 discusses the term ‘civil society’, of which this thesis offers no precise definition. Instead, I demonstrate that the term is highly disputed and surrounded by both descriptive and normative ambiguity. How the actors within civil society understand the social sphere they constitute, their own role as well as the roles of others, are of key concerns to this analysis. Political theorists have long debated over what civil society is, and whether it has a distinct purpose. The section briefly introduces two theoretical perspectives that will serve as a foundation for discussing the normative implications of the findings in Chapter 6.

Section 2.2 provides a brief theoretical account for how I treat foreign aid as a social practice of unreciprocated giving constituted by material asymmetry (Hattori 2001). This theoretical understanding is incorporated into the analytical framework that I present in Chapter 3. Moreover, I discuss the specific characteristics of donors and recipients, and differentiate them into subgroups.

The concepts and terms defined in the previous section will guide us through the empirical overview in section 2.3. This final section provides a brief overview of the evolution of a civil society in Palestine over the 20th century. Civil society in Palestine has evolved from a small collection of non-professional voluntary organisations, to a large sector of highly professionalised NGOs engaged in a combination of service provision and advocacy work. The overview dedicates particular attention to the traditional political role of Palestinian role, and discusses the apparent professionalisation and de-politicisation with the influx of large-scale foreign aid in Palestine after the signing of the Oslo Accords.

2.1 What is civil society?

The concept of civil society has its roots in ancient Greek political thinking. To Cicero, the civil society was the highest form of political order, where citizens actively engaged in

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2 I use the term ‘Palestine’ to refer to the areas contemporary known as the West Bank and Gaza Strip (WBGS), while ‘historical Palestine’ refer to the geographical area of today’s Israel and Palestine. ‘Palestine’ and WBGS are therefore used interchangeably.
political dialogue with one another, and made decisions effectively and peacefully for the common good (Wnuk-Lipinski and Bukowska 2011). In contemporary discourse, civil society refers to a sphere of civil organisations located between the individual and the state; separated from the political and economic spheres of society. For this reason, scholars and policy makers often refer to it as the ‘third sector’. For instance, the World Bank defines civil society as

the wide array of non-governmental and not-for-profit organizations that have a presence in public life, expressing the interests and values of their members or others, based on ethical, cultural, political, scientific, religious or philanthropic considerations. Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) therefore refer to a wide of array of organizations: community groups, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), labor unions, indigenous groups, charitable organizations, faith-based organizations, professional associations, and foundations (World Bank 2013b).

But ambiguity still remains if we adopt this definition. While political parties are generally seen as part of the political, and not the civil society sphere, NGOs with declared political affiliations remain. Some definitions of civil society even include certain businesses, such as commercial media (WHO.int n.d.). The term is therefore surrounded by descriptive ambiguity, as various scholars and policy makers are unable to agree on a joint definition of what civil society actually is. However, the concept is also characterised by normative ambiguity, as policy makers, scholars, activists and the like ascribe different roles or purposes to civil society.

Recognising the fact that civil society indeed means different things to different people is crucial for understanding the policies that seek to promote it (Edwards 2005). As I argue in the upcoming section, aid relationships serve as a channel through which ideas about civil society are transmitted from donor to recipient. Launching new ideas about the nature and role of civil society into the public discourse of developing countries may together with the material incentive structure of aid policies shape the behaviour of the actors within it. There is widespread consensus that civil society is important for successful democratisation, but disagreement on exactly how civil society can and should promote democracy. In Chapter 6 I discuss this issue in light of the analysis’ findings based on two competing theoretical perspectives. One is based on the liberal thinking of Alexis de Tocqueville, and his reflections on the emerging civil society in the United States of America in the 19th century. The other is based on the writings of the Marxist thinker Antonio Gramsci. Although these perspectives are not used explicitly before the discussion of normative implications in Chapter 6, they are introduced briefly below for the sake of illustrating that the term is indeed disputed.
2.1.1 Tocquevillian and Gramscian civil society

In Tocqueville’s thinking, civil society is an extension of liberty, where citizens utilise their freedoms by coming together in associations in order to promote and advance their mutual interests. As a liberal of his time, Tocqueville held a sceptical view towards the power of the state. He argued that there was no society in which a vital civil society was more needed than in a democracy. This was because in true democracies, where liberty and equality is guaranteed, citizens are weak by themselves. So individuals have to acknowledge their mutual interests and form associations that tend to them. Associations and the culture of associating are therefore means of self-help; helping people rely upon themselves and their fellow citizens, rather than the state (Tocqueville 2003). A cornerstone in Tocqueville’s thinking is the distinction between the civil and the political. The political sphere, or the state, is always vulnerable towards succumbing to authoritarianism, unless its power is balanced by the civil society. Civil society is therefore not only seen as inherently good, but also as a precondition for true democracy (Tocqueville 2003).

Civil society is seen as the aggregation of all civil associations that are established independently from the political realm, and its purpose above all is to balance the power of the state in order to prevent authoritarianism. Donors often invoke Tocquevillian ideals when funding NGOs in order to promote democratisation (Mercer 2002), but tend to ignore the fact that Tocqueville saw associations as a natural extension of the interests and liberties of citizens. If civil society is ‘subsidised’ by foreign donors promoting other interests and ideals, does this not alter the nature of civil society, making it less autonomous?

Gramsci’s understanding of civil society differs from Tocqueville’s on important aspects. He does not view it as inherently good, but rather as a battleground of ideas, reflecting the political conflicts of society in general. Being a Marxist, Gramsci was particularly concerned with relationships of power and class-based struggle. In his theory, civil society plays an intermediary role between the base, which is the economy; and the superstructure, consisting of e.g. political institutions, schools, churches and civil organisations (Jones 2006: 33). It is a sphere for debate and public discourse, where the bourgeoisie tries to assert its control through the production of an ideology that legitimises the status quo, which maintains its hegemony.
However, the bourgeoisie is not able to assert total control over the minds of the oppressed. Within civil society, other political forces try to challenge the bourgeoisie’s ideology and prevent it from attaining hegemony. Political forces clash together in trying to promote their ideology, which eventually leads to conflict. Therefore, Gramsci concludes, civil society is not an inherently good sphere. Rather, it is a battleground, reflecting the wider political conflicts of society. The exercise of power is not reserved for the state, as in the Tocquevillian typology, but power struggles are the catalysing factor behind conflicts within the civil society. And power is asymmetrically distributed between the bourgeoisie and the oppressed. Separating the civil from the political is therefore meaningless in Gramsci’s view; civil society is political.

These two thinkers obviously did not deal with the issue of civil society-oriented foreign aid, which is a largely modern phenomenon. But how we evaluate the consequences and implications of civil society-oriented foreign aid largely depends on how we see civil society itself. These two typologies will therefore serve as the basis for a normative discussion of the implications of the findings. Moreover, Tocqueville’s tri-partite model of political, economic and civil society is embedded in development policy promoted by the proponents of neo-liberal development agendas (Lewis 2002: 571). Implicit is the assumption that a strong civil society may actually be a catalyst for democratisation (Mercer 2002). But whether this model – largely reflecting a Western historical experience – can and should be exported to countries that do not share this tradition are completely different questions. Tocqueville and Gramsci therefore serve as useful contrasts when discussing the normative implications of the findings in Chapter 6.

2.2 Foreign aid: theoretical and conceptual clarifications

In this section I introduce a theory of foreign aid and clarify a number of terms that will be used throughout the thesis. In light of the theoretical conception of foreign aid as a social relationship, I discuss who ‘donors’ and ‘recipients’ are, and divide them into separate categories. The reader should be aware that this differentiation is drawn up for the purpose of this particular empirical analysis, and does not constitute a comprehensive categorisation.
2.2.1 Foreign aid

Modern foreign aid, as we know it, has its origins in the international regimes, institutions and practices that were established after the end of World War II. As long as it has existed, scholars and practitioners have debated whether foreign aid should be used for advancing state interests, or whether it should be provided exclusively to improve living conditions in underprivileged recipient countries. Hattori (2001) argues that scholars have embraced the concerns of practitioners and thus focused on the effects of foreign aid, rather than the basic social conditions that enable it. He emphasises foreign aid as a social practice of unreciprocated giving. Foreign aid is first and foremost characterised by the symbolic power politics between donor and recipient that reinforce the material and social hierarchy between them: “in extending a gift, a donor transforms his or her status in the relationship from the dominant to the generous” [emphasis in original] (Hattori 2001: 640). Over time, this may lead to a misrecognition that eventually serves to naturalise this social hierarchy.

According to Hattori, the concept of foreign aid is often misapplied to for example military sales on credit or ‘concessional’ loans (Hattori 2001: 636). Similarly, foreign aid is also mistaken as a form of redistribution – a confusion which liberal scholars have contributed to. Foreign aid is a form of resource allocation that is different from both economic exchange and redistribution. In economic exchange giving is voluntary, but the recipient is able to reciprocate. Redistribution is different from giving, as the donor is forced by an external authority to give up her resources. For example, paying taxes is not giving, but involuntary redistribution. But with foreign aid, the wealthy donor gives resources to the recipient, which is unable to reciprocate (Hattori 2001: 636–637).

In this thesis, foreign aid is understood and analysed as a social practice that involves donors and recipients. It is not the material inequality between them per se that determines the nature of the relationship, but rather the donor’s power to give, and the recipient’s lack of power to reciprocate. The power to give enables the donor to create representations of the recipient society that in turn impacts its social organisation. The donor identifies ‘needs’ of the recipient society which in turn inform the design of its aid policy and programmes through which indigenous NGOs apply for funding. In order to qualify for funding, indigenous NGOs must define themselves in a manner that corresponds to the ideas and values expressed by the donor; and they must develop projects and activities that addresses the needs it has identified.
Consequently, NGOs become increasingly distanced from the societies they claim to represent (Lopes 2011). As existing discourse analyses on donor-recipient relationships indicate, donors’ representations of recipients may in turn pacify them (Torkelsen 2007) or otherwise shape recipients behaviour. Giving and receiving therefore helps sustain a perception of reality and identities that in turn help sustain a social practice and an asymmetry of power that enables donors to give in the first place.

The upcoming analysis is not concerned with the processes through which aid policies are created, but rather how they are presented and communicated and the impact this has upon the organisations that receive the aid. I therefore pay some attention to the expressed purposes of foreign aid as well. Most definitions of foreign aid have an embedded description of purpose. For instance, Lancaster (2006: 19) defines foreign aid as

A voluntary transfer of public resources to a government, to an NGO, or an international organization (such as the World Bank, or the UN Development Program) with at least a 25 per cent grant element, one goal of which is to better the human condition in the country receiving the aid [emphasis added].

This definition has both a descriptive component; describing a transaction of material resources, such as money, in addition to a distinct normative element defining also a purpose of the aid; such as “to better the human condition (…)” or similar. Furthermore, these wider purposes are operationalised into specific goals and objectives that are to be achieved through various aid programs and mechanisms.

The following sections clarify who the different actors in the foreign aid relationship are and what functions they perform. Both donors and recipients may be multilateral organisations, states, international organisations and foreign non-governmental organisations to name but a few. The point here is that contemporary foreign aid is a far more complex phenomenon than a mere transaction from one state to another. I also clarify what kind of actors and processes that will be at the heart of my analytical focus.

2.2.2 Donors, recipients and the in-betweens

Donors

As already established, donors are primarily characterised by material possession; they have something to give, which enables them to be donors in the first place (Hattori 2001). Most
students of international relations consider states to be the primary donors. This is also reflected in OECD’s definition of ‘official development assistance’ (ODA):

Flows of official financing administered with the promotion of the economic development and welfare of developing countries as the main objective, and which are concessional in character with a grant element (…) By convention, ODA flows comprise contributions of donor government agencies, at all levels (…) (OECD 2003).

ODA is comprised of all assistance provided by “official agencies, including state and local governments, or by their executive agencies (…)” (OECD 2008). As an example, the majority of Norway’s foreign aid is provided through the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, its foreign missions and the ministry’s underlying directorate (Norad 2011a). However, other Norwegian ministries give foreign aid as well, in the form of development projects within their thematic field to be executed in foreign countries. For instance, the Norwegian “oil for development” programme, that has the expressed purpose of “reduce[ing] poverty by promoting economically, environmentally and socially responsible management of petroleum resources” in developing countries (Norad 2011b). The programme is a joint venture involving four different ministries (Foreign Affairs, Finance, Petroleum and Energy, and Climate and the Environment), all of whom bring different expertise and at times contradicting political motivations to the table. It has been criticised for mixing economic interests with foreign aid, as the largely Norwegian state owned company Statoil operates in several of the programme’s target countries (E24.no 2009). By pursuing economic interests, critics argue that such programmes violate the expressed purpose of Norwegian humanitarian and development policy, which is to be motivated by values and the common interests of humanity, not national self-interest (St.meld. nr. 15 2008-2009: 11). This example illustrates both that foreign aid is at the least not exclusively motivated by altruism, and that governmental donors are a many-faceted category.

**International non-governmental organisations (INGOs)**

The complexities are no less apparent on the recipient side. When a state (at any level) gives foreign aid, it is either given as bilateral (country to country) aid, or through multilateral (an international organisation where states are the primary constituents, such as the UN) forums. However, since the late 1980s, an increasing amount of foreign aid has been channelled through international non-governmental organisations (INGOs) (Tvedt 2006: 679–680). INGOs are here understood as highly professionalised non-governmental organisations that
operate beyond the border of the country in which they are based. As an example, the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs finances Norwegian INGOs such as the Norwegian People’s Aid and the Norwegian Church Aid in order to achieve its foreign policy and development goals. And in many cases, the INGO engages in so-called ‘partnerships’ with non-governmental organisations (NGOs) in the recipient country, and this partnership usually involves a transaction of money or other material goods from the INGO to the indigenous NGO (Norad 2013). In Palestine, USAID has followed the same model and used INGOs to disperse grants and loans to local NGOs (Challand 2008: 118–120). In this chain of relationships, the INGO is both a recipient (by receiving funds from the donor government), but in its relation to the indigenous NGOs, it is a donor. For the purpose of this analysis, the INGO role is understood as a ‘mediator’, connecting large government donor agencies on the one hand, and smaller local NGOs on the other (as suggested by Hattori 2001: 649). I will return to this point when applying the analytical framework to the empirical context in Chapter 3.

Non-governmental organisations (NGOs)

The term ‘NGO’ is a contested one, and taken literally it refers to virtually any organisation that is not part of government. The World Bank defines NGOs as organisations “that are (i) entirely or largely independent of government; (ii) not operated for profit; and (iii) exist to serve humanitarian, social or cultural interests, either of their memberships or of society as a whole” (World Bank 1999). Unless otherwise specified, I use the term ‘NGO’ as a denominator for professionalised non-profit organisations largely independent from government. These organisations are usually supported by foreign or domestic donors and have paid staff, sometimes in combination with volunteers. NGOs help promote development in various fields and are also assumed to explicitly or implicitly contribute to democratisation (Bratton 1989).

Civil society organisations (CSOs)

‘CSO’ is a collective term for organisations that are part of civil society and NGOs are by most definitions considered to be part of this category (Tomlinson 2013: 123). This broader category, including NGOs, but also trade unions, faith-based movements, foundations, grassroots organisations (GROs) and others. A CSO is therefore, virtually any global, regional
or national organisation that are not part of government or profit-based business (World Bank 2013a). In the thesis, the term CSO therefore refers to any organisation that is (largely) independent from government or profit-based business. I refer first and foremost to domestic CSOs unless otherwise specified.

2.3 Palestinian civil society: contextual overview

The purpose of this section is to give the reader a basic understanding of how the nature of Palestinian civil society has changed over the course of the past few decades. Palestine is not a mere ‘development’ context, but is characterised by overreaching and unresolved political issues. As civil society is often understood in terms of its relationship to the state, the case of Palestinian civil society needs a broader and contextually anchored understanding. For most of its history, there has been a Palestinian civil society, but no Palestinian self-government structures. This empirical overview is for the most part, limited to the geographical area of the so-called West Bank. However, much of the political development and characteristics described in this overview would be valid for the Gaza Strip as well.

2.3.1 Civil society and foreign aid in the absence of government

Palestine has long been known for a vibrant and active civil society (Muslih 1993: 259). The political control over the Palestinian territories shifted several times over the course of the 20th century. For its part, the West Bank has been under Ottoman (until 1918), British (1918-1948), Jordanian (1948-1967), Israeli (1967 and onwards), and finally limited self-government from 1994 and onwards (Kimmerling and Migdal 2003). Palestinian civil society has thus evolved under a series of different political and legal frameworks (Challand 2008: 59), all sharing the attribute that de facto governments were not considered to be legitimate by the local population.

In the absence of a legitimate government, civil society was able to play a dominant role. Freedom of association was first established in historical Palestine under Ottoman law in 1907. However, this freedom was severely limited, as it did not permit the establishment of nationalist and politically oriented CSOs. During the Ottoman era, most CSOs were a-political and religiously based charitable organisations (Challand 2008: 60). The British rulers had a far more liberal attitude towards CSOs. In the 1918-1948 period, a vast number of
CSOs, such as religious groups, clubs, labour unions women’s societies etc. were formed, and according to Muslih these organisations flourished “outside the framework of British authority” (Muslih 1993: 260), and articulated the interests of different sectors of society. An important development during the British era was the politicisation of CSOs. Nationalist leaders eventually succeeded in drawing many civil organisations into the realm of politics. Local elites were able to mobilise CSOs not only for the ‘national cause’ of liberation, but used them to increase their own legitimacy and subdue domestic political opponents as well (Muslih 1993: 261).

As a society without formalised systems of political representation, Palestinian civil society became an important source of legitimacy. From 1948 and onwards, economic support by foreign powers to CSOs in the occupied Palestinian territories emerged as a means to build legitimacy and buy political support, a practice often referred to as clientelism. Clientelism can be defined as “a form of exercise of power whereby persons [or organisations] in influential positions offer their services to less centrally placed persons [or organisations] in return for political support” (Selvik and Stenslie 2011: 60). The patron-client relationship is asymmetrical, as the client often becomes dependent on the resources or services provided by the patron. This asymmetry can be exploited by the patron in order to exert political power over the client. This practice is often referred to by scholars as ‘patronage politics’ (Auyero, Lapegna, and Poma 2009: 1). Similarly, critical scholars have seen modern foreign aid as a form of patronage politics where the donor (patron) buys legitimacy for its political agenda through implementing its policies through indigenous organisations (clients) (Stirrat and Henkel 1997).

