

# **Beyond the Terrorist Label**

## **- How Five Palestinian CSOs Experience and Resist Terrorist Allegations**

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# Abstract

This thesis investigates the terrorist designation issued by Israel against six Palestinian civil society organizations in 2021. The organizations are based in the West Bank and remain designated as terrorist organizations according to Israeli law, despite rejections and condemnations by the European Union (EU), the United Nations (UN), and the United States (US). The investigation builds on an interpretive approach and in-depth semi-structured interviews with five of the six designated organizations. By using the theory of ontological counter-securitization to investigate a case of shrinking civic space, this thesis brings the theory to a new context. Given that the context of Palestinian civil society is understudied, the aim is to contribute new context-specific findings as well as theoretical knowledge. More specifically, this approach is aimed at better understanding views and means of resistance among the interviewed organizations. The findings show that the five organizations view their terrorist designation as a way to defund Palestinian civil society. It is further implied that the terrorist designation has impacted the organizations' relationship with their donors. To maintain their work, the organizations have undertaken a form of *risk management*. The analysis also shows that enhanced *recognition*, *cooperation* and *conviction* have constituted means of resistance. The main finding of the analysis concerns the construction of a *new identity* among the designated organizations. It is argued that this identity construction is a specific form of resistance against the shrinking civic space. The findings are central to enhancing the understanding of how security practices are resisted in asymmetric power relationships.

*Key words:* Palestine, Shrinking civic space, Terrorist designation, Resistance, Ontological counter-securitization

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# 1 Introduction

The events of 7 October 2023 and its aftermath have brutally shown that the protracted conflict between Israel and Palestine continues. Hamas terrorist-attack in Israel, and the Israeli counter-offensive on the Gaza Strip, have claimed many thousands of civilian lives.

Pursuits of security have shaped the conflict since far back (Pinfeld, 2023:262). Since 1967 the UN Security Council has determined in several resolutions that Israeli settlements on the occupied Palestinian territories have no legal validity (S/RES/446, 1979; S/RES/465, 1980; S/RES/2334, 2016). From the Israeli perspective, maintaining the existing order has become a matter of national security. The occupation has been justified through a securitized logic and language (Pinfeld, 2023:263). While Israel perceives that its control of the Palestinian territories is the only way to ensure safety, Palestinians experience that these policies are the source of deprivation of sovereignty, and hence also of security (Ibid:264). Violence from the Palestinian side has in turn been depriving Israel of security, which has made Israel less prone to territorial concessions (Pinfeld, 2023:273). Despite dark outlooks, civil society actors on both sides of the conflict have maintained channels of communication and worked for coexistence and peace over the years (Golan, 2022:349).

Emphasis on civil society has become a central focus among global development actors. Civil society's contribution to democratization and development is considered more vital than ever (Biekart et al., 2023:4-6). However, scholars observe that this increased emphasis has made regimes more prone to restrict the actions of civil society and Human Rights Supporters (Carothers, 2016; Jennings, 2013). The fact that civil society actors are facing increasing difficulties in operating freely since the millennial turn is a global phenomenon, commonly labeled as shrinking/closing civic space (Dupuy et al., 2021:5). Deeper academic engagement is requested to obtain more comprehensive knowledge about restrictions on civil society (van Wessel, 2023:230), especially in the global south (van Wessel et al., 2023). Palestinian civil society offers a unique context considering that the state has played a minimal role, while external donors have had a massive influence (Weisman, 2012). This thesis sets out to contribute to an understanding of how restrictions on civil society operate in Palestine.

Research shows that restrictions on civil society bring resistance (Biekart et al., 2023; Vuori, 2015). Dupuy et al., (2021) request more investigations of how civil society actors resist and react to their shrinking space in different settings. Hence, this thesis addresses the

understudied context of shrinking civic space in Palestine by focusing on experiences and resistance among five Palestinian human rights organizations based in the West Bank. The organizations are Al-Haq, Defence for Children International Palestine, Addameer, Union of Agricultural Work Committees and Bisan Center for Research and Development. Interviews were conducted with the five organizations between July and September 2023. The presented organizations are among six Palestinian organizations that were designated as terrorist organizations by Israel in October 2021 (CNN, 2021). The designation has been externally investigated and rejected by the US, the EU (Reuters, 2022), and the UN (OHCHR, 2022). However, the organizations remain designated as illegal terrorist organizations according to Israeli law, which brings implications for their possibilities to continue working for human rights. Therefore, this thesis further investigates how the organizations have maintained their work since the designation.

The introduced focus addresses the identified research gap by contributing relevant and local perspectives on forms of resistance against shrinking civic space. This approach thus highlights the organizations' perspectives. A knitted theoretical framework that combines resistance with ontological counter-securitization is applied.

## 1.1 Aim and research questions

To my knowledge, this is the first investigation of the terrorist designation from the perspective of the Palestinian civil society organizations designated by Israel in 2021. In an interpretive approach based on semi-structured interviews, this thesis studies experiences and means of resistance among five of the six designated organizations. The aim is to investigate the understudied local context of Palestinian civil society by focusing on the shrinking civic space. This contributes to new, relevant and context-specific findings as well as theoretical knowledge.

A theoretical contribution is made by applying the theory of ontological counter-securitization in the context of shrinking civic space, which has not been done in earlier studies. New tools are thus offered to better understand resistance within dynamics of power asymmetry.

Based on the described aim of the essay, this study intends to investigate the following questions:

1. *How do the five interviewed Palestinian CSOs view their terrorist designation and how have they adapted to maintain their work?*
2. *What means of resistance have been undertaken?*

## 1.2 Outline of the thesis

An empirical background of the terrorist designation introduces this thesis, which is followed by chapter 3 which covers previous research within critical security studies and critical terrorism studies, as well as relevant literature concerning shrinking civic space and resistance. The following chapter introduces the theoretical framework, which combines ontological counter-securitization with theory of resistance against shrinking civic space. Chapter 5 further describes how the theory is embedded in the analysis. This method chapter also explains how theory has been translated into analytical tools and how it informed the semi-structured interviews. The chapter is finished with reflections on methodological limitations, as well as ethical considerations. The findings and the analysis of this thesis are presented in chapter 6, which ends with a summary before moving on to the concluding chapter in which the conclusions of this thesis are presented.

## 2 Background: the designation

The then Israeli Minister of Defense, Benny Ganz, designated six leading Palestinian civil society organizations as terrorist organizations on 19 October 2021. All six organizations are based in Ramallah, West Bank (HRW, 2022). In the West Bank, Palestinians are tried in the Israeli military court system while Israeli citizens, including Israeli settlers<sup>1</sup>, are tried in the Israeli civil justice system. In practice, this means that Israelis and Palestinians who are convicted of the same crime in the same place are prosecuted in different courts with different practices. According to the International Commission of Jurists, the Israeli military justice system does not comply with international law regarding several aspects (ICJ, 2022:4-13) and children as young as 12 years can be arrested (US Department of State, 2021:17).

The Israeli military courts have the main function of prosecuting Palestinians who are charged with what is defined as security violations in military orders (Hajjar, 2005:3). The designation was done by invoking Israel's Anti-Terrorism Law from 2016. This law was extended to the West Bank through a military order on 3 November 2021, which also made the organizations illegal. The six designated organizations are Al-Haq, Defence for Children International Palestine, Addameer, Union of Palestinian Women's Committee, Union of Agricultural Work Committees, and Bisan Center for Research and Development (HRW, 2022). All six organizations are working for human rights in different ways (OHCHR, 2022). For example, Al-Haq has criticized the state of freedom of expression in the Palestinian Authority. The organization also advances proceedings in the International Court of Justice against Israel's actions in the settlements on the occupied territories (Haaretz, 2021).

According to the Israeli Defense Ministry, the organizations are financially supporting the Popular Front of the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP) (CNN, 2021; Reuters, 2022). PFLP is considered a terrorist organization by Israel, the EU, the US and other Western countries (DW, 2021; US Department of State, 2023; EU-CFSP, 2009). In a letter sent to the Israeli authorities on 16 December 2021, the designated organizations demanded Israel to reveal the material used as evidence for the designation. On 2 January 2022, the Israeli Military Attorney replied that the main evidence could not be revealed since it was based on confidential intelligence information (Addameer, 2022; Adalah, 2022a). As a response, some

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<sup>1</sup> In the territories that Israel conquered and occupied in 1967, Israel began building homes for Israelis after a few years. *The Fourth Geneva Convention* prohibits an occupying power from moving its own population to occupied territory. In the West Bank, one of the occupied territories, Israeli settlements continue to grow. At the beginning of 2023, there were just over 500,000 Israeli settlers in the West Bank, with East Jerusalem uncounted (Ui, 2023)

of the organizations filed an objection to the Israeli Military Commander in charge of the Occupied Palestinian Territories (Civicus, 2022; Adalah, 2022b). External investigations were initiated by European and American security officials to evaluate the Israeli secret evidence concerning terrorist activities. Several states were suspending their funding to some of the six organizations while awaiting the results (ACW DC, 2022). Israeli emissaries also sent a classified dossier to European countries to back their allegations. It did however not convince the European governments (AP News, 2021; +972 Magazine, 2021).

In July 2022 a joint statement was made by nine European states. The Israeli designation was rejected due to the absence of evidence, and the EU states would continue working with the six designated Palestinian organizations (Gov NL, 2022; Reuters, 2022). Despite rejections, the Israeli military raided the offices of the six organizations, as well as of the Palestinian Health Work Committees, in August 2022 (HRW, 2022). UN experts condemned the suppression of the organizations on 24 August 2022 by stating that the terrorist designation and the raids of their offices “... amount to severe suppression of human rights defenders and are illegal and unacceptable” (OHCHR, 2022). When a classified report from the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) could not find any evidence to support the Israeli decisions, the US also rejected the terrorist designation of the six Palestinian organizations (The Guardian, 2022).