The King of Jordan long practiced patronage politics in order to maintain a clientelistic network both during and after the end of the Jordanian occupation of the West Bank in 1967. Jordan continued to pay the salaries for Palestinian charitable organisations up until 1988 (Challand 2008: 60). But Jordanian influence was gradually challenged by the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO), the forefront of the Palestinian national movement. The PLO was established in 1964, and was restructured into an umbrella organisation for Palestinian political parties and CSOs in 1968 (Kimmerling and Migdal 2003: 254; Parsons 2012). It has traditionally been dominated by the secular Fatah party under the leadership of Yassir Arafat, who assumed chairmanship over the PLO in 1969 (Parsons 2012). Palestinians in the occupied territories accepted the PLO as their ‘state’, and during the era of Israeli occupation
many CSOs became part of the PLO’s political network (Muslih 1993: 259). An important factor behind the PLO’s political influence was its large cash reserves. Thus the PLO practiced patronage politics itself in order to build legitimacy and extend its interests on the ground in the oPt (Muslih 1993: 262).

Large scale European funding first became available during the Palestinian uprising against the Israeli occupation, or Intifada (1987-1993). The brutality in Israel’s response to the Intifada put the conflict higher up on the agenda in many Western countries. European consulates and NGOs started to finance local Palestinian organisations at the same time as Jordan withdrew its funding for Palestinian civil society actors and many organisations were forced to find new donors (Challand 2008: 60–61). By 1991, the PLO was politically and financially bankrupt, and did no longer have the financial means to maintain its patronage politics. Some years earlier, many CSOs had started to loosen their ties to the PLO. Grassroots organisations (GROs) played an increasingly important role, especially during the Intifada. These organisations provided both relief and helped mobilise the population for protests and strikes against the Israeli military. As some CSOs started to receive funding from European donors, they were forced to professionalise. Accountability was a crucial demand posed by donors, and thus Palestinian CSOs had to learn how to write project proposals and reports, and to maintain financial monitoring. For these organisations, this was not merely a process of reorganisation, but a process of social learning that eventually resulted in them evolving to what I here refer to as professionalised NGOs.

2.3.2 NGOs and the Palestinian Authority

The Palestinian Authority (PA) is a set of self-government institutions that were established after an agreement signed by Israel and the PLO in 1993, popularly called the ‘Oslo Accords’ (Declaration of Principles 1993). The PA was intended to be a temporary entity, that most observers assumed would evolve into a Palestinian state based on final status negotiations between Israel and the PLO.

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3 Jordan stopped most of its funding of NGOs in the WBGS, after PLO announced the independence of the ‘State of Palestine’. This statement did in no way result in the establishment of a Palestinian state as a de facto political entity on the ground.
The establishment of the PA marked a shift from armed resistance and liberation to state-building for the PLO chairman. Within the new paradigm of peace negotiations with Israel, Arafat had to cope with new challenges. At the domestic level, he had to deal with domestic opposition to the Oslo Accords. The mouthpiece of this opposition was the Islamic Resistance Movement, known by its Arabic acronym, Hamas. As a non-PLO member, Hamas was able to criticise not only the policies of Arafat, but challenge the legitimacy of the PLO itself (Shain and Sussman 1998: 292). Hamas condemned the PLO for renouncing violent resistance against Israel and accepting partition of the land of historical Palestine. Consequently, Hamas refused to participate in the 1996 elections to the presidency and the legislative council of the PA because they argued participation in self-rule would give legitimacy to the peace process (Milton-Edwards and Farrell 2010: 82). In 2006 Hamas changed its policies and chose to participate in the parliamentary elections. Surprisingly, the Islamist movement won, which resulted in an immediate boycott of the PA by Western donors (Hovdenak 2009: 59–60). This made it clear that there were significant political conditions attached to this aid, and that the donors were willing to enforce it.

In the 1990s, the Islamists were not the only challenge to the PA. According to Shain and Sussman (1998: 292), Arafat saw the civil society and NGOs as a challenge to the PLO’s political monopoly in the occupied territories. While most NGOs politically affiliated with Arafat’s own secular party, Fatah, voluntarily went into the PA’s ministries, many were unwilling to relinquish their autonomy. In the PLO chairman’s eyes, the civil society represented a challenge to his emerging state structures. The fact that key NGOs in the WBGS were headed by his political opponents in the left and Islamist movements, did nothing but increase his will to put the civil society under the control of the PA (Shain and Sussman 1998: 289–292). Political tensions between the PA and the civil society sector erupted as the PA tried to use legislative tools to conquer the NGO domain. The PA’s proposed ‘NGO Law’ attempted to enforce NGOs’ registration requirements with the authorities. The proposed law would commit NGOs to register with the relevant ministries, and to obtain permits from the authorities in order to receive international funding (Shain and Sussman 1998: 292–293). The Palestinian NGO Network (PNGO), an umbrella organisation for Palestinian NGOs, saw the proposed law as an attack on their autonomy and lobbied extensively in order to prevent the law from being passed (Shain and Sussman 1998: 294). The law that was eventually passed put significantly fewer restrictions on NGOs than the original proposal, and allowed NGOs to operate by registration rather than permit (USAID 2011: 45).
2.3.3 From service provision to advocacy: the rise of professionalised NGOs

To the international donor community, the PA was able to justify its legislative restrictions on NGOs by claiming its aim was to eliminate the duplication of services (Shain and Sussman 1998: 293). It was estimated that international funding to the NGO sector had been reduced by 30-50%, in favour of funding to the PA after its establishment in 1994. As the PA now took over the responsibility for the service provision traditionally done by NGOs in the absence of a government, many organisations defined new roles for themselves. Decreased overall funding to NGOs also contributed to the sector taking more part in advocacy work, and less in service provision (Challand 2008: 66).

The reorientation towards advocacy work was furthermore accelerated by donors drawing up new funding schemes based on new thematic priorities. Some donors, such as Norway and Canada emphasised “people-to-people” (P2P) programs designed to promote Israeli-Palestinian reconciliation (Brynen 2000: 88). According to the research institution acting as the secretariat for the Norwegian P2P program, Fafo, the goal was to “to take steps to foster public debate and involvement, to remove barriers to interaction between the peoples” (Fafo n.d.). 165 NGO projects were funded as part of the Norwegian P2P program, each involving at least one Palestinian and one Israeli NGO (Fafo n.d.). P2P programs generated a lot of controversy within Palestinian civil society. Some organisations, like the Palestinian NGO Network (PNGO) advised its members not to participate in joint projects with Israeli organisations, unless the latter “‘support the Palestinian right to freedom and statehood and a comprehensive, just and durable peace that meets Palestinian national rights’” (Hanafi 2007: 143–144).

Brynen (2000: 193) argues that ‘trendy’ themes such as democratisation dominated donor priorities, and thus also the agendas of Palestinian NGOs. There was an apparent disconnect between the needs identified by CSOs, and the projects implemented by NGOs. Many NGOs “responded to the thematic priorities of funders less out of conviction than out of the imperatives of fund-raising” (Brynen 2000: 188). In order to survive, NGOs had to adjust to and subordinate themselves to donor agendas and priorities which were more driven by national interests or random institutional influence from key individuals in donor countries (Brynen 2000: 192). P2P programs are perhaps the most evident example of disconnect
between donor priorities and needs identified by Palestinian CSOs. But ‘hearts and minds’ had to be won in order for the peace process to succeed. Perhaps one of the purposes of international aid to Palestine was, as Brynen (1996) puts it, to ‘buy peace’.

2.3.4 Driven by donor priorities?

Palestinian CSOs have undergone profound change over the past three decades. As Hammami (2000) explains, NGOs were able to develop a certain degree of autonomy after the PLO’s political decline during the first Intifada. Still, there have been important setbacks in terms of autonomy for NGOs after the establishment of the PA. NGOs have suffered from interference by the PA ministries and also stated that they “suffer from restrictions imposed by donor agencies” (Lopes 2011: 9). These restrictions of programmatic funding are presented both in terms of thematic priorities, such as ‘democratisation’, ‘women’s rights’ and ‘good governance’ (Brynen 2000; Challand 2008), and in terms of administrative monitoring systems and regulations (Lopes 2011: 9).

The professionalisation of the NGO sector that began in the late 1980s has transformed these organisations from political, and mainly grassroots based organisations, to professionalised development organisations (Jad 2007; Lopes 2011). Palestinian NGOs have changed dramatically in character, and thus also in the functions they perform. In the 1980s they were mainly GROs that produced downward accountability, by mobilising – and being held accountable by their members and local communities. Today, most of them have evolved into or been replaced by professional NGOs whose primary relationship are with international donors (Lopes 2011: 24–25).

The professionalisation of the NGO sector created a new Palestinian elite (Lopes 2011: 24). According to Hanafi and Tabar (2005), this elite ascribes to a set of globally oriented ideas about development and that they are growing increasingly detached from the Palestinian national struggle for independence. Continued interaction with donor agencies who hold a view of development defined in terms of a narrow set of socio-economic concepts (Lopes 2011), has arguably contributed to disconnecting Palestinians from the core of their own society. Given the poor state of the Palestinian economy, the NGO sector offers attractive opportunities for young and educated Palestinians seeking paid work or who wish to contribute to society. But Palestinian factionalism and donors put severe conditions on the
sector’s opportunities for political mobilisation (Christophersen, Høiglit, and Tiltnes 2012; Gerster and Baumgarten 2011). But it is too simplistic to view the professionalisation as a mere reflection of the agendas and conditions stipulated by donors, as there are clear indications that the ideas and beliefs of the Palestinian NGO elite have changed as well (Hanafi and Tabar 2005). In the upcoming chapter, I draw up an analytical framework for assessing the ideational impact of donors upon Palestinian NGOs.
3 Analytical framework

In this chapter, I establish an analytical framework designed for the purpose of investigating the influence of donor ideas and upon Palestinian NGOs. This framework is based on social constructivist (constructivist for short) assumptions about the nature of the social reality and how we produce knowledge about it. By applying these principles, we assume that behaviour is determined by ideas rather than observed or deduced rational interest. The concept of ideas encompasses normative goals as well as descriptive assumptions about what one wants to accomplish as well as ideas about how this can best be done. Although material factors do not directly determine behaviour, it does not mean that they are irrelevant. Material inequality is what grants donors the ability to give (Hattori 2001), but ideas, not material factors, transforms this inequality into an asymmetry of power. Ideas are what help us separate right from wrong, and they also shape our understanding of the world and our own role within it, which in turn shapes behaviour. In order to explain why Palestinian NGOs behave the way they do, it is crucial to understand their social relationships to donors and the ideas that are communicated and articulated in the conversations between them.

I have deemed critical discourse analysis (CDA) to be the most suitable approach for this analysis. CDA provides a set of theoretical and methodological tools for conducting systematic empirical studies of discourse, through linguistic analysis of texts. The aim of this approach is to determine how the use of language helps generate and change meaning, our understanding of the social world, as well as how this knowledge motivates social behaviour (Jørgensen and Phillips 2002).

This chapter is divided into three main sections. First, I pick up on one of the key questions from the empirical overview: why do Palestinian NGOs accept foreign aid if they disagree with the donors’ approach? I argue that even though the relationships were initially established through perceived material necessity, social interaction with donors may contribute to a change of ideas in the NGOs over time. Like Fearon and Wendt (2002), I assume that behaviour is motivated by beliefs, which comprises both ‘interests’ and ‘ideas’. I also briefly review alternative approaches to the research task at hand and explain why these were not selected. Secondly, I present Norman Fairclough’s approach to CDA. This section explains his three-dimensional model on the relationship between text, discursive practice and social practice and its theoretical and methodological premises. The third and final section of
the chapter adapts Fairclough’s three-dimensional model to the empirical context, and presents the analytical tools used in the textual analysis of USAID documents in Chapter 4.

3.1 Ideas and interests: competing or complementary explanations?

As stated above, I assume that NGO behaviour is influenced by social interaction with donors. Due to the limited scope of this thesis, I choose not to investigate the processes through which donors design their policies, and which ideas motivate them (cf. 3.1.1 below). But I do intend to say something about how NGOs as recipients are affected by the social interaction with donors. Some of the available studies on Palestinian NGOs have claimed that financial necessity made NGOs relinquish their autonomy to donor agendas that contradicted with their own missions and values (Brynen 2000: 192). This explanation bears resemblance to institutional theory, which points to the formal aspects of institutions (such as their legal and structural features) in putting limitations upon agency. While institutional explanations can account for the material conditions that enable ideas to be communicated in the first place, they are unable to explain the content of this influence and the meaning it generates (Lieberman 2002: 697). The material asymmetry of the donor-NGO relationship constitutes a structure that determines the agency of both, but it also enables a process of socialisation and generation of meaning that makes this structure changeable over time. Analysis of NGO behaviour should therefore account for the generation of meaning that happens through continuous social interaction with donors.

Rationalist and constructivist theories disagree on whether strategic calculations drawn from microeconomic theory or ideas motivate action. It is often argued that constructivist explanations by emphasising ideas are ‘rivals’ to rationalist explanations emphasising preferences (Goldstein and Keohane 1993). This claim is based on the assumption that preferences or interests are not ideas, which would imply that ‘rationality’ is something more ‘real’ than ideas. Not only is this claim difficult to test empirically, but it helps obstruct efforts of methodological pluralism that could bring advances to empirical research within both approaches. The same is the case for some constructivist ‘hardliners’ who reject the concept of interest (which can be observed or deduced) and thereby the idea of rationalist explanations at all. It is indisputable that interests are an integral part of cognitive processes that motivate
action. But interests are more complex than a mere reflection of material necessity; interests are shaped by ideas (Hay 2011).

Fearon and Wendt (2002) suggest that we can overcome the deadlock of the rationalist-constructivist debate by framing it in empirical rather than ontological terms. Such an approach allows us to utilise the explanatory power of the ‘useful fiction’ that is rational interest (see MacDonald 2003: 554), without reducing ideas to a mere reflection of material necessity. Both approaches assume that actors act on the basis of their beliefs. For this reason, “there is little difference between rationalism and constructivism on whether ideas ‘matter’ ”, but, rather, how they matter (Fearon and Wendt 2002: 59). Hay (2011: 71) argues that the concept of material interests is “an aid in the simplification of social and political reality”. He does not dispute the fact that there is such a thing as objective material interests that can be deduced on the basis of an actor’s position within a social context. But he maintains, however, that these interests are a theoretical construction which the actor cannot access directly herself (Hay 2011: 75).

Therefore, Hay argues that behaviour is based on perceived interests, which are subjected to ideational manipulation. Given the social nature of knowledge, material interests are subjected to manipulation and persuasion, which is a social process where ideas play an important role. An actor might perceive her interests differently, e.g. because of normative influence about what is considered to be ‘right’ or ‘just’, which in turn influences behaviour (Hay 2011: 74–75). In such a model, material factors ‘matter’, but how they matter depends on ideas (Fearon and Wendt 2002: 58). An important advantage of the concept of ‘perceived interests’, is that the model accounts for how interests may change over time, even though the material context remains essentially unchanged. Thus, social learning exposes actors to descriptive and normative ideas that shape how they understand the world, and consequently what they perceive as their own interests within it.

The concept of perceived interests allows me to analyse how the ideas of NGOs and their preferences changes over the course of donor-NGO social interaction, without dismissing the material and institutional structures that enable this interaction. From the outset, NGOs might strategically adapt to donor agendas in order to get funding, as suggested by Brynen (2000: 192). But over the course of extensive socialisation with the donors, they are exposed to new ideas that eventually transform their own identities and consequently their behaviour.
3.1.1 Alternative approach

Before presenting Fairclough’s approach to CDA, I briefly discuss an alternative approach and explain why it was not selected. The most obvious and perhaps most fruitful alternative to this approach would have been empirically driven process tracing. In recent years, this method has been embraced by constructivists emphasising the importance of social processes and variable-oriented positivists alike (Checkel 2006: 369; George and Bennett 2005: 206). A promising alternative to the research design I have suggested, would have been to use process tracing and test two competing hypotheses; based on logic of consequence (rationalist) and logic of appropriateness (norm based learning) (Fearon and Wendt 2002: 60). This approach would have allowed me to investigate in detail the effective causal mechanisms in effect in the social interaction between donors and NGOs and would address the pivotal issue of norm diffusion. Do recipients change behaviour because new ideas have taken hold or simply because they respond strategically to donor priorities? Process tracing is a brilliant example of an area where positivists and constructivists have found common ground by focusing on empirical research, as suggested by Fearon and Wendt (2002). Researchers from both camps are able to use the same methodology but still keep their analytical tools.

This is evident in the research on compliance with liberal human rights and democracy norms in Central and Eastern Europe. Here, Schimmelfennig takes “a rationalist approach to international socialization” (2005: 828) and argues that compliance with norms is based on interests and cost-benefit calculations. Constructivists, on the other hand, emphasise that interests and preferences are not set in stone, and that agents present arguments and try to persuade others into compliance (Checkel 2005: 812). A research design encompassing both of these perspectives could potentially improve our understanding of how the socialisation between donors and NGOs takes place.

The obvious problem with process tracing is the method’s immense data requirements (Checkel 2006; George and Bennett 2005). In order to utilise within-case variation, it is necessary to collect data for different variables over time, which increases research costs in terms of time and other resources. Moreover, it must be possible to establish a clearly defined timeline which delimits the process leading to an outcome. As established in the previous chapter, foreign aid to NGOs involves a complex series of events and relationships and satisfying the data requirements of process tracing would be challenging within the fairly
limited scope of a master thesis. Given the complex political context, it would also be difficult to control for all possible sources of error, and thus establish a case selection strategy that would ensure proper standards of validity (Gerring 2006).

3.1.2 An ideational approach to conditionality and compliance

Instead of tracing the process through which donors influence Palestinian NGOs, I proceed based on an assumption that ideas do matter. The core question the analysis will answer is how they matter. Schimmelfennig’s research on the international socialisation of Central and Eastern European countries to liberal human rights and democracy norms serves as a useful example here. He concludes that countries initially comply to these liberal norms out of rationalist based strategic calculation in order to attain EU and NATO membership. But the true test comes once membership is granted and the powerful sanctioning instrument of denying membership disappears. Will these countries still comply with liberal norms? If compliance has indeed been based on strategic calculation, domestic political forces will certainly have strong incentives to repel liberal norms and revert to authoritarian practices (Schimmelfennig 2005: 855–857). Testing this rationalist explanation would require a quasi-experimental research design where we could observe the object’s behaviour upon the removal of the incentive. Translated to the Palestinian context, the argument would be that NGOs comply with the donor’s norms based on the incentive of funding, which is also indicated by Brynen (2000: 192). But we would not necessarily know whether these norms were truly internalised until the donor stopped the funding, and thus removed the incentive.

This hypothetical question is, however, of minor relevance to this analysis. The research question is not whether ideas matter, but how they matter and shapes the discursive practice within Palestinian civil society. I assume that NGOs do believe in the ideas they express, and that these beliefs help shape their activities. Whether they will remain true to these ideas in the future if the donor chooses to stop the funding, is of minor importance in this regard.

3.2 Critical discourse analysis (CDA)

There are many different approaches to discourse analysis, but most of them share the basic assumption that “our ways of talking do not neutrally reflect our world, identities and social relations but, rather, play an active role in creating and changing them” (Jørgensen and
Phillips 2002: 1). Jørgensen and Phillips (2002: 1) define discourse as “a particular way of talking about and understanding the world (or an aspect of the world)”. A discourse is therefore a collective understanding of a social or political phenomenon. Discourse analysts dispute the claim that the use of language is a passive reflection of some objective, material reality; rather, it helps shape a social reality that is constantly changing. Empirical studies of texts and how they are produced can help us understand how ideas, manifested in discursive practice and texts, motivate social behaviour.

This section will explain the basic principles of Norman Fairclough’s approach to critical discourse analysis (CDA). Though CDA does share important properties with post-structuralist discourse theory, such as that developed by Laclau and Mouffe, it differs in important aspects. Laclau and Mouffe’s discourse theory aims to map out the processes by which individuals create meaning and maintain certain collective representations through discourse. While Laclau and Mouffe for instance view discourse as a force for creating meaning (i.e. constitutive), CDA asserts that discourse is also created (i.e. constituted) by other social forces. It does, to a larger extent focus on the interplay between text, discursive practice and social practice. CDA combines detailed linguistic analysis and other non-discursive social theory to analyse discourse and its implications for social behaviour within a given social domain (Bratberg 2014: 43–44).

### 3.2.1 Fairclough’s three-dimensional model and key concepts

Fairclough’s approach to CDA consists of a set of theories and methods for the empirical study of the relationship between discourse and other social developments within a given social domain. In order to explain this relationship, Fairclough has developed a three-dimensional model that explains how discursive and non-discursive phenomena interact with each other. All the three dimensions, text, discursive practice and social practice are of concern to CDA, but the latter must be complemented by other social or cultural theory, as it consists also of non-discursive activities (Jørgensen and Phillips 2002: 69).

There are two key concepts that serve as a basis for understanding his model. The first is the communicative event, which is best described as an instance of language use. Such an event

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4 The CDA term is also used as a denominator for a wider movement consisting many approaches of which Fairclough’s is one (Jørgensen and Phillips 2002: 60). Unless otherwise specified, CDA will in this thesis refer to Fairclough’s approach.
might be a newspaper article, an interview, a video, a political speech etc. The second is the *order of discourse*, which refers to the configuration of all *discourse types* within a given social field. A discourse type consists of both *discourses* (patterns of language use) and *genres* (e.g. an interview, newspaper article etc.). A social field is an institution such as a hospital or another social sphere (Jørgensen and Phillips 2002: 67), for instance civil society.

Jørgensen and Phillips (2002: 67) use the example of a hospital’s order of discourse. The *discursive practice* in this context includes doctor-patient consultations, the written and spoken technical conversations among medical staff and the promotional language of the public relations officer. By analysing texts we would probably discover that the various discursive practices would have somewhat different ways of presenting the same phenomenon and identifying patterns in language use. We might refer to these patterns as *discourses*, which often originate from other social fields than the one under study. The promotional language used by the public relations officer has most likely evolved from another social field (such as an advertising firm), and then expanded into social fields associated with the public sector, such as hospitals and universities.

![Figure 3.1: Fairclough’s model adapted from Jørgensen & Phillips (2002: 68)](image)
Every communicative event (instance of language use) consists of these three dimensions, and when conducting a critical discourse analysis based on Fairclough’s model, all of these are accounted for. This, however, does not mean that each of these dimensions must be analysed separately. Eventually, analysis of the text’s linguistic features must be considered in terms of its discursive practice – the conditions under which the text is produced and consumed (Jørgensen and Phillips 2002: 68). How we should analyse a politician’s statements in a live TV interview with a journalist is different from how we would analyse a well prepared speech she gives to the general assembly of her political party. The below table (3.1) is based on Jørgensen and Phillips’ (2002: 66–71) overview of Fairclough’s three dimensional model. Table 3.1 below describes the properties of each dimension, and what the analytical focus of each dimension should be.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 3.1: Explanation of the three-dimensional model</th>
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<tr>
<td>Description</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Text</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Is a speech, writing, visual image or a combination</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>of these. Texts are analysed through linguistic tools</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>provided by CDA.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Discursive practice</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Is the practice through which texts are produced and</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>consumed (such as a doctor-patient consultation or a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>job interview).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Social practice</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All social activity of which discursive practice is</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>only a part. Social practice includes both discursive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>and non-discursive practice.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Discursive practice is what mediates the relationship between text and social practice, and analysis of this dimension is essential in any critical discourse analysis. A key question for any empirical analysis is whether the discursive practice under study reproduces or restructures (i.e. challenges) the existing order of discourse. Reproduction means that the text draws nearly exclusively on already existing elements of the dominating discourse within the social field. But subjects may attempt to restructure the existing order of discourse by drawing on new genres and discourses. The order of discourse is a system, but not in a
structuralised sense, as it both shapes and is shaped by language use. This makes the order of discourse both *structure* and *practice* (Jørgensen and Phillips 2002: 71–72). As structure, the order of discourse delimits what it is possible to say within a social field, as it defines which resources (discourses and genres) are available. By drawing on genres and discourses that are already available within it, the discursive practice helps reproduce the existing order of discourse.

But subjects also have the power to change the order of discourse through creative use of language. The order of discourse is particularly open to change when elements from other genres and discourses are introduced (Jørgensen and Phillips 2002: 72). The most obvious example is the proliferation of a ‘marketised’ discourse within the public sector of many European countries. Public relations officers increasingly promote e.g. health care as services where they portray patients as *customers* rather than fellow citizens.

### 3.2.2 Critical and inductive research

Fairclough recognises that the insights we obtain through CDA are not of an objective nature; objective knowledge is an ideal we might strive towards, but it is impossible to achieve. As he states, “[R]eality (the potential, the actual) cannot be reduced to our knowledge of reality which is contingent, shifting, and partial” (Fairclough 2003: 14). Textual analysis is inevitably selective, as the researcher actively decides to focus on particular elements of the text from particular perspectives, at the expense of others. There is no such thing as ‘objective’ analysis of text, unless we limit our analysis to simply stating that the text is there, and that it contains words. Theorists constantly create new theoretical tools and analytical categories that frame existing knowledge into different perspectives. On this basis, the assumption that what we *know* about the social reality is *true* – for ever and always – is at least as problematic as the potential analytical bias originating from the subjectivity of the researcher. Assuming that our knowledge of texts is necessarily partial and incomplete and that we are always striving to improve it, does inevitably mean that our analytical tools and theories will also be subject to change (Fairclough 2003: 15).

Fairclough himself defines his approach within the tradition of ‘critical social science’ (2003: 15). CDA is ‘critical’ in the sense that it “aims to reveal the role of discursive practice in the maintenance of the social world, including those social relations that involve unequal
relations of power” (Jørgensen and Phillips 2002: 64). It does not ascribe to the paradigm of objectivist science, and does therefore not view itself as politically neutral (Jørgensen and Phillips 2002: 64). CDA is a form of explanatory critique, where the researcher seeks to disclose a ‘misrepresentation’, that is “a mismatch between reality and the view people have of this reality that functions ideologically” (Jørgensen and Phillips 2002: 77). The conclusions that will be presented eventually are fundamentally interpretive, and do not claim to be objective in nature. Instead of aiming to derive objective laws, this analysis will contribute to the body of research by increasing our understanding of how the actors under study understand themselves and each other, and implicitly, why they behave the way they do (Bratberg 2014: 14–15).

Qualitative research looks for aspects of an empirical phenomenon that makes the phenomenon different from others (Stenbacka 2001: 551). Therefore, we need to look for other concepts of quality and procedures to enable other researchers to evaluate our findings than the ones provided in conventional methodological literature (typically illustrated by King, Keohane, and Verba 2001). In the upcoming section I explain how CDA will be utilised for empirical analysis in Chapters 4-6, and present my approach in detail in order to enable the reader to critically evaluate my findings.

3.3 A critical discourse analysis of Palestinian civil society

Having presented the core principles of CDA, I will dedicate the final section of this chapter to intertwine these principles with the empirical and theoretical overview from Chapter 2 and present the analytical tools that will be used in the textual analysis. As suggested by Jørgensen and Phillips (2002: 76), methods should be selected based on the nature of the project. The purpose of the analysis is to investigate how ideas promoted by a donor transmits or nourishes equivalent ideas at the level of recipients, which strengthens a particular discourse at the expense of others. Donors do not only increase the capacity of partner NGOs through material funding, but supply them with ideational ‘ammunition’ as well. Consequently, this ideational ammunition strengthens a particular perception of reality, i.e. discourse within Palestinian civil society.
3.3.1 Palestinian civil society as a ‘social field’

In CDA, the research question is always formulated based on the social practice (Jørgensen and Phillips 2002: 78) which takes place within a specific social field (Jørgensen and Phillips 2002: 67). The social field in question is Palestinian civil society, which I understand to be a social sphere consisting of Palestinian NGOs that interact with each other. As indicated by Figure 3.2 below, I do not treat donors as part of this social field, but as external actors that through their funding schemes and programmes produce a form of stimuli that affects the ideas and beliefs of Palestinian NGOs.

![Figure 3.2: The social field of Palestinian civil society and Fairclough’s model adapted](image)

Although a convincing case could be made for seeing donors as part of civil society, I have chosen to treat them as external. There are two main reasons for this; the first being that donors in general and USAID in particular, is not a part of the regular interaction within Palestinian civil society. USAID’s role is largely one-dimensional, as they design programs which are ‘implemented’ through an intermediary party, often an INGO (Challand 2008: 118–119). As Palestinian NGOs have to compete for the attention of donors (Brynen 2000) and there is no direct dialogue between them, it makes more sense to assume that donors exert ideational influence over NGOs, rather than the other way around. The lack of
contextualisation of USAID programs in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, which I demonstrate in Chapter 4, supports this assumption.

The second reason is more pragmatic and relates to the role of intermediary INGOs. As suggested by Hattori (2001: 649), these organisations can be understood as ‘mediators’ between indigenous CSOs on the one hand and foreign donors at the other. In some cases, INGOs hire local staff and implement activities directly without involving indigenous CSOs. But within thematic fields like democracy promotion and human rights, this is rarely the case. For instance, USAID’s ‘Civic Participation Program’ is implemented by an INGO, Catholic Relief Services, which in turn provides sub-grants for Palestinian CSOs (USAID 2012: 1). Unfortunately, this organisation was not willing to be interviewed for the research project and unwilling to provide a list of their Palestinian grantees. As the availability of material that might shed light on the role of INGOs has been limited, I have chosen to omit them from the analysis. My analysis is not actor-oriented, but idea-oriented, which means tracing the probable source of their proliferation and how they are reflected at different dimensions in the model. As already established, the purpose is therefore not to investigate effective causal mechanisms, but rather to trace how certain ideas influence text, discursive and social practice within the social field of Palestinian civil society.

3.3.2 Selection of material

The primary material consists of USAID documents and interviews with Palestinian NGO personnel in the West Bank. In addition, I draw extensively on secondary literature, particularly in the discussion of social practice.

USAID documents

These documents outline both overall strategic goals for USAID in the field of democracy, human rights and governance (DRG) and discuss specific interventions and needs in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. The combination of general and contextual documents of different genres allows me to triangulate political ideas and determine to what extent generalised ideas are operationalised to fit the local political context.
Interviews with Palestinian NGO personnel

During the fieldwork in the West Bank in the period November-December 2013 I conducted 8 interviews with persons well-informed about foreign aid in general and USAID’s role in particular in Palestine. All of the informants, except for one university professor and one consultant were at the time of the interview employed with Palestinian NGOs. The informants were generous in sharing their knowledge and perspectives on their own role in Palestinian civil society and that of donors. I have selected four of these interviews for in-depth analysis in Chapter 5, but the others have also been valuable in shaping the research design at different stages of the process. Before accounting for how the different dimensions will be analysed, I briefly explain how interviews were conducted and discuss methodological challenges.

3.3.3 Methodological challenges in interviews

The use of interviews has a twofold purpose in the thesis. I seek both to capture the worldviews and perceptions of the informant concerning Palestinian civil society, but also to extract ‘factual’ information that can be used for describing the processes belonging to social practice. Use of semi-structured interviews has allowed me to account for both of these purposes. In semi-structured interviews, the researcher follows an interview guide consisting of a set of largely open questions or topics that allows the interviewee to speak relatively freely and express views by her own terms (Bryman 2004: 324–325).

Ideas and perceptions cannot simply be ‘collected’ from the minds of the interviewees, but must be understood as data or material generated in the interview setting (Andersen 2006: 279–280; Stenbacka 2001). As suggested by Andersen (2006: 289–290) I used my own existing knowledge about the field actively both before and during interviews. Conducting fieldwork in the West Bank helped me attain a comprehensive understanding of the research topic before conducting the actual interviews. Presenting some of my existing knowledge about the research topic as well as my background was essential in order to establish a sufficient level of trust where the informants felt they could speak relatively freely. It was also crucial to conduct the interviews face-to-face and in a physical setting where the informants felt comfortable, usually their workplace. During the interviews I used information obtained from other sources in order to steer the conversation in a direction where I ensured generation

5 See the attached interview guide in Appendix 1
of relevant data (Andersen 2006: 285–286). However, I prepared well before each interview to avoid asking leading questions, and made sure to pose all the relevant questions in the interview guide to all the NGO informants, in order to establish a basis for comparison.

A common critique of active interviewing styles is that it may impede objectivity (Andersen 2006: 80). Moreover, one must be aware that interviewees are not obliged to tell the ‘truth’. All of the informants were highly educated professionals that might be motivated to for instance overestimate their own role or putting their own organisation in a more positive light (Berry 2002: 680). This is deemed to be of minor impact to this study, as my aim is to analyse the perceptions and ideas of the informants, rather than assessing the impact of their organisations.

Some of the initial interviews did not follow the interview guide, as these were primarily conducted with the purpose of gathering factual information and to identify relevant NGOs for in-depth interviews. The practical constraints of the research project and the complex nature of the field made it impossible to conduct probability-based sampling. Therefore, informants were identified by chain-referral or ‘snowballing’ (Bryman 2004: 334; Tansey 2007: 770). The selection of informants may have impacted the nature of the analysis. This is not crucial, as the purpose of the interviews is mainly to identify discourses – the cognitive and normative frameworks that determine their possibilities for expression and action. However, in order to account for this I selected the interviews that I deemed to be most representative for in-depth analysis in Chapters 5 and 6.

### 3.3.4 Analysis of the three dimensions of Fairclough’s model

The analysis is divided into three chapters. The first, Chapter 4, does not analyse the social field, but uses textual analysis to identify the ideas promoted by USAID which constitute a form of external stimuli. The USAID documents are therefore analysed as texts in Fairclough’s model, even though they are not part of the social field of Palestinian civil society. My analytical focus here is on the linguistic features of the text (Jørgensen and Phillips 2002: 69). I have selected a collection of analytical tools that will be used for the analysis (cf. 3.3.4 below). Analysis of texts will in CDA eventually involve analysis of the processes through which texts are produced and consumed (Jørgensen and Phillips 2002: 68–69). In Chapter 4 I will therefore discuss aspects relevant to the production of the texts, while
the consumption aspect will be analysed in Chapter 5 within the social field of Palestinian civil society.

Chapter 5 analyses how the ideas identified in the preceding chapter influences text and discursive practice within the social field. I analyse whether these ideas are present at the text level and how they help constitute and are interpreted within the framework of discourses. Finally, I discuss the role of discourse in enabling different forms of social practice in Chapter 6. For the analysis of the social field in Chapters 5 and 6, each dimension will be analysed according to the outline below.

**Dimension I: Text**

Analysis of this dimension relies on the interviews with representatives from Palestinian NGOs. These consist of organisations that both do and do not receive funding from USAID. This combination allows me to investigate how ideas influence different actors, both those who are financed by USAID and those who are not. In this dimension, interviews will be treated as ‘text’, which means trying to capture specific ideas. Although the informants were generally skilled in English, interviews are not suitable for the use of strict linguistic tools. This means a less rigorous analysis, but I will compensate for this by referring much of the context from which individual quotes are collected.

**Dimension II: Discursive practice**

Discursive practice entails the processes through which texts are produced and consumed. CDA assumes that text both constitute and is constituted by discourses (Jørgensen and Phillips 2002: 61–62). This means that texts are both shaped by discourse, which determines what is possible to say or not; but at the same time, texts reproduce and thus help consolidate the discourse. Based on the ideas identified in the preceding dimension, I will delimit discourses that mediate the relationship between text and social practice. Here, I will bring in the cluster of ideas promoted by USAID identified in Chapter 4 and explore how these ideas give ‘ideational ammunition’ to discourses within the social field.
Dimension III: Social practice

Finally, I analyse how these discourses constitute and enable different forms of social and political action for Palestinian NGOs. This dimension entails non-material factors as well as material ones, and consequently it will be relevant to discuss how foreign aid to some NGOs at the expense of others also strengthens some ideas within Palestinian civil society rather than others. Here, it will also be relevant to discuss some of USAID’s funding conditions, which systematically excludes certain types of NGOs based on their political affiliations.