A group of more than 150 organizations in Palestine and internationally expressed their full solidarity with the designated organizations in a common statement four days after the raids (HRW, 2022). Despite the international outcry, the six Palestinian organizations remain designated as illegal terrorist organizations according to Israeli law. This thesis sets out to contribute with an understanding of how five out of the six organizations have maintained their work since the designation. It further seeks to understand how the organizations experience and resist their shrinking space, specifically their terrorist designation. The thesis is based on interviews that were held with representatives from the organizations in Ramallah, West Bank, between July and September 2023.



## 3 Previous literature

### 3.1 Critical security studies: contesting security practices

Critical Security Studies (CSS) is an interdisciplinary field in international relations. In a short description, CSS is used to question conventional assumptions about security practices (Peoples & Vaughan-Williams, 2010). CSS thus offers a more holistic and multi-faceted approach to evaluating and understanding security than traditional security studies. Underlying structures of power are highlighted by engaging with cultural, social, and political factors when investigating dominant discourses and policies of security. However, scholars such as Camps-Febrer argue that Westphalian ideas and the Weberian state model are inherent in many approaches within CSS. Camps-Febrer states that these assumptions need to be overcome when approaching security in the Global South (Camps-Febrer, 2020).

Huysmans (2014) focuses on a political reading of security. Without suggesting a specific definition of democracy, he defines the concept of *Security Unbound* as “the enactment of democratic limits” (Huysmans, 2014:13). From this critical approach, certain aspects associated with democratic politics are at risk within practices of security. Huysmans stresses that basic human rights are being violated in the name of security and that security practices center around enemies, fears and risks. When this insecurity permeates how we relate to neighbors, or how governments shape their policies, it is democracy, and not our security, that is at stake (ibid:4).

In *Contesting Security* by Balzacq (2015) the following four concepts: Resistance, De-securitization, Emancipation and Resilience, are investigated from different perspectives. In a concluding chapter of this book, Hansen (2015) argues that what unites the four concepts is that they all “contest” security in different ways by asking *ontopolitical* questions. This means that the concepts engage with ontological and political questions concerning who the subject of security should be, how security is achieved as well as what the logics behind security are. This brings normative questions for scholars, citizens and policymakers concerning how “security” can be increased (Ibid:221-226).

Marx engages with the concept of resistance by seeing security practices in themselves as opportunities for contestation (Marx, 2015). By focusing on surveillance technologies, he argues that these practices are resisted from the outside as well as the inside since they carry their own possibility to challenge security practices (Ibid). Marx's approach

to resistance can be connected to the way security practices have been operating, and turned into a counterforce, in the shrinking civic space under investigation in this thesis. As further précised in the theoretical framework, resistance is considered the most relevant concept of contestation for this study. The concept of resistance is thus applied when investigating how the terrorist designation of the Palestinian organizations has been contested.

### 3.1.1 Critical terrorism studies: effects on civil society

More specifically than CSS, Critical Terrorism Studies (CTS) challenges traditional approaches to terrorism and how to counter it. The growth and consolidation of CTS have been part of the social academic field since the events of 9/11 in 2001. It has produced a rich amount of literature reflecting upon the securitization of both terrorism and extremism and its associated impacts on civil liberties. The focus has mainly been on Islamist terrorism (Jackson, 2016; Crenshaw, 2010), but more recently securitization of right-wing extremism has also been investigated (Jarvis, 2022).

In an article investigating how terrorism is governed through risk, Arda and van Munster argue that the “war on terror” has contributed to a new form of governance: a governmentality that undertakes technologies, such as mass surveillance and profiling, at the limit of knowledge in the search of taking precautions against terrorism (Arda & Munster, 2007).

de Jonge Oudraat & Marret engage with how terrorist designation lists have been “used and abused”. The authors highlight that criteria for designation vary vastly between countries. Decisions to list are often highly political and terrorist destination lists are thus strong policy instruments, both in the national and international arenas. In addition, the decision-making processes leading to listing are often opaque. It is further argued that safeguards need to be in place to appeal listing decisions. Otherwise, terrorist designation lists easily turn into sources of dissent abroad, while simultaneously eroding civil liberties in the national context (de Jonge Oudraat & Marret, 2010).

The analytic research that has been done within CTS has until now focused mainly on Western states. More research from the perspective of the countries that have felt the impacts of “the war on terror”, and experience intrusive measures of counterterrorism, is requested (Jackson, 2016:8-9). One such attempt comes from Lind who examines the effects of counterterrorism in the Israeli and Palestinian civil society. This is done through an investigation of the changing dynamics of aid since September 2000. Lind argues that Israel

has intensified its scrutiny of Palestinian civil society groups in the aftermath of the escalated violence of 9/11 and that this has contributed to an isolation of Islamic civil society. According to the author, it is secular- and human rights organizations within Palestinian civil society that have enjoyed international legitimacy and continued support (Lind, 2010). This essay deals with the question of how the Palestinian organizations experience that they are seen by the international community. Within CTS the question remains whether these organizations, all with a human rights- and secular profile, experience that they are seen as legitimate by the international community since their designation. This issue is thus addressed by the first research question of this essay, which concerns how five out of the six organizations view their designation.

### 3.2 Resisting shrinking civic space

Since the millennial turn, civil society organizations (CSOs), or non-governmental organizations (NGOs), are facing difficulties in operating as freely as they have been able to in earlier periods (Dupuy et al., 2021; Brechenmacher & Carothers, 2019). Shrinking/closing civic space is a label commonly used to describe this phenomenon of global character (Dupuy et al., 2021:5). Strachwitz & Toepler point out that the pure act of setting standards, or other frameworks that aim to oversee civil society activities, can't be seen as restricting or contesting civic space. The central question is whether an independent civic space is ensured and if the existing regulations comply with human- and civil rights principles (Strachwitz & Toepler, 2022:183).

Bromley et al.'s investigation shows an unprecedented rise in governments' use of legal restrictions on foreign funding to NGOs. Over 60 countries have implemented laws that limit foreign funding to NGOs between 1994 and 2015, often while referring to a defense of the nation from outside influences (Bromley et al., 2020). Russia introduced funding restrictions when adopting its NGO Law in 2006. This law was extended with the Foreign Agent Act in 2012 and opened for the state to label organizations as "foreign spies". Increasing numbers of regimes across the Global South imposed similar legal restrictions in the aftermath (Strachwitz & Toepler, 2022:184-185). A more specific labeling of civil society actors as terrorists is also highlighted as a justification for various kinds of restrictive measures. Buyse emphasizes how "discourse is key" when regulatory restrictions are imposed by labeling civil society actors in such a way that their work is de-legitimized (Buyse, 2018:969).

Previous research has shown that restrictions on civil society bring resistance. A recent study of civil society in Central and Eastern Europe sheds light on the important role of "uneventful protests", agency formation and other processes that enable collective action in contexts that are unfavorable for civil society (Jacobsson & Korolczuk, 2020). Another recent study from Turkey investigates the deteriorating environment for civil society activity since the coup in 2016. Zihnioğlu argues that the civic capacity to collectively resist and defy, named "activist capital", is necessary to better grasp how activists maintain their activities in the narrowing civic space in Turkey (Zihnioğlu, 2023).

However, according to Dupuy et al., we need to investigate further how the relational aspects of civic spaces play out in different contexts (2021). Attention should be paid to the ways states, regimes and civil society actors shape civic spaces through their different and continuously changing relationships (Biekart et al., 2023:17). Palestine offers a unique context since the state has played a minimal role in civil society development. Hence, external donors have had a massive role in influencing Palestinian civil society (Weisman, 2012; Challand, 2009). There are studies where shrinking civic space in Israel has been investigated. Katz and Gidron's case study based on interviews with leaders of the New Israel Fund (NIF), is such an example (Katz & Gidron, 2022). A general investigation of the history and emergence of civil society in Israel, amongst the Arab population included, has also been examined (Golan, 2023). However, the Palestinian civil society remains relatively understudied, especially from the perspective of shrinking civic space. Hence, Palestinian civil society is relevant as a case for deeper investigation.

Studies of the reaction to the specific terrorist designation seem to remain uninvestigated from the perspective of the designated Palestinian organizations. The research gap that this thesis addresses concerns the understudied local context of Palestinian civil society through the lens of shrinking civic space. Specifically, the thesis focuses on five of the organizations' views of, and resistance to, their terrorist designation. This contributes with relevant local knowledge on forms of resistance against shrinking civic space in Palestine, while also applying a knitted theoretical framework. The theoretical framework centers around the requested focus on relational aspects. It highlights identity formation among social groups as a specific kind of resistance against shrinking civic space. This framework is further described in the next chapter.

## 4 Theoretical framework

In this framework, theory of resistance against shrinking civic space is combined with ontological counter-securitization theory when investigating the terrorist designation of the Palestinian organizations. In other words, this thesis attempts to treat ontological counter-securitization as a specific form of resistance toward shrinking civic space.

Jamal (2020) suggests that engagement with the topics of ontological counter-securitization brings attention to previously unaddressed dynamics of identity construction among social groups that are securitized. However, during the research process, it appeared as if ontological counter-securitization theory alone could not satisfyingly help understand the response to the terrorist designation among the designated Palestinian organizations. Hence, theory of resistance to shrinking civic space was added to the framework. This provides a deeper understanding of how ontological counter-securitization emerges as resistance in new ways. The theoretical framework has been generated through an abductive approach, this process is further described in chapter 5.