3.3.5 Analytical tools

Table 3.2 below presents a set of analytical tools from Fairclough’s book *Analysing Discourse* (2003: 191–194). These will be used in the textual analysis of USAID documents in the following chapter. Each tool consists of a series of questions that the researcher should pose when analysing the text. Fairclough presents 12 tools in total, and I have selected seven of these based on their analytical utility and relevance to the texts. As Jørgensen and Phillips notes, it is neither necessary nor practical to use all the tools, the selection of tools and methods in CDA should be tailored to match the nature and purpose of the project (2002: 76). Tools have been both added and removed from the toolbox over the course of the analysis, and the final selection consists only of the tools that were used in the final form of the analysis. Furthermore, I have removed some questions I have deemed irrelevant or of limited utility from each of the tools.

Table 3.2: List of selected analytical tools adapted from Fairclough (2003: 191–194)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ANALYTICAL TOOL</th>
<th>QUESTIONS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Social event    | • What social event, and what chain of social events is the text a part of?  
• What social practice or network of social practices can the events be referred to, be seen as framed within  
• Is the text part of a chain or network of texts? |
| Difference      | Which (combination) of the following scenarios characterize the orientation to difference in the text?  
a) An openness to, acceptance of, recognition of difference; an exploration of difference, as in ‘dialogue’ in the richest sense |
b) An accentuation of difference, conflict, polemic, a struggle over meaning, norms, power

c) An attempt to resolve or overcome difference

d) A bracketing of difference, a focus on commonality, solidarity

e) Consensus, a normalisation and acceptance of differences of power which brackets or suppresses differences of meaning and over norms

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assumptions</th>
<th>What existential, propositional, or value assumptions are made?</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Is there a case for seeing any assumptions as ideological?</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Discourses</th>
<th>What discourses are drawn upon in the text, and how are they textured together? Is there a significant mixing of discourses?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>What are the features that characterize the discourses which are drawn upon?</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Representation of social events</th>
<th>What elements of represented social events are included or excluded, and which included elements are most salient?</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>How abstractly or concretely are social events represented?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>How are processes represented? What are the predominant process types (material, mental, verbal, relational, existential)?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>How are social actors represented (activated/passivated, personal/impersonal, names/classified, specific/generic)?</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Modality</th>
<th>What do authors commit themselves to in terms of truth (epistemic modalities)? Or in terms of obligation and necessity (deontic modalities)?</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>To what extent are modalities categorical (assertion, denial etc.), to what extent are they modalized (with explicit markers of modality)?</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Evaluation</th>
<th>To what values (in terms of what is desirable or undesirable) do authors commit themselves?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>How are values realized – as evaluative statements, statements with deontic modalities, statements with affective mental processes, or assumed values?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
4 USAID’s conception of civil society

In this chapter I identify a cluster of ideas that constitute USAID’s conception of civil society. Based on the analytical framework, I conduct a textual analysis of USAID documents using the tools outlined above (cf. 3.3.4). I show that a vital civil society is at the cornerstone of USAID’s democratisation policy. Moreover, I argue that its conception of civil society is rigorous as it contends that the role of civil society is universal and derived from neo-liberal ideology. This rigorous conception fails to account for important contextual factors of the Palestinian context.

4.1 Analytical approach and selection of texts

By assuming a constructivist position, scientific knowledge is here seen as generated and therefore (Stenbacka 2001). This view entails an assumption that the production of knowledge is linked to social processes, and consequently that the researcher’s own ideas consciously and unconsciously affect the generation of knowledge (Jørgensen and Phillips 2002: 5–6). In order to enable the reader to critically evaluate my interpretations, I refer most of the text fragments in the form of direct quotes and I try to provide sufficient descriptions of the context in which they are presented.

I have selected the following three documents for in-depth textual analysis:

- USAID’s global strategy on democracy human rights and governance (hereafter ‘DRG strategy’, USAID 2013)
- USAID’s West Bank and Gaza Mission website (USAID.gov 2014d)
- USAID’s CSO sustainability index for the Middle East and North Africa (hereafter ‘CSO index’, USAID 2011)

The first document is a general strategy, while the other two deal directly with the Palestinian context. I begin by analysing the DRG strategy, a document that guides DRG promotion in all countries that receive such support from USAID. The document reveals a largely linear view on democratisation and the goal of USAID assistance is to ensure that countries progress in this process of democratisation, rather than backslide. Civil society promotion is one of the
main forms of support for advancing democratisation, governance and human rights. Both of the contextualised documents reflect the generalised conception of civil society articulated in the DRG strategy. The claim here is not that these texts in particular have been influential in Palestinian civil society, but rather that they reflect a set of fundamental ideas that are likely to influence USAID’s policy and communication towards Palestinian NGOs. The results from this the analysis in this chapter allows me to trace these ideas in the discursive practice of Palestinian NGOs in Chapter 5.

4.2 Textual analysis

4.2.1 Strategy on democracy, human rights and governance

One of the stated purposes of USAID’s DRG strategy is to help “elevating and integrating democracy, human rights, and governance into [USAID’s] broader mission” (USAID 2013: 2). The document is written by high ranking USAID personnel from the agency’s different departments, and the report team consulted with various staff both from the headquarters in Washington and the field while writing the report (USAID 2013: 3). Production of the document appears to have been a thorough process, and we may therefore presume that it reflects the beliefs held within the organisation, which makes it a valuable source for understanding the basic ideas that shape USAID policy and practice globally.

The stated purpose of DRG support is to help countries move up the ladder to becoming liberal democracies, where “basic political freedoms and civil liberties are respected and reinforced by a political culture conducive to democratic processes” (USAID 2013: 29). Countries where these freedoms are guaranteed are not targeted for DRG support, but USAID may help promote economic governance in order to further consolidate democracy (USAID 2013: 29). In countries where democracy is not yet consolidated, support should be given to initiatives that help introduce democratic reforms or promote economic liberalisation and adherence to global economic regimes and institutions that may increase the external pressures on these regimes to reform (USAID 2013: 28). Moreover, civil society is portrayed as a catalyst for both democratisation and economic liberalisation. Below, I discuss how various ideas are woven together in order to crystallise USAID’s conception of the term.
Civil society as counterbalance to the state

USAID’s definition of CSOs is referred in the glossary of key terms in the DRG strategy:

Civil society organizations include formal non-government organizations (NGOs), as well as formal and informal membership associations (including labor unions, business and professional associations, farmers’ organizations and cooperatives, and women’s groups) that articulate and represent the interests of their members, engage in analysis and advocacy, and conduct oversight of government actions and policies (USAID 2013: 37).

All the types of organisations listed here are primarily interest-based and we can therefore assume that civil society is seen as the aggregation of individual self-interest. It is noteworthy that all of the social actors listed are generally seen as constructive and legitimate, while potentially destructive elements are excluded from the definition of CSOs.

The role of civil society is first and foremost defined in relation to the government. This is clearly articulated in the description of the two functions CSOs perform; (i) analysis and advocacy and (ii) conduct oversight of the government actions and policies (USAID 2013: 37). The argument that civil society should control the state and not the other way around is based on the text’s value assumption that civil society – understood as the aggregation of individual interests – is inherently ‘good’, while the state is inherently ‘bad’ unless it is controlled by the former.

The text also promotes existential assumptions about what types of social actors are part of civil society. Actors seen as ‘good’ and characterised by values of civility (Belloni 2001) are included, while what would be considered destructive elements by most, for example mafias and jihadist groups are excluded. Consequently, USAID’s definition presents a normative criterion – support for liberal democracy – as the principle for inclusion within civil society.

NGOs as civil society actors and autonomy from government

Although USAID maintains that CSOs include different types of organisations, NGOs are its primary focus. Like other CSOs, professionalised NGOs are too perceived as largely independent from government. This reveals an inherent contradiction, as most NGOs, contrary to other indigenous CSOs, are funded by states (Tvedt 2006: 679). The explicit focus on NGOs rather than other types of CSOs is apparent in the excerpts below:

Closing space for civil society in some parts of the world is a growing challenge. Restrictive media laws, laws governing non-governmental organizations (NGO) [emphasis added], and harassment or
persecution of civil society activists, have limited freedom of speech and association in many places (USAID 2013: 4).

And

As democracy has become the predominant form of government, *its opponents* [emphasis added] have discovered ways to undermine its consolidation (...) Governments are more adept at creating a façade of democracy and using carefully calibrated tools of repression, such as manipulation of electoral laws and *imposing restrictive NGO legislation* [emphasis added] (USAID 2013: 11).

The latter is particularly interesting, as it constructs a polemic struggle over meaning. **Difference** is accentuated through the construction of a conflict between the proponents of democracy and its ‘opponents’. Roles and motivations are assigned within this polemic struggle, dividing actors between simplified protagonist and antagonist categories. Restricting the freedom of NGOs is presented as measures used by ‘opponents of democracy’, which by definition means that NGOs are self-evident ‘proponents of democracy’; to limit the freedom of NGOs is to be opposed to democracy. Using a strong term like ‘opponents’ indicates a high degree of **modality**, where the author is highly committed to the statement. The protagonist-antagonist divide reduces nuances, and no space is created for those, who for other reasons than being ‘opponents of democracy’ hold some sceptical views concerning NGOs.

**4.2.2 USAID’s West Bank and Gaza mission website**

The USAID’s West Bank and Gaza mission website[^6] is part of USAID’s global information portal. It has two major sections, ‘history’ and ‘our work’. The text fragments that are analysed below are collected from the latter section, which is divided into 8 different thematic areas of support. The text is short and concise, while the language is mainly promotional (Fairclough 1993) mixed with terms from a professionalised development discourse. The text does not, however, belong to a specific **genre** in the conventional sense of the term. The website is continuously edited, although the changes to the text are of minor character. A website constitutes the ‘public face’ of an organisation, and has to relate to a wide target group. We can assume that the texts are produced with both American tax payers and Palestinian NGO personnel in mind. As the text presents USAID’s work in Palestine, it allows me to explore how the general political ideas presented in the previous section are operationalised in the Palestinian context.

Arguably, these ideas are not adapted to match the particularities of the Palestinian context. As with the DRG strategy, the role of Palestinian CSOs is primarily defined in relation to the domestic government – the PA. USAID establishes that its efforts “help strengthen the Palestinian Authority’s (PA) ability to serve effectively as a governing body by supporting its capacity to meet constituents’ needs” (USAID.gov 2014b). The focus on “constituents’ needs” may indicate a reproduction of the minimalist state, whose primary purpose is to balance and respond to the demands of different interest groups (Mercer 2002: 7).

The most noteworthy aspect of the text, however, is the lack of references to Israel. As the Israeli-Palestinian conflict remains unresolved and the military occupation of the West Bank is still in place, it is interesting to observe that Israel and elements that can be associated with the occupation are not portrayed as obstacles to Palestinian development. In fact, ‘Israel’ or ‘Israelis’ are barely mentioned at all on USAID’s website. And in the few instances they are brought up, they are portrayed in exclusively positive terms, in the context of ‘reconciliation’. For instance, USAID emphasises its support for “people-to-people reconciliation activities that bring together individuals of different ethnic, religious and political backgrounds from areas of conflict to address the root causes of tension and instability” (USAID.gov 2014c). This represents a minor acknowledgement of difference in the sense that it recognises that there is indeed a conflict. However, it suppresses its political dimensions by framing it as a conflict between ‘individuals’ coming from different ‘backgrounds’. This characterisation is important to our analysis because most of these grants are disbursed to Israeli and Palestinian NGOs (USAID.gov 2014a).

In presenting its results, USAID emphasises its successful efforts to “(…) improve the movement of people and cargo through crossing points between Israel and the West Bank and Gaza” (USAID.gov 2014c). These ‘crossing points’ are commonly referred to as ‘check points’ by Palestinians and are manned by military personnel. As this is an element conventionally associated with the occupation, it is interesting to see that USAID’s priority is not to remove these checkpoints, but accepts their existence and tries to improve their efficiency. Moreover, use of the neutral term ‘crossing’ rather than ‘check’ points also helps suppress the asymmetry of power by removing the notion that someone has the power to control someone else.
Civil society as promoter of ‘civic values’

Much as rights language emerged in professional development discourses as a response to pacifying top-down development processes (Cornwall and Nyamu-Musembi 2004), ‘civic participation’ and ‘civic engagement’ are terms that also seek to activate citizens. The terms are applied in many different contexts and refers to how citizens participate in order to influence the development of a community or wider society (Adler and Goggin 2005). However, their ambiguity makes them vulnerable of being subjected to political agendas, and therefore we need to investigate whether they are specified or applied as mere ‘buzzwords’ that have no substantial meaning of their own (Cornwall 2007: 474). Neither ‘participation’ nor ‘engagement’ says anything about whether the people involved in these processes actually influence policy-making (Fairclough 2003: 199).

On USAID’s website, the ‘civic participation’ term appears in the context of capacity-building of the PA’s institutions: “USAID supports the development of Palestinian institutions necessary for a future Palestinian state by promoting the rule of law, increasing civic engagement [emphasis added], and enhancing respect for human rights” (USAID.gov 2014b). By putting civic participation in this context, it is promoted as a value at the same level as ‘human rights’ and ‘rule of law’, and altogether they constitute the very essence of liberal democracy. But as we see, the nature of such participation, whether it translates to giving citizens actual influence in decision making processes remains unclear.

The same lack of specification is apparent in USAID’s presentation of youth related initiatives:

As part of USAID’s commitment to empowering young people and engaging them in their communities [emphasis added], USAID has implemented more than 4,000 youth-related activities in the West Bank and Gaza during the past ten years (USAID.gov 2014e).

This ‘empowerment’ and ‘engagement’ is materialised primarily in terms of an inter-sectorial approach and embedding a ‘youth focus’ in USAID’s different programs. Furthermore, it states that:

Specifically, USAID works to increase public participation and leadership opportunities for youth [emphasis added]; provide youth with necessary skills to launch successfully their careers; improve education services and access to them; and build the capacity of local institutions to address youth issues (USAID.gov 2014e).
These ‘leadership opportunities’ are provided first and foremost through employment opportunities in the private sector, as USAID below lists a series of cooperative projects with private sector enterprises. ‘Public participation’ is difficult to decipher, and might refer to politics, without using the term explicitly.

Civil society organisations are only referred to once. This reference is made under the ‘our work’ section on USAID’s website. In this one instance, CSOs are discussed in relation to the PA.

USAID works to improve the capacity of PA institutions to deliver high-quality services to the public on a sustainable basis, and enhance communication and coordination between the Palestinian Authority, local governments, and civil society organizations [emphasis added] (USAID.gov 2014b).

This can be seen as a re-articulation of the tripartite model, where the government consults with CSOs in order to get input on policy formulation. It may be interpreted as that citizens are involved (both individually and through associations), but they do not have the power to directly impact policy, as influence depends on the government’s willingness to listen. But arguably, the process in which citizens interact with the government helps reduce antagonisms and potential conflict.

Throughout USAID’s website, there are numerous references to ‘democratic governance’, ‘civic participation’ and ‘empowerment’, but not a single reference to politics. This creates an impression that citizens should be ‘active’, but they should not set the agenda. As discussed above, the text suppresses difference, and presents USAID’s programs and initiatives as if they all address a common goal that all Palestinians have agreed upon. And by framing these efforts as ‘in the interest of all’, addressing conflicts explicitly becomes obsolete. Without the potential for conflict, civil society becomes a largely de-politicised space.

### 4.2.3 CSO sustainability index

The first CSO index for the MENA region was published in 2011 and seeks to analyse and rate the ‘sustainability’ of civil society in 7 MENA countries. The report is written by two of USAID’s internal bureaus, and local “CSO practitioners and experts” (USAID 2011: ii) have been consulted throughout the process. The report rates the civil society of each country
across 7 different ‘variables’\(^7\) with a sustainability rating of either ‘impeded’, ‘evolving’ or ‘enhanced’. The West Bank and Gaza Strip are referred to collectively, and sustainability is rated to be ‘evolving’ on all of the 7 factors. In-depth descriptions of the assessments made are provided for under each factor. The genre of the text is not a formalised one, but combines elements from both academic and development ‘practitioner’ discourses. In the analysis below, I have focused on statements related to the West Bank rather than the Gaza Strip.

**Autonomy from government**

USAID contends that Palestinian civil society should be autonomous from the PA, and criticises the government’s efforts to impede CSOs from working. We recognise this position from the DRG strategy, which contends that civil society should be free from government interference. Many of the core ideas expressed in the DRG strategy are evident in the CSO index as well. It stresses the importance of CSO independence from government, and takes a clear stance on assisting CSOs in combatting PA legislation that seeks to regulate the freedoms of Palestinian CSOs:

> The (…) [NGO Law] was promulgated in 2000. *CSOs and foreign governments mobilized to ensure that the law recognized the right of CSOs to work by registration rather than permit* [emphasis added]. Consequently, the PA lost the legal basis to impede CSOs from operating through revocation of their permits. Additionally, *the law enabled decision-making independence of CSOs* [emphasis added] (USAID 2011: 45).

Although not as polemic as the example from the DRG strategy, this statement does constitute a protagonist-antagonist divide. CSOs and foreign governments are placed on one side and the PA is positioned on the other. **Difference** is accentuated by assigning motivations; the antagonist PA seeks to enact restrictions upon civil society, while the protagonist CSOs supported by their donors try to combat them. Turning to **evaluation**, it is evident that a ‘free’ civil society is deemed attractive, as opposed to a regulated one. Over a series of statements, a perception is created that CSOs and donors are one category, and that there are no conflicts between them. This indicates that USAID is much less concerned about CSOs’ autonomy donors than from the domestic government.

\(^7\) Legal environment, organizational capacity, financial viability, advocacy, service provision, infrastructure, public image

44
Autonomy from donors?

Agendas of foreign donors and systems of conditional funding are not seen as threats to the autonomy of civil society. Financial dependence on donors is partly presented as a problem, as CSOs rarely have funding to operate for more than one or two years ahead. There seems to be little concern however, for the operational implications of donor dependency, which could potentially hamper both the independence as well as the performance of Palestinian CSOs.

When discussing organisational capacity, the report states that “CSOs in both territories tend to adopt donors’ agendas rather than pursue their own strategic objectives” (USAID 2011: 47). It is not clear whether USAID sees this as problematic or not, but given the context one gets the impression that CSOs adopt donor agendas because they lack the organisational capacity to pursue their own objectives, not because of the programming structure and conditions posed by donors. This is an underestimation of donor power, as donors have proven to be able to shift the priorities of CSOs through dividing their funding into thematic priorities (Brynen 2000: 188).

While lack of autonomy from government is presented as a real and serious problem, lack of autonomy from donors is first and foremost a problem of perception.

Yet the sector lacks financial independence and the trust and support [emphasis added] of the Palestinian people because of the sector’s reliance on international funding (USAID 2011: 45).

And

(…) organizations that advocate for democratization and gender rights are often perceived by the public as driven by foreign agendas, lacking transparency, and divorced from the grassroots. The public also holds negative perceptions [emphasis added] that CSOs misuse resources, undertake unnecessary international travel, and compromise national interests for personal benefit. Much negative perception is tied to the fact [emphasis added] that a lot of donor interest came out of the framework of the Oslo Accords, which were not supported by all Palestinians and have not resulted in a Palestinian state or the end of the Israeli occupation (USAID 2011: 51).

As discourse helps reduce the possibilities for meaning, the definition of a problem within a given discourse helps reduce the possibilities of solutions. The statement establishes that the problem is that there is a perception that CSOs are seen as driven by donor agendas etc., but whether this is true is not questioned at all. When the problem is framed as one of perception, it turns it onto something less than a real problem. Consequently, CSOs and their donors are more likely to adopt superficial solutions that seek to ‘correct’ the public’s perception of CSOs, rather to address the structural issue; lack of autonomy from donors.
While USAID acknowledges that “CSOs in both territories [WBGS] tend to adopt donors’ agendas rather than pursue their own strategic objectives” (USAID 2011: 47), but this is framed in the context of limited ‘organisational capacity’. In other words, CSOs lack the capacities to execute their own agendas, therefore they adopt those of donors. Furthermore, a clear link is established between organisational capacity and donor funding: “In the past five years, CSO organizational capacity has decreased as donor funding has declined” (USAID 2011: 47). Organisational capacity is here understood primarily in financial terms; the ability to develop strategic plans, have proper office or technological equipment and “retain professional, highly skilled personnel” (USAID 2011: 47). It is evident that USAID sees organisational capacity as a vital precondition for being able to build local constituencies. The lack of such capacity impedes the “commitment and abilities of CSOs to build constituencies” (USAID 2011: 47). It might also result in other forms of mismanagement, such as lack of transparency and corruption.

**Israel-oriented CSOs as deviant?**

As with USAID’s website, there are relatively few references to Israel. The CSO index states that while the majority of Palestinian CSOs are suffering from a decline in membership rates, “CSOs that work on issues such as land confiscation and the West Bank barrier continue to draw public attention and participation” (USAID 2011: 47). It is noteworthy that the common denominator, the term ‘occupation’ is omitted in the description of these activities. Why these organisations choose to work with these issues or why they seem to be better capable of involving the public is not elaborated upon. Instead, CSOs and NGOs specifically are primarily discussed in terms of their function as service providers or advocacy towards the PA for promoting ‘good governance’. This can be interpreted as that occupation-oriented NGOs and other CSOs are seen as deviant from the model of civil society stipulated by USAID.

Israel is addressed briefly under the ‘advocacy’ section. It is acknowledged here that the majority of advocacy campaigns are directed against Israel, but the nature, value or results of these campaigns are not discussed. Instead, the focus is shifted to domestic issues, where all of these three elements are discussed:

*Most coalitions and campaigns address issues related to Israel rather than internal political or policy issues* [emphasis added]. However, the AMAN Coalition successfully lobbied for the creation of an anti-corruption commission and developed, in cooperation with the Higher Judicial Council and the
Activities of CSOs are social events, which constitutes what is actual (Fairclough 2003: 223). What we see here is that the representation of social events is systematically skewed. Not only are campaigns and CSOs working with issues related to Israel and the occupation mentioned far more rarely than CSOs that work with domestic issues, but CSOs that work with Israel-related issues are also represented far more abstractly than those who work with domestic issues. And as USAID recognises that Israel-oriented CSOs manage to maintain far larger constituencies, a deeper comparison between domestic oriented and Israel-oriented CSOs is suppressed.

4.3 Summary

4.3.1 Ideological foundation: neo-liberalism

It is evident that USAID draws extensively upon a neo-liberal discourse of development, and all of the texts do to a large extent reproduce and confirm the structure of this discourse. USAID reproduces the ideas embedded within the so-called ‘good governance’ agenda that became popular in the 1990s. This agenda is based on the neo-liberal assumption that a ‘virtuous circle’ could be built between state, economy and civil society, which would promote growth, equity and stability (Lewis 2002: 571). The same ideas underpin USAID’s policies. The strategy’s focal point is the normative idea of liberal or consolidated democracy, and all development efforts are centred on how this goal can be realised. USAID assumes that there are ‘good’ forces within the economy and civil society that are willing and capable of breaking the government’s power monopoly, and consequently, they advocate support for these agents. Within the neo-liberal ideology, a strong civil society capable of articulating the interests of citizens is essential for the success of the model of small government (Clarke 2004). The role of the state is effectively reduced to balancing between the demands of different interests groups (Mercer 2002: 7). This ensures a system of government where the state can rule with transparency and accountability, i.e. ‘good governance’. Below, I summarise the main ideas proliferated by USAID towards Palestinian NGOs, based on the textual analysis.
4.3.2 Core ideas

Civil society as ‘inherently good’

USAID holds a positive view of civil society and ascribes to it immense capability of accelerating the transition towards as well as sustaining democracy once it is consolidated. The purpose of civil society is to organise and articulate the interests of citizens and influence government institutions to change laws and policy to address the needs and concerns of citizens. Moreover, CSOs provide services to vulnerable segments of the population that are beyond the reach of the state and private sector. Because civil society is a positive sphere where individuals come together in order to attend to their own interests and solving societal problems, it is perceived as ‘inherently good’. This idea is cultivated by the exclusion of seemingly negative or destructive elements from civil society.

Civil society proliferate ‘civic values’ of cooperation and participation

Civil society is perceived as inherently good because it is a natural extension of liberal ideas. Implicitly, CSOs function as ‘workshops’ where people exercise their liberties in order to attend to their own interests and contribute to society. CSOs encourage individuals to be more engaged in their communities and to participate in public affairs. Thus, individuals learn how to cooperate with their fellow citizens and utilise their liberties for the common good rather than nourishing their own egoism. This conception of civil society accentuates cooperation rather than conflict, and consequently organisations are portrayed as largely a-political, because political conflict could potentially tear up the fabrics of civil society. NGOs are seen as integral parts of the wider category of CSOs, and their affiliations to donors and global ‘civil society’ is emphasised as positive.

Civil society as counterbalance to the state

USAID is particularly concerned about the concentration of power within the state apparatus, and advocates small government in order to prevent authoritarian rule. As civil society is seen as good and represents ‘the will of the people’, it should check and balance the power of the state. This relationship need not be conflictual, because CSOs can engage in constructive dialogue with government institutions and officials in order to improve public policy.
Nonetheless, it remains crucial that civil society is largely autonomous from government as the absence of this counterbalance could potentially lead to the government’s attack on citizens’ liberties. In many developing countries, civil society is weak, and consequently CSOs must co-operate with INGOs and donors in order to fulfil their democratising roles. This generates a moral impetus for donors to support civil society organisations in foreign countries in an effort to promote democratisation.

4.3.3 Expected influence upon Palestinian NGOs

Based on the conception of civil society identified here, one can easily identify likely points of contention with dominating perceptions of the concept of civil society in Palestine. Derived from its general conception, USAID advocates that the role of Palestinian civil society should be to check and balance the power of the Palestinian Authority. This contradicts the traditional role undertaken by Palestinian CSOs, which has been to mobilise the population for the resistance against Israeli occupation. Moreover, USAID emphasises that CSOs should not be confrontational, but rather disseminate positive values of public participation and cooperation. In other words, CSOs should be largely apolitical. Again, this contradicts the traditional role of Palestinian CSOs who have long had close ties to political parties, and perceived themselves as cornerstones within a highly politicised national agenda of liberation. The upcoming chapter demonstrates how the ideas about civil society advocated by USAID are perceived and reproduced in the discursive practice of Palestinian NGOs. To a certain extent, these ideas collide with pre-existing ideas concerning what civil society is and should be. What happens when these competing conceptions clash together will be examined in Chapter 5.
5 Text and discursive practice

Having identified the core ideas advocated by USAID, I now turn towards analysing the dynamics within the social field of Palestinian civil society. This chapter analyses the two inner dimensions in Fairclough’s model, text and discursive practice. Before beginning the actual analysis, I provide a brief overview of USAID’s practices of conditional funding, which prevent recipient NGOs from working with particular individuals and organisations aimed at ensuring that aid does not end up supporting “entities or individuals associated with terrorism” (USAID 2007: i). This practice is controversial among Palestinians (Challand 2008; Joplin 2004) and was frequently brought up during my interviews with NGO personnel. USAID’s conditional funding and the anti-terrorism procedures in particular will be discussed in light of the theoretical account on conditionality and compliance in Chapter 3 (cf. 3.1.2).

Section 5.2 consists of an inductive mapping of the ideas expressed by Palestinian NGO personnel during the interviews. This entails analysis of the text dimension, the inner circle in Fairclough’s model. Here, I investigate which ideas are presented, and whether they can be understood as corresponding to the ones advanced by USAID.

Based on patterns identified inductively, in section 5.3 I move on to analyse the discursive practice, which mediates the relationship between text and social practice. Here, I argue that there are two distinct ways of thinking and talking about how to realise the goal of an independent Palestinian state. I have referred to these as the discourses of ‘institution-building’ and ‘resistance’, where the former is reinforced materially and ideationally by USAID’s policies in Palestine. In this section I also identify and discuss antagonisms between the two discourses.

5.1 USAID and conditional funding

5.1.1 Anti-terrorism procedures

The interviews confirm observations in the existing literature that USAID practices a very strict form of conditionality compared to other Western donors. In order to ensure that American tax dollars does not end up benefitting what the U.S. State Department defines as
‘terrorist organisations’ (Challand 2006: 18), Palestinian NGOs must sign a waiver declaring that their projects and activities will not end up supporting “entities or individuals associated with terrorism” (USAID 2007). Organisations that have been designated terrorist entities by the U.S. include several Palestinian political parties and organisations, most notably Islamists such as Hamas and Islamic Jihad, but also the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP) and the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine (DFLP), both aligned with the political left (USAID 2007). Moreover, USAID generally declines funding to entities that for instance have the Arabic word shaheed (martyr) in their name (USAID 2007). The anti-terrorism conditions apply globally, but reactions were particularly intense in Palestine where they were interpreted as a form of collective punishment for all Palestinians (Joplin 2004). Consequently, many NGOs refused to comply with USAID’s anti-terrorism conditions (Joplin 2004; Tamkeen 2004).

Palestinian NGOs that apply for USAID funding undergo a vetting process of ‘key individuals’ from the organisation, such as board members or executive personnel with key responsibilities for the USAID-funded project. These individuals are checked for known links to individuals or organisations that are designated as ‘terrorist’, such as the ones listed above. Several informants claimed that this vetting procedure is conducted in cooperation with Israeli intelligence services, which did nothing but increase their scepticism towards USAID’s agenda. As donors seek to uphold a certain level of activity in both the governmental and NGO sectors, they take careful steps to make sure that this funding is not channelled into active resistance against the Israeli occupation (Christophersen, Høiglit, and Tiltnes 2012: 12). Consequently, some Palestinians refrain from participating in anti-occupation activities out of fear from losing their jobs (Interview, Birzeit 06.12.2013 n.d.).

Furthermore, in order to purchase goods or services from local enterprises, the recipient NGO must obtain the contractor’s signature on the so-called ‘anti-terrorism certificate’ (ATC). By signing this certificate, the prospective recipient confirms that to the best of his/her current knowledge, he/she has not or will not support ‘acts of terrorism’ (USAID 2007). For instance, if a Palestinian NGO is to host a conference in a hotel, they need to get the hotel that provides the meeting facilities to sign the ATC. The same goes for the restaurant who delivers the food.
According to the informants, no European donors have similar vetting procedures (NGO#A 2013; NGO#C 2013).

5.1.2 Conditionality and compliance

Rationalists argue that conditionality helps promote compliance if behaviour is seen as strategically motivated (cf. 3.1.2). But this argument is based on the premise that socialisation has no effect whatsoever upon actors’ preferences. Recalling Hay’s (2011) argument, an actor’s perceived interests is subjected to ideational manipulation. Over the course of socialisation actors are exposed to new ideas that eventually changes their preferences (Checkel 2001: 225). From the outset, the NGO’s actions might very well be explained as strategically calculated behaviour. Over the course of socialisation, however, the NGO undergoes a process of social learning, which generates better conditions for a transmission of ideas from donor to NGO. Somewhat paradoxically, the donor’s power to sanction is what eventually constitutes the possibility of ideational transmission in the first place.

USAID’s conditionality imposes restrictions upon NGOs in two important aspects that have implications for the analysis. The first is a restriction in who NGOs are allowed to work with, as they are prevented from having working with groups or individuals with what the U.S. defines as ‘terrorist affiliations’. The second is a more conventional one; programmatic funding. NGOs apply for grants and contracts through programs that specify thematic priorities. Consequently, USAID is able to retain a large degree of control over the NGOs actual activities (Challand 2008: 118–119).

5.2 Analysis of text

As established in the analytical framework, Fairclough sees discourse as both constitutive and constituted (Jørgensen and Phillips 2002: 66). Texts constitute and discourse, but at the same time discourse determines how texts are consumed and interpreted (Jørgensen and Phillips 2002: 68–69). While acknowledging this mutual dynamic, I have chosen to deal with these two aspects separately for pedagogical reasons. In this section (5.2) I delimit discourses based

8 For the list of informants, see table 5.1 below

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8 For the list of informants, see table 5.1 below
on the texts, while I demonstrate how they construct a framework for consumption of texts in section 5.3.

This section of the analysis draws upon four in-depth interviews with personnel from different Palestinian NGOs. Two of these organisations were at the time of the interviews financed by USAID. This does not necessarily mean that USAID was their only donor, but it was a major one. Table 5.1 below briefly summarises some of the main characteristics of these NGOs. The informants have been anonymised and the interviews will be referenced by the code keys in the column labelled ‘NGO #’.

**Table 5.1: List of informants**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>NGO #</th>
<th>Donors</th>
<th>Date of interview</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>USAID-funded</td>
<td>25.11.2013</td>
<td>Women and youth focus. Development of personal skills, economic opportunity, conflict resolution</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>USAID-funded</td>
<td>27.11.2013</td>
<td>Youth focus. Development of personal skills, economic opportunity, culture, civic and community engagement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>Formerly USAID-funded</td>
<td>04.12.2013</td>
<td>Youth focus. Civic and political participation, national unity, ending the Israeli occupation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>Not USAID-funded</td>
<td>27.11.2013</td>
<td>Attending to the interests of Palestinian NGOs. Stated objective of contributing to the resistance against the Israeli occupation</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Below, I present the different ideas identified in the material. Over the course of analysis I discovered contradicting ideas along four different aspects:

- Role of Palestinian civil society
- Individual versus collective rights and values
- Autonomy from government versus autonomy from donors
- CSOs should work despite the occupation or confront it directly
I discuss the competing ideas articulated along these four aspects below before delimiting discourses and discussing aspects related to the discursive practice. The analysis demonstrates that NGOs funded by USAID (hereafter ‘USAID NGOs’), to a greater extent than others articulated ideas related to the ones identified in USAID’s documents in Chapter 4.

5.2.1 Role of civil society

All of the informants saw civil society as a space between the individual and the government, but they held very different ideas about its specific functions.

#1: Civil society as counterbalance to the state

As established in Chapter 4, this idea holds a key position in USAID’s policy. The informants also articulated this idea, and it was most evident in the interviews with informants from USAID NGOs. For instance, NGO #A stated that:

The role of civil society is to be in the middle between the citizen and the government [emphasis added]. To take the citizens’ needs and put it in the scope of projects or take issues and put them in front of political parties [emphasis added]. People have problems in understanding the political system and in dealing with conflicts. Problem in violence. And the government has problems in transparency [emphasis added]. So you are in the middle and you try to take what the Palestinian society needs and put it to the politicians [emphasis added]. Through advocacy, services, change laws [emphasis added] (NGO#A 2013).

This view resembles the ideas articulated by USAID. Implicitly, we see that civil society performs exclusively positive functions, which reproduces the idea of civil society as ‘inherently good’. By bringing the ‘needs’ of society in front of the politicians, civil society acts as a counterbalance to the state. As in the case of USAID, the relationship between civil society and the government is not portrayed as conflictual, but constructive. Still, it is evident that this is essentially an articulation that refers to a ‘balancing’ mechanism, indicating that in the absence of civil society, government will be unwilling or unable to address the needs of citizens.

#2: Civil society as a catalyst for the ‘national agenda’

Some of the informants expressed a wider understanding of civil society that went beyond the mere functioning of balancing the power of the state. They understood civil society as a caretaker of the national agenda of liberation. As the goal of liberation is shared by all
Palestinians, civil society should promote activities that practices non-violent resistance against the occupation in order to realise the goal of liberation. For instance, the informant from NGO #C said that:

I think the priority for the Palestinian people now should be to get independence [from the occupation]. After that, these priorities – the Palestinian society is interested in involving in democratisation process. But we can’t guarantee what happens. Because there is democratic values here, and maybe we cannot use the democracy because this is the first experience for us after Hamas. Maybe – and I think after the occupation, the situation here in Palestine will not be settled, like in other Arab countries. You know democracy needs long experience, it needs a long history, it’s not just about elections (NGO#C 2013).