### 4.1 Securitization theory and beyond

Securitization theory was introduced in the late 1980s by the Copenhagen School (Balzacq, Léonard and Ruzicka, 2016). This first generation of securitization theory arose from a will to avoid an all-encompassing concept of security. The Copenhagen School presented a framework that engages with security through a traditional “Schmittian<sup>2</sup>” meaning of the concept, but questions whether security is solely a positive value that should be maximized: the concept of de-securitization was introduced (Weaver, 1995:57). Security is understood as a social construction. Security issues emerge when a phenomenon is labeled as such through speech acts, usually performed by the state or leading elite, which thereby requires extraordinary measures to counteract the security problem (Weaver, 1995:54-55; Buzan et al. 1998:24–29).

The Copenhagen School has received considerable amounts of critique. Wilkinson argues that the Securitization theory is characterized by Western bias since it presupposes European

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<sup>2</sup> According to Schmitt, a clearly defined enemy outside the nation is needed for the state not to undermine itself: real war strengthens the state and unites the nation (Schmitt, 1996/2007 [1932]). The Schmittian concept of security thus implies that the state naturalizes security, and that Friend-Enemy distinctions are necessary.

understandings of state and society as universal. She further argues that the theory's focus on speech acts excludes other kinds of expression and emphasizes the need to include bodily aspects (Wilkinson, 2007). The focus on speech acts has also been criticized by Williams who sheds light on the importance of including visualizations (Williams, 2003). Criticism against the absence of gender is raised by Hansen (Hansen, 2000).

Howell and Richter-Montpetit argue that classic securitization theory is fundamentally structured by methodological whiteness and racism. However, they also indicate that further empirical testing of the "second generation of securitization theory" is needed to evaluate whether adjusted frameworks manage to avoid contributing to structural racism (Howell & Richter-Montpetit, 2020). One such attempt at empirical application is done by Olekser (2014). Olekser builds on Floyd's partly adapted securitization framework, which highlights the change of behavior (not only the speech act) as a precondition for a successful securitization process. It can be argued that he with help from securitization theory was able to ask questions about structural orders. However, the article is written from the securitizing authority's perspective. The security dilemmas experienced by the securitized referent subjects remain unaddressed. This thesis provides an investigation of securitization from the perspective of the securitized subjects.

#### 4.1.1 Ontological security

Mitzen (2006) and Rumelili (2015) differentiate between physical and ontological security. The latter is achieved when relationships with significant others are routinized, and actors hence become attached to those relationships. Since ontological security is provided even by dangerous routines, security-seekers can become attached to conflict (Mitzen, 2006). In opposition to human security, ontological security applies to individual actors as well as collectives. States and individuals alike are social actors seeking security in, as well as from, each other (Rumelili, 2015:57).

*Ontological security* concerns are not relevant to a specific security sector only. From the perspective of ontological security, the stability and certainty of identity can remain a concern for states, as well as for societies or individuals, regardless of which realm the threats are located in. Ontological security is not bound to a conception of security that is wedded to survival and threats. Instead, it is a question of an ongoing concern with *the stability of identity*, which does not presuppose a threat towards it (Rumelili, 2015:57).

It is possible to be in a state of physical insecurity and at the same time experiencing

ontological security, and the other way around. While in a state of ontological security and physical (in)security, stability and certainty can be experienced by actors when the Other is constructed as a threat to their security-as-survival. Israel/Palestine is given as an example of a protracted conflict where this state of security is sustained by Self/Other relationships based on roles of enmity. Since conflict-producing routines maintain the certainty of being, the consequence is a relationship locked into dynamics of conflict. In such a state of security, ontological security is ensured through perceptions and representations of each other's identities as inherently incompatible, which are reproduced through acts of securitization (Rumelili, 2015:59). Ontological security is applied in this thesis to better understand the identity conflicts at play in the context of shrinking civic space in Palestine.

## 4.2 Counter-securitization as resistance against shrinking civic space

*Shrinking civic space, closing civic space and closing civil society space* are all labels that describe what seems to be a significant global shift in a negative direction concerning state-civil society relations (Dupuy et al., 2021:5). Dupuy et al., specifically focus on "... how new, state-imposed legal restrictions and other forms of repression impact organizations specifically, and how these organizations have responded to these restrictions" (Ibid). This definition sheds light on a Gramscian approach related to hegemonic and counter-hegemonic struggles. Actors of civil society have the option to legitimize the power of the elite, but also to contest or resist the elitist powers trying to restrict their operational space (Gramsci, in Biekart et al., 2023:17). This definition informs the understanding of shrinking civic space in this thesis.

Stritzel and Chang (2015) define *counter-securitizing* moves as moves of resistance against crucial elements of a securitization process (Ibid:552). Vuori argues that it makes sense to highlight the difference between dynamics of *contention*, which takes place among political actors who have the same possibilities to exercise security, and dynamics of resistance. The latter concerns dynamics between those in the position of exercising deontic<sup>3</sup> security, and those who are subjected to, but still question it (Vuori, 2015:41). From this perspective, *resistance* highlights the power asymmetry between state authorities that possess the capacity to wield security practices, and civil society actors without such capacity. Vuori's

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<sup>3</sup> Relates to moral ideas such as responsibility and obligation (Cambridge Dictionary, 2023)

definition of resistance thus grasps the context under investigation in this thesis well. Vuori further refers to what Buzan et al. call “institutionalized securitization” (Buzan et al, 1998: 27-29) when investigating resistance among civil society towards securitizing moves by authorities (Vuori, 2015). He argues that the word “security” does not necessarily have to be used for an issue to be securitized in specific contexts. Particular concepts or words, such as terrorism, allude to the logic of fear and danger. Terrorism is seen as a *watchword*, which decreases the need to argue on the security characteristics of specific cases (Vuori, 2015:33). In the investigated context of this thesis, the terrorist designation of the six Palestinian organizations is seen as an indicator of a “successfully institutionalized securitization”. Like Vuori, this thesis investigates resistance initiated by the securitized subject.

#### 4.2.1 Ontological counter-securitization

Jamal combines Stritzel & Chang’s treatment of counter-securitization with Rumelili’s and Mitzen’s separation between physical and ontological security. It is argued that this approach is of both theoretical and empirical importance, especially when investigating complex contexts where asymmetric identity conflicts are at play (Jamal, 2020:939). The framework builds on the relationship between securitization and identity formation among securitized subjects. It focuses on how this dynamic emerges as a form of counter-securitization. In this process, a gradual construction of the securitized subject’s identity is shaped as a specific form of counter-securitization - a strategy of resistance.

Jamal further argues that engagement with these topics brings attention to previously unaddressed dynamics of identity construction among social groups that are securitized and experience a profound relation with their securitization (Jamal, 2020:933-934). From this perspective, the phenomenon of being securitized carries double meanings. On one side, it makes the subject a target for surveillance and control. At the same time, being securitized also makes the subject aware of its power to pose a threat. It thus also becomes an agent capable of counter-securitization (Ibid:938). A securitized group can accept their construction as a threat, but they can also resist it. The securitization makes them aware of the power that lies within their identity. Hence, their mere search for ontological security is converted into a form of counter-securitization (Ibid:937).

In his analysis, Jamal investigates how the Israeli state authorities have securitized its relationship with its Palestinian citizens. In this thesis, the framework is instead applied in the context of Palestinian civil society. When bringing the framework from Israel to Palestine,



another securitized relationship is investigated, and in a new setting. Based on Vuori's (2015) arguments presented above, this thesis argues that asymmetric dynamics are at play between the Israeli state authorities and the Palestinian civil society.

#### 4.2.2 Summary theoretical framework

Based on the description above, this study investigates five Palestinian organizations' experience of, and resistance to, their terrorist designation. This is done through a framework that combines theory of resistance to shrinking civic space with ontological counter-securitization theory. Resistance among civil society actors is requested for further investigation. Bringing the theory of ontological counter-securitization to the field of shrinking civic space suits this thesis since it helps understand resistance within the existing dynamics of power asymmetry. In chapter 5 it is further explained how the theoretical framework has been generated, as well as how it is embedded in the analysis.

## 5 Method

This thesis is underpinned by critical realism and a qualitative-interpretive design. It builds on in depth semi-structured interviews which are analyzed through the method of reflexive Thematic Analysis (TA) as presented by Braun and Clarke (2022).

### 5.1 Approach

The methodological assumptions of this thesis are based on critical realism. Reality is seen as singular, however, reality is not the same as representations of it (Braun & Clarke 2022:169). Experiences and understandings of reality are thus considered socially located.

Abductive logics of inquiry follow a spiral-like pattern. Steps are taken back and forth between theoretical literature and empirical material, and the “abductive surprise” comes from encounters with the material. These empirical encounters are informed by, but not bound to, prior encounters in theory and literature (Schwartz-Shea & Yanow, 2012:27-33). The described understanding of an abductive approach has been applied in this thesis. The steps between theory and empirical material are further explained in section 5.4 of this chapter. An abductive logic does not require the researcher to investigate context-specific meaning. However, interpretive research does (Schwartz-Shea & Yanow, 2012:32). Interpretivism seeks to understand a phenomenon by studying how it is used among particular people in a specific context (Ibid:23). It is this kind of context-specific meaning that is at the center of interest in this thesis when investigating forms of resistance against shrinking civic space among the interviewed Palestinian organizations.

The interpretation undertaken is experiential as well as critical. An experiential approach treats language as a mirror of reality, whereas a critical approach interrogates latent meaning (Braun & Clarke, 2022:160, 204). In other words, the interpretation in this thesis is not fully determined by the semiotic meaning of the data. Instead, the analysis aims to also *unpack* presented claims through the lens of the theoretical framework. Mapping the explicit meaning of the participants’ views and experiences of their designation lays the foundation for a critical and interrogating approach. This combination helps to better understand nuances and contradictions within the studied context.

## 5.2 Semi-structured interviews: collecting material

Semi-structured interviews open for a participant's story to unfold, while at the same time including questions informed by a selected theory. Using this method of data collection leaves space for influences in exchange with the participants during the interviews, which is well-suited when approaching the multifaceted nature of lived experience (Galletta & Cross, 2013:2). This approach responds well to the abductive design as well as the aim of this thesis, which seeks to contribute to a deeper understanding of shrinking space by investigating the lived experience of actors within Palestinian civil society. The in-depth semi-structured interviews were guided by themes influenced by Jamal's theory of ontological counter-securitization, and the associated theory of ontological security. It is important to point out here that the themes that guided the interviews are not the same as those that were later developed as a result of the analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2022:263). How theory informed the interview questions is further explained in section 5.4.

The same basis of the questionnaire was used for all interviews to allow comparison across them (Driscoll, 2021:109), but it was adapted for each organization in certain formulations. The questionnaire was evaluated and revised after each interview to improve it by learning from each experience. Room was made for improvised follow-up questions during the interviews and flexibility was applied regarding the order in which the questions were asked. This created space for nuances to come out.

The semi-structured interviews were carried out with representatives from five out of the six designated Palestinian civil society organizations:

1. *Al-Haq*, the first Palestinian Human rights organization (Farah, 2022). The interview took place in two parts. First in a meeting at Al-Haq's office in Ramallah, and later during a field visit in Jordan Valley.
2. *Union of Agricultural Work Committees (UAWC)*. The organization mainly works within agriculture by strengthening and supporting farmers in Palestine (UAWC, 2023). The interview was held in a public spot in Ramallah.
3. *Defense for Children International - Palestine (DCIP)*, promotes and protects the human rights of Palestinian children (DCIP, 2023). The interview was held in the organization's office, Ramallah.

4. *Addameer* is an organization that offers legal support to prisoners and works to end torture and violations of prisoners' rights (Addameer, 2021). The interview was held in Addameer's office in Ramallah.
5. *Bisan Center for Research and Development* (Bisan) which "seeks to contribute in building a Palestinian civil, democratic, effective and active community" (Bisan, 2023). The interview was held over video-call on two occasions.

Four out of five interviews took place in Ramallah between the middle of July and the beginning of September 2023. All interviews lasted between 60 and 120 minutes. The fifth interview, with Bisan, was done in two parts over video calls from Sweden at the end of September and the beginning of October 2023. The data used as material in this thesis consists of the above-described five interviews. All interviews, except the one with Al-Haq, were recorded and later transcribed. During the two meetings with Al-Haq, digital and analog notes were made and later cleared and rewritten to computer writing. This aspect is discussed under section 5.2.1. Since all participants spoke English, the interviews were conducted as well as analyzed in English.

### 5.2.1 Discussion of material

One out of the six designated organizations did not respond to attempts to meet for an interview, hence the data collection does not cover the complete group. The aim of this thesis, however, is not to generalize beyond the investigated context. Findings in relation to the selected theory might however still bring relevant insight into logics of social practices (Braun & Clarke, 2022:175).

To protect the participants, the transcribed interviews are not made available. It can be argued that this affects the trustworthiness of this thesis. However, the balance between ethical considerations and transparency is an inherent dilemma when handling sensitive data. A systematic approach has been undertaken in this thesis to still allow for transparency concerning each step of the process.

Another aspect concerning the collected material is that the participants had partly different hierarchical positions within their respective organizations. This impacted the power dynamics during the interviews differently, and potentially also the information shared. During an interview with a general staff member, the atmosphere could sometimes feel more relaxed. At the same time a staff member might be careful or unsure about what kind of

information is appropriate to share. On the contrary, a person in a leading position has a mandate to make more autonomous decisions and can potentially speak more freely. However, having participants with partly different positions enabled encounters with a wider variety of meaning. This contributed to information power, or richness of the dataset. In other words, exposure to different kinds of hierarchical roles within the group of designated organizations also enhanced the exposure to varied perspectives.

To increase trustworthiness, member-checking has been undertaken when uncertainty concerning the materials arose. On occasions when the explicit meaning of the transcription was not clear, the extract in question was sent back to the quoted participant for clarification. The extract was put in context by explaining how and in what part of the analysis it would be used. One participant had asked to see all citations, hence all quotes used from this specific organization were sent back to the participant. As mentioned in the previous section, the interview with Al-Haq was not transcribed. Hence, to minimize the risk of misunderstandings a follow-up interview was done at a later point with this organization. During this second interview, additional questions were asked which enabled clarification of the material.

### 5.3 Method of analysis: reflexive TA

The analysis is done through Thematic Analysis (TA). Out of the many existing forms of TA available, this thesis applies *reflexive* TA (Braun & Clarke, 2022). Reflexive TA is intended to form an approach that is embedded in theory. However, differently to other analytical approaches, the researcher self-selects the theory in which TA is embedded (Ibid:434). This allows for a structured thematic analysis while maintaining the flexibility inherent to the method.

Within reflexive TA, a *code* is an analytic unit and output. During the coding process, data is marked with code labels. The *themes* are later developed from these codes and can be seen as the next level of analysis when engaging with the data (Braun & Clarke, 2022:229). A good quality of codes and themes results from dual processes concerning both deep immersion as well as developing distance (Ibid:4-8). To achieve distance to the material in this thesis, the process of engagement with the data was not done in one block. I listened to the recordings and made some initial notes in connection to the interviews. However, deeper engagement happened first while transcribing the recordings when back in Sweden, around two weeks after the first four interviews were finished. At this time the first thorough reading of the texts was also done.

When encountering context-specific knowledge, previously established theoretical assumptions can be challenged (Braun & Clarke, 2022:4-8). An abductive approach with its starting point in theory was allowed since work with this thesis was initiated already in June, before the departure to Israel/Palestine. The theory of ontological counter-securitization, and the associated theory of ontological security, were already engaged with and influenced the design of the interview questionnaire.

When later engaging deeper with the collected material it appeared as if ontological counter-securitization theory alone could not satisfyingly help understanding the response to the terrorist designation among the designated Palestinian organizations. The organization's ways and means to *resist* the consequences brought by the designation in their *shrinking space became* central. This “abductive surprise” brought my attention to theory concerning resistance towards shrinking civic space. After engaging with this new body of literature, theory of resistance to shrinking civic space was added to the theoretical framework and thus applied in the analysis of the material. Six themes were developed during the analytical process. These themes were generated from thorough engagement with the text during a second and third reading and after the described revision of the theory. The described engagement with the data enabled room for distance and reflections. Such an approach in the analysis reflects the values of reflexive TA, which centers on reflective and recurring procedures (Braun & Clarke, 2019).

## 5.4 Analytical framework

In the following section, it is explained how the theory has been translated into analytical tools. The interviews were analyzed using “repeated reading” (Braun & Clarke, 2006), to identify key aspects and repeated reasoning within and between the interviews, which allowed to group them into themes.

Theory was the starting point in the abductive design of this thesis. The interview questionnaire was created based on prior engagement with the theory of ontological security and ontological counter-securitization. When later engaging with the interviews and transcribed material, resistance against shrinking civic space appeared as a central aspect of the investigation. Hence, after further engagement with this theory, the concepts of shrinking civic space and resistance were added to the theoretical- and analytical frameworks.

The analysis is based on the four following concepts from the theoretical framework: *ontological security*, *ontological counter-securitization*, *shrinking civic space* and *resistance*.

Table 1 summarizes the theoretical definitions of the four key concepts. In table 2 it is shown how the concepts have been interpreted in the analysis according to theory.

**Table 1: Overview of the four key concepts and summarized definitions**

<b>Theoretical concept</b>	<b>Definition</b>
<b><i>Ontological security</i></b>	While in a state of <i>ontological security</i> and physical (in)security, stability and certainty can be experienced by actors when the Other is constructed as a threat to their security-as-survival. This state of security is sustained by Self/Other relationships based on roles of enmity (Rumelili, 2015:59).
<b><i>Ontological counter-securitization</i></b>	<i>Ontological counter-securitization</i> builds on the relationship between securitization and identity formation among securitized subjects, and focuses on how this dynamic emerges as a form of counter-securitization (Jamal, 2020). A securitized group can accept their construction as a threat, but they can also resist it. The securitization in itself makes them aware of the power which lies within their identity. Hence, their mere search for ontological security is converted into a form of counter-securitization (Jamal, 2020:937).
<b><i>Shrinking civic space</i></b>	The definition of <i>shrinking civic space</i> in this thesis refers to "... how new, state-imposed legal restrictions and other forms of repression impact organizations specifically, and how these organizations have responded to these restrictions" (Dupuy et al., 2021:5)
<b><i>Resistance</i></b>	<i>Resistance</i> concerns dynamics between those in position of exercising deontic security, and those who are subjected to, but still question it (Vuori, 2015:41). From this perspective, resistance highlights the power-asymmetry between state-authorities, possessing capacity to wield security practices, and civil society actors without such capacity.

**Table 2:** the first and second columns show how theory of ontological security and ontological counter-securitization have been applied in the interviews. The theoretical concepts were “translated” into the questionnaire themes presented in column 2. The third column shows that the concepts of shrinking civic space and resistance were added to the theoretical framework after exploratory engagement with the collected material. In the last column it is shown how all four key concepts from the theoretical framework have been applied in the analysis.

<b>Theoretical concept</b>	<b>Themes in interview questionnaire</b>	<b>Added theoretical concept</b>	<b>Interpretation applied in analysis</b>
<i><b>Ontological security</b></i>	1. Evolvement during and after the designation 2. Effects of the designation		Have identity-constructions based on Self/Other dichotomies been strengthened, or emerged in new forms, since the designation?
<i><b>Ontological counter-securitization</b></i>	3. The puzzle: dual outcome of the designation? 4. Relationships 5. Security 6. Identity-formation - <i>What kind of identity/identities are emphasized throughout the interview?</i>		Have constructions of identity impacted forms of resistance? What kind of identity-formations can be seen as related to the terror-designation itself? How does the terrorist label affect a sense of belonging among the designated organizations?
		<i><b>Shrinking civic space</b></i>	How do the organizations view their terror-designation? How have they been impacted by, and responding to it?
		<i><b>Resistance (against shrinking civic space)</b></i>	What dynamics of resistance are discernible among the designated organizations since the designation? Are new tactics used by the organizations in order to be able to keep on working despite the restrictions?