Moreover, he stated that “because we are Palestinian, even NGOs and the PA, we have some agenda. Not just to enhancing youth, we have a national agenda against Israel” (NGO#C 2013). Of course, this does not necessarily contradict idea #1, but nevertheless it entails a wider understanding of the role of civil society. This conception draws upon the historical roots of Palestinian civil society, which the informant also brought up during the interview. He pointed to the fact that civil society in Palestine is stronger than in other Arab countries, because of the resistance against Israeli occupation:

Civil society is (...) [very] important. It is one of the bridges between the people and the [Palestinian Authority]. By civil society the people can raise their voice and it is like a challenge between them. In Palestine, the civil society is strong, compared to other Arab countries. Because the civil society has a long experience especially against the occupation [emphasis added] (NGO#C 2013).

Over the course of the interview, substantially more references to the occupation and Palestinian history were brought up than in the interviews with USAID NGOs. The idea of civil society as a catalyst for the national agenda is therefore contextualised, and deeply rooted in Palestinian history.

### 5.2.2 Individual versus collective

This dimension was evident in all of the interviews except NGO #D, where the issue was not brought up. USAID NGOs generally focused on enhancing the skills of individuals and promoting universal ‘civic values’ that were recognisable from USAID documents. On the other hand, the focus of non-USAID NGOs was with the national agenda, and increasing the awareness of Palestinian youth about ‘national’ values and their history. The former idea (#3) emphasises the agency of the individual, while the latter (#4) focuses on that of the collective. The USAID NGOs clearly promoted idea #3 by emphasising individual ‘beneficiaries’, while the other focused on the collective, and the importance of the collective in resisting
occupation. This division was quite distinct, and the ideas can therefore be portrayed as conflicting.

**#3: CSOs should promote ‘civic values’ and enhance individual skills and opportunity**

This idea is highly related to the functions of civil society prescribed by USAID. One of the core ideas of neo-liberalism is that the individual is naturally good, while the collective is potentially oppressive (Clarke 2004: 28). If the individual is free, she is also willing to act responsibly and take actions that benefit society as a whole, but this positive individualism is often suppressed by the tyranny of the majority or authoritarian government. During the interviews, informants from USAID NGOs were particularly concerned with helping individuals develop their own skills and desires and to promote ‘civic values’ that encourages the individual to ‘participate’ in society.

The informant from NGO #B said that the energy of youth is ‘wasted’ in ways that will not benefit them in their lives. Among other things, his organisation’s activities seek to enhance youth with the skills to pursue employment and educational opportunities. As he explained:

> What we try to do here is to invest in that energy [of youth] in the tools so that they can use those tools in a way that will benefit them at some point in their lives. For example we train youth in life skills, communication skills, teach them to use their energy to deepen themselves, find what they do best and create this skill (NGO#B 2013).

Moreover, he argued that NGOs played an important role in promoting these skills, and that being able to have a ‘normal’ life was important for helping people take their mind off the occupation and misery. He stated that his motivation was to “put smile on peoples’ faces” (NGO#B 2013) and that he was proud that people had grown and enhanced their skills after participating in the organisation’s activities (NGO#B 2013).

The other USAID NGO emphasised the importance of training smaller CSOs in order to “increase the capacity of Palestinian society in dealing with conflict” (NGO#A 2013). The ability to deal with conflict in peaceful ways can also be interpreted within the framework of ‘civic values’, which as demonstrated in the previous chapter are largely de-politicised.
#4: CSOs should raise awareness and socialise individuals within the national collective

In sharp contrast to the USAID NGOs, others advanced a competing idea that put the ‘nation’ in focus rather than the individual. This collective was presented as its own being within a national agenda of liberation from the Israeli occupation. The informant from NGO #C said that it was important to remind Palestinian youth today about their history and that:

> We implement many activities for enhancing loyalty among the youth, to increase and strengthen the relation between them and the land – the territory. We made many activities to boycott Israeli products (NGO#C 2013).

Here, the individual is subordinated to the collective, and the focus is on conforming individuals within the ‘national agenda’, something which contradicts the idea discussed above. The informant was critical towards USAID’s policies because they prevented NGOs from working with what he described as ‘national activities’, which included demonstrations against the wall and Israeli settlements. If NGOs engaged in ‘national’ activities that USAID perceived as too conflicting towards Israel, they would cancel the funding without stating a reason. In his view, it was problematic that some NGOs did not participate in national activities:

> That’s a problem because you cannot work to do your activities – you are civil society – you have a national agenda to increase awareness about your history. You’re fighting Israel, the settlements, the wall. It’s not far away from us. (…). So some national activities, you cannot pretend that you don’t see it, you have to participate in it. In olive harvest we implement many activities, even if it’s not against Israel, it’s about increasing awareness. That’s important for NGOs (NGO#C 2013).

Moreover, the informant was clear that NGOs and the PA should work together in advancing this national agenda. Based on the interview, it was evident that the informant saw the ‘national’ as something that transcended the borders between political and civil society.

### 5.2.3 Autonomy from government versus autonomy from donors

All of the informants brought up the issue of independence or autonomy of civil society in various ways. However, where the USAID NGOs emphasised that civil society should be autonomous from the PA, others were more concerned with autonomy from donors. This division might be seen in relation to the above-mentioned point on the divide between universal ‘civic’ values and ‘national’ values.
**#5: Autonomy from government**

This form of autonomy was stressed by the USAID NGOs in particular. They did not identify themselves in an antagonistic relationship with vis-à-vis the government, but they did understand themselves as ‘representatives for the people’ that would create projects based on the needs of citizens, and bring issues to the politicians (cf. 5.2.1). In order to execute this function, it was essential for this NGO to be largely independent of government. For instance, the informant from NGO #A said that his organisation had targeted the PA for many of their activities, for instance in conflict resolution. He said that they attended debates with government officials frequently, and discussed community and domestic political issues with them in the media (NGO#A 2013).

Moreover, the informant highlighted the importance of participating in international civil society networks. USAID and the intermediary INGO played a very positive role in this regard. Not only did they provide them with material resources, but made great efforts to also raise their knowledge and skills:

(... you learn from USAID projects. You learn to be more specific, how to be more active in media, develop your organisation, be in contact with CBOs, you learn from follow up and mistakes in the reports. You learn from your relationship with the society. So this is good about USAID (NGO#A 2013).

Harvesting knowledge from international networks is a typical element within professionalised development discourses that blurs out the boundaries of states and creates new alliances (Tvedt 2006). Development professionals in both donor and recipient countries have a common agenda as part of the ‘global civil society’, and consequently, donors and NGOs become allies in achieving particular political objectives. If donors and NGOs are seen as promoters of the same values and agendas, then the issue of autonomy from donors becomes less important to NGOs.

**#6: Autonomy from donors and foreign governments**

Non-USAID NGOs were primarily concerned with autonomy from donors. As the informant from NGO #C argued, aid is not neutral:

Most of the donors have agendas. Their political attitude is to make Palestine a democracy state, so they give money to us. And they feel that when Palestine becomes democratic it will be less violence. And I think it’s a good mission and good things. Of course, this helps their foreign policy, and also us as a people. So that is the cross interest between us (NGO#C 2013).
He saw it as important that the NGOs themselves rather than the donors should be the ones to identify needs and develop projects. Furthermore, he explained how USAID had suddenly decided to cancel the funding to his organisation, without stating a reason. He believed it was because of their involvement in what he described as ‘national activities’, such as Israeli boycott campaigns and demonstrations (NGO#C 2013). The best donors, he said, were the ones that did not put any conditions:

Most of the donors are easy to work with, they do not have conditions until now, and they work with you like a partner. But of course USAID doesn’t. When you work with them you feel like you are working with the security or an army authority or intelligence (NGO#C 2013).

Moreover, he explained that it was important for the Palestinian people as a whole, not to become dependent on foreign donors that seek to advance their own interests:

(… because we are Palestinian – even NGOs and the PA – we have some agenda. Not just to enhancing youth, we have a national agenda [emphasis added] against Israel – against interference from USA in our territory – a lot of things. But if you take money from USAID, you cannot do these things [emphasis added] (NGO#C 2013).

This statement expresses clearly that accepting USAID funding is understood to be incompatible with the ‘national agenda’. The informant from NGO #D gave similar remarks and argued that USAID interfered with the independence of Palestinian CSOs:

They interfere with the independence of the civil society organisations. They do not believe that these organisations should be independent. They want them under their umbrella. I know that because I worked two years with USAID funds. You submit your proposal, but after one year you find yourself implementing what they want (NGO#D 2013).

Furthermore, she said that under such conditions it was impossible to have any meaningful development partnership. She was particularly critical towards the USAID funded youth programs: “With youth programs they want to create new leaders for Palestine. I don’t know why, but it is not the Americans’ place to create new leaders for Palestine” (NGO#D 2013). The idea of autonomy from donors disregards the notion of a global civil society where donors and NGOs are natural partners. Instead, aid is considered in relation to wider political agendas that can be both compatible and incompatible with the agendas of Palestinian NGOs.

5.2.4 Working against occupation or despite occupation

The NGOs also differed in terms of how they addressed the issue of the Israeli occupation. While all of them maintained that their activities in one way or another did contribute to the realisation of Palestinian national aspirations for an independent state, they suggested quite
different ways of accomplishing this goal. Non-USAID NGOs advocated actions that targeted the Israeli occupation directly, such as boycott activities, demonstrations against the settlements and the wall etc., while USAID NGOs argued that the occupation should not be used as an excuse for not addressing domestic issues.

#7: Civil society should work despite the occupation

While maintaining that the Israeli occupation constitutes a major injustice and humiliation imposed on the Palestinian population, the informant from NGO #B was clear that it should not be used as an excuse for not contributing to society. He argued that people – and youth in particular – should use their creative abilities to think of new ways to circumvent the manifestations of the occupation. As an example of thinking of new ways, the informant proposed a solution to how to alleviate the problem of water shortage in the West Bank. Israeli military law prohibits Palestinians from digging wells in the West Bank in order to extract water. He suggested that Palestinians instead should try to collect rainwater, which is not prohibited under Israeli military law that governs most of the West Bank (UNOCHA 2009: 2–4).

Israel forbids you to dig wells, but what about the rain water? You could move around that law, and it is legal in terms of what the occupation forces upon us and what they say are laws. Use that and think of new ways (...) we should not use the Israeli oppression always to justify our frustration. [we can’t keep saying] I am not going to work because the Israeli oppression is standing in my way; I am not going to think of new ways because the Israeli oppression is standing in my way (NGO#B 2013).

The informant was clear that he did not accept the occupation, but neither would he use it as an excuse for not addressing development issues. Instead of addressing the source of the problem, Israeli prohibitions against digging wells in the West Bank, he suggested alternative solutions that circumvent these laws. The example the informant provided shows resemblance to the example of the Israel’s military checkpoints around the West Bank, as well as between the West Bank and Israel. As discussed above, USAID promoted its own success in helping “(...) improve the movement of people and cargo through crossing points between Israel and the West Bank and Gaza” (USAID.gov 2014c). Instead of questioning the legality and necessity of these checkpoints, USAID accepts their presence and instead helps increase their efficiency. This is presented as positive for the Palestinians in terms of more efficient travel and economic growth, but it also fails to address the question of why these checkpoints are there in the first place.
#8: Civil society should work against the occupation

Informants from non-USAID NGOs advocated a more confrontational stance against the occupation. The statutes of NGO #D clearly established that the organisation’s purpose was to contribute to the national resistance to end the Israeli occupation. This belief was reiterated during the interview with the informant from this organisation (NGO#D 2013). Moreover, the informant from NGO #C was clear that the priority of Palestinians should be to end the occupation and achieve independence. Only then could issues like democratisation be addressed in a meaningful manner:

I think the priority for the Palestinian people now should be to get independence [from the occupation]. After that, these priorities – the Palestinian society is interested in involving in democratisation process. But we can’t guarantee what happens. Because there is democratic values here, and maybe we cannot use the democracy because this is the first experience for us after Hamas. Maybe – and I think after the occupation, the situation here in Palestine will not be settled, like in other Arab countries. You know democracy needs long experience, it needs a long history, it’s not just about elections (NGO#C 2013).

This idea is therefore clearer in refusing de facto compliance with the Israeli military laws and the occupation.

5.3 Analysis of discursive practice

I will now turn to the second dimension in Fairclough’s model, namely discursive practice that mediates the relationship between text and social practice. Analysis of this dimension involves investigation of the conditions under which texts are produced and consumed (Jørgensen and Phillips 2002: 81). Based on the ideas identified in 5.2, I have delimited two discourses that can help us understand this relationship, namely ‘institution-building’ and ‘resistance’. On the one hand, these discourses reduce the possibilities of meaning i.e. what is possible to say in texts; and discourse is therefore constitutive. On the other, these discourses are constituted by the ideas observed and delimited in the texts.

In the previous section I demonstrated that Palestinian NGOs have conflicting ideas about a number of issues. Further, I identified that these divisions to a large degree follow the demarcation line between USAID-funded and non-USAID funded NGOs. In this section, I will put these patterns into a wider perspective and analyse how they together constitute different discourses – ways of understanding and talking about Palestinian civil society. Table 5.2 below illustrates how the core ideas are placed within the discourses.
Table 5.2: Two competing discourses of Palestinian civil society

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Role of civil society</th>
<th>State through institution-building discourse</th>
<th>State through resistance discourse</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>#1: Civil society as counterbalance to the state</td>
<td>#2: Civil society as a catalyst for the ‘national agenda’</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individual versus collective</td>
<td>#3: CSOs should promote ‘civic values’ and enhance individual skills and opportunity</td>
<td>#4: CSOs should raise awareness and socialise individuals within the national collective</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Autonomy</td>
<td>#5: Autonomy from government</td>
<td>#6: Autonomy from donors and foreign governments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Israeli occupation</td>
<td>#7: Civil society should work despite the occupation</td>
<td>#8: Civil society should work against the occupation</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The USAID NGOs expressed more generalised ideals derived from neo-liberal discourses about ‘good development’ and through their work they have used these ideas to give meaning to their local missions. Therefore, these NGOs draw extensively upon – and help reproduce – what I have termed the ‘institution building’ discourse. This discourse produces a narrative where the Palestinian state can be ‘built’ by creating democratic institutions and a less conflict-oriented society. The discourse constitutes a role for civil society which is to contribute to the realisation of this mission, whose specific functions are defined by its relationship to the PA rather than with Israel.

The other discourse is more rooted in the traditional political discourse of the Palestinian national movement. It takes a different point of departure; the ‘national agenda’ of liberation that should bring an end to the era of Israeli occupation. Here, the constituted role for civil society is to help advance this national agenda. It produces a narrative where the occupation must end before any meaningful development and democratisation can happen in Palestine.

In the following I argue that USAID’s ideas and practices help strengthen the ‘institution-building’ discourse at the expense of the ‘resistance’ discourse within the social field. Below I describe how these discourses are structured and constituted by the ideas identified in the previous section, as well as how USAID’s ideas and practices can be expected to influence these dynamics.
5.3.1 ‘State through institution-building’ discourse

The institution-building discourse was constituted as a result of the diplomatic breakthrough between the PLO and Israel in the early and mid-1990s. With the establishment of the PA, a new political space was created that enabled INGOs and donors to take part in shaping the future development of Palestine. Donors support Palestinian actors materially, by financing NGOs, but also ideationally by providing them with extensive training.

The defining feature of the institution-building discourse is that a Palestinian state can be built regardless of the Israeli occupation. The discourse is introvert; it addresses the domestic problems within Palestinian society rather than the Israeli occupation. Furthermore, it constitutes a limited role for Palestinian civil society, whose role is to balance the PA and suppress the development of authoritarian tendencies. NGOs that draw upon this discourse focus on service provision and DRG activities that aim at contribute to the successful implementation of the Palestinian state-building programme. The institution-building discourse might be seen as a contextualised version of a global neo-liberal discourse of development. The social practice it enables is primarily a-political; focus on individual rights and opportunities rather than the collective. Arguably, this has helped fragment the mass-based movements that characterised Palestinian civil society prior to the Oslo Accords (Jad 2007: 623).

As demonstrated in Chapter 4, USAID advocates a conception of civil society where it is first and foremost defined in relation to the state. This idea is also present within the ‘institution-building’ discourse, where civil society’s role is to be a counterbalance to the power of the government, the PA. This idea (#1) was clearly articulated by USAID NGOs, who also tended to focus on domestic issues, rather than on issues related to Israel. Moreover, we find the idea of CSOs as arenas, where individuals learn the habits of cooperation make them ‘empowered’ citizens that ‘participate’ in society. Proliferation of these ‘civic values’ strengthens civil society itself, and by implication its capacity to balance the power of the state and ability to protect individuals from the state’s power (Fukuyama 2001: 11). As we see, the idea of ‘civic values’ and the idea concerning the role of civil society are therefore mutually reinforcing.

Scholars and aid practitioners alike see a strong civil society both as a precondition and catalyst for liberal democracy (Mercer 2002). As Fukuyama (2001: 11) argues,
If a democracy is in fact liberal, it maintains a protected sphere of individual liberty where the state is constrained from interfering. If such a political system is not to degenerate into anarchy, the society that subsists in that political system must be capable of organising itself.

This bears remarkable resemblance to stated USAID goals to create democratic culture and institutions that are ‘self-correcting’ in the case of crisis (cf. 4.2.1).

Both discourses hold the autonomy of civil society to be important, but the question is; autonomy from whom? As the institution-building discourse understands civil society primarily in relation to the government, its main concern is autonomy from the PA. This is reflected in the USAID documents analysed in Chapter 4, where the agency highlighted the positive efforts by CSOs and foreign governments in lobbying against the PA for increased freedom for NGOs (cf. 4.2.1). Informants from USAID NGOs were not happy about the anti-terrorism conditions of USAID, which prevented them from working with certain political parties such as Islamic Jihad and Hamas. Although they were criticised by other Palestinian NGOs for accepting these conditions, they did not believe that accepting conditional funding put their independence in jeopardy:

Sometimes they [other NGOs] deal with you as if you are making a big mistake. I don’t have any problems in dealing with USAID projects. Do you know why? Because this project, even if it targets A or B, the Palestinians benefit from it. It is very important. (...) And actually, we put the agenda, not USAID. We choose the type of the project, USAID does not give us the type of the project (NGO#A 2013).