To sum up, the analytical framework is based on four key concepts from the theoretical framework. These concepts illustrate the core aspects of how the theory has informed my interpretation. Moreover, since the analytical framework combines two bodies of literature, and is adapted for the specific context under investigation, it brings depth to the analysis.

#### 5.4.1 Methodological limitations and reflections

As Watson emphasizes, visiting both Israel and the Palestinian territories is a privilege and the best way to get an understanding of how life works and is experienced by different people living there (Watson, 2023:551). However, it requires reflection and sensitivity when engaging with research in this setting. My experiences from the region consist of work and travels in Tel Aviv and Jerusalem in 2017, and fieldwork for the NGO “Ecumenical Accompaniment Programme in Palestine and Israel” (EAPPI<sup>4</sup>) from 15 June – 15 September 2023. It was during the later period that data was collected for this thesis.

Working for EAPPI involved cooperation with international, Israeli, and Palestinian peace activists and organizations. This introduced me to nuanced perspectives and the network enabled access. I did not have any personal or professional relationships with the interviewed organizations before starting the work with this thesis. However, without working for EAPPI, the process of reaching them and receiving their consent to participate in this research would have been a lot more complicated, maybe not even possible. Accessing local knowledge through practical engagement brings challenges regarding loyalties. However, the three months in Israel and Palestine gave me valuable contextualized knowledge needed for the thesis.

Three weeks after I came home from Israel and Palestine and started writing this thesis, the war between Israel and Hamas started, which placed the thesis in a new light. It has made the work more challenging and sometimes I asked myself if it was too sensitive a subject. However, it also appeared very central to still use the collected material and highlight aspects that were overshadowed by the war. A question I often get is: “On what side are you in the conflict”? A question that for me is unanswerable. To this thesis, I bring a sense of

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<sup>4</sup> EAPPI supports individuals and organizations that are working for peace in Israel and Palestine. People from all over the world travel to Palestine and Israel to help, through their protective presence, expand the space for action and give hope and support to people to work for peace and reconciliation (Följeslagarprogrammet, 2023). EAPPI was established in 2002 on request from local church leaders in Jerusalem who asked for international presence in the country. The programme is not promoting any specific religion, but supports interreligious dialogue and cooperation (EAPPI, 2023).

hopelessness concerning the situation and the political leadership in both Israel and Palestine regarding what they are doing to achieve a just peace for their people. On the other hand, I strongly believe in the vital role that both the Israeli and Palestinian civil society play.

The investigated context of shrinking civic space in Palestine has an overarching layer: the occupation. I turned up as an outsider from a Western country and could leave the occupied territories whenever I wished to. Despite being quite well positioned socioeconomically, as well as recognized internationally, some of the participants could not leave the occupied Palestinian territories. This contributed to certain dynamics during the interviews. My presence created (potential) interests from both sides: I wished to collect useful data and aimed to create an atmosphere of trust for the participants to open up and share their inside information. From the participants' side, I was likely seen as a potential messenger for an international crowd: a researcher they could influence. However, being aware of this aspect made it possible for me to keep my academic integrity. With the described dynamic in mind, it appears crucial to not only investigate explicit meaning but also critically interrogate the meaning of the data, to bring meaningful depth to the analysis. This is a central argument for my earlier described approach to interpretation, which combines the experiential and critical understanding of meaning (see Chapter 5.1).

My presence could also potentially bring risks to the organizations. In one case, some control questions were posed from the organization's side before the interview started. This can be seen as if they wanted to check my intentions and make sure I was doing the interviews for research purposes only. This aspect sheds light on the importance of ethical considerations in research, which brings responsibility to not harm. How the principles of research ethics have been addressed is further discussed in the following section of this chapter.

The main aspects I have reflected upon in the process concern the political context, my effect on the participants and vice versa. I did not start the analysis directly after my return, which made it possible to get a break that created room for reflection. I also received consultancy from supervisors about how to best use my field experience in this thesis. In summary, it has been necessary to develop distance to the participants to enable analytical clarity and room for reflection.

## 5.5 Research Ethics

Ethnic background, political opinions or religious/philosophical beliefs are all sensitive personal data that potentially could become part of the material collected for this thesis. Hence, measures were undertaken to protect the participants concerning the four principles of research ethics (consent, information, confidentiality, and use) according to the guidelines from the Swedish Defence University (SEDU)<sup>5</sup>. An aptitude test was approved by the institution before departure to Israel and Palestine. The measures and considerations undertaken are briefly described below.

### **Consent & Information**

No one below 18 years was asked to participate. When a representative for an organization agreed to participate by answering positively over email/WhatsApp, an information leaflet including the information addressed below was shared. Some of the research participants were from affected communities. A systematic recording of signed information leaflets could put these participants at risk (van Baalen, 2018). In this research project, it was therefore not deemed suitable to save or store any signed information leaflets or other identifiable information.

Before the interviews started the participants were asked if they agreed to be recorded. The participants were informed that in case they would choose to terminate their participation, no further questions would be asked and no pressure would be posed on them to stay in the investigation. Minimum personal information was kept to minimize the risk of harm due to participation in this thesis.

An overarching plan for the investigation, as well as the aim, methods and potential risks associated with participation, were communicated in the information leaflet which was distributed to the participants before the interviews. That the Swedish Defense University is the research principal, that participation is voluntary and that the participant had the right to terminate their participation with immediate effect before a specific date was conveyed. Before as well as after the interviews, the participants were reminded that they could pose questions about the research project and ask for clarifications. The participants received an email address as well as a local number if supplementary questions would arise at a later point.

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<sup>5</sup> Personal data in independent student projects:  
<https://www.fhs.se/en/student-web/all-about-your-studies/my-studies/personal-data-in-independent-student-projects.html>

## **Confidentiality & Use**

To protect the participants, all data is pseudonymized. The interviews were recorded with the help of a voice memo program when consent was given. Handwritten notes were taken during the interviews, and then transferred to computer-writing as soon as possible after the interview. The risk that the data would be scrutinized by third parties was especially high when checkpoints within Israel/Palestine were crossed, and during the travel back to Sweden when passing through the airport. Hence, recordings as well as documents were transferred to a cloud service (which was not traceable from electronic devices) and all data files were deleted from my electronic devices. No physical material was kept.

According to SEDU's guidelines, the data will be deleted once the grade is decided and registered. In other words, the data will be kept until it is no longer needed to support the conclusions of this thesis.

Data recorded for the thesis will be used for the thesis restrictively. Parallel missions such as report-writing and documentation for EAPPI occurred. Ethical approval was ensured for both of these missions respectively.

## 6 Findings & Analysis

The qualitative deep reading and thematic analysis of the transcribed interviews led to the construction of six themes and additional sub-themes. The first and second themes answer the first research question: *How do the five interviewed Palestinian CSOs view their terrorist designation and how have they adapted to maintain their work?* The terrorist designation is viewed as a way to defund Palestinian civil society (theme 6.1) which has been handled through risk management to maintain their work (theme 6.2). Themes three to six address the second research question: *What means of resistance have been undertaken?* The central means of resistance identified are Recognition & new networks (theme 6.3), Cooperation (theme 6.4), Conviction (6.5) and a New Identity (theme 6.6). The quotes used as illustrations are original statements.

### 6.1 The terrorist designation as a way to defund Palestinian civil society

Among the participants, there is a central view of the designation as a means for Israel to silence influential voices within Palestinian civil society and hinder the organizations from operating. However, it is also highlighted that the designation was not needed to enable repressive measures, as illustrated by Bisan: “... if they want to come and arrest, to persecute, to shoot, they can do that - as always under occupation. They didn't need the designation to be able to do that” (Representative Bisan). Repressive measures are thus not considered a new phenomenon, but the specific designation can be understood as a partly new tactic, which is indicated in the following quote from DCIP:

What happened in 2021 and 2022 is part of a smear campaign that we used to be subject to for more than 10 years [...]. I consider it [the designation] more as a message to the EU-states, not to me. For me there was nothing new. (Representative DCIP)

The quote above illustrates the view of the terrorist designation as a state-imposed restriction aimed at targeting civil society (Dupuy et al., 2021). A specific form of shrinking civic space, where civil society is constrained through donors and strangled funding. The designation can

also be seen as a securitizing move, where the watchword terrorism (Vuori, 2015) is used as a signal to the international community. The terrorist designation is thus analyzed as a securitizing move by the Israeli state towards the six Palestinian organizations.

The actual impacts of the designation on funding are viewed differently among the participants. It is partly constructed as a failed attempt as if the designation was not enough to make donors escape. The following quote from DCIP illustrates such a view: "... the funding even increased for us" (Representative DCI-P). However, even if donors would still support the organizations, there seems to have been issues concerning the financial flows. In the interviews, problems concerning bank transactions come out. Discussions of registering some of the organizations in another country to get around bank rejections highlight that the financial situation is a struggle. There are also explicit formulations around the designation's direct effect on funding, as stated by UAWC: "... donors got scared. So it worked, unfortunately, it worked" (Representative UAWC).

The following quote from Bisan deals with another aspect of the experienced shrinking civic space:

My organization was raided twice by the Palestinian Authority [PA] between 2021 and 2022 [...]. [Also] [T]he PA is repressing the Palestinian people, or doesn't want an active and independent civil society [...]. They [Israel and the PA] are in cohort. Although they sometimes vocally go against each other they have strong security coordination. (Representative Bisan)

Bisan highlights that double systems of repression are operating in the context of shrinking civic space in Palestine. This aspect is not presented as a concern of shrinking civic space among most of the participants. How can this lack of critique against the Palestinian Authority (PA), or the absence of mentioning the PA's attitude towards Palestinian civil society, be understood? Here it appears necessary to look at the wider political context and the role of construction of identity in Israel and Palestine.

As presented by Rumelili (2015), the ontological dimension of security is provided through reproductions of Self/Other in protracted conflicts such as the Israeli-Palestinian. Hence, in the investigated context where both Israeli and Palestinian authorities are operating, the PA's role turns into a question about this identity. Acknowledging the PA's repressive measures within the shrinking civic space in Palestine goes against the routinized Self/Other relationship that has been established. From this perspective, a critical attitude towards the

local authorities is incompatible with loyalty to Palestinian self-determination. It would go against the stability of identity, the ontological security, which is based on a construction of Palestinian solidarity and “Selfness” in opposition to the Israeli Other. Silence among many of the organizations concerning the PA's role can thus be interpreted as a reflection of this identity dilemma and concern with ontological security. This aspect is not directly related to the terrorist designation. However, repressive measures from both the Israeli state and the PA add a layer to the intricate situation in the shrinking civic space that the five interviewed organizations are facing. Opposing the Israeli restrictions brings risks of increased repression. Criticizing the PA brings additional risks of repression, as well as a concern for the stability and certainty of being - the ontological dimension of security.

In summary, the terrorist designation is viewed by the organizations as a way for the Israeli state to scare donors from sending funding, and thus target the designated organizations indirectly through their international donors. Buyse highlights in his article that labeling civil society actors as terrorists is used as a justification for restrictive measures - but also to delegitimize these actors' work (Buyse, 2018:969). The designation, understood as a new way for the (occupying) state to strangle civil society in Palestine through their donors, is similar to Buyse's emphasis on how terror labels are used to de-legitimize civil society.

There are nuances concerning whether the designation is constructed as if it affects funding or not. However, it seems like financial struggles have been a severe consequence since the designation. Another nuance concerns whether the role of the Palestinian Authority (PA) is presented as contributing to the shrinking civic space in Palestine. This aspect can be understood with help from Rumelili (2015) and the ontological dimension of security. Ontological security is here maintained by reproducing the identity role of the Palestinian Self by highlighting the repressions undertaken by the occupying Israeli Other - but not focusing on repressions by the PA.

## 6.2 Risk-management

The organizations are still operating. However, when handling the consequences brought by the designation by continuing to work, risk management appears unavoidable. Fear of increased repression seems to be constantly present, at least underlying. This is highlighted by Addameer: “I don't know if it's over. The decision itself is still there, they can implement it whenever they want, this is what we are afraid of” (Representative Addameer). It is not only the organizations' fear that is included in this risk management. Also, the fear from the

donor's side is taken into consideration when the organizations are calculating risks, as proposed by Al-Haq: "... there are probably situations where a partner is trying to avoid the headache. It is about risk assessment [also] on their part" (Representative Al-Haq). Risk management seems to be a balancing act between the risk of increased repression if being too vocal, and the risk of losing support if not being visible. The balancing act can be seen as a struggle aiming to keep and attract donor support by countering the hegemonic narrative (Gramsci, in Biehart et al., 2023:17). Here the occupying state, international states and civil society actors are thus shaping the civic space in Palestine through continuously changing relationships (Biehart et al., 2023:17) in a specific way.

Addameer speaks about how the designation entails risk management on different levels:

It [the designation] affected the relation internally – the staff level, the board, how often we meet altogether and these issues. It affected a bit the donor-relations of course, we are more careful with the relation. Sometimes more safety measures were taken in the communication between Addameer and our donors in order to protect the relationship, the level of sharing of information with the public about this relation or not and so on. (Representative Addameer)

The quote above illustrates that dealing with the designations through risk management seems to be important in various kinds of communication. Not only in the direct communication with donors but also concerning how the donor-relation is communicated publicly. Communication within the organizations is subject to risk management, but also the communication with local communities, which is highlighted in the following quote from one of the organizations: "...all our field workers have had to be very very quiet [...]. You don't see our logo everywhere anymore".

Somehow related to communication comes the aspect of technical security measures. The month after the designation was announced, it was discovered that representatives from some of the organizations, as well as Palestinian activists, were hacked with the Israeli spyware Pegasus (Amnesty, 2021; France 24, 2021). The question of security measures is also a higher priority since the designation, as illustrated by Bisan: "... we employed much stricter security measures. Much stricter phone security measures, electronic security in general" (Representative Bisan). This quote indicates that risk management in the shape of technical security measures also concerns communication, but mainly digital



communications. Regarding this aspect, however, the power asymmetry between the Palestinian civil society organizations and the Israeli state comes out strongly when Bisan adds:

There are now organizations, and not just in Palestine but globally, civil society organizations that are dedicated to digital security. Of course we're collaborating with them... we understand that it falls way behind what the governments, autocrats, and repressive regimes - especially the Israeli one - have in their capacities. They are of course much more advanced... but at least we do what we can. This is how we are looking at it. There's no final guarantee but we are doing what we can. (Representative Bisan)

As illustrated above, carrying on, taking risks, and not focusing too much on fear is a central aspect of risk management. Continuing to work and dealing with what seems to be severe consequences through risk management, can thus be seen as a strategy to be able to maintain the work. Zihnioğlu argues that civic capacity to collectively resist and defy is necessary to understand how activists have maintained their activities in Turkey by adapting to the narrowing civic space in different ways (Zihnioğlu, 2023). As indicated in the analysis above, maintaining activities in the Palestinian shrinking civic space has required discretion and an enhanced focus on security in communication. However, as will be presented in the following themes, collective capacity and relational aspects seem to have been central for the Palestinian organizations to maintain their work - but also to resist their shrinking space.

According to Vuori, resistance concerns dynamics between authorities in a position of utilizing deontic security, and those who are subjected to, but still question it (Vuori, 2015:41). This definition of resistance captures the experienced power-asymmetry which is highlighted in the last quote from Bisan above. The means of resistance that are identified in the asymmetric power relationship between the designated organizations and the Israeli state: *recognition & new networks, cooperation, conviction, and new identity*, are further described under the following themes.

### 6.3 Recognition & new networks

Being recognized and thus becoming able to establish new networks comes out as a central means of resistance to the designation. Interestingly, a previously existing dynamic of contrast between local versus global orientation appears to have been partly overbuilt since

the designation. In other words, local as well as global recognition seems to have contributed to resistance - without ending up at odds with each other.

The designation is here spoken about in a different manner since it also entailed possibilities of accessing new networks.

### 6.3.1 Locally

Among organizations with a grassroots profile, or community-level profile, a close relationship to their local communities comes out as strongly tied to the mission of their organizations. A high level of mutual trust with their local communities is highlighted by UAWC: “Many of us are from rural areas. The roots: ‘Fellah’ - which means farmer or peasant in Arabic - is a label we wear with pride” (Representative UAWC). A local profile was also emphasized throughout the interviews as something the more grassroots-oriented organizations have maintained since the designation as a tool of resistance. For more internationally oriented organizations, the designation seems to have brought about a stronger shift concerning local recognition. This is emphasized by Bisan:

We always had good relationships with the local community... they gave us a little bit more legitimacy after the designation. Because the local community understood that not only them as local Palestinians are being persecuted, but also the organizations. Our organizations were sometimes seen as a little bit, what do you call it, posh?

*Question (interviewer):* Posh... or elite?

*Answer (interviewee):* Yes, a little bit elitist. That we were coming with international funding, with our projects, with the international discourse, sometimes bringing international visitors. So they saw that OK these organizations are also targeted so maybe there's more truth in what they are saying. (Representative Bisan)

The above-described increased local recognition seems to have brought additional advantages. It is presented as if it facilitated the operational work for organizations that earlier were perceived as part of an international elite, as emphasized by Al-Haq:

When working in field, for example in Jordan Valley, we've noticed that they [the locals] see us suffering in a similar way as them. A sense of a shared experience. They have expressed their solidarity to us. In the end the terrorist label has made the field-work easier. (Representative Al-Haq)

The citations above illustrate nuances. For organizations with more of a grassroots profile, the relation to the local community can maybe not be seen as a new tool of resistance, but as an ongoing tool of resilience. However, for the organizations where the international profile has been more prominent, the designation seems to have opened a possibility to build a bridge between the local and the international orientation. Previously critical locals seem to experience a shared struggle since the designation, and thus find it easier to relate, also to organizations with international connections. From this perspective, the designation enabled broader recognition within the Palestinian local communities. An enhanced local trust is presented as if it facilitated the organizations' work and broadened their networks.

Jamal describes ontological counter-securitization as the construction of identity which builds on the relationship between securitization and identity formation among securitized subjects (2020). In the interviews, an increased shared identity between the designated organizations and local communities is described as a result of the designation, based on “similar suffering” (Representative Al-Haq). When analyzing the designation as a securitizing move by Israel, the described increased recognition from the locals seems to stem from a shared experience of being securitized subjects.