The informant stressed that the NGO, not USAID were the ones designing the project9. The informant from NGO #D, however, who had experience from working with USAID projects said that this was not the case: “You submit your proposal, but after one year you find yourself implementing what they want” (NGO#D 2013).

Moreover, the institution-building discourse promotes a way of thinking where the Israeli occupation is seen as something that just ‘exists’, and something that Palestinian civil society is not in a position to change. Palestinian actors who draw upon this discourse believe that the occupation constitutes a major injustice, but they advocate initiatives that seek to circumvent it, rather than fighting against it. The example regarding the water issue (cf. 5.2.4) provided by the informant from NGO #B illustrates this way of thinking; as they could not dig wells because of the laws of the occupation, they should think of creative solutions that allowed them to collect rainwater instead. Furthermore, he said that “we should resist the idea of

9 However, it should be noted that Palestinian NGOs usually apply for grants from a program that specifies thematic priorities and objectives for projects (Challand 2008: 118–120).
hibernating and blaming the occupation for everything” (NGO#B 2013). This may be interpreted as at least recognising the reality of the occupation allows you to work around it, but if Palestinian’s only focus on fighting it directly, they will fail to address other issues. The argument is fully logical, but rests on a claim of ‘truth’ that Palestinians cannot do anything about the Israeli occupation laws. The competing ‘resistance’ discourse contradicts this assumption, and puts ending the occupation at the top of civil society’s agenda.

5.3.2 ‘State through resistance’ discourse

The resistance discourse draws upon the historical roots of the Palestinian national movement, whose goals and measures have shifted over the course of the past decades (Baumgarten 2005). Palestinians are still in a phase of national struggle, in which civil society holds an important position. It puts the ‘national agenda’ as the focal point, and the top goal of this agenda is ending the Israeli occupation. Palestinian CSOs should play an important role in resisting the Israeli occupation and should help coordinate and mobilise for grassroots-based initiatives of boycott of Israeli goods and other forms of non-violent resistance (Hanafi and Tabar 2005: 15). The resistance discourse bluntly rejects the neo-liberal division between ‘political’ and ‘civil’ societies (Hanafi and Tabar 2005: 16). Rather, it asserts that NGOs and other CSOs cannot remain ‘neutral’ to the national agenda of achieving independence. Within this discourse, the Israeli occupation is portrayed as the main cause of the poor political, social and economic conditions in Palestine. Consequently, it contends that Palestine will not be able to develop neither politically or economically until the Israeli occupation is brought to an end.

The point of departure for this discourse is a claim of truth that there is such a thing as a collective ‘national’ agenda with ending the occupation as its top priority. Like its competitor, the resistance discourse also advocates that NGOs should interact with the PA. However, informants from non-USAID NGOs also argued in favour of demounting the boundaries between political and civil society in order to pursue the national agenda (idea #2). These organisations also emphasised disseminating ‘values’, but others than the ones emphasised by USAID NGOs. The informant from NGO #C focused on strengthening the national identity of Palestinian youth and their ties to the land (idea #4) in order to make them aware of their history and their place within the national collective (NGO#C 2013). This does not
necessarily contradict the ideas promoted by USAID, but was nevertheless seen as an important supplement for pursuing the national agenda.

Although both NGO #C and NGO #D brought up the issue of autonomy from the PA, their main concern seemed to be autonomy from donors (idea #6). The informants were particularly concerned of Palestinian CSOs being subdued the political agendas of foreign governments by accepting conditional funding. USAID was portrayed as the main antagonist in this regard. Recalling a quotation referenced above, the informant from NGO #D made this remark regarding USAID-funded youth projects: “With youth programs they want to create new leaders for Palestine. I don’t know why, but it is not the Americans’ place to create new leaders for Palestine” (NGO#D 2013). Moreover, the informant from NGO #C maintained that while USAID projects were able to do good things for Palestinians, such funding was incompatible with the national agenda: “Maybe it’s compatible with the NGOs’ agenda and activities, but not with the national agenda. That’s the difference. So their money helps Palestinian society, but it does not match with the national agenda” (NGO#C 2013).

The informant from NGO #C said that CSOs had to participate in ‘national’ activities like the Israeli boycott conferences and political demonstrations (NGO#C 2013). His own organisation had previously received USAID funding, but the agency chose to stop the funding. Although he was clear that the organisation was not provided with a clear reason for why the funding was cut, he suspected it had to do with their participation in ‘national’ and ‘anti-occupation’ activities:

they [USAID] boycott us. And we don’t know why. It is maybe because of our political attitudes. (…) Against occupation, that’s our political view. We implement many activities for enhancing loyalty among the youth, to increase and strengthen the relation between them and the land – the territory. We made many activities to boycott Israeli products (NGO#C 2013).

Consequently, many Palestinian NGOs, like the Palestinian NGO Network rejected “equating legitimate resistance with terrorism” (Ma’an Development Center 2011: 19). Moreover, critical voices within the discourse have claimed that “USAID's programs are based on linking all development assistance with repudiating the ideas of resistance and surrendering to the occupation” (al-Tamimi 2013). The resistance discourse therefore advocates direct, but not necessarily violent resistance against occupation, and tries to discredit all those who seek to deny Palestinians the ‘right’ of resistance.
5.3.3 USAID’s influence over text production

In Fairclough’s model, analysis of discursive practice entails investigation into the conditions that affect the production and consumption of texts (Jørgensen and Phillips 2002: 81). USAID influences NGOs’ production of texts through conditional funding. For instance, by defining certain organisations as ‘terrorist’, USAID directly intervenes in their partnering NGOs’ production of texts. According one of the informants, the NGO has been asked not to cooperate with certain PA ministries and municipalities: “They have a list of organisations, and they ask you not to work with these organisations (…) because they have representatives from Islamic parties” (NGO#A 2013). Moreover, USAID’s anti-terrorism procedures specify that assistance will not be granted to any facility that

is named after any person or group of persons that has advocated, sponsored or committed acts of terrorism. This includes any facility that has ‘shuhada’ or ‘shaheed’ (‘martyr’ or ‘martyrs’) in its name, unless an exception is approved by the USAID mission director (USAID 2007: 21).

Arguably, these restrictions impact the dimensions of discursive practice and social practice. Here, I deal with the former and then discuss implications for the wider social practice in Chapter 6. Given the privileged position of the donor vis-à-vis the NGO, when USAID labels certain political parties as ‘terrorist’, it is reasonable to assume that this shapes the way recipient NGOs talk about these organisations and over time, how they think about and understand them. As NGOs interact more with donors than their local constituencies (Lopes 2011: 24), they are arguably less inclined to express themselves in a manner that draws upon the resistance discourse.

There is an evident antagonism over how to define certain political elements in Palestine. While the resistance discourse contends that these elements constitute part of a legitimate national agenda of resistance, USAID labels them as ‘terrorist’. This puts USAID NGOs in a difficult position, and it may seem like they are torn between domestic public opinion and their donors. The domestic majority sees resistance, either armed or non-violent, as the most effective means towards Palestinian statehood (Palestinian Center for Policy and Survey Research 2014: 15), while USAID labels this as terrorist activities. Until now, it seems like the answer of some USAID NGOs has been to ignore the subject, and cultivate their professional development profile rather than invoke ‘national’ elements associated with the resistance discourse. This directly impacts both text production and consumption of USAID NGOs; they are less inclined to include elements that may be associated with the resistance
discourse in their text *production*, and less inclined to respond positively to calls to ‘resistance’ against Israel when they *consume* texts.

Finally, donors directly intervene in NGOs’ text production in some cases. For instance, the informant from NGO #A said that USAID requires extensive documentation and has to monitor and approve a lot of details concerning the projects:

> USAID is more focused [controlling], they need to know everything about the project. They need to observe the media, the employees of the project, they ask you all the time to do weekly reports, monthly reports and quarterly reports (NGO#A 2013).

With ‘observe the media’ he clarified that USAID had to approve for instance posters and press releases. Within our analytical model, this can be interpreted as a direct attempt to manipulate the conditions concerning NGOs’ abilities to produce texts.

### 5.3.4 USAID as a provider of ‘ideational ammunition’

The above discussion focused on how conditional funding puts limitations upon NGOs, but USAID also enables NGOs various ways, most importantly through material funding. However, the donor-recipient relationship also entails transfer of non-material resources. As established above (cf. 5.2), USAID NGOs did to a larger extent promote generalised ideas about ‘participation’, ‘civic values’ and the like. Of course, these ideas were not conceived within Palestinian civil society, but have been extended into this social field through continued donor-NGO social interaction. Arguably, the cluster of ideas promoted by USAID constitutes is a major resource for the NGOs that help them cultivate their professional profile and give meaning to their work. As the informant from NGO #A stated, he learned a lot by working with USAID, for example how to be visible in the media and that he learned more about his own society (cf. 5.2.3). This knowledge or new ideas are resources that shape the ways in which NGOs work, and shows that ideas are something more than mere reflections of material necessity.

There is a high degree of correlation between the neo-liberal ideas promoted by USAID and the generalised ideas about civil society in Palestine articulated by Palestinian NGOs. This indicates that USAID and possibly other donors sharing similar beliefs are indeed influential actors that supply ‘ideational ammunition’ to the NGOs that draw upon institution-building discourse. USAID’s cluster of ideas establishes a distinct purpose for Palestinian NGOs that
through their practices and activities contribute to the reproduction of the same ideas, which
give meaning to social practice within the social field. Consequently, promotion of ‘civic
values’, ‘good governance’ and the like are presented as local measures to achieve an
independent Palestinian state. Thus, the focus is shifted away from the Israeli occupation and
towards domestic problems within Palestinian society. By providing ‘ideational ammunition’,
USAID is able to strengthen the institution-building discourse at the expense of the resistance
discourse.
6 Social practice and normative implications

This final analysis chapter will be dedicated to discussing the implications for the wider social practice. Discourse is both constituted and constitutive, meaning that it both shapes and is shaped by the wider social practice. As Jørgensen and Phillips (2002: 89) notes, proving that such a dialectical relationship exists and drawing the exact demarcation line between discursive and non-discursive phenomena is challenging. Consequently, we need to investigate how the two different discourses each constitute a framework of beliefs that determine what statements and actions are seen as ‘good’, ‘natural’, and ‘meaningful’ (Jørgensen and Phillips 2002: 90). Commitment to the idea that the role of civil society is to balance the government is likely to enable NGO behaviour that, for instance, aim at increasing the transparency and accountability of government institutions rather than acts of resistance against the Israeli occupation. In section 6.1 I discuss how the two discourses enable different forms of social practice, as well as how USAID influence at the level of social practice enables ideational influence over NGOs.

How we consider the role of NGOs in democratisation is inevitably bound to ideas about civil society. In the final section (6.2) I will discuss normative implications of the findings in light of two theoretical perspectives on civil society; the Tocquevillian and Gramscian research traditions.

6.1 Analysis of social practice

In this section I present three main arguments concerning the relationship between discursive and social practice. Firstly, discourse shapes social practice by constructing a set of logical forms of action based on the core ideas that constitute the discourse. Secondly, USAID provides ‘ideational ammunition’ to NGOs, who in turn contributes to reproduction of the institution-building discourse. Thirdly, conditionality serves as a framework at the level of social practice that enables ideational influence by ‘interlocking’ the USAID-NGO relationship and limiting possibilities for action. Over time, NGOs’ actions shape their beliefs,
and consequently USAID interference at the level of social practice helps reproduce the institution-building discourse.

### 6.1.1 Different discourses – different social practice

If we assume that behaviour is determined by beliefs constituted by normative and descriptive ideas, then discourses can explain why NGOs expressing different ideas also choose different forms of action. As already established, most Palestinian NGOs share the overarching goal of establishing an independent Palestinian state. While some NGOs to a large extent focus on active resistance against the occupation in demonstrations, Israeli boycott activities etc., others favour a more seemingly a-political approach encouraged by their donors. Arguably, these different forms of social practice are caused by and help reproduce differing views about what Palestinian civil society is and should be.

The institution-building discourse proliferates normative ideas of a liberal democratic form of governance. Based on the interviews, Palestinian NGOs funded by USAID seemed to share this belief, as they design activities that (i) seek to spread civic values and individual opportunities that benefit citizens, and (ii) interact with the PA in order to maintain liberal and anti-authoritarian practices of governance that guarantees individual liberty. Thus, civil society facilitates its own ‘reproduction’, which in turn enables it to counterbalance the power of the PA.

Although NGOs drawing upon the resistance discourse are keen to point out the lack of democratic features of PA institutions, they see resistance against Israel as the priority for civil society. They have positioned themselves in an antagonistic relationship vis-à-vis USAID, because its anti-terrorism procedures are designed to exclude a substantial part of the population from receiving services based on their political affiliation. Consequently, donor conditionality is seen as an attack on the autonomy of Palestinian CSOs and a potential threat against their ‘national agenda’ of resisting the Israeli occupation.

### 6.1.2 USAID shapes discursive practice through NGOs

Both donors and NGOs are actors that seek to realise their interests, which are constituted by ideas about what they want to achieve as well as how this best can be done. Their possibilities
for action are limited by structures in the form of material resources and institutions, but also by discourses that delimit what actions are sensible for achieving their goals. As the dominant one in the relationship, the donor is in a better position than the NGO to pursue her interests (cf. 3.1).

As already established, asymmetry of power makes it more likely for NGOs to adjust themselves to the civil society conception advanced by donors rather than the other way around. It is therefore plausible that foreign funding of NGOs stirs up and alters the discursive practice within the social field if the donor strictly communicates a specific conception of civil society. The donor is in a position to promote its own views and ideas by conducting ‘capacity building’ of Palestinian NGOs, for example through teaching NGOs how to design projects and write proposals. Most of these courses in the West Bank are conducted with USAID funding and addresses not only the linguistic elements of proposal writing, but also formulation and content of projects (Challand 2008: 121).

The purpose of these workshops is to teach NGOs to design projects and texts that resonate with the views of USAID and its implementing partners. A rationalist explanation would argue that Palestinian NGOs attend these workshops out of ‘strategic calculation’ in order to learn how to develop project proposals that resonate with USAID’s own ideas, and thus increase their chance of being funded. It is obvious that NGOs apply for funding because they hope to get it, but as the interviews indicated, they also value the learning aspect of working with USAID. As the informant from NGO #A stated in a quotation also referenced above:

> On the other side you learn from USAID projects. You learn to be more specific, how to be more active in media, develop your organisation, be in contact with CBOs [community based organisations, small CSOs], you learn from follow up and mistakes in the reports. You learn from your relationship with the society. So this is good about USAID (NGO#A 2013).

USAID is therefore not a mere provider of material resources, but in the virtue of being a donor, it is also in a position to educate the NGO. However, the curriculum is not neutral, as it largely reflects USAID’s own conception of civil society. The findings from the textual analysis in Chapter 4 show that USAID has a rather limited view on civil society that is not adjusted to the local political context. Challand (2008: 101) has drawn similar conclusions, and argued that USAID is unique in the sense that it runs its programmes in a largely managerial way and that “the vocabulary adopted is that of business where NGOs should think in terms of contracts, managerial processes and reporting mechanisms”.
How do we understand this practice theoretically? As the donor, USAID is the dominant one in the relationship. Its material superiority shapes the social nature of the relationship, which effectively subordinates the NGO to the donor. Arguably, this asymmetrical relationship makes the NGO more receptive towards the ideas and views promoted by the donor. As the analysis of the relationship between texts and discursive practice suggests, these ideas are at least to some extent internalised and reproduced by the NGOs themselves. Consequently, the practice of giving enables USAID to deploy a cluster of ideas into the social field, even though USAID itself is not directly part of this field. Moreover, NGOs reproduce donor ideas in a manner where they help give meaning to their work within the Palestinian context. As NGOs themselves conduct training for smaller CSOs (NGO#A 2013), these ideas are proliferated to other organisations and individuals. There is an indication that the ideas promoted through the USAID NGOs might be at odds with existing beliefs in Palestinian society. One of the informants had been volunteering with the NGO before he was employed and described his own experience in the following manner:

I was suspicious at first. I was at a point where – you are seen as patriot for your cause, and if you join this kind of organisation you would lose that patriotism. But on the contrary you have to dig deep and see the actual work before you judge and that’s the way it is (NGO#B 2013).

In light of the two discourses, this can be seen as a form of discursive struggle where new ideas promoted through the NGO clash with the resistance discourse. However, as the informant explained, he was eventually influenced through his own socialisation with the organisation. Through reproduction of the institution-building discourse, NGOs spread these ideas beyond these organisations as well. While the material incentive of funding is a strong one for NGOs to comply with donor norms, it is not as apparent for individuals that begin to volunteer at these organisations. Given its extensive involvement at the level of text (Challand 2008: 118) it is entirely possible that USAID’s ideas have an impact outside the NGO as well. Regardless of whether the NGO actually internalises norms issued by the donor or strategically adapts to them, it still reproduces these ideas in texts and thereby contribute to reproduction of the institution-building discourse. A study conducted after the beginning of the ‘Arab Spring’ identified that there is a substantial group of Palestinian youth who wants to be active, but whose engagement is constrained by the polarising factionalism of Palestinian politics. The engagement of this group is therefore channelled into the NGOs, where the possibilities for political engagement is more limited (Christophersen, Høiglit, and Tiltnes
These observations support the argument that NGOs constitute an important arena for socialisation and proliferation of new ideas.

6.1.3 Conditionality enables ideational influence

While Schimmelfennig (2005) argues that conditionality matters because actors are strategically motivated, my analysis suggests that conditionality can also serve to enable and reinforce ideational influence. As argued above, USAID’s conditionality consists of (i) restrictions in possible partners for recipient NGOs and (ii) restrictions in what activities NGOs perform through programmatic funding (cf. 5.1). If an USAID NGO violates these conditions, USAID will implement sanctions on the level of social practice by cutting the funding. Consequently, NGOs are likely to have a strong perceived interest in adapting to these conditions. However, compliance may very well have the effect of reinforcing USAID’s ideational influence over the NGOs, even though it is ‘strategically motivated’. First of all, NGOs’ possibilities for social interaction are reduced as USAID prevents them from cooperating with organisations USAID have labelled as ‘terrorist’ (i). Thus, they are less exposed to the resistance discourse and the ideas proliferated through it and more easily affected by other discourses.

Secondly, their possibilities for action are reduced as programmatic funding ensures that money is not channelled into active resistance against the occupation (Challand 2008; Christoffersen, Høiglit, and Tiltne 2012: 12). As the analytical framework assumes a dialectical relationship between discursive and social practice, change at the latter dimension also affects the former (Jørgensen and Phillips 2002: 89). I.e. not only are our actions motivated by what we believe, but what we believe is also shaped by what we do. If USAID puts limitations on NGO behaviour at the level of social practice through programmatic funding, it is plausible that NGOs’ beliefs will be shaped accordingly over time. Consequently, conditionality and the threat of sanctions enable USAID to persuade NGOs into adopting new norms and ideas, which eventually helps reproduce the institution-building discourse.

This does not, however, mean that the relationship described above is deterministic. As Fairclough notes, people are always capable of resisting ideological discourses (Jørgensen and Phillips 2002: 75). In the material it was evident that USAID was unable to influence the
dominating beliefs of NGO #C. In this case, USAID had used its ability to sanction and thus cut the funding. The informant from this organisation suspected that USAID disproved of their participation in what he called ‘national’ activities, which included anti-occupation campaigns (NGO#C 2013). In this case, USAID has not been successful in enforcing its ideas and values upon this particular NGO, which has sustained its ‘resistance’ oriented social practice. Although the interview was conducted after USAID had terminated the contract, it is reasonable to assume that the NGO saw that USAID’s worldview collided with its own, but was motivated by the incentive of funding. As argued above, ‘strategic calculation’ may account for why the NGO chose to establish the relationship in the first place, but it is plausible that the socialisation was unsuccessful in altering the beliefs of the NGO. This socialisation may have been unsuccessful because other discourses, such as the resistance discourse, was strong enough to resist the institution-building discourse and the ideas promoted by USAID.

6.2 Normative implications

The empirical analysis illustrates that both policy and research on civil society is intricately bound to ideas of what civil society is and should be. In the final section of this chapter, I discuss possible implications of the findings based on two normative perspectives. As mentioned in Chapter 2, these are based on the writings of Alexis de Tocqueville and Antonio Gramsci, two intellectuals that wrote systematically about civil society. The two perspectives encompass competing descriptive as well as normative ideas and are commonly used as theoretical contrasts in the scholarly literature on civil society (see for instance Foley and Edwards 1996; Lewis 2002; Mercer 2002).

6.2.1 Tocqueville: civil society as ‘counterbalance’ to government

As an intellectual of the liberal tradition, Tocqueville saw civil society as an extension of individual liberty. In his writings, civil society is the glue that binds citizens together and prevents them from being devoured by an authoritarian government one the one hand and their own egoism on the other. Citizens come together in associations in order to pursue their mutual interests and they act as ‘schools of citizenship’ where individuals learn the habits of cooperation (Fukuyama 2001: 11). These values are also present in the contemporary
scholarly literature on democratisation (Edwards and Foley 1998). For instance, Putnam’s conception of social capital as “features of social organization such as networks, norms, and social trust that facilitate coordination and cooperation for mutual benefit” (Putnam 1995: 67) shares many similarities with the Tocquevillian civil society. Moreover, Western policy makers and INGOs have turned this concept into an operational one, by financing NGOs in development countries in an effort to build social capital and thus foster civil society (Fukuyama 2001: 18). From this perspective, NGOs are seen as microcosms of the liberal democratic process and much like civil society itself, deemed to be inherently ‘good things’ (Mercer 2002: 9). Western donors have invoked Tocquevillian ideals in designing their development policies. They have often taken the sheer number of NGOs as an indicator of the strength of civil society (Mercer 2002: 10) and perhaps been less concerned with investigating whether they are capable of becoming organic parts of society once the funding dries up (Fukuyama 2001: 18).

USAID’s policies in Palestine reproduce this largely Tocquevillian version of civil society. As demonstrated in Chapter 4, civil society is viewed as inherently good and the PA’s attempts at restricting the freedom of NGOs are harshly criticised. Moreover, we saw that support for liberal democracy constitutes a normative criterion for inclusion within civil society, and actors that deviate from this ideal are excluded. This is reflected in USAID’s practice in Palestine, particularly with regards to the anti-terrorism procedures that prevents NGOs from working with individuals or groups that have been labelled as ‘terrorist’ by the U.S. Moreover, programmatic funding of donors is indeed used to prevent money from being channelled into active resistance against Israel (Christophersen, Høiglit, and Tiltnes 2012: 12). From a Tocquevillian perspective, this need not be problematic as the primary purpose of civil society is to promote and sustain liberal democracy. NGOs that deviate from their liberal democratic purpose by confronting the Israeli occupation are seen as deviant and attempted excluded from civil society by USAID’s policy and practice.

The superiority of liberal democracy creates a normative justification particularly for ‘Western’ governments to provide not only material support but also guidance and expertise in order to foster civil society as they perceive themselves to be the caretaker of these values. Increasing the operational capacity of Palestinian NGOs, through financing as well as schooling in liberal values, must therefore be seen as positive things from the Tocquevillian perspective.
However, despite the apparent Tocquevillian linkages, civil society promotion remains paradoxical. As the virtue of civil society lies in its autonomy from the government (Mercer 2002: 7), is it not important that civil society is also autonomous also from foreign governments? In *Democracy in America* (Tocqueville 2003) it is evident that civil society is something which is to evolve naturally when liberty and freedom of association is guaranteed by law. Indeed, some Tocquevillian scholars have argued that civil society breaks down undesirable traits and vertical mechanisms of patronage that helps enable the rule of authoritarian leaders (Mercer 2002: 11). Regardless of whether civil society promotion is capable of breaking down these structures, what replaces them might not necessarily be considered better (Fukuyama 2001: 19). The analysis suggests that NGOs that do not have a solid and grassroots-based foundation runs the risk of being co-opted by strong donors with fixed agendas. From a Tocquevillian perspective, this need not be problematic. However, one should be aware that this rests upon an assumption that donors and NGOs are self-evident promoters of liberal democracy, and that this form of governance is indeed the “only game in town” (Mercer 2002: 7).

### 6.2.2 Gramsci: civil society as a ‘battleground’

As a Marxist, Antonio Gramsci was particularly concerned about structures that maintained unequal power relations in society. While he shares the general understanding of civil society as a social sphere between the individual and the state, he intertwines it with his theory of hegemony, which seeks to explain how dominating social groups maintain their superior position (Buttigieg 1995: 3). The dominating social group produces an ideology that asserts their authority and makes its rule appear legitimate and natural (Jones 2006: 96–97). However, people always have the possibility to resist this ideology, and therefore hegemony is never total. These ideological struggles over hegemony are fuelled by the wider political struggles of society, and consequently civil society is far from the idealised sphere of positive individualism described by Tocqueville. On the contrary, it is a potential battleground (Hearn 2001). It is important to note that Gramsci’s concept of civil society is not normative *per se* and has even been highlighted for departing from Marxist orthodoxy (Buttigieg 1995). Nevertheless, it is natural to derive normative implications of the concept, at least in the sense of criticising the use of power by the few. After all, Gramsci contends that the working class
must nurture their own ‘organic’ intellectuals that can challenge the *bourgeoisie* hegemony within civil society from the bottom and up (Jones 2006: 83–84).

In the Gramscian perspective, civil society and NGOs reflect wider economic, political and social struggles (Mercer 2002: 11). In this perspective, support to NGOs must be seen in terms of their political, social and economic effects upon the recipient society. By financing NGOs, donors become part of an ideological struggle over hegemony that affects the wider social practice. As the analysis has shown, USAID’s promotes a cluster of ideas that sustains its preferred model of liberal democracy. Moreover, it provides material support to actors within Palestinian civil society that supports this model, and educates NGOs in an effort to reinforce these ideas. The findings indicate that these ideas are internalised and reproduced by some NGOs, while rejected by others. However, NGOs who reject USAID’s ideas are excluded from receiving funding, which limits their potential to influence the discursive practice within Palestinian civil society.

The core aspect of the Gramscian view is its critical edge towards the use of power, and we should therefore investigate what systems of dominance and authority USAID’s support enables. The West Bank is under Israeli military control and critical voices claim that “USAID's programs are based on linking all development assistance with repudiating the ideas of resistance and surrendering to the occupation” (al-Tamimi 2013). The findings from this analysis can certainly be interpreted the same direction. As argued above, conditional funding serves as a mechanism that alters and reinforces beliefs upon recipient organisations that eventually results in practice that deviates from the traditional resistance approach of Palestinian NGOs (Gerster and Baumgarten 2011: 8). Consequently, the professionalisation advanced and accelerated through foreign aid has the effect of de-politicising Palestinian civil society and consequently advance a system of beliefs that does not challenge the current system of authority, namely the Israeli occupation (Jad 2007).

The systematic exclusion and marginalisation of the Islamists and the political left can also be seen as ideologically motivated in this regard. Despite completely different ideological heritages they are united in affirming ‘Palestinian right to resistance’ against the Israeli occupation, including with violent means. For instance, in late 2013 the leftist organisation PFLP issued a statement saying that “Hamas is part of the Palestinian national movement and we do not call upon them to abandon their ideology” (PFLP.ps 2013). This example illustrates that the resistance discourse serves as a common umbrella for uniting political movements
from competing ideologies in disputing the current system of authority in Palestine. From the perspective of the institution-building discourse and that of USAID, these actors can be seen as the most likely challengers to the political *status quo*.

Some Palestinian scholars have argued that the de-politicisation have had several undesirable effects. The ‘NGOisation’ and professionalisation of Palestinian CSOs have created a space that has “helped Islamist groups to establish themselves as a powerful and hegemonic force in Palestinian civil society” (Jad 2007: 623). Moreover, some argue that Palestinian NGOs failed to work with GROs to develop non-violent forms of resistance (Hanafi and Tabar 2003: 206). These arguments, much like the Gramscian view, emphasises that the dynamics within civil society and the intervention by foreign donors do indeed have consequences outside this social field as well. From this perspective, efforts to de-politicise Palestinian civil society is by itself a *political* exercise, within the ideological project of consolidating the hegemony of liberal democracy.
7 Concluding remarks

The empirical puzzle that triggered this thesis was the professionalisation and subsequent depoliticisation of Palestinian NGOs that have occurred since the influx of aid in the 1990s. My aim has been to investigate how the political ideas promoted by the largest bilateral donor to the Palestinians, USAID, affect social and political dynamics within Palestinian civil society and resulted in depoliticisation of NGOs.

7.1 Main findings

Based on the material I have argued that Palestinian civil society can be understood in terms of two largely competing discourses. While both of them envisage the establishment of an independent Palestinian state as an overall goal in the future, they are constituted by quite different ideas that consequently induce different forms of action. The ‘resistance’ discourse contends that Palestine is under occupation and that Palestinian civil society must mobilise for resistance against Israeli occupation. The ‘institution-building’ discourse constitutes a far more limited role for Palestinian civil society; to function as a counterbalance to the PA’s governing institutions and thus contribute to democratisation of the Palestinian political entity. I have argued that these competing discourses explain why Palestinian NGOs that hold different ideas also choose different forms of action.

According to critical discourse analysis (CDA), text, discourse and social practice appear in a relationship where they are mutually dependent. The empirical analysis of the thesis applied this perspective in perceiving the Palestinian civil society as a social field wherein NGOs are vehicles of ideas which inform specific practice. The way in which foreign donors affect this process (and thereby the balance of strength between perspectives on the future of Palestine) has been a topic of particular concern for the thesis. USAID proliferate a cluster of ideas concerning the concept of civil society towards its recipient NGOs in Palestine. Moreover, I have argued that USAID’s conditional funding reinforces their ideational influence over NGOs in two important ways. First, USAID’s anti-terrorism procedures prevent NGOs from working with individuals and organisations that are assumed to support ‘terrorist’ activities, which are defined in broad terms (Ma’an Development Center 2011). By accepting USAID funding NGOs commit themselves to abstaining from interaction with individuals or entities
NGOs associated with the resistance discourse put the ‘national agenda’ of active resistance against the Israeli occupation at the heart of their activities. USAID’s limited conception of civil society collides with the perceptions of the concept held by these NGOs. Consequently, they criticise USAID’s policies and view them as an attempt to destroy the Palestinian resistance and make them surrender to the occupation.

Civil society is a powerful concept and aid policies and practices that seek to strengthen it have important normative implications. From a Tocquevillian perspective, educating citizens in the habits of cooperation strengthens civil society’s ability to balance the power of the PA and thereby furthering the process of liberal democratic institution-building in Palestine. But as democratisation remains the stated goal of USAID’s policy, it is paradoxical that civil society – whose virtue lies in its independence from the government – is subsidised by foreign states. The Gramscian perspective reminds us that the de-politicisation of Palestinian civil society is by itself a highly political exercise, by subduing the possibilities for challenging the status quo of the current ruling system (Gerster and Baumgarten 2011). By enforcing its own ideas upon recipient NGOs, USAID affects the balance of strength between perspectives on the future of Palestinian development. Systematic exclusion of political forces that advocate resistance against the Israeli occupation increases this paradox of USAID’s democratisation policy in Palestine.

### 7.2 Methodological implications and suggestions for further research

Employing CDA has proven to be fruitful in analysing development policy; a field that long has been both scholarly and practically bound to ideas (Mercer 2002; Tvedt 2006). This has
also been the case for this empirical study on the role of USAID in promoting ideas about civil society through its aid to Palestinian NGOs. The analytical framework suggested here could also be applied to other contexts in order to investigate how donor ideas and practices shape the discursive dynamics and social practice within developing countries. After all, Palestine may indeed be a special case, given the close relationship between the U.S. and Israel.

An essential strength in applying CDA is its capacity to conceptualise the relationship between text, discourse and specific social practices. As texts are produced, they subscribe to specific discourses which are then reflected in social practice. Such practice helps sustain the fundamental ideas of a discourse and thereby the texts that sustain it. However, practice may also challenge the discourse and provoke change by challenging its tenets, as when a firm immigration policy is matched by practices that prove intolerable. This perceived dynamic between text, discourse and practice prepare the ground for causal arguments and testable assumptions about the role of specific ideas in a given empirical context.

However, the basic strength in CDA is also its greatest challenge, since the theoretical separation between the discursive and the non-discursive remains the main problem with this approach in terms of empirical research (Jørgensen and Phillips 2002: 89). While I have attempted to limit the impact of this problem by extensive data triangulation, this analysis is not able to ‘prove’ the relationship. Future research could adopt the two discourses identified here in a process tracing approach. Such a research design could contribute further to theoretical innovation by zeroing in on exactly where and how the discursive and non-discursive moments influence each other. This would also benefit empirical research on Palestinian civil society by investigating the exact arenas of socialisation and observing whether socialisation corresponds to change in social practice. Further specification of discourses could be achieved by making use of comparative process tracing by including different donors as well as more NGOs in the analysis.
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Appendix 1

Interview opening – inform the interviewee about…

- The purpose of the research project
- That audio recordings and written notes from the interview will be stored digitally by the researcher
- The informant’s responses will be used as data material for a Master Thesis, which will be published online in 2014
- The data material will be stored by the researcher and may be used for future research
- The informant may choose to remain anonymous
- The informant’s responses may be cited by name in the thesis or future research publication, unless the informant chooses to be anonymous

Make sure the informant understands these conditions. Ask whether he/she accepts to be interviewed, and whether he/she has any questions before we begin.

Questions (semi-structured interview)

- What is your role in the organization, and how long have you been involved with the organization?
- What is the main objective of the organization?
- What are the organization’s main sources of funding?
- How would you describe the organization’s relationship with the donor [SPECIFIC DONOR]?
- In your opinion, are the donor’s conditions for funding reasonable or too strict? Are you able to develop and execute projects in accordance with your own beliefs and priorities?
- What is your understanding of the term “civil society”? In your opinion, what is the ideal civil society?
- How would you describe civil society in Palestine, and would you say civil society in Palestine is in accordance with your own ideal conception of civil society?
- How would you describe your organization’s role within Palestinian civil society?
Letter to key informants

As part of a Master Degree in Political Science at the University of Oslo, Norway, I am conducting a research project on the Palestinian NGO sector. The purpose of the research project is to better understand the relationship between international donors and Palestinian NGOs.

In order to investigate this subject, I am trying to gather the insights of those who have experience from the NGO sector in The West Bank. Because of your experience, I would like to invite you to participate in a brief interview.

Each interview will take approximately 30-45 minutes. Written notes and audio recordings of the interview will be stored in order to preserve the accuracy and accountability of the research. As an informant, you may choose to be anonymous. If so, please notify me at the beginning of the interview or in advance.

Your contribution will be used in a Masters' thesis research project, which is scheduled to be completed by the 23rd of May 2014. This thesis will be written in English and published on the Internet, and you will be provided with a link to the final publication if desirable. Your contribution may also be referenced as source material for future research projects.

Please note that:

- It may be possible to identify you in the final research publication(s), as it may be necessary to reference your name and/or affiliated organization.
- You may choose to remain anonymous, by notifying me before or at the beginning of the interview.
- Recordings and notes from the interview will be stored by the researcher for up to five years after the interview date, in order to be able to do follow-up studies.
- Participation in the study is voluntary, and you may withdraw from the study at any point in time, up until the completion date without stating a reason. If you choose to withdraw, all information received from you will be deleted immediately.

If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Sincerely,
Erling Hess Johnsen
Oslo, 21 October 2013

MA Student in Political Science
University of Oslo

Øivind Bratberg
Ph.D. and Post.Doc researcher
Project supervisor

[Contact information removed in the Appendix version]