### 6.3.2 Internationally

Increased recognition in the international arena also seems to have contributed to resistance since the designation. Increased international support is presented as if it enabled access to new networks, both regarding states and organizations. This aspect is addressed by Addameer:

I'm not sure if they [Israel] were aware about how much attention it would cause, maybe they didn't expect so much solidarity and support, especially not from the official level. [...] in the last two years they made us known in places I don't think we would easily reach otherwise. We are always present on the UN-level, but I mean more like on the state level, the US-state level, other international NGOs, and the media on the international level. (Representative Addameer)

In relation to new international networks, a shift can be noticed concerning how the designation is spoken about. The following quote from DCIP illustrates this aspect: “...it becomes like a certificate that you are in the right direction when you are targeted by the Israeli occupation” (Representative DCIP). A coping strategy, or means of resistance, is

discovered from the fact that the designation brought international recognition. The potential power lying within the notion of being labeled is here turned into a positive understanding of the designation. This transition can be seen as part of an ontological counter-securitization (Jamal, 2020). Instead of speaking about the designation as a risk, it is spoken about as a certificate of approval in relation to the international community. The designation, or “certificate”, is thus turned into a possibility of accessing new networks of support in the international arena.

## 6.4 Cooperation

Different kinds of already established cooperation seem to be central tools for resistance among the designated organizations. In theme 6.3 it is presented how the designation brought an increased recognition which opened up *new* networks and brought resistance. However, it also seems like already established relationships and cooperation have contributed to means of resistance. Both regarding the Palestinian civil society at large, as well as on a global level. Global relationships are however not considered as unproblematic. Among some of the organizations, global cooperation and donor-dependency are addressed as a tool of resistance, but also as part of the root cause which *enabled* the designation. In the following quote from Bisan, it is suggested that an organization’s size and its already established cooperation matters for how well the designation can be resisted:

DCIP is more part of a global network. They should be the most resilient actually among the six, because it’s a local chapter. It’s DCI-Palestine. But there is also DCI international, it’s DCI all over the world. I think there are around 60-70 chapters globally, it’s a massive organization. (Representative Bisan)

Here it is presented as if being a large and internationally connected organization is an advantage when responding to the designation. However, global networks seem to have brought resistance also for smaller organizations, or organizations with less of an international profile such as UAWC: “We do have partners all over the world that are committed, and the solidarity around the world has also helped us as individuals. It helps keep us going” (Representative UAWC). Other aspects concerning global cooperation and associated funding dynamics are however not seen as unproblematic, as presented by the

same organization:

The global power structures create dynamics of conditionality and beneficiaries through donor dependency, which has been used by Israel in the designation [...].

*Question (interviewer):* What was the situation like in the “vacuum-time” between the designation in 2021 and the following year when the EU, US and UN came with their rejections or condemnations?

*Answer (interviewee):* A lot of funding was paused during this period. The rejection was important – but not enough. Still not all previous donors have un-paused their funding. Effectively speaking, what is the difference between pausing and ending? (Representative UAWC)

Here, the global power dynamics and donor dependency are seen as aspects that have been used by Israel to target the Palestinian organizations. Global networks are seen as a means of resistance - but also as part of the problem - since the designation was enabled by certain global conditions of power distribution. The organizations’ different capacities to resist the designation can be seen as a result of this condition. The global donor-regime system, which brings certain conditions imposed from the donors, thus also affects the power distribution *among* the designated organizations. External donors have had a very central role in influencing the Palestinian civil society over the years (Challand, 2009; Weisman, 2012). This seems to still be the case for the designated organizations.

## 6.5 Conviction

An enhanced conviction stemming from the designation seems to have brought resistance. A confirmation of significance and injection of motivation is highlighted in the interviews, and illustrated by the following citation from Al-Haq:

The attacks have reaffirmed the importance of our work and that has given extra energy. After the designation I got more motivated, the designation showed that we are doing something important. Just going to work and print a document became a way to resist. (Representative Al-Haq)

In the quote above, it is portrayed as if the designation has indicated that the work of the organization is more important than ever. It has even made the daily administrative tasks feel

more meaningful. It also seems as if the mission of the organization is not only connected to the work, as noted by Bisan: “As Palestinians, we feel the slow violence every day on your skin, and this is our daily life. At least as civil society we are doing something about it” (Representative, Bisan). This quote illustrates that the mission of the organization is not only seen as a job but as a responsibility to ensure the possibility to continue life and resist the occupation. In the following short quote from DCIP: “I am the organization! [...]” (Representative DCIP), there are no clear cuts between the personal and the mission of the organization. An enhanced conviction and discovery of inhabiting power which stems from the designation is highlighted also in this theme. However, differently to theme 6.3 Recognition, the meaning of the designation as Conviction is not an external recognition, but an *internal* motivation concerning the core mission of the organizations in their daily work. According to Jamal, being securitized makes the subject a target for surveillance and control. However, it also makes the subject aware of its power to pose a threat. The subject thus also becomes an agent capable of counter-securitization (Jamal, 2020:938). The designation brought about the already described risks concerning surveillance and loss of funding. It also entailed strategies of resistance such as the already described themes of Recognition and Cooperation. As presented in this theme, conviction seems to have brought resistance and can be seen as an important precondition of an ontological counter-securitization. With the conviction came a realization of how the identity of the organizations and their mission is their very source of resistance.

## 6.6 New identity: The Six

The designation seems to have contributed to the creation of a new identity as a specific kind of resistance. This resistance can be considered an *ontological counter-securitization* (Jamal, 2020). However, how attractive this new identity appears as a tool of resistance seems to be nuanced and connected to risk management. If a global network and identity were already established, the new identity among the six seems to be perceived as something that is not only positive but also linked with additional risks. In the absence of an already established strong global network, the new identity appears to be considered as a strong base of resistance. The following quote from Bisan illustrates how the designation opened for a new constellation, which later developed into a new identity: The Six.

We were contacted by a journalist on Friday, they did it on a Friday. He said ‘we received this statement from the Israeli Ministry of Defense that they are designating your organization as a terrorist organization’ [...]. So, we were sending it [the statement] to the lawyer of the organization and he explained it to us... and we then understood the gravity of the situation. We then contacted the other organizations, but they did not know. So, we were the bringer of bad news for them. We consulted with the other organizations, talked about what to do and decided to meet the next day to discuss and then issue a new statement together. It was like a shock, you now [...].  
(Representative Bisan)

In the quote above it is highlighted that the terrorist label suddenly created a shared experience and a situation that required common action. In the interviews, it seems like the group of the designated organizations did not have much in common before the designation since they are working with different aspects of human rights. It appears that a few had been coordinated concerning certain projects or issues, but that they had never worked together in this specific constellation (all six) before the designation. However, the new situation of being designated as terrorist organizations created a new base of identity. It became natural to come together since they were suddenly The Six. In the next quote, Addameer elaborates on the effects of the designation:

I mean the fact that they designated all of us at one point made us work more coordinated in this specific campaign concerning the designation, for protection [...]. Our common campaign is positive when it comes to the support for the whole Palestinian civil society, not just for the six, because we were coordinating as well with PNGO<sup>6</sup>, with other networks, with other organizations on the local level [...].  
(Representative Addameer)

What is referred to as “the campaign” in the quote above is the common campaign #standwiththe6 that the designated organizations launched shortly after the designation was announced (Avaaz, 2021). The campaign and associated hashtag got wide international recognition and spread at the end of 2021 and was revitalized after the raids of the organizations’ offices in 2022 (HRW, 2022). This campaign can be seen as “the peak” in the process presented by Jamal’s theory of identity formation among securitized subjects. Jamal treats this dynamic as a gradual construction of identity and as a specific kind of counter-securitization (Jamal, 2020:933-934). According to Jamal, a securitized group can accept their construction as a threat, but they can also resist it. The securitization makes them

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<sup>6</sup> The Palestinian NGOs Network

aware of the power that lies within their identity (Jamal, 2020:937). *Recognition* and *conviction* have been identified as means of resistance among the designated organizations. These findings also can be seen as steps in the gradual identity-construction described by Jamal since these aspects made the organizations aware of the power lying within their identity. When launching the campaign #standwiththe6, the Palestinian organizations use the discovered power embedded in their new identity, which stems from their securitization. Strengthening this new identity of being the designated six by turning the designation into a campaign for support, is thus when “their search for ontological security is essentially converted into a form of counter-securitization” (Jamal, 2020:937). This process of identity construction “... introduces ontological counter-securitization” (Ibid). In this specific case, the ontological counter-securitization is very explicit, almost a meta-construction. Since the identity of The Six was constructed after Israel designated six organizations at the same time, the designation (or securitization move) is converted into a tool of resistance to the very designation - an ontological counter-securitization.

However, the attitude towards the new identity seems to be nuanced. Below it is emphasized by DCIP how the new label of The Six is projected from the outside and brought negative implications for the organization:

They put us in the same... in one boat. Even with the response to our objection<sup>7</sup>. We made individual objections, but our lawyers received a one sentence answer via WhatsApp, saying they were all rejected. How come? Of course, each organization has its own nature, circumstances, structure, and policies. They must answer separately to the argument that our lawyers raised. My organization's argument may entail different details from the others. They made a decision without even responding to any of the submissions raised by our lawyers. (Representative DCIP)

In the quote above the difference between DCIP and the other designated organizations is emphasized. It seems important for the organization to distinguish itself from the other designated five, and it appears as if the new label also brought additional difficulties since everyone was dealt with as one case. DCIP's situation was not considered on its own grounds, which is seen as a disadvantage. On the contrary, the following quote from Bisan highlights the essence of the new identity of The Six as a window of opportunity, where the awareness of being designated - a securitized subject - also sheds light on the subject's power to pose a

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<sup>7</sup> Some of the organizations filed a legal objection to the Israeli Military Commander's decision to declare them as “unlawful associations” (Adalah, 2022b)



threat (Jamal, 2020:938), which enables resistance, or ontological counter-securitization:

We could have continued our lives without the designation of course. It de-railed us from the main tasks we are doing. On the other hand, I think having creative professional people leading the organizations, being the staff, being the board members of these organizations, have also made it possible to act proactively to the designation and turn the threats into opportunities [...]. (Representative Bisan)

In the quote above, using the designation to strengthen the new identity emerges as a central means of resistance. To some extent, this may be more relevant for those organizations that suffer the most from fund endings. However, also organizations that seem to struggle less financially always come back to this new identity. If not directly, then by referring to The Six, often as “us”, and by talking about how this new group has been operating since October 2021. Still, the organizations identify themselves with this new identity to various degrees. From a more distanced approach, the new identity among The Six is possibly perceived as bringing bigger risks of being associated with the terrorist label. In such a situation, the international network and an international identity come out as a more appealing means of resistance.

## 6.7 Discussion of key findings: new and existing identities as resistance

Being recognized in new spheres seems to have contributed to another view of the designation. Since the designation opened up new networks of solidarity, it suddenly carried dual meanings: the designation is not only a delegitimizing label but also a “certificate” of approval since it brought support from states and organizations internationally. The international acknowledgement is however an external recognition. Also, the enhanced internal conviction brought a realization of how the common identity of the organizations as terrorist-designated was a shared source of resistance. Both recognition and conviction can thus be seen as important preconditions for the construction of a new identity in the shape of The Six.

Regardless of whether the new identity formation of The Six is emphasized as something to strengthen or to disassociate from, it is constantly present and related to in the interviews. This identity formation, analyzed as a specific form of ontological

counter-securitization, brings implications concerning theory. In the investigated context, the securitizing move (the terrorist designation) seems to have contributed to the formation of a new identity among The Six, but it also strengthened a shared identity with the local community. Already existing identities, such as an international and a local one, are identified as means of resistance as a response to the designation. A strengthened international identity seems to have emerged as a reaction to the securitization. This approach however seeks to position itself further away from the identity associated with the source of securitization (the other designated organizations). However, it can still be argued that not only the new identity but also existing identities constitute a form of “identity construction among social groups that are securitized and experience a profound relation with their securitization” (Jamal, 2020: 933-934).

The identity formation among The Six is the most explicit form of ontological counter-securitization identified in the analysis. It is related to the aspect of the theory where the securitization in itself - and in its purest form - is turned into a form of resistance, or “window of opportunity” (Representative Bisan). Since the terrorist designation also is the source of an international campaign to support the designated organizations (the securitized subjects), it suddenly is no longer clear whether the designation is a securitizing or counter-securitizing move. Hence, in this investigation security practices in the form of a terrorist designation were turned into resistance. This is similar to how Marx highlights that security practices in themselves are opportunities for contestation (Marx, 2015).

In short, what role the new identity plays for each specific organization’s resistance is not homogenous. When association with The Six is perceived as bringing additional risks, a distanced approach to the new identity comes out. In other words, calculations in risk management seem to have affected which identity formation appeared most appealing to the securitized subjects: the new identity of The Six, or already established identities. However, both these kinds of identity formation are specific forms of resistance, and nuances of ontological counter-securitization, identified in the Palestinian context of shrinking civic space.

## 7 Conclusions

This thesis has investigated views, experiences and means of resistance among five out of six Palestinian CSOs in the West Bank that were terrorist-designated by Israel in October 2021. The organizations remain designated according to Israeli law, despite rejections and condemnations by the EU, the UN and the US.

### 7.1 Summary of findings

Two research questions have been addressed, first:

*How do the five interviewed Palestinian CSOs view their terrorist designation and how have they adapted to maintain their work?*

The interviewed Palestinian CSOs view their terrorist designation as a way to defund Palestinian civil society, and they have adapted through risk-management to continue working.

Second: *What means of resistance have been undertaken?*

In the findings, the identified means of resistance that have been undertaken since the designation are *recognition & new networks, cooperation, conviction* and a *new identity*. It seems as if the external recognition, as well as the strengthened internal conviction, entailed a realization for the organizations: their common situation as terrorist-designated carried dual meanings. It brought increased risks, but it was also a shared source of resistance. Hence, both recognition and conviction can be seen as important preconditions for the last and main finding of the analysis: the construction of a new identity, The Six, as a specific form of resistance to the designation. In other words, a specific form of ontological counter-securitization was a central means of resistance to the terrorist designation.

The new identity became the source of an international campaign, #standwiththesix, which was launched by the organizations. However, both existing identities, and the formation of the new identity of The Six, have been identified as means of resistance. These different identity constructions are thus nuances of ontological counter-securitization

identified in the Palestinian context of shrinking civic space.

The findings provide local knowledge about how shrinking civic space is experienced and resisted among specific actors in the understudied Palestinian civil society. The analysis also highlights how identity plays a role in the construction of (in)security - identity implies loyalty, which here affects which repressive security measures are talked about and which ones are not. The approach of this thesis thus helped uncover dual layers of repression in the Palestinian civil society: both the Israeli state and the Palestinian Authority are contributing to the shrinking civic space.

It can be argued that this investigation would have benefited from including the perspectives of all six designated organizations. I agree that this potentially could have affected the findings differently. However, since five organizations participated a majority of the perspectives relevant to this thesis are included. The aim of this thesis is also not to generalize beyond the investigated context, and the findings still allowed for dynamics of identity construction to come out and bring relevant insights.

## 7.2 Implications

This thesis interpreted ontological counter-securitization as a specific form of resistance toward shrinking civic space. The theory of ontological counter-securitization has not been applied in the context of shrinking civic space in earlier studies. This new approach contributed to a better understanding of how constructions of identity emerged among the Palestinian organizations after their terrorist designation. The fact that the organizations were designated contributed to a shared identity between them, which opened a new form of common resistance. The findings presented from this approach bring implications for how the global phenomenon of shrinking civic space is studied in its various shapes and different contexts.

When investigating complex contexts such as the Israeli-Palestinian where identity conflicts are at play, not only theoretical but also empirical implications are highlighted. The campaign #standwiththesix showed that increased support for democratic values, such as a free civil society, can be spread internationally when identity constructions work as a base of resistance. States as well as civil society actors all over the world supported the campaign and stood up for the democratic right to a free civil society. However, dynamics of identity construction among securitized subjects might also center around other values, such as extremist-based ideologies. This aspect sheds light on a possibly strengthened sense of

“Selfness” among marginalized groups. Security measures might fuel identity constructions of all kinds, which brings implications concerning how issues such as migration and organized crime are addressed - or securitized. For example, taking precautions against terrorism by governing through mass surveillance and profiling (Ardau & Munster, 2007) might bring undesirable consequences. Given that such measures are likely to increase exclusion and strengthen a sense of belonging among those portrayed as a security threat, the result may be increased support for the extremism that these measures aim to curb.

The findings also carry potential implications for the current situation on the Gaza Strip, and Israel's response to Hamas's brutal terrorist attack on Israeli civilians. The war shows that Palestinian civilians are among the ones paying the price for Hamas's extremism. Military force is used to wipe out Hamas and its extremist ideology, however, when civilians suffer in this fight against terrorism - what possibilities of resistance are left for them? If a specific identity connected to Hamas ideology emerges among civilians affected by the countermeasures, this could potentially fuel support for Hamas. Since the conflict engages populations all over the world, this risk is not only present in Gaza.

In his book *Security Unbound*, Huysmans refers to how democratic principles such as basic rights are at risk when practices of security are unleashed (Huysmans, 2014). As indicated by this thesis, democratic aspects such as a free civil society are strangled by repressive security practices in Palestine. However, in the investigated context the importance of civil society is crucial to offer democratic means of resistance. This thesis has shown that ensuring an independent civil society seems to be a central aspect to offer alternatives to extremism, and thus contribute to a safer situation for both sides in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

### 7.3 Relevance in relation to previous and future research

One interesting aspect of the findings is that the interviewed Palestinian CSOs view their designation as a way for Israel to scare donors from sending funding, hence targeting the organizations through their international donors. Maintaining their work for human rights after the designation has therefore required a form of risk management in which the fear from the donors' side has influenced the calculations largely. This aspect aligns with previous research from Weisman (2012) and Challand (2009) concerning that external donors have had a massive role in influencing Palestinian civil society. This role of international donors has also impacted how the interviewed organizations view global cooperation. Global networks

emerged as resistance but were to some extent also seen as part of the problem that enabled the terrorist-designation. These findings bring insight for global development actors supporting Palestinian civil society. In future research on shrinking civic spaces, it would be interesting to learn more about the local views on how to offer relevant support to civil society actors in Palestine. It would also be interesting to see if the theory of ontological counter-securitization can help enhance our understanding of how identity constructions work as resistance in other cases of shrinking civic space.

The analytic research that has been done within CTS has until now focused mainly on Western states. This thesis has offered perspectives from Palestine concerning how civil society has experienced practices of counter-terrorism. Lind has argued that secular- and human rights organizations within Palestinian civil society have experienced continued support since 9/11 (Lind, 2010). However, it seems as if the designated Palestinian organizations still partly struggle to prove their legitimacy since their terrorist designation. In future research, it would be interesting to see whether other actors in Palestinian civil society experience that they are considered legitimate by the international community.

The designation, analyzed as a securitization, and the resistance against this label show how security measures opened for resistance in the Palestinian civil society. In this sense, the designation brought risks for the organizations, but it also opened up possibilities. Hence, security practices were in themselves turned into opportunities for contestation (Marx, 2015) and the designation carried possibilities to challenge the security measures. When investigating security the double, or even contradictory, consequences of security practices are an interesting focus for future investigations. For the field of critical security studies, this aspect seems especially central to enhancing our understanding of how security practices are resisted in asymmetric power relationships.

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### 8.3 Empirical material

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- Representative Al-Haq, interviews July 2023. Personal interviews, Ramallah & Jordan Valley
- Representative Bisan Research and Development Center (Bisan), interviews September & October 2023. Interviews by video call
- Representative Defence for Children International, Palestine (DCIP), interview September 2023. Personal interview, Ramallah.
- Representative Union of Agricultural Work Committees (UAWC), interview August 2023. Personal interview, Ramallah